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Christy Miller

COLLECTION



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ROBIN JONES GUNN

Here's What Readers Are Saying about
the Christy Miller series...

"I started reading the Christy Miller series when I was fourteen. I read all of them in a matter of weeks, and they changed my life. I truly feel that your books have helped me through some of the hardest times of my life."

"To me Christy is a friend. She is so real to me. I can really relate to her...I feel that my relationship with God became so much stronger as I read the Christy Miller series."

"After I read *Summer Promise*, I realized what a real Christian was, so I prayed along with Christy and now I know I'm a real Christian."

"My friend told me I should read your books. I had never really asked Jesus into my heart... You showed me,

“Your books helped me take the first step in giving my heart to the Lord. They inspired me to stay pure.”

“I am a hurricane Katrina survivor... During the time when I was in the hurricane, the Bible and the Christy Miller series were my comfort... Thank you for all the hope you have given me through those books.”

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A TIME TO CHERISH
SWEET DREAMS
A PROMISE IS FOREVER



ROBIN JONES GUNN

Multnomah® Publishers *Sisters, Oregon*

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A Time to Cherish

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Sweet Dreams

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Book 12: *Take My Hand*

BOOK TEN



A Time to
● ● ● ● ● *Cherish*

*To a couple of “peculiar treasures” in Escondido,
John and Debbie Ferguson,
who gave me my first typewriter
and told me to go write a book.
And to my publicist and true friend,
Beverly Rykerd,
who has opened her heart and her home to me
and is always ready with a listening ear.*

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No Guarantees

Christy Miller suddenly woke up. She kicked the heavy sleeping bag off her sweaty legs and squinted her eyes in the darkness, trying to remember where she was. Her bed seemed to tilt back and forth with a gentle roll.

Then Christy remembered. She was on a houseboat—Aunt Marti’s idea of a “Farewell to Summer” party over the Labor Day weekend.

She could hear her best friend, Katie, gently snoring across the cabin. Christy pulled on her sweats and placed her bare feet on the cool floor. Padding her way to the boat’s front deck, she closed the sliding glass door behind her and drew in a deep breath of fresh morning air.

The sky had not quite awakened but seemed to be slowly rising, rubbing the thin pink cloud “sleepers” from its eyes and checking its reflection in the still lake-mirror.

The day promised to be perfect. She could smell it in the sweet breeze rising off the water. Just then something splashed in the water. She quickly figured out it must be

either Todd or Doug. The two of them had slept under the stars on the houseboat's roof.

Soon Todd's white-blond head popped up out of the water. He didn't notice Christy watching him and kept swimming with quiet, easy strokes. Turning to float on his back, he spoke into the dawn.

"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth! You have set Your glory above the heavens!"

Christy couldn't help but smile. That was so like Todd.

She moved closer to the railing, wondering if she should interrupt Todd's conversation with God. On her last step, her foot tagged the corner of a folded-up beach chair, causing it to tip over and clatter loudly. Todd spun around in the water and began to swim back toward the houseboat.

Christy quickly smoothed back her nutmeg-brown hair and tried to tuck the wild ends into her loose braid. *I probably look awful! Groggy, to say the least.*

Then she realized that this was Todd, and he had never been the kind of guy to judge anyone by outward appearances. Hopefully he would keep that in mind when he saw her fresh from her sleeping bag.

Todd grabbed on to one of the ropes hanging from the front of the houseboat and pulled himself up the steps onto the deck.

"Hi," Christy whispered shyly. "How's the water?"

Todd smiled and reached for a beach towel on the railing. His silver-blue eyes met Christy's, and he whispered back, "You want to find out?"

"Not really."

"Not even a little cold shower?" Todd shook his hair in front of her like a dog.

“Okay, okay.” Christy giggled, holding up her hands in defense. “You convinced me; it’s cold!”

“Refreshing,” Todd corrected her, slipping a navy blue hooded sweatshirt over his head and sticking his hands in the front pocket. “You the only one up?”

Christy nodded. “I think so.”

“It was a long ride here yesterday,” Todd said. “They’ll probably all sleep in. What got you up this early?”

“I was burning up in my sleeping bag. It must be designed for subzero temperatures.”

“I know the perfect way to cool you off. Let’s go for a spin around the lake.”

“In what?” Christy asked. “If we start up the ski boat, we’ll wake everyone.”

“Then we’ll take the raft.” Todd pulled the big, yellow inflated monster from the side of the houseboat and dropped it into the water. “Ladies first.”

Christy went through all her mental resistance in record time. Would they get in trouble for going out like this without telling anyone? No, Bob and Marti trusted Todd. What if she got her sweats wet? So what? She could change into something dry when they came back. Unable to think of a reason why she shouldn’t go, Christy lowered herself into the wobbly raft.

Todd grabbed two paddles, put up the hood on his sweatshirt, and with the beach towel wrapped around his wet swim trunks, joined Christy. They silently paddled away from the cove and headed for the open part of the lake.

One look at Todd’s face and Christy knew he thought this was an adventure. Todd thrived on adventure. His lifelong ambition was to become a missionary and live in the jungle.

Christy liked adventure too. At least the little bit she had experienced in her seventeen years. But she wasn't sure how she felt about spending the rest of her life in the jungle. Maybe if she had one of those butane curling irons that didn't need to be plugged in.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Todd looked up at the awakening sky. He pointed to a trail of puffy white clouds stomping across the seamless blue. "The clouds are the dust beneath His feet."

Christy smiled at Todd's poetic flair. He looked like a monk with the hood covering his head. "Did you just make that up?"

"No," Todd confessed. "An Old Testament prophet did. Nahum, to be exact. I always think of that verse when I see clouds that look like God just went for a morning stroll across the face of the earth."

Christy knew the look in Todd's eyes. She had seen it many times during the two years she had known him. Two years filled with more ups and downs than an elevator. Yet one thing had never changed: Todd's love for God. More than once Christy had wished Todd would become even one-tenth as committed to her as he was to God.

It wasn't that she didn't love God too. She did. She had promised her heart to the Lord more than two years ago and had grown a lot as a Christian since then. But all Todd had ever promised her was that they would be friends forever. What did that mean?

Next week she would begin her senior year of high school, and Todd was now a sophomore in college. How old did a guy have to be before he made a substantial promise to a girl?

“You know what this reminds me of?” Todd asked.
“That morning on the beach.”

“You mean Christmas morning a couple of years ago when we made breakfast and the seagulls scarfed it all?” Christy said.

Todd smiled. “I almost forgot about that. No, I mean that morning last year. Remember? We just happened to meet on the beach in the fog.”

A knot tightened in Christy’s stomach. That was not a morning she liked to remember. “And here we are,” she said, ignoring the knot, “out together again at the break of day. Only this time you’re not telling me you’re going off to Hawaii indefinitely to surf.” Christy hesitated. “Or are you?”

“Nope.” Todd put down his paddle and let the raft float. He propped his hands behind his head and leaned back against the pudgy side of the raft. “And you’re not trying to give me back your ID bracelet either.”

Christy glanced down at the gold bracelet on her right wrist. The engraved word “Forever” glinted in the rising sun. “I wanted you to be free to go to Hawaii and not feel obligated to me.”

“And I wanted you to be free to date Rick and not feel like I was holding you back,” Todd countered.

Christy sighed. “I wish now that you had held me back. I don’t have pleasant memories of dating Rick.”

“Had to be your own choice,” Todd said. “No one else could make that decision for you. That would be robbing you of who you are. There’s great value in everything that happened. You just have to look for it.”

Christy leaned back and felt the sun warming the left

side of her face. She thought hard about Rick and his overpowering ways, wondering what possible great value had come out of their relationship. Maybe going out with Rick had taught her more about the kind of guy she *did* want to be with. Now, more than ever, Todd was definitely that guy.

“What would you like from me, Christy?” Todd suddenly asked, as if he had been reading her thoughts.

“What do you mean?”

“You want more of a commitment than what we have now, don’t you?”

Christy felt her cheeks turn red—and not because of the sun. “Why do you say that?”

“Your aunt had a little talk with me on the way up yesterday when you were in the truck with Katie and Doug. She told me that if I didn’t stake my claim soon, you’d take off with some other guy. She thinks it’s time we officially start going out, let people know we’re a couple.”

Now Christy felt really embarrassed. Aunt Marti was always speaking her mind, but Todd never seemed to pay much attention to her. Why was he bringing all of this up now?

“Todd, you know my aunt. That’s her idea, not mine.”

“Yeah, I know. That’s what she said.”

Christy shook her head. “Todd, I apologize—”

“No need. I would have let it go, except Doug has been asking me about our relationship. I guess you know he’s wanted to go out with you for a long time.”

“Doug?”

Todd nodded. “You mean you didn’t know?”

“No. I was hoping he and Katie would get together.”

Todd shrugged. For several long minutes it was quiet.

“So,” Todd said, leaning forward and looking Christy in the eye, “I guess I’m feeling like we have to start making some decisions about us. What do you really think, Kilikina? Do you want more of a commitment from me?”

Christy always melted inside when Todd called her by her Hawaiian name. For a long time she had wished he would ask her this kind of question. But she hadn’t expected it. Not here. Not this morning. If it weren’t for her bare feet being nearly numb from the puddle of cool water in the raft, she would have thought she was still asleep, and this was all a romantic dream.

“I don’t know,” she said, surprised to hear such a wishy-washy answer pop out.

“Then tell me how you feel.”

“About you?”

“About me, about us. I need to know what you’re thinking and feeling.”

“Well, I feel really good when I’m with you,” Christy began. “Really comfortable. I miss you when I don’t see you. I think about you all the time, and I pray for you every day. You make me feel closer to God, and I never feel pressured to try to be anything other than myself around you. I like you more than any other guy I’ve ever known.”

A slow smile crept onto Todd’s face. It was as if Christy’s words were warming him from the inside out. She had never been able to tell him so clearly how she felt about him. It felt good to put her heart out there in the open. She had tried doing the same thing a year ago at their early morning encounter on the beach, but it obviously wasn’t the right time. Todd wouldn’t receive her words last year. This morning they made him glow.

“I feel the same way about you,” Todd said. “It’s been important to me all along that we take things slowly. I never wanted our relationship to grow too fast.”

“Two years is not exactly too fast,” Christy said with a teasing smile.

“Just about right, I’d say. That’s the way it is with God, you know. He’s always on time but rarely early.”

Christy couldn’t believe how smoothly this conversation was going. She and Todd didn’t talk about their feelings very often. A hint of apprehension and excitement started to hedge in.

It was silent again as the morning ripples on the lake gently rocked their raft back and forth. Todd broke the quiet with a nervous chuckle. “I don’t know how to say it. What’s the term for us? Are we now officially ‘going out’ or what?”

“I don’t know, are we?” Christy asked cautiously.

“That’s what you want, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I mean, if that’s what you want.”

“That’s what I want,” Todd said firmly. “I want to be your boyfriend, even though I hate using that term. You reflect what’s in the heart. Something doesn’t come from inside you simply because you speak it into being. If it’s truly in your heart, it will come out in what you do.”

Christy nodded. She knew exactly what Todd meant. Their relationship had always been beyond labels. Todd had consistently been true to his word to be her friend, no matter what happened.

“So now we’re officially a couple.” Todd squared his broad shoulders and smiled so the dimple showed on his right cheek. “Do you feel any different?”

“No, not exactly.”

“Neither do I. Maybe that’s good. Maybe everything is still at the same level with us, only now we have an answer to give everyone else. We’re going together.”

Christy liked the sound of Todd’s deep voice saying, “We’re going together.” She loved the feeling of being more secure in their relationship.

“I’m glad,” she told him softly.

“Me too,” Todd said, then tenderly added, “You are an incredible person, Kilikina. I hold you in my heart. You are the only girl I’ve ever kissed. I haven’t been the same since that night right after we met and I followed you out to the jetty when you left Shawn’s party.”

“I felt like such a baby that night,” Christy remembered. “Everyone was drinking, and I was so naive!”

“You were innocent, Christy. You have no idea how beautiful that made you.”

Christy felt like crying. “Todd, I...” She didn’t know how to put into words everything she felt right then. “I’m really glad, I mean, this is so... I don’t know. It’s so *right*. I’m really happy we’re moving our relationship forward.”

Just then the roar from a ski boat engine broke their magical moment. Todd squinted and then started to wave at the boat. “It’s Doug and Katie. I bet he’s ready to start some serious waterskiing!”

Doug cut the engine on the boat and slowly drifted toward the raft. “Ahoy, mates!” he called out. Doug wore a bandanna “pirate style” around his short sandy blond hair. The broad smile that spread across his face showed he was in his typically great mood. “Would ye be needin’ a hoist

back to the cove before ye find yourselves shipwrecked?”

Todd turned to Christy, “That wouldn’t be so bad, would it?”

“Which?” Christy asked. “Being hoisted back to shore or being shipwrecked?”

Todd didn’t answer, and for a moment the two of them locked gazes, their eyes revealing a thousand secrets of the heart.

“I think we’re interrupting something.” Katie’s red hair swished as she looked at Christy and Todd and then at Doug. She held up an orange flag used to indicate a downed skier in the water. Waving it like a fairy wand, she asked, “Tell us, you two, what did we miss out on this morning? Anything you’d like to share with the rest of us?”

Christy felt herself blushing again and wondered how old she would be before she outgrew this reflex.

“We’ve been checking out the dust of God’s feet,” Todd answered. “And making some promises,” he added in a whisper loud enough for only Christy to hear.

“So how about we make some of our own wave-dust?” Doug asked. “You ready to break up some of this glass?”

“Wait! We want you to tow us first,” Katie yelled. “Let me get in the raft with Christy, and you guys can tow us back to the houseboat.”

“As long as you promise to go *slow!*” Christy said.

Doug threw out a long rope for Todd to secure the raft to the back of the boat while Katie made the transfer from boat to raft. Todd climbed up the stepladder by the rudder and tightened the knot on the rope.

“Okay, here are the signals,” Todd said. “Thumbs up means go faster. A finger across your throat like this

means stop, and a thumb down means slow down.”

Christy put her thumb down. “I mean it, you guys, go slow!”

“You’d better find something to hold on to,” Todd called from the boat. He tossed two orange life vests into the raft and instructed them to put them on.

Christy fastened the vest over her sweats and grabbed on to a black handle on the side of the raft. “Whose idea was this anyway?”

“Mine,” Katie said without regret. Then looking into Christy’s blue-green eyes, Katie said, “What?”

“What *what*?”

“What’s up with you?”

“What do you mean?”

Katie put her hand on her hip, tilted her head, and examined her best friend’s expression. “I was right. There was something going on between you two this morning. You have a secret, Christina Juliet Miller, don’t you?”

Christy didn’t answer with words, but the smile skipping across her lips gave it all away.

“I knew it!” Katie cried loud enough to awaken any lazy fish who weren’t up yet. “Don’t tell me; let me guess. You and Todd are finally going together! Am I right?”

Christy looked up into the boat, hoping to see Todd’s assuring grin. Instead she saw Doug’s usually smiling face transformed into a grim frown.

Just then Doug started up the boat with a roar. The rope pulled tight, and the raft lurched in the water.

Christy let out a scream and yelled, “Go slow!”

Doug jammed the ski boat into high. Their raft felt as if it suddenly became airborne. The girls held on, screaming

and trying to motion the “slow down” and “stop” signals to the guys.

Doug turned to the right, and the raft flew over a wave and skittered outside the wake. Before they could get their balance, another larger wave rushed up from underneath the raft, flipping the girls into the water.

Their life vests brought them bobbing up to the surface at the same time, and Katie and Christy began to tread water and hurl threats at the guys.

“Doug did that on purpose!” Katie said as the boat slowly motored in a circle to come back and retrieve them. “And I have several ideas of how we can get him back this weekend.”

Even across the sparkling water, Christy could recognize the mischievous glint in the eyes of her redheaded friend.

“I leave all the revenge games to you,” Christy said, aware of how heavy her soaked sweats had become as she kicked her legs in the water. “I don’t want to start anything unless there’s a guarantee I won’t get hurt in the end.”

Katie tilted back her head and laughed. “It’s too late for that!”

Christy was now next to Katie in the water. The guys threw them a rope.

“One dunk in the lake by Doug doesn’t mean it’s too late,” Christy said.

“Oh, I didn’t mean Doug,” Katie answered. “I meant with Todd. Something happened with you two this morning. I can tell. And whatever it was, I have a feeling it’s too late for any kind of a guarantee you won’t get hurt in the