

A NOVEL

DIARY
OF A TEENAGE
GIRL

Becoming Me

MELODY CARLSON

CAITLIN



NO. 1

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GIRL

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Multnomah® Publishers

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ONE

*Monday, January 1 (a rather uneventful new year,
so far anyway)*

I heard somewhere that when you write in a diary you should pretend that you're writing a letter to a really good friend, someone you trust completely, and you know will never laugh at you. So that's what I'm telling myself, because to tell the truth I feel kind of silly writing about my life in this dorky little book. And it's funny because I've actually had this diary for several years now, and suddenly it hits me—like hey, I'm sixteen! According to some people this should be one of the most memorable eras of my whole life. Well, I'm not too sure I even want to remember everything about being sixteen, but on the other hand, things seem to be looking up lately, and it might actually be fun to track how the rest of my junior year goes. Especially considering the first few months have been pretty dull so far.

But first of all, let me say this: Being sixteen is not really that sweet. And furthermore, it's not terribly

exciting either—at least not for me (although I'm certain that some kids my age are having a really great time). Take last night, for instance, I wanted to go to a New Year's Eve party with my friend, Beanie Jacobs. But do you think I got to go? Yeah, right! To protest, I stayed up in my room most of the night, until my mom literally begged me (using her famous it's-a-holiday guilt trip combined with the promise of double-dutch brownies) to "come join the family." And then we watched this really lame video about a bunch of stupid kids who got lost in the woods. And then we stayed up until midnight and watched our neighbors shooting off (what are supposed to be illegal) fireworks. Well, big whoopdee-doo!

But back to being sixteen and how it's not so sweet. What some people don't realize is that sixteen comes with its own set of problems. Like, take driving for instance. I was all excited when I got my license the end of last summer (on my birthday, no less!), and I thought for sure my parents would want to get me a car now. Naturally, I didn't expect a new car (although I wouldn't mind having one of those cool VW Bugs with the little flower vases on the dashboard—maybe in yellow or blue), but I would have settled for almost any old thing with four wheels, as long as it ran decently. But do you think I could get them to spring for a car (even though I patiently explained how they'd never have to haul me around everywhere, and how I would even give my little brother rides to his stupid ball games not to mention run an endless amount of errands for them)? Well, think again! "You

don't want to deal with that kind of responsibility yet, Caitlin Renee," Mommy says ever so sweetly. (I'm pretty sure she even patted me on the head!)

Honestly, sometimes my parents treat me like I'm still ten years old! And, of course, they say it's because they love me, but I think the truth is they don't really trust me. They probably think if they give me just the tiniest taste of freedom that I'll run hog-wild, get a tattoo, and start smoking dope or something equally disgusting! Why can't they believe in me—just a little? I mean, I've never given them a single reason not to trust me (at least nothing of any real significance). It's just not fair. About the only thing they willingly let me do is to go to our church's high school youth group functions—and, man, let me tell you, there are some kids in there who are pretty bad news. Not exactly a great "influence" as my dad likes to call any teenage kid he doesn't quite get (take my best friend, Beanie, for instance, but I'll get to her later). Anyway, the thing is, I don't even tell my parents about the kids in youth group who smoke and drink and God only knows what else—or I'd never get to go anywhere until I turned twenty-one!

Now I'll try to say something nice about my parents (just in case they're reading this). And if they are—I will take back every single word of it, and never, ever speak to the old snoops again! Okay, for the most part, my parents are pretty cool (and not the kind of people to read other people's diaries!). For one thing, they've managed to stay married to each other for almost twenty years (a

pretty big deal when everyone else's parents seem to be splitting up); and my dad has a pretty interesting job at an advertising firm downtown, while my mom teaches first grade. I guess I could've done worse as far as parents go. Like my best friend, Beanie Jacobs, her dad was a cocaine addict who left her mom with nothing but overdue bills when Beanie was still in diapers. On top of that, her mom's kind of freaky and irresponsible, plus she drinks too much and forgets to pay her bills. I know she got married really young, but it's kind of like she never grew up. But she actually makes Beanie act like the parent most of the time, which is pretty weird, if you ask me.

Of course, the one good thing about that whole Beanie situation is that she gets to do whatever she wants whenever she wants. And I kind of envy that. Oh, sure, I know it has its down side too. Let me tell you, Lynn Jacobs (Beanie's mom) can be pretty scary sometimes, and I've seen her tear into Beanie like she's a dog or something less than human. As a consequence I try to never get on that woman's bad side (which lately seems to be every side). Anyway, Beanie's been my best friend since sixth grade (when we both discovered we were totally hopeless on the violin). I could tell right off she was really smart, and she had this really dry sense of humor. Plus, I liked that she wasn't afraid to speak up and say how she felt (at least around anyone but her mom).

Now, I'll be the first to admit that Beanie Baby (she goes absolutely nuts when I call her that, which I rarely do, except if I'm ticked at her about something) tends to

dress, well, shall I say, outlandishly (I've been reading Jane Austen books lately and sometimes I wish we still talked like that)? But back to Beanie and how she has this rather interesting sense of style (you see, her mom never gives her any money for clothes, so she has to come up with all these creative ways of dressing—and she actually shops at Goodwill, and then she even sews some of her weird stuff together). And sometimes she even dyes her hair some pretty wild colors like magenta or midnight blue. Normally it's almost black and very curly which she says is because her dad was Jewish, although she doesn't practice his religion.

But Beanie's pretty fun to hang with, and I'm glad she's my friend. My parents didn't like her at all at first. But then I got her going to youth group with me. And now they think she's okay but strange, and I don't think they quite trust her. Beanie's actually very pretty (in a sultry kind of way) and one time my mom (trying to be helpful) wanted to give her a complete makeover—but that's another story. Let's just suffice it to say that when Mom was done, Beanie looked like a Mary Kay poster child. Poor Beanie.

Well, I guess that's enough for one night. So, now, you can see how my life is just so terribly exciting. Like, wow, maybe they'll make this book into a movie some day! Not!

Wednesday, January 3 (back to school)

I need to say that I read back over my first entry in this diary and had to laugh. I mean, I sound like such a blabbermouth. And in real life I'm not even like that. In

fact, some people think I'm rather quiet and reserved. My grandma says that's a good thing because there's a Proverb that says something like "even a total fool can appear wise if she keeps her mouth shut." Anyway, I guess the way we express ourselves in writing isn't always the way we express ourselves in real life (and I notice I use a lot of parentheses too). But that's okay—I think writing is fun. Now back to my life...

Okay, today I'm thinking about the pros and cons of popularity (well, mostly the pros). And believe me, I realize (as much as any sixteen-year-old possibly can) that popularity is highly overrated and it's not like it's ever been my primary goal in life. But I guess I never wanted to be a total geek either! And it's not like I am. Not really anyway. Okay, I'm not popular, but I'm not such a loser. I guess I'm just not much of anything. I mean I'm not in any particular group in school—not a geek or a freak, not exactly an academic, and certainly not a jock! Mostly I just hang with Beanie, and sometimes with some of the kids from youth group (but then they can act pretty geeky at times, and we don't always like being connected with them, not that anyone would really care since we are basically nobodies anyway).

But just because we're "nobodies" doesn't mean that kids who think they are "somebody" should put us down. Does it? I mean, I don't think I put other kids down (even if I think they're total geeks), but I suppose if I was being really honest (which was my original goal in this diary, so I better stick to it)...well, I suppose I might act just a little

superior sometimes. I mean, it's not like I really think I'm better than anyone else or anything—but I suppose I might act a little bit snooty, especially when I'm afraid that someone else is going to put me down anyway. I know that's not very nice, but it's the truth.

So, back to the question of popularity. I have to admit that when I was a little kid I used to think it'd be so cool to be the most popular girl in the whole school. Like my Aunt Stephe—she's my mom's baby sister, but so much younger she could almost be my big sister. Anyway, I remember how Grandma used to complain that the phone "rang night and day" for Aunt Stephe. She was a cheerleader and had this really cool boyfriend who looked just like Tom Cruise (Tom was more popular back then, although I still think he's pretty cool).

Anyway, all that popularity stuff seemed pretty great to an eight-year-old kid, and I remember thinking that when I was in high school, I wanted to be exactly like Aunt Stephe. Not that her life has turned out all that great as a grownup, at least not according to my grandma (she's always on poor Stephe's case) and I'd have to admit Steph does have some fairly serious problems (like a baby and no husband plus she freeloads baby-sitting from Grandma). So I guess, in some ways, all that popularity didn't do her a whole lot of good in the long run. But just the same, I still sometimes wish that I was one the coolest girls in high school. Now, how's that for honest?

At the same time, I'd like to think that I'm more mature than that, and I'll admit that Beanie and I

sometimes make fun of the "popular" kids (behind their backs, of course!). And like I said, it's not like I'm a complete loser either—in fact, I got my braces off last fall and my skin is almost completely clear now. I got my hair cut in this really cool style during Christmas break, so that it kind of swings back and forth when I walk. And Aunt Stephe said I look just like Gwyneth Paltrow (of course, she wanted me to baby-sit Oliver at the time, and she might've said anything to seal the deal). I've got a magazine with Gwyneth's photo on it, and I studied my face in the mirror, and I do think there is a slight resemblance. And since I got my haircut, it suddenly seems like other people are looking at me differently. Perhaps even some pretty cool people are actually looking my way (unless it's my imagination). But even so, it feels kind of good. I mean all these years before I just felt kind of invisible (which wasn't so bad; I mean, it was better than sticking out in a crowd).

Now I know I must be sounding all lame and desperate to go on like this (not to mention totally shallow); like all I care about is getting some airhead approval from a bunch of kids who aren't all that nice in the first place. And, like I said, it's not like I don't already have any friends. I mean there's always Beanie. There's a few others too. Okay, I admit it, they're mostly from the youth group! But at least I know they'd stick by me through the very worst. I think some of the nicer ones would. I seriously doubt if those popular kids would be like that. Not that I'll ever have a chance to find out. But on the other

hand, I guess I'd be willing to find out, if I had the chance.

Okay, is that so terribly wrong? Is it so wrong to want some different friends for a change? To want life to change and become more exciting? Last week our youth group leader said that if we don't have something that we really think we need, we should pray for it. I wonder if it would be wrong to pray to become popular. I guess the worst that could happen is that God could say no. It might be worth a try. I don't know why God wouldn't want me to have more friends; we're always being told to "reach out" to those around us. Hey, I'm willing to do some reaching here.

Well, all this wondering is probably just a big, stupid waste of time, because I'm sure the popular kids don't want to hang with me anyway. I've heard them make fun of the geeks and nerds and freaks before—as if we're all deaf and can't even hear them. Or maybe they think we have absolutely no feelings at all. In fact, now that I think about it, I can't even believe that I've sat here and actually considered hanging with kids like that in the first place. But I'm supposed to be honest here. And the truth is, I would hang with them if only they would let me. But, I ask you, is that so terribly wrong?

t w o

Thursday, January 4 (a beginning)

Today, **Jenny Lambert**

talked to me. Now, that might not seem like much to you. But Jenny is one of the most popular girls in the whole school. I know, here I go sounding all shallow again. You know, Jenny is a person too—and I shouldn't hate her just because she's popular, should I? Besides, for a popular person, Jenny is actually pretty nice. She's friendly and even though she's a cheerleader, she doesn't seem all that full of herself the way most of them do. And she's probably the prettiest one of the bunch too. She has brown eyes and long, dark hair that's shiny and thick. Also, she's really smart.

She actually spoke to me at the honor society meeting this afternoon (Beanie refuses to join honor society, even though she's smarter than most of the kids in there). Honor society is in charge of the Valentine's Day Dance, and Jenny and I are on the decorating committee. And while we were compiling our list of what we'll need (like red and pink crepe paper and stuff) Jenny told

me she didn't even want to go to the dance because she had just broken up with her boyfriend, Josh Miller.

Now, if I made a list of all the boys that I'd like to have for my boyfriend, Josh would definitely make the top three. Honestly, he looks just like Matt Damon—same smile, same teeth, everything! But when Jenny ragged on and on about what a total jerk Josh is, I just nodded and agreed with her. I mean, what do I know, just because he's good looking doesn't mean he has any character to speak of.

But the best part was how Jenny even confided in me about him in the first place. And she also told me that she liked my outfit. I got the jeans and top at The Gap last week (with a gift certificate from my other grandma who lives in Pasadena), but my dad thought they were way too expensive—well, I'd say they were well worth it! Then Jenny asked me where I got my hair cut! And she said she wanted to get hers cut like that too. To be honest, at that point, I thought maybe she was just teasing me. You know how kids do that sometimes, saying things like, "Hey, where'd you get those cool shoes?" to some poor kid who's got on a pair of ratty, old Air Jordans or something equally uncool. Anyway, I could tell Jenny wasn't kidding when she actually wrote down the name of the hair salon on her notebook. And the whole time, I just acted really cool and laid back about everything. I never once revealed how totally excited I was just to be talking with her. And then we even walked down to our lockers together!

But now, here comes the embarrassing part. It's some-

thing I wouldn't want to tell anyone, but diaries are good for this kind of confession. You see, Beanie spotted me walking with Jenny. One thing I haven't said too much about is how much Beanie just loves to just blurt out all kinds of crazy stuff. She totally gets off on being loud and shocking—mainly to get attention, I think.

Anyway, I was freaking that Beanie was going to say something really stupid about me walking with Jenny, so I tried to avoid making eye contact with her. But as soon as she saw me she said hey just like usual and started coming my way, but then I just turned and looked away from her, pretending like I didn't even know her. I basically just ignored her! I couldn't even believe I did it. For sure, it was totally stupid not to mention risky—I mean, talk about an open invitation for Beanie to really let me have it. But the really weird thing is, she didn't. She just kept on walking by. And now I feel absolutely lousy about the whole thing, and I know I'll have to tell her I'm sorry. I know she will never, in a million years, understand why I'd ever want to be friends with someone like Jenny Lambert. But the truth is, I do! I really do! And it makes me really mad to think that something so simple should suddenly feel so totally complicated.

January 5, Friday (tough choices)

Today, Jenny Lambert invited me to sit with her and her friends at lunch. Beanie, at the time, was nowhere in sight (unbelievable luck!). So I said, "Sure, why not." Man, I thought I must've died and gone to heaven—either that

or maybe she was teasing. But no, it was true. And so there I sat with them (Jenny and another cheerleader, both wearing their uniforms, and a couple of her other friends too). The most incredible part was that I didn't make a total fool of myself.

The secret, I've decided, is 1) not to seem overly excited by the whole thing, 2) not to try too hard to impress anyone, and 3) [perhaps most importantly] not to talk too much. But let me tell you, it's a tricky balancing act, at best. I mean, if you're too quiet they think you're all stuck up—and that is totally not acceptable when they're the ones who are supposed to be snubbing you. But then if you act all happy and pleased to be with them, they'll treat you like you're part of their little geek outreach program, and for sure that'll be the last time you get to sit at their table. Now don't ask me how I know all this, I think it's like osmosis—like where you just absorb information without knowing it. Or maybe it's because I've been secretly observing them for the past few years. Just like that little kid with her nose pressed up against the candy store window. Pretty pitiful, isn't it? But the good news is—I didn't totally blow it today.

After school, I did get a chance to talk to Beanie about ignoring her yesterday (and I knew by then that she was purposely ignoring me out of pure spite, and maybe hurt feelings too). Of course, my explanation and apology didn't go too well. Just like I thought, she didn't understand at all. She always acts just like she could care less about who's popular and who's not. At least I

think it's an act—you can never be too sure with Beanie, she's so dramatic about everything all the time. I must admit she's one of the best actors in the drama department. She's always trying to get me involved, but the problem is I just freeze up in front of crowds. Maybe I'm getting better at this acting business now. I mean, look how cool I can act around Jenny and her friends. In fact, Beanie should be proud of me. But of course she's not.

Anyway, I told her to give me a break—and that all I want is to have some more interesting friends. Now that was the totally wrong thing to say to someone like Beanie. I know it really hurt her feelings.

"So, I suppose I'm not interesting enough for you?" she practically screams as we wait for the school bus (yes, embarrassingly enough, we still ride the school bus). Then she storms off and sits next to this other girl on the bus without saying another word to me. (And let me tell you, it's bad enough riding the school bus, but it's absolutely the worst when you can't even sit with your friend!) This is the first time I can remember making her that mad. But maybe it's a good thing just now. I really do think I need some space from her—just for the time being. Besides, Beanie is Beanie, and I'm pretty sure she'll always be there for me—you know, when I need her.

So, enough about Beanie. Anyway, here's the really good news. Jenny asked me to go to the mall with her tomorrow—she's going to get her hair cut almost just like mine. I don't think I'll have too hard of a time convincing my parents that Jenny is okay. Especially since her dad is

the superintendent of the school district (which sort of makes him my mom's boss). Also, I know they'll respect that Jenny's a cheerleader. My mom was a cheerleader (way back in the dark ages) and I don't know how many times she's nagged at me to try out, but I always refuse. (I say I think it's stupid, but the real reason is I know I'd probably forget every move and, like I said earlier, I'd probably just freeze and make a total fool of myself in front of the entire student body. Thanks, but no thanks!) But anyway, I'm sure Mom will be ecstatic to know that I'm actually hanging with an actual cheerleader.

But here's the best part—Jenny has her very own car! It's a silver Honda Accord, not new, but still in nice condition. It used to be her mom's, but she told me her mom got a brand new BMW (navy blue) for Christmas, and now the Honda is Jenny's! Man, some people get all the breaks! But I'm not complaining, not at all. If I can't have my own car, what's wrong with having a friend with one? I just hope Jenny still likes me after spending a few hours together. And now I have to figure out what I'm going to wear!

January 6, Saturday (breaking the rules)

Okay, you are not going to believe what happened today! First of all, Jenny and I went to the mall just as planned, and we actually had a really great time—but that's not the part you're not going to believe. We saw a couple of Jenny's friends while we were having an Orange Julius at the food court, and so we all just talked and stuff (and,

by the way, they both really liked Jenny's new haircut), and anyway, the next thing I know, one of the girls (Heather Larson) invites me to come to her boyfriend's house where he's throwing a birthday party for one of his buddies tonight. I said, "sure, why not," but the whole time I'm freaking out, thinking there's no way my parents will let me go to a party at some boy's house.

But wonder of wonders, they said I could go. Actually, it was my mom who said I could go (my dad was off at his office again—he's been putting in a lot of hours lately). I'm pretty sure the only reason my mom let me go is because she's so impressed with Jenny. I'm pretty certain that if I set both Jenny and Beanie side by side, my mom would pick Jenny to be my best friend (not that Jenny's offering, but she is being pretty nice to me).

So anyway, Jenny picks me up and we drive over to Brian Whittier's house (that's Heather's boyfriend and a fantastic basketball player by the way) where it turns out, Brian's parents are gone for the entire weekend—and I guess it should come as no surprise that, with no parents around, the alcohol is flowing in abundance. I have no idea how Brian got all of it, and of course I don't ask. And even though I feel slightly shocked about the whole thing, I don't let on at all. I just act like everything's cool.

But just the same, I don't consume a single drop of alcohol. The truth is, I'm way too scared. I know for a fact that my parents would kill me if they knew what was going on here, and the whole time I'm looking over my shoulder and worrying that this party's going to get busted

big time, and then I'll have a police record, and how in the world would I explain all this to my conservative, church going parents? But what complicates things even further is that everyone at the party is being all cool and chummy to me, and they're all kind of goofy and relaxed (not at all how they act in school), and I'm actually having a pretty good time (other than worrying about getting busted).

So I don't let anyone know that I'm not drinking anything besides club soda. And pretty soon I even start acting all silly like them (like it's contagious or something). Of course, it's a little disturbing (not to mention slightly gross) when a couple of kids get really sick. And one girl throws up all over my favorite shoes—talk about disgusting! But I tell her, "No problem, it's okay." Not that she'll ever remember since she's so totally wasted. I seriously doubt if I'll ever get the smell out of these shoes. But all in all it's not so bad. Not really. But there is one thing that bothers me.

And so now I'm going to be totally honest about something I felt really uncomfortable with tonight—something I totally regret. You see, I let Jenny drive me home even though I knew she was driving under the influence. Of course, she acted like having a few drinks was no big deal, assuring me she was perfectly sober (although I'm pretty sure she wasn't). And I must admit it scared me a lot! Especially when she accidentally drove up over the curb just a block from my house. I mean, my parents have given me all those talks, you know the ones, about how you

should never, ever get in a car with a drunk driver. But they never tell you exactly how to avoid it. I really do know it was an incredibly stupid thing to do—and my parents would totally freak if they knew.

I feel pretty guilty about the whole thing, and if anything like that ever happens again, I'll just offer to drive—or maybe I'll just call my parents to pick me up (although that would be unbelievably embarrassing). To be honest, I don't know what I'd do under those same circumstances again. Or maybe I'll just never go to a party like that again. I know how the Bible says to obey your parents. What I did tonight was anything but obedient—still, I didn't drink any alcohol. Now, wouldn't they be pleased about that?