



SISTERCHICKS®

*Say Ooh  
La La*

Robin  
Jones Gunn



MULTNOMAH  
BOOKS

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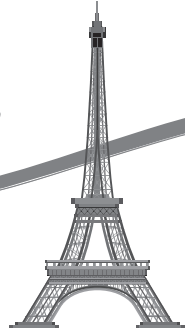
*Praying For Your Future Husband*

To the one and only Anne-girl  
who showed me *her* Paris after I vowed I'd never return.  
Okay, so you're right, mon ami.  
Paris is an amazing city.  
And the little cha-cha you danced on the Eiffel Tower  
was pretty memorable, too... Sisterchicks forever!

*God's Spirit beckons.  
There are things to do and places to go!  
This resurrection life you received from God is  
not a timid, grave-tending life.  
It's adventurously expectant, greeting God  
with a childlike, "What's next, Papa?"  
God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms  
who we really are. We know who he is,  
and we know who we are: Father and children.*

ROMANS 8:14-16

# Prologue



My best friend, Amy, likes to say her first words as a baby were, “Ooh la la!”

She also says her Parisian *grandmere* taught Amy to say *merci* instead of *thank you* and to walk with her shoulders back and her chin forward. From the day I met her, she always has carried herself with a ballerina-like posture. If it’s possible for a woman to be elegant at age eight, Amy was.

Amy arrived in our uncouth corner of Memphis in the middle of our third-grade year. She moved into the big brick house on Forrest Avenue with her mother and grandmother. Her mother had flawless creamy skin that made me want to touch her face and hands. Her grandmother spoke only French and wore an expensive perfume that, whenever I got close to her, came home with me in a pillowy after-cloud. At my house, I was the youngest of five

and the only girl. Stepping into Amy's pink palace of femininity was my first brush with bliss.

The day Amy entered our class as the new girl, during roll call I studied her long raven tresses. How did she manage to balance her crisp white hair bow so perfectly on the back of her head?

At recess I followed her out to the playground. She turned around and, to my surprise, confided in me as if I were her best friend. "My real name isn't Amy. It's Amelie Jeanette. Most people can't pronounce Amelie Jeanette the right way."

"I bet I can." The advantage of being the youngest with all those brothers was knowing how to accept every challenge and feign fearlessness. That is, until I got hurt. Then I would run away and hide.

Amy raised one of her Elizabeth Taylor eyebrows and waited for me to prove my stuff. I carefully repeated her first and middle names and then added her last name, "DuPree," just to prove I'd been paying attention in class. She was impressed.

I tested her back. "Do you know my name?"

"Of course. It's Lisa Marie Kroeker."

She got my middle name wrong, but I didn't correct her. It was the spring of 1968, and everyone in Memphis, and maybe the rest of the world, had heard the name Lisa Marie that February when Elvis announced he and Priscilla had a baby girl. I liked being called Lisa Marie. Marie was

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much better than my real middle name, which I had never revealed to anyone.

For an entire week Amy and I were inseparable at school. She brought a package of Hostess Twinkies for lunch every day and always gave me the second one. When I was asked to choose a partner on my day as milk monitor, I chose Amy. It was the happiest stretch of my elementary career and a definite turning point in my no-frills childhood.

My reveling, however, took a nosedive at the end of our first week as best friends when Amy asked, “Do you want to come to my house after school today and play Barbies?”

“Barbies?” I repeated, feeling the walls of our brief Camelot crumble. My mother had unbendable views on Barbie dolls. She said Barbies were “unrealistic” in proportions, “unsavory” as role models, and an “unnecessary” waste of a young girl’s leisure time. I rarely was allowed to play with other girls once my mother found out they owned Barbies. Girls who came to my house were expected to play hopscotch.

“I don’t have any Barbies,” I said.

“That’s okay; you can play with mine. I have eight,” Amy said. “And two Kens.”

My stomach melted. *Eight Barbies! Two Kens!*

“Amelie Jeanette.” I tried to appeal to something deeper in her than even I understood. “I have to tell you something.”



This part of the story is where Amy shines best. She listened, eyes unblinking, as I explained my mother's ban on all things Barbie and her indictment against Ken dolls.

Amy slid her arm around my shoulder. "Leave it to me, Lisa. Your mother will never know."

"But I will," I said, suffering from a strong sense of right and wrong. "I'll know about the Barbies at your house. And the Kens."

"Not if I never take them out of the closet."

"What do you mean?"

With a flip of her ponytail she said, "Whenever you come over, I'll leave them in the closet."

"Amy, are you saying you would give up Barbies for me?"

She nodded.

I blinked almost as fast as a hummingbird's wings and told Amy I had something in my eye. I wasn't used to crying. But then, no other girl had ever been willing to give up Barbies for me.

True to her word, Amy never pulled her Barbies or her Kens out of the closet when I went over to her house. Not even once. I made it through childhood without defying my mother. I saved that delicacy for adulthood.

All Amy asked in return was for a few promises. Some of the promises were sweet, like agreeing to be each other's bridesmaid. Some were silly, like always reading the same Nancy Drew book at the same time and never reading a chapter ahead.

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One promise was ridiculous, but I agreed to it anyway. Amy wanted us to go to Paris when we grew up. She said she wanted to stroll down some boulevard called the Champs-Élysées wearing high-heeled shoes and sunglasses. She said that would prove we were stylish. I could use all the style lessons I could get, so I willingly agreed to go with her.

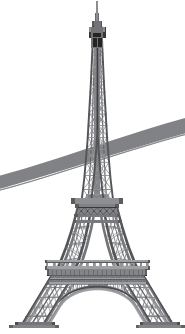
That was before we had a falling out in high school and went our separate ways. We didn't talk to each other for eight years. Such a thing never should have happened to two friends such as we, but that's what happened.

During our separation I formed my own opinions of Amy's beloved France. I came to the conclusion that I never would go to Paris. Not even with Amy. Not even because I promised her I would.

However, I'm beginning to believe that every promise can be heard in the celestial courts, which gives every promise the potential of becoming something of eternal significance. I don't know how it works. I don't know if God really was listening to the "forever friends" promises Amy and I made under the ruffles of her canopy bed when we were young. All I know is that Amy's and my childhood promises were unexpectedly called back into play on a rainy autumn afternoon in the emergency room of Cincinnati General Hospital.

It all started with a not-so-simple "ooh la la!"

# One



**T**he first time Amy made me promise we would go to Paris was on a sultry summer night when we were eleven. A noisy metal fan balanced atop a stack of books on Amy's vanity table provided the only movement in her bedroom. The two of us had positioned ourselves belly-down at the end of her princess bed, chins resting on our folded hands. Facing the fan, we looked at ourselves in all three sides of the vanity mirror. We liked looking in the mirror and making faces at ourselves and at each other. This particular night, however, was too hot to be silly. Amy switched to a different form of entertainment—thinking up things for me to promise her I would do.

“You have to swear something to me, Lisa,” she said with her dramatic Amy flair. “You have to swear to me that we will always be best friends, no matter what.”

“I’m not allowed to swear,” I said.

“Then promise it. Promise me we’ll always be best friends.”

“I promise.”

“And promise me you’ll be in my wedding and I’ll be in yours.”

“Okay, I promise.” I liked the idea of being Amy’s maid of honor. I knew she would have an all-pink wedding, and there was a good chance I’d wear a very fancy dress.

“Now promise me you’ll be there, right beside me, when I give birth to my first child.”

“Why on earth would I want to do that?”

“You don’t have to watch or help or anything, Lisa. I just want you to be there. Promise me you’ll be there.” Her expression reflected in the mirror made it clear she wasn’t kidding about any of this.

“Okay. I’ll be there for you, Amy. I promise.”

“Okay, good.” Flipping over onto her back, Amy reached for the ruffled eyelet of the canopy with her pointed toe. Earlier that evening we had painted our toes with frosted cotton candy nail polish. I noticed that Amy’s toes looked pinker and frostier than mine, so I went for the bottle on the vanity to apply another coat. Keeping up with Amy tended to take extra effort.

“If my first baby is a boy, I’m going to name him Davy,” Amy said in her dreamiest voice.

This was no surprise since Amy’s closet door was cov-

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ered with a collection of Monkee fan pictures torn out of her *Tiger Beat* magazines. In the center of the collage was the cover of her mother's *TV Guide* embellished with a red heart around Davy Jones's grinning face.

"Davy is a nice name," I said agreeably. Amy already knew that Peter was my favorite Monkee, so it wouldn't be of any value to bring up that topic again. Ninety percent of the reason I cast my crush vote for Peter was because every other girl at school thought Davy was the cutest. Those were the same girls who had pink vinyl carrying cases for their Barbies.

"Who do you think you and I will end up marrying?" Amy asked.

"Beats me."

"I'm thinking we'll find men who are smart and rich and maybe famous."

I grinned. "I thought you would say they would be French."

"Of course they'll be French!"

Outside, a souped-up car rumbled loudly, leaving behind a puffy gasp of leaded gasoline that rose silently and slipped through the second-story bedroom window to our pristine hideaway. I coughed involuntarily. Anything that had to do with the dirtiness of cars made me cough.

"Unless, of course, I marry Davy Jones," Amy said. "Then maybe we'll just live in France."

I gave Amy one of my "oh, brother!" looks over the top of my glasses.

“It could happen! Of course, you do know, Lisa, that before either of us has babies or gets married, we must go to Paris.”

“Why?” I held up my foot in front of the fan in what I’m sure was a rather unladylike pose.

“We have to go to Paris to show we have style. We’ll buy high-heeled shoes and sunglasses and parade down the Champs-Élysées like refined and sophisticated women. When we come home, everyone will think you and I are the classiest young ladies in all of Memphis.”

Amy seemed to have forgotten that I was the daughter of Tommy Kroeker, as in Tommy Kroeker Deluxe Carwash on Downing Street and Elm. I did not come from a family known for style or sophistication. As a matter of fact, my father was known for his strangely twisted, self-deprecating humor. Instead of minimizing that our last name was pronounced “croaker,” he plopped his face on the ten-foot-tall caricature of a bullfrog and turned “Tommy Kroeker’s Car Wash” into one of the most memorable sights in Memphis. Before Graceland opened its gates to visitors, that is.

I won’t begin to recite all the taunts I heard while growing up. Kermit the frog had not yet made his celebrity debut, and no one yet understood how it isn’t easy being green. By the age of six, I was convinced there was nothing positive about being a Kroeker. Especially when you’re the only female Kroeker and forbidden to kick or slug or bite,

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even though you knew you would be pretty good at it if given the chance.

Amy all but dispelled the Kroeker curse that night when she talked about how going to Paris would make me classy and refined. That small seed of hope tucked itself into my spirit and stayed with me for many years before it sprouted.

I look back now and realize that the gift of a true friend is that she sees you not the way you see yourself or the way others see you. A true friend sees who you are inside and who you can become. That's what Amy did for me during those precarious preteen years. She showed me what a beautiful and feminine thing it was to carry around a dream with you. According to Grandmere, Amy said, "Hope is the most versatile and sparkling of all accessories and can be worn by any woman, regardless of her age."

Catching my contorted position in the vanity mirror of Amy's room that evening, I straightened up, and with a heightened sense of my lack of decorum said, "Your mother lived in Paris when she was in high school, didn't she?"

"For two years," Amy said. "Not that you and I have to stay that long. But don't you think my mother is classy?"

No doubt about it. Amy's mom, Elie DuPree, was the classiest of all women. She worked at an exclusive clothing store inside the lobby of the famous Drake Hotel in downtown Memphis. Guests from around the world would ask

her advice on what silk scarf matched which leather hand-bag.

“And what about Grandmere? She’s classy, too,” Amy continued.

“The classiest,” I agreed.

Grandmere used to be a seamstress when she lived in Paris. At only fourteen years of age she sewed clothes for Coco Chanel. Grandmere had an autographed photo of the famous designer framed in silver on her bedroom dresser. I adored Amy’s grandmere so much I pretended she was my grandmother, too. Amy knew I was enamored with the three captivating women who filled her house with their lacy laughter. They always welcomed me with a kiss on each cheek and offered me something to eat.

At my house, five boisterous men filled the air with the scent of smelly socks, and after-school treats were unheard of. If Amy came over, and we were absolutely starving, we could eat an apple or a banana before dinner. That is, if my monkey brothers hadn’t cleaned out the fruit bowl before Amy and I arrived. My mother, by Amy’s confidential assessment, would have made a good pilgrim if she had only been born before the Mayflower sailed.

The crazy thing is that Amy said she liked going to my house as much as I liked going to hers. That was incredible to me. She liked being around my brothers. Amy’s father left when she was three. I knew she had long held out the hope that her father would one day step back into her life.



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But he never returned. My brothers seemed to fill that loss of male camaraderie in a roundabout way. They taught Amy to play baseball and laughed at what they called her “prissy manners.” She loved it whenever one of them chased us with the garden hose.

At Amy’s house we sat on velvet-cushioned chairs and learned how to stitch lavender lace sachets for our underwear drawers. At my house we dug up worms for the end of my brothers’ fishing hooks. I guess in many ways we both needed each other. While my life provided Amy with roots in the richness of this good earth, she was offering me butterfly wings to soar above it all.

According to Amy, Paris was the nonnegotiable starting point for our flights of fancy. All a young woman like myself needed was to stroll under the Arch of Triumph or saunter past the Eiffel Tower with a well-groomed poodle on the end of a pink leather leash, and I would be transformed into a stunning debutante.

Amy was the one who could make all that happen for me. My part was to simply keep my promise to always be there for her.

“So?” Amy challenged me that night under the ruffled canopy. “Do you promise to go to Paris with me before we have babies and get married?”

“Okay, I’ll go to Paris with you. But, Amy, we have to be married first before we can have babies.” I lifted my feathery blond hair off my perspiring neck and added

with an air of authority, “That’s how it works.”

“What do you mean? That’s how what works?”

“First you get married, and then a baby grows inside you.”

“You don’t have to be married for that to happen.”

“Yes, you do.”

Amy tilted her head and looked at me. “Lisa, you don’t know how it really happens, do you?”

“How what happens?”

“How a baby gets inside its mother.”

“Of course I know.”

“Okay, then tell me.”

“Well...it...actually, nobody really knows how a baby gets in there. It’s a miracle. *The miracle of life.*”

Amy let out a low, “Ooh la la.”

“What?”

“Come here. Sit next to me, Lisa.”

“Why?”

“Because I have something to tell you, and if you don’t sit beside me and watch my face the whole time, you’re going to think I’m making this up.”

With her shoulders back and chin forward, my all-knowing friend revealed to me the specifics of one of life’s great mysteries. I believed every word. I had no reason to doubt that Amy would always tell me the truth.

As I look back, I don’t think I blamed my mother for avoiding the details that Amy so willingly gave me that

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night. As a matter of fact, I've always treasured that Amy was the one who told me the truth about where babies come from. Such stunning information is best delivered eye to eye, and that conversational style had never been one of my mother's strong points.

I wondered how Amy knew so much. I remember thinking it might have something to do with the church she, her mother, and Grandmere attended faithfully every Sunday morning. They left the house wearing lace doilies on their heads, carrying strings of wooden beads, and walked the four blocks to St. Augustine's with a peaceful solemnity.

Sometimes our family would drive past them on our way to the largest church in town. My mother would cluck her tongue, and my father would honk the horn and wave at them. I always wondered what kinds of secrets about the mysteries of life they were telling Amy inside that fancy church.

At our church, we got the gospel every Sunday, and it never seemed like extraordinary information to me. Amy said they lit candles at her church. We didn't have mystifying things like that at our church. All we had was a baptismal tub with a drain in the floor behind the choir loft. Sometimes the drain would glug at unexpected times, and my brothers would make rude faces at each other and try not to laugh.

Our family always sat five rows back on the left. Each

of us had our own Bible, and whenever Pastor Mason would step to the pulpit and say, “Open your Bibles with me to...” my brothers would vigorously compete to see who could be the first to find the right page.

One time Will turned the pages so fast he ripped 1 John right down the middle. My father leaned over and swatted him upside the head. I was so embarrassed I started to cry. My mother took me by the hand and led me to the restroom where I received a firm swat on the bottom for “acting up in church.”

After that I volunteered to help in the church nursery and discovered that no one thinks you’re acting up if you’re playing with the babies.

My church experience improved when I reached junior high because we had youth rallies and sports nights at which my brothers always dominated the playing field. Amy came with me all the time and told me how much better my church was than hers because we could play basketball in the parking lot and we had guitar music. Plus all of our songs were in English.

I never visited Amy’s church because my parents forbade it. I never understood what they were afraid of. But then, I didn’t understand why Amy always ate fish sticks on Fridays, either. My mother was pleased whenever I said Amy was coming to a church activity with me. She didn’t know that Amy was coming because we had cuter boys at our church.

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Amy's first kiss was behind the closet door in the choir room with one of my brothers' friends. She was thirteen. When she came and found me in the church kitchen, I was helping make popcorn for the youth event going on in the fellowship hall, which is where Amy was supposed to have been, hearing the gospel.

As soon as she told me, I grabbed her by the elbow, took her down the hallway, and said, "You listen to me, Amelie Jeanette DuPree. You are *not* going to get a bad reputation around here. Don't you *ever* go off like that again and kiss any other boy at this church! Do you understand me?"

She was so mad at me she called her mother to come pick her up.

Two days later Amy walked over to my house with a bandanna on her head. She came up to my small bedroom that had pictures of kittens and horses pinned to the wall. We closed the door and whispered so no one would hear us.

"Promise me, Lisa! Promise me you won't let me ruin my reputation," she said tearfully.

"I promise, Amy."

After that, Amy was sparing with her kisses, but she didn't stop her systematic development of a new crush on each of the boys in our class. The longest crush was the one she had on Charlie Neusman. He never responded in kind, and I always thought that bothered her, even though she didn't talk about it.

That's the only explanation I could find for the way Amy acted after Charlie asked me to the prom. He was my first date. The prom was my first dance. It took three days of pleading and discussing before I could persuade my parents to let me go with Charlie.

When I told Amy, she said she was happy for me. The next day she turned strangely quiet. The remaining few weeks of our senior year played themselves out, and she stayed away, always giving me what sounded like reasonable excuses for her disassociation with me and everyone else in my family. I kept waiting for Amy's tempo toward me to change the way the big mood ring she wore on her thumb changed every few hours.

Yet Amy didn't change.

I finally asked if she still had a crush on Charlie or if she wished he had asked her to the prom instead, and she said no. I couldn't think of any other reason she would be mad at me.

At graduation we hugged, and Amy whispered in my ear, "I'm sorry. I'll never forget you, Lisa Marie."

I thought it was a strange thing to say. What was even stranger was the way she couldn't find time to get together and do things the way we did every summer. But we both had summer jobs that kept us busy, and soon Amy and I had drifted apart. She went to college in Kentucky. I stayed home and went to community college in Memphis.

We didn't speak to each other for almost eight years.

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Those were fumbling years for me. I went from being the small dot at the end of a long exclamation mark at our house to being a mere speck of a life that could easily be brushed away. I wanted to prove to the world that I was strong. I was woman. I roared! But no one was close enough to hear me.

That is, until Amy rolled back into my life, stretched out on a hospital bed with her abdomen rising under the tight sheet like the dome of a package of Jiffy Pop popcorn.