



Had there been a contest to see who could spend the most time in the bathroom getting ready, Christy would have won first prize the following morning. After nearly an hour and a half of preparations she opened the door to find Aunt Marti standing in the hall, ready to knock on the guest room door.

“There you are, honey. We were just wondering how you were coming along. Let’s see how you look.”

Hoping for some sign of approval, Christy asked, “Well? How do I look?”

“Your hair, dear...your hair looks...well, I’d say you did a very good job for your first try.”

“I think I used too much spritz; my bangs all clumped together.”

“Yes, maybe you should use a tad less next time. And perhaps go a bit easier on the eyeliner. But the bathing suit looks marvelous on you with your long legs, dear. You won’t always have thighs like that if you take after your mother’s side of the family, so watch the starches

and keep those legs slim as long as you can.”

“Yes, Aunt Martha.” Christy’s voice showed her irritation at the endless advice.

“Well, you know what they say,” Marti quickly added, “nobody can ever be too rich or too thin!”

They both laughed and headed down the stairs.

“Do you have any good books I could take with me to read on the beach?” Christy asked.

“Sure, all kinds, darling. They’re on the bookshelf in the den. Take your pick. Are you ready for your breakfast drink?”

Christy shuddered at the thought. “No, I’m not hungry. I’ll just take something with me to drink.” She pulled a paperback novel from the shelf.

Marti returned from the kitchen with two bottles of flavored mineral water and tucked them into Christy’s canvas bag. “There you go. Have a wonderful time, and remember: Make an effort to be friendly so you can get to know some of the other young people on the beach.”

“Yes, Aunt Martha.” Christy ducked into the kitchen, where Uncle Bob was reading the paper. “Shhhh,” she hissed, holding her finger to her lips. Then, opening the refrigerator, she exchanged the mineral water for two cans of Coke.

Uncle Bob winked and went back to reading his paper.

As Christy shuffled through the sand twenty minutes later, a few thin clouds sailed across the late morning sky. The “young people,” as Aunt Marti called them, clustered together down by the jetty where the surfers hung out. The jetty, as Christy had learned from her uncle on her first day there, was a long, man-made peninsula of rocks that stuck

out into the ocean, creating a calm harbor inlet on one side and the beach's biggest waves on the other.

Christy stopped and watched the morning waves smashing against the jetty. The northern waves first swelled some distance out; then, pressing in like a wall, they crashed straight down on the rocks with powerful force.

"Take control of your destiny!" Christy's aunt's words echoed in her head and pounded against her nerves. She lifted her head high and walked straight toward the same group that had laughed at her a few days earlier. With the new haircut and swimsuit, she hoped they would think she was a different girl.

Spreading out her towel, Christy noticed a few of the guys looking in her direction. *So far, so good!* Then, stretching out on her stomach, she began to read her paperback, playfully wiggling her toes in the sand. She didn't know what would be worse: for them to ignore her again or for someone to come over and actually talk to her.

A few minutes later she cast a shy glance toward the guys to see if she still held their attention. She didn't. They all fixed their eyes on an unbelievably gorgeous girl coming their way.

Tall and thin, clad in a bikini and sunglasses, the girl waltzed through the sand. Her blond hair fell to her waist, swishing behind her like the mane of a wild horse. She stopped a few feet away from Christy. Then, as everyone watched, the model beach beauty settled into the sand and gazed out at the ocean as if posing for a swimsuit ad.

What's she trying to prove? Christy pretended not to notice her. *Why is she sitting near me? What if the guys come over here to talk to her? What if they talk to me?*

A strong urge to run away swelled up in Christy. But she ignored the way her heart raced and fixed her eyes on her book. Her aunt's voice pounded in her head: "Take control of your destiny. Make the first move! Be aggressive!"

The sweet smell of coconut oil floating from the girl taunted Christy until she looked over and, with great effort, forced out a weak "Hi."

The girl responded eagerly. "That's a good book. Have you gotten to the part where they get stuck in the taxicab in Hong Kong?"

Christy was startled at the girl's friendliness. "No."

"Then I won't spoil it for you," the girl said with a smile. "But that part in Hong Kong is great, and it's so intriguing."

"Oh." Christy turned to study the girl more carefully. She seemed awfully nice—for a snob.

Then the girl asked, "Have you been in the water yet? Is it very cold?" Christy noticed that she had an unusual accent when she said certain words.

"No," Christy said. Then, realizing she wasn't adding much to the conversation, she stammered, "I mean, no, I haven't been in yet today, and I didn't go in yesterday, so I don't know if it was cold then, but the day before it was really nice." She hesitated and then asked, "Were you out here yesterday?"

"No. We arrived yesterday. My name is Alissa. What's yours?"

"Christy. Where are you from?"

"We've just come from Boston, where my grandmother lives, but this past year we lived in Germany."

"You're from Germany? Really?" Christy asked in

amazement. “My dad has some relatives in Germany. I always wanted to go there.”

“We only lived in Germany for the past two years. Before that we lived in Argentina, and before that, Hawaii.”

“Wow, that must’ve been something.”

“It has its good points and its bad points. My dad was in the air force. What about you? Do you live here?”

“No. My aunt and uncle do, and I’m staying with them. I live in Wisconsin.”

Wisconsin sounded pretty boring compared with Argentina or Hawaii. Alissa didn’t scoff, though. Instead she suggested they go in the water. Christy felt the gaze of the surfers as she and Alissa started in slowly, moving out till they were up to their waists before diving under the foamy waves.

The cool water hit Christy’s every pore. *There’s no other feeling in the world like this!* To Alissa she said, “I love the ocean, don’t you?”

“Definitely!” Alissa replied, bobbing over the top of a mild wave. “You would love the beaches in Hawaii. The water is so warm and clear. You can stay in almost all day, it seems. And the waves are perfect for bodysurfing.”

“I wish I could bodysurf,” Christy lamented. “I’m just too uncoordinated.”

“It’s all a matter of catching the wave at the right time,” Alissa explained. “Like, see this one coming? If you wait too long, it will break on you and take you right to the bottom. You have to start kicking and paddling as the wave crests behind you. Then let it carry you to shore, like you’re part of it.”

The wave behind them rose too big for them to float

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over, so they held their noses and dove down to the calmer water below. Up they came, treading water as the wave pushed its frothing curve toward the shore.

“Now that would have been a perfect wave to ride,” came Alissa’s evaluation as she smoothed down her soaking hair. “See, those guys over there caught it. I was told in Hawaii by some surfers that every seventh wave is the one to catch.”

They floated over four smaller swells before Alissa pointed out, “See the seventh wave building out there? It should be the best one in this set to ride. You go over it, and I’ll try to ride it in. Maybe you can see what I mean about starting to kick before it crests.”

With a powerful swell the wave lifted Christy with the ease of a parent lifting a baby. She watched Alissa gracefully ride the wave all the way to shore. *She makes it look so easy!* Christy thought with a sigh.

The guys down the beach were equally impressed with the graceful Alissa. As she emerged from the water, four of them left their surfboards and jogged over to talk to her.

Christy watched with twinges of jealousy as Alissa, dripping wet, gathered her long hair over her shoulder and wrung the water out. *Oh, to have a body and a personality like Alissa’s. She has it made in every way.* Christy both admired and disliked her at the same time.

Absorbed in watching the scene on the shore, Christy didn’t notice the huge wave rising behind her. Without warning it broke, pulling her down with its crashing force. She turned a complete somersault under water and, panicking for air, gulped in a choking mouthful of saltwater. The terror of her dream the night before rushed up, caus-

ing her to fight something greater than the ocean. Mercilessly the wave dealt her a final blow, spewing her onto the shore and scraping her elbow in the coarse sand. The wave receded, leaving Christy like a beached seal only a few feet from none other than Alissa and the surfers.

“Oh, no!” she gasped as the group began to laugh. Water dripped from her nose, sand trickled from her ear, her bathing suit straps were all twisted in the back, and a long strand of seaweed had wrapped around her ankle. Worst of all, her hair stood straight up in the back, and the whole right side lay plastered across her cheek, covering her eye. She blinked, looking to the group for some support, but they all kept laughing. Alissa laughed the longest.

A tall, good-looking surfer with long, bleached blond hair stood next to Alissa. “Gnarly! That was totally thrashin’!”

Blood trickled from Christy’s elbow, stinging almost as much as her hurt pride. *This is the absolute worst moment of my entire life!*

Then one of the surfers who had just ridden a wave into shore came over to Christy. He planted his orange surfboard into the wet sand and reached out to help her untangle the seaweed from her ankle. “You okay?”

“Yeah.” Christy looked up into the face of the cutest guy she had ever seen. He matched exactly the description she had given to Paula months ago of “the perfect guy”: sun-bleached blond hair falling across a broad forehead, a strong jaw, a straight nose, and screaming silver-blue eyes.

He took her by the elbow and helped her stand.

“I feel so stupid,” she confided softly.

He stood at least five inches taller than her, making her feel small.

“Yeah, I can see how you would.” It didn’t sound cruel the way he said it. He seemed to understand how she felt.

The others went back to flirting with Alissa while Christy made her way through the hot sand to her towel. The cute guy tucked his orange surfboard under his arm and followed her. He just stood there while she dried herself off and tried to shake the sand from her ears.

Finally, Christy broke the silence. “Thanks for helping me.”

“Sure.” He carefully laid his board on Alissa’s towel and sat next to it in the sand. “Will your friend mind if I borrow her towel?”

Christy glanced at her “friend,” who was so involved in flirting with the surfers that she acted as if Christy didn’t exist.

“I don’t suppose so.”

“I’m Todd.” He smiled a fresh, clean smile.

“I’m Christy.” She was surprised at how calm she acted around this unbelievably adorable guy. “Do you live here?”

“Yeah, during the summer—with my dad.”

“Where’s your mom?” Christy asked.

“Tallahassee, Florida. My parents are divorced, and my mom lives in Tallahassee. I live with her during the school year and spend the summers and some holidays with my dad.”

Just then Alissa and one of the surfers sauntered over. They looked as though they were getting along very well. He had his arm around Alissa’s waist, and they each held a beer bottle.

“You want some?” the guy offered Christy.

“No, that’s okay,” she answered, feeling caught off guard.

“Oh.” He looked at Todd. “You must be one of his kind of friends.”

“Well, actually, I brought some Cokes with me,” she stammered, not sure what he meant by “one of Todd’s friends.”

“I’ve got two.” She turned toward Todd. “Do you want one?”

“Sure.”

Todd moved over next to Christy on her towel and then introduced the other surfer as Shawn. Christy introduced Alissa. Shawn moved Todd’s board off the towel and sat down with Alissa beside him.

This is too wonderful to be true. She knew her aunt would be thrilled.

For the next hour they sat and talked. Alissa pretty much carried the conversation. She had lots of stories about what life was like in Germany. Christy liked her accent, which must have been a combination of all the places Alissa had lived and all the languages she had been exposed to.

“And the cars go so slow on the autobahns here,” Alissa said. “But that’s not the right word. What do you call them? Freeways?”

“No,” said Christy.

“Yeah,” said Todd at the same time.

They looked at each other.

“In California we call them freeways,” Todd explained.

“In Wisconsin we call them interstates,” Christy said.

“You still drive very slowly here,” Alissa said. “In

Stuttgart it was nothing to drive at 120 kilometers an hour.”

Todd and Alissa talked about cars, and Christy listened. She barely knew the difference between a Jag and a Jetta and was afraid she might say something foolish. Shawn seemed quiet too. He looked as though he wasn't all there, and his eyes were glazed. Whenever he did focus his gaze on Christy, she felt uncomfortable.

“Check it out,” Shawn suddenly exclaimed, waving an arm toward the water. “That dude can shred!”

“What's that mean?” Christy asked Todd quietly.

“See that little kid out there on the white board? He's only about eight years old, and he's a really good surfer.”

“How old are you?” Alissa asked Christy.

Thinking she was probably the youngest of the four of them, Christy started to lie. “Fifteen.” But then she caught herself. “Well, actually, almost fifteen. My birthday is in a few weeks. How old are you, Alissa?”

“Seventeen.”

Christy wasn't sure if she was lying or not. Alissa looked that old, but whenever she laughed she seemed like a junior higher. Plus, why would she be hanging around someone as young as Christy if she really were seventeen?

“You guys haven't said how old you are,” Alissa pointed out.

“Ah, I forget,” Shawn said.

“We're both sixteen,” Todd said.

“Thanks a lot,” Shawn said. “Now Alissa's going to leave because she doesn't go out with guys who are younger than her, do you?”

“That all depends.” Alissa gave Shawn a look that embarrassed Christy.

She wasn't sure why, but she felt as though she were intruding on a private game. Shawn must have known all the rules to this game, because he leaned over and whispered something to Alissa. Christy turned to look down toward the jetty.

"Waves are picking up," Todd said. "Let's go surfing, Shawn."

Shawn stood and offered Alissa his hand, pulling her up with him. "Naw. We're taking off."

Alissa grabbed her towel and slipped her hand into Shawn's. "See you guys later," she said. "Nice meeting you both." The couple moved quickly through the sand toward the row of beach houses.

"Are they going to get some lunch or something?" Christy asked, confused by their sudden exit.

Todd looked at her strangely. He didn't answer.

Christy wasn't sure what she had missed, but she knew Todd wasn't exactly thrilled about Shawn leaving. She didn't mind. She would love to spend the rest of the day sitting here, talking to Todd, looking into his gorgeous blue eyes. She had never liked a guy as much as she liked Todd, and she only met him today! Did he like her? He seemed to, even though he hadn't tried to hold her hand or anything like Shawn had done with Alissa.

Actually, the thought terrified her. *What if Todd tries to hold my hand? What if he tries to kiss me?*

"Well, do you want to?" Todd interrupted her thoughts.

Christy's heart skipped a beat. "Want to what?" *Did he just read my thoughts?*

"Do you want to go surfing?"

“Oh!” Christy laughed. “I don’t know. I’m not very coordinated in the water, as you may have noticed.”

“I’ll teach you.”

“What I really want to learn is how to bodysurf. That’s what Alissa was trying to teach me earlier.”

“I’m not the best bodysurfer around, but I’ll teach you what I know.”

They dove into the water, and Christy was met again by that fresh exhilaration. Only this time it was magnified by the excitement of having Todd beside her. Like a pair of dolphins they faced the waves together, talking and laughing. Patiently Todd tried to teach her to bodysurf, but she couldn’t get the timing right. Every wave rushed past her, taking Todd with it and leaving her behind, drenched.

After a while another surfer paddled to where they were bobbing over the wave, and Todd introduced him as Doug. He was cute, and Christy thought he was much friendlier than Shawn and the other surfers she had encountered earlier.

“Try this.” Doug offered Christy his body board.

“How do you use it?” Christy asked, unsure of what to do with the soft, short, blue and white board he held out to her. It was much shorter than a surfboard and looked less threatening.

“Well...you just hop on and, ah...I don’t know. You hold on and ride it to shore,” Doug said.

“Here.” Todd strapped the Velcro end of a leash around his wrist. “I’ll show her.”

As the next wave swelled behind them, Todd lay across the body board on his stomach and began kicking furiously to get ahead of the wave. Christy and Doug floated over the

wave and watched Todd as the wave broke right behind him, lifting him and the body board, pushing them to shore.

“Looks fun!” Christy exclaimed. “I think I can handle this.”

“Sure you can!” Doug agreed. “Use it all you want.”

“Thanks!”

Todd paddled back out and handed the body board to Christy. “Here you go. Remember to kick yourself ahead of the wave and hold on once it begins to carry you.”

Christy self-consciously lay on the board. Todd and Doug’s instructions and demonstrations suddenly eluded her. All she could think was, *I hope my rear end isn’t sticking up!*

“Okay,” Todd called out, “start kicking!”

Christy kicked and kicked and didn’t look behind her. Suddenly, the force of the wave caught her, starting at her feet and then lifting her, pushing her upward, forward. Before she realized what was happening, the wave had enveloped her. As she hung on to the board for dear life, she felt the force of the ocean tide rushing toward the shore. For one triumphant moment she felt as if she were flying. Then the belly of the body board slid onto the coarse sand at the shore, and immediately the wave receded.

Christy stood up, unscathed, and waved to Todd and Doug, who were waving their congratulations to her.

That was so fun! No wonder surfing is such a big deal. I can’t imagine how it would feel to do that standing on a board! Just lying on the body board was enough to take my breath away.

She fought the waves, getting back out to the calm swells where Todd and Doug were treading water.

“Awesome!” Doug said when she joined them.

“Awesome?” Todd echoed. “Nobody says *awesome* any-

more.”

“I do!” Doug laughed. “And, Christy, that was an awesome ride! Took you all the way to shore.” He had such a boyish look of joy on his tanned face that for a moment Doug reminded Christy of her little brother, David.

“Hey, what time do you think it is?” Todd asked.

Doug squinted up at the angle of the sun. “Probably close to three-thirty.”

“That’s my guess too. I gotta jam,” Todd said. “I’m picking up Tracy from work.”

Then he turned to Christy. “Will you be here tomorrow?”

Christy nodded, shivering a little from the cool water.

“Maybe you’ll be ready to try surfing tomorrow,” Todd said.

“Hey, this looks like a good one.” Doug motioned toward the huge wave that was building behind them. “Let’s all take it in.”

While Christy lay on the body board, Doug and Todd held on to the sides, and they all kicked together. As soon as the wave caught up with them, the force tore the three of them apart, pushing Christy the fastest. She gave a tiny scream as the powerful surge thrust her forward, yanking the body board out from under her. She tumbled just once under the wave and came up behind it. The leash around her wrist allowed her to pull the board back. Todd and Doug, both now ahead of her, were rising out of the water at the shoreline.

Christy stretched back onto the board and let the wave behind her, a smaller and more tame one, nudge her to shore. She watched as Todd tilted his head back, shaking his sun-bleached hair so that all the salty droplets raced down

his back.

“See you tomorrow,” Doug called out as Todd headed up the beach toward where he left his surfboard in the sand.

“Yeah, later!” Todd called after them.

“You going back out in the water?” Doug asked Christy.

She was still watching Todd, hoping he would turn around and give one last wave meant only for her.

“No, I’m kind of cold.” She unstrapped the Velcro leash around her wrist. “I think I’ll lie out for a while. Thanks for letting me use your board. It was really fun!”

“Sure,” Doug said, taking it from her. “Anytime.”

Christy stretched out on her towel and let the sun warm her. The salt water dried in little spots on her legs, and she felt scratchy and dry and terribly thirsty. She lasted on the towel only about half an hour before deciding she couldn’t stand it any longer. Doug was still out in the water, riding his body board, and Todd wouldn’t be back for the rest of the day. Alissa was long gone. There was no reason to wait around, so she gathered her belongings and hurried back to the house.

This whole day has been “awesome,” to use Doug’s word, she thought as she picked her way over the hot sand. My aunt is going to be so proud of me! She was right. All I needed was the right kind of bathing suit and hairstyle. I love being part of Todd’s group. Todd. Oh, man, Paula is never going to believe this!