

Best-Selling Author of *Becoming Us*

ROBIN JONES GUNN

Being Known

A Novel

SNEAK
PEEK



SAMPLE
ONLY

UNCORRECTED
PROOF

Haven
Makers
Series

Being Known

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

BOOKS BY ROBIN JONES GUNN

Series and Collections

Christy Miller

Sierra Jensen

Christy and Todd: The College Years

Katie Weldon

Christy and Todd: The Married Years

Christy and Todd: The Baby Years

Glenbrooke

Sisterchicks

Haven Makers

Novellas and Hallmark Movies

Finding Father Christmas

Engaging Father Christmas

Kissing Father Christmas

Nonfiction

Praying for Your Future Husband: Preparing Your Heart for His

Victim of Grace: When God's Goodness Prevails

Spoken For: Embracing Who You Are and Whose You Are

A Pocketful of Hope for Mothers

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

ROBIN JONES
GUNN

Being Known

A Novel



MULTNOMAH

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

BEING KNOWN

Scripture quotations and paraphrases are taken from the following versions: King James Version. Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. New King James Version®, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

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

Trade Paperback ISBN 978-0-7352-9077-8

eBook ISBN 978-0-7352-9078-5

Copyright © 2020 by Robin's Nest Productions Inc.

Cover design by Kelly L. Howard

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 Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

MULTNOMAH® and its mountain colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gunn, Robin Jones, 1955– author.

Title: Being known : a novel / Robin Jones Gunn.

Description: First edition. | New York : Multnomah, [2020] | Series: The haven makers

Identifiers: LCCN 2019035342 | ISBN 9780735290778 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9780735290785 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Domestic fiction. | GSAFD: Christian fiction.

Classification: LCC PS357.U4866 B45 2020 | DDC 813/.54—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019035342>

Printed in the United States of America

2020—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

With much aloha to my closest DOEs, Rachel, Janet, Marlene, Kim, Carolyn, Janna, Manasseh, Jill, Donna, Alyssa, Leslie, and Molly. Thank you for being so generous with your time, words, prayers, and love. It's an honor to be known by you. You are the mothers, sisters, friends, and daughters who have brought the sacred into my ordinary days. More, please.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

Chapter 1

Whenever I close my eyes and think of my mother, I see her red toenails. Her perfectly manicured toes flaunting her signature nail-polish color, Oh My, Cherry Pie.

I saw her toes in my mind's eye when I stopped at 19th and Harbor on my way home on an ordinary Thursday. The January sun was hitting the traffic light just right, intensifying the red, scorching my thoughts with visions of cherry red toenails.

In an instant, everything went from feeling normal to a sensation that my heart was being squeezed. *Strangled* might be a better word, as if all the breath, joy, and hope of my life were being choked out by an angry, invisible hand.

I suddenly felt so alone.

The impression surprised me because I was not alone. Rarely am I by myself long enough to even take a decent shower. In the back seat of the car my four-year-old daughter, Eden, was singing one of her sweet and silly songs. In the rearview mirror I could see that her thirteen-month-old brother was enthralled, as always. Alex was rewarding Eden

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

for her performance by kicking his feet and bobbing his head from side to side.

I love my children. I love my husband. I love the house where we live. It's a dream to be so close to the gorgeous Southern California coast. We have wonderful friends and generous in-laws who are both kind and dotting. I love our life. Anyone looking in from the outside would say I have it all.

But I don't.

I don't have my mother. And no one can bring her back to me.

The traffic light changed to green, and the great chasm between what was and what is seemed to be closing. I drove into our neighborhood telling myself to breathe and be grateful for all the good things in my life. Choosing gratitude always helped to shrink the raw, gaping ache.

"Mommy?"

"Yes, Eden."

"Are we going to my dance class now?"

"No, honey. We'll go after nap time this afternoon."

"I don't need a nap."

"I know." I pulled into our driveway, turned off the engine, and looked at her in the mirror. My daughter's dark eyes were so much like mine. "But Alex needs a nap. And so does Mommy."

Eden giggled and put her hand over her mouth. The gesture was new, and I wasn't sure where she picked it up. "That's silly. Mommies don't take naps."

"Don't I know it," I muttered.

That evening as Joel and I were driving to our friends' house for dinner, we stopped at a red light, and I wanted to tell my husband about the

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

way grief had snuck up on me earlier that day. I wanted to hear all the comforting words he had given me over the past six years whenever I talked about how much I missed my mom. I wanted him to know what I was feeling, and most of all, I wanted him to somehow enter the hazy place of loss with me.

But my handsome, always efficient husband was on the speakerphone. He was setting up the training schedule for the new assistant chef who was starting on Saturday. Joel was part owner at the Blue Ginger restaurant in Corona del Mar, and he was also the head chef. The dual roles were ambitious, but then, so was Joel. The only reason he had this rare Thursday night off was because a new stove had been installed that afternoon, followed by a series of spot safety checks.

The light turned green. Joel glanced at me and seemed to notice for the first time that I'd been facing him, waiting for my turn to get his attention. I reached over and smoothed back his dark hair that was growing too long in the front. His clean-shaven face, with his straight nose and intense, amber-flecked eyes, reflected all the best of his Italian heritage. He looked as handsome to me tonight as when I'd first met him nine years ago. I could wait for his attention. Joel was always worth the wait.

Turning away, I looked out the window and quietly watched the familiar sights as we rolled into our old neighborhood. The rows of beach houses lined up like mismatched vintage toys on a shelf.

Coming up on the right was the cottage we rented when we first moved to Newport Beach. Joel and I had packed a lot of good memories into that 950-square-foot, two-bed, one-bath bungalow with the sapphire-blue door. I noticed that the garden boxes Joel had set up still

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

lined the narrow space at the front of the house. They were now filled with what looked like lemongrass.

I smiled, remembering how happy we were when we brought Eden home to her lovingly prepared nursery. I wondered if the hand-painted morning glories still curved up her bedroom wall, or if the new tenant had painted over my handiwork.

Joel had tried out dozens of recipes in that tiny, inefficient kitchen. I sat for hours, watching from the oval table where I painted and practiced calligraphy on dozens—maybe hundreds—of cards and plaques. We hosted many small get-togethers with new friends as well as lively, crowded dinners with Joel's extended family.

Life was simpler then. Joel and I were just becoming "us." We had only been married for a couple of years when we moved to Newport Beach. Our love was new, and we were intent on crafting our careers and starting a family.

I look back now and realize that our happiness and fresh, young love probably had cocooned me from feeling the full impact of the sudden loss of my mom right before we moved. Joel and I had each other, and in that season, I guess I thought that was enough. We were shoulder to shoulder in our quest for courageous endeavors and new beginnings.

Now, in a little more than half a decade, we had accomplished and acquired everything we had only dreamed of back then. Joel owned his restaurant; we had a daughter and a son. We lived in a two-story, newly renovated house with an exceptional kitchen, and I had the space and freedom to pursue my love of watercolor painting and entertaining to my heart's content.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

The only problem was, I couldn't think of anything my husband and I were shoulder to shoulder on anymore.

Joel wedged our Lexus into a rare open space by the curb just down the street from our memory-soaked cottage. I got out and softly closed my door. He was still on his call and, from the sound of it, might be for a while longer. Using both hands, I carried the large, heavy wicker basket to Christy and Todd's front door and pressed the doorbell with my elbow.

The door opened, and my lovely friend Christy greeted me with a hug. "Jennalyn, hi! Come in." Christy's blue-green eyes looked down the street. "Is Joel with you?"

"He's finishing a call in the car. He'll be here in a minute."

I made myself at home in the open downstairs of the beach home that had become so familiar over the past few years. Meeting Christy was one of the biggest blessings that came with the early years in our cottage by the sea. While placing the basket on the large kitchen counter, I noticed that Christy had set out only four of her white dinner plates.

"Is it just the four of us?" My hair had been bugging me all day. I stepped into the small bathroom off the kitchen, pulled the long dark strands to the right side, and made a swiftly folded braid. "Is it okay if I use this hair tie on the counter?"

"Yes and yes," Christy called back from the kitchen. "Yes, it's just us for dinner, and what's mine is yours. Or I should say, what's Hana's is yours."

I turned on the faucet and ran my hands under the water, then smoothed back the sides of my thick straight hair. Rolling my shoulders

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

back, I took one last look in the mirror and wished I had put on some jewelry or at least something other than the plain heather-gray V-neck sweater I had worn all day.

Returning to the kitchen, I took note of how fresh Christy looked in her jeans and long-sleeved white top with the sleeves rolled up. She was also wearing one of the darling aprons she sews and sells online and in local shops. This one was made from a mix of pink, green, and blue fabric remnants, with a playful yellow ruffle across the top.

“Sierra and Jordan said they might stop by after eight,” Christy said. “I kind of doubt they’ll make it, though. Emily called and said she and Trevor are coming down with colds.”

“That’s too bad. What about Tess?” I reached for the two fresh baguettes in my basket, pulled a long knife from the block by the stove, and began slicing.

“She said she was meeting someone. I asked if it was a client, and she said no, it was a guy.”

“A guy?”

Christy nodded and arranged the chunky baguette ovals on a cookie sheet.

“What else did she say?” I asked.

“That was it. She probably didn’t want to say much because, you know, she assumed I would tell you guys, and our group is always so . . .”

“Caring?” I piped in.

“I was going to say nosy.”

“We’re only nosy because we care,” I said. “I think we do a pretty good job of looking out for each other.”

“Yes, we do,” Christy agreed.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

A little more than a year ago, five of us friends unexpectedly formed a group and named ourselves “Daughters of Eve” or “DOEs.” We liked the connection to the way Aslan called Susan and Lucy “Daughters of Eve” in the Narnia tales. More than that, the name fit because we could all relate to Eve in some way. My connection was that Eve didn’t have a mother to help her figure out how to raise her children.

Recently our group had migrated to another term we liked. It fit all of us, whether single or married. We called ourselves haven makers because we saw ourselves as being a haven for each other.

“I wish all the DOEs could have come tonight. Maybe it wasn’t such a good idea to invite our husbands.” I glanced around Christy’s quiet downstairs. “Speaking of which, where’re Todd and your kids?”

“They left almost an hour ago. When Todd heard Emily wasn’t coming and no one was bringing dessert, he decided we needed ice cream. Of course, as soon as the kids heard him say ice cream, they ran to the car.”

I lifted one of the two large pans of lasagna from the basket and folded back the foil. “Do you think we should put this in the oven?”

“Oh, that smells good.” Christy pulled back her long nutmeg-brown hair and leaned in for a sniff. “I feel bad that you and Joel made so much, and now it’s only the four of us.”

“You won’t feel bad and neither will I when we have leftovers for days. This is GiGi’s recipe, so we had to make a lot. I don’t think any of my mother-in-law’s recipes come with ingredient proportions for under twelve people.”

Just then the door to the garage opened, and Todd entered with Joel, along with seven-year-old Hana and four-year-old Cole. Cole had telltale signs of chocolate ice cream circling his contented smile.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

Hana, their affectionate little blond cutie, dashed over and gave me a big hug. “We got vanilla bean and chocolate chip for you guys.”

“And what flavor did you get?” I asked Hana.

“I got a strawberry cone, Cole got chocolate, and Daddy got a mango shake.”

“Kid’s size all around,” Todd said before sliding two containers of ice cream into the freezer.

I watched as he gave Christy a chin-up grin in response to being busted for treating the kids to dessert before dinner. Her response was to lower her chin and offer a close-lipped grin in return. If she was mad at him for his parenting choice, it didn’t show. I saw nothing but a field of love between the two of them.

Their exchange intrigued me because if Joel had done that with our kids, I might not have said something, but I probably would have been shooting messages his way with scolding looks. I had to admit, Todd looked pretty happy that he had scored points with his kids. Christy’s quiet response seemed to infuse the noisy kitchen with a special sort of peace.

Todd’s attention had turned to the pan of lasagna on the counter. “Whoa! Look at this beast!”

Joel laughed. “If we ever add my mom’s lasagna to the menu at the restaurant, someone remind me to call it ‘The Beast.’”

Christy pulled the warmed baguettes from the oven, and we all joined hands around the counter to pray, as was the Spencer family tradition. It felt so good to be with friends. To be holding hands with Hana and my husband and to feel connected. Included.

I realized it was the first time that day I hadn’t felt painfully alone.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

Chapter 2

The next few hours felt both familiar and odd. Familiar because Joel and I had enjoyed lots of meals with Christy and Todd over the years. Conversation was never a challenge for the four of us. It felt odd, though, because our kids weren't with us, and this wasn't the Haven Makers' group dinner party we had planned.

Hana and Cole were too sugared up after their ice cream treat to eat much dinner. As soon as Christy and I finished eating, we slipped into a co-mothering role and got the kids washed and in their jammies. I tagged along as Christy took them upstairs to bed.

The guys ended up out on the deck by the firepit talking about who knows what. They seemed intent and focused, so Christy and I were glad to leave them for what looked like a male version of a heart-to-heart discussion. I hoped Joel was opening up about how difficult things had been at the restaurant over the past six months and how much his work had cut into family time. The one person who might be able to give Joel good counsel was Todd.

Once we put the food away, Christy and I wandered into the living

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

room and sat together on her small but comfy sofa. We were both too full for any ice cream and opted for mugs of steaming mint tea instead.

“I never heard what happened to the idea you had about teaching a watercolor class at the arts center.” Christy tucked her long legs under her and adjusted one of the cute throw pillows under her side. Her custom throw pillows and tablecloths along with her popular aprons had provided just enough income over the last few years for her to remain a work-at-home mom while Todd taught at a private high school.

“I’m not ready to teach a class. I thought I was. I went to the arts center a week ago and was going to set up a meeting with the manager. Something didn’t feel right about the timing. Maybe I’ll consider it once Joel figures out his staff shortage.” I took a sip of tea.

“Are you still giving Audra private lessons?” Christy asked. “Emily told me that Audra was loving them.”

I smiled thinking of Emily’s precocious preteen daughter and her love for arts and crafts. I had been meeting with her every other week starting last summer, nurturing her natural talent.

“We paused the lessons right before Christmas,” I told Christy. “She’s taking a ceramics class now at the arts center. We might pick up again in the spring.”

“I should see if the arts center has any music classes for Hana’s age group,” Christy said.

“I don’t know about music classes, but I signed up Eden for dance lessons. Her first class was this afternoon. Joel had the afternoon off, so he took her, which made her so happy.”

“Do you need a leotard?” Christy asked. “I might still have one of

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

Hana's in a box somewhere. I think we already gave away all the toddler-sized tutus my aunt bought her."

"Thanks, but GiGi already has outfitted Eden with everything, including a pink shoulder bag to carry her ballet slippers in."

Christy smiled and closed her eyes. "Where would we be without our Aunt Marti's and GiGi's in our lives?"

"We probably would have a lot less lasagna in our bellies right now," I said with a grin.

Christy patted her stomach and quickly covered her mouth as a leisurely yawn leaked out. "Sorry!"

"No apology needed. I'm right there with you. Maybe we should make it an early night."

"No, I'm good. Let's talk." She shifted her position and drew in a breath through her nose. "It's been months since you and I have had a chance to do this. Tell me of you."

Christy's effort to play hostess was noble. The wording of her request was sweet, and I repeated it.

"Tell you of me, huh? Well, I don't think there's much to tell."

Christy gave me one of her chin-dipping looks, as if she knew more was going on under the surface. "How are you and Joel doing? Are things still as crazy for him at work as last time we talked?"

"Yes. His hours have been ridiculous. He's never home. It's been a rough six months. Actually, it's more like a year of ongoing transitions at the restaurant."

"Joel has done a lot to turn things around at the Blue Ginger, from what I've heard."

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

“He has. It’s taken longer than he thought it would, and he’s still understaffed. He’s working on that. I just want him to work on us.”

Christy nodded and added in a lighthearted tone, “I feel understaffed around here a lot of the time.”

“I know what you mean. When Joel does come home, he’s exhausted. We don’t have a lot of time to be alone, just the two of us.”

I glanced over my shoulder at the guys out on the deck and then turned back to Christy. “How was it for you and Todd? Was it more difficult for you guys to get back in sync with each other after Hana or Cole was born?”

Christy paused and became thoughtful for a moment, and I wondered if what I had asked was too personal. Christy was always respectful and guarded about the intimate details of her marriage. I reached for my cup of tea and felt a familiar, self-inflicted awkwardness that came whenever I was uncertain of where I ranked on her friendship scale. I considered Christy to be my closest friend. I never had told her because the twelve-year-old girl in me didn’t want to risk being the one to say, “You’re my best friend” and receive no reciprocal declaration.

She didn’t appear uncomfortable when she replied, “For me, after Hana was born, intimacy was more difficult because everything was different, you know? My body was more altered than I expected. What I remember most was always being so tired.

“Then when Cole was born, I think Todd and I had figured out how to adjust, so it wasn’t as difficult. I know that I didn’t feel anxious all the time like I had with Hana. I was calmer around the kids, and I’m sure that helped me relax more with Todd. Having a baby is definitely an adjustment in body and mind.”

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

“Not to mention emotions,” I added.

“Yes, emotions! Who was it that called our emotions ‘the womanly wild card’? Was that Sierra?”

“Probably. Sounds like Sierra.” I realized that maybe it didn’t matter where I lined up on Christy’s friendship list. Did women in their thirties even think in terms of best friends anymore? Maybe at this age we simply connected at whatever level we could, in whatever way we could, and did our best to let ourselves be known.

“So, I’m guessing it’s been more difficult for you since Alex was born,” Christy said.

“Yes. My body hasn’t adjusted as quickly as it did after Eden. With Joel and me, our timing is off. Sometimes I feel like we’re living two different lives.” I hoped I wasn’t sounding too melancholy. “I just miss us being us, you know?”

“I know exactly what you’re saying. I think most couples go through something like that.” Christy reached over and squeezed my arm. “You guys can turn things around, Jennalyn. I know it helps if you can be open to all the possibilities of when you can get together. Timing is everything. We sure had to be more creative with our love life and not think of it as an uphill challenge. The good news is that everything is easier for us as the kids get older.”

“That’s encouraging.” I carefully took another long sip of the calming tea. “I don’t know why my body hasn’t bounced back to normal the way it did after Eden was born.”

“I think second babies can do that,” Christy said. “I got so big when I was carrying Cole. At least you’ve lost your baby weight from Alex. I’m still trying to figure that out. Talk about uphill challenges.”

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

“You look really good, Christy. You always do.”

“So do you, Jennalyn.”

“Let’s keep telling each other that.” I grinned. “Hopefully we’ll convince each other that it’s true.”

“It is true,” Christy said. “We’re both healthy, and that’s what really matters, right? This might be the new normal for us. The new, thirty-something-mother-of-two normal. I mean, we’re not sixteen anymore.”

“Sixteen.” I laughed. “Do you realize that was half a lifetime ago for us?”

Christy’s expression took on a sudden faraway look. “It was, wasn’t it?”

“Way back before our bodies ushered two humans into this world and altered us forever.”

“Even more reason to give ourselves some grace,” Christy lifted her teacup, and I gently tapped it with the rim of mine. We spontaneously repeated in tandem a phrase our DOEs had begun using as our favorite blessing. “Shame off us, grace on us.”

We grinned, and I felt a sense of hope rising in me. Sierra had once said that Christy’s superpower was compassion. It was true. She had a way of listening, saying just the right little something, and giving a smile or a squeeze. When she did, she transferred just enough courage, hope, peace, or whatever was needed. That’s what made her style of compassion so rich.

“What about you?” I was happy to change the subject and decided to add Christy’s clever phrase. “Your turn. Tell me of you.”

Christy’s eyes lit up. “I got my word for the year.”

I long had been intrigued with the way Christy asked God for a word at the start of every year. She saw it as a banner to hang over the months

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

ahead. I had done it, too, in a more hesitant way over the past years, but this year I hadn't even thought about it.

"My word for this year is *trust*." Without further evaluation, she asked, "What about you? Are you going to ask God for a word this year?"

"I should. I'm glad you reminded me." I pulled one of the throw pillows that was behind my back and rested it on my stomach, folding my arms on top of it and feeling vulnerable once again. "My days seem consumed with diapers and naps and trying to figure out how to get Eden to eat something other than cheese."

Christy laughed. "With Hana it was applesauce. Uncle Bob always stocked those lunch-sized containers and kept them on the lower shelf. Every time we went over there, Hana went right to their fridge and helped herself."

"Does she still like applesauce?"

"Not really. Not the way she did when she was three." Christy reached for her phone on the coffee table and read the message that had just come in. "Sierra says they aren't coming by tonight." She looked up. "You know what? We should see if all the DOEs can get together before January is over. We can have a Word for the Year party. What do you think?"

"I'd love it."

Within a few minutes Sierra and Emily had texted back to say that next Thursday worked for them. We decided to meet at my house at seven, and I told Christy that if Tess couldn't come, we would change to a different night.

"Agreed," she said. "Because if Tess is starting to see some guy, she will need helpful input from her self-appointed sisters."

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

“True. And if any guy wants to pursue our girl, he will have to be DOE-approved!”

Christy laughed. “Aren’t you glad we didn’t have self-appointed sisters during our dating years?” She paused. “Actually, I guess I kind of did. Katie never held back on her opinions. I appreciate it now, even though at the time I often disagreed with her. She was right about a lot of things.”

I adored Christy’s redheaded friend, Katie. She lived in Kenya now with her husband and their three sons. Katie was bold and funny, and I knew what Christy meant about how she never hesitated to share what was on her mind. I admired women who could speak up and express themselves well.

“I wish I’d had a friend like Katie during high school,” I said. “I think my life would have turned out differently. At least my dating life probably would have.”

Christy looked intrigued. “I don’t think we’ve ever talked about that. Did you date much in high school?”

“Just one guy. For two years.”

“Sounds serious.”

“I thought it was. He even gave me a ring.”

Christy waited for me to continue. I hadn’t talked about any of those events in so long.

“It was a small emerald ring. I wore it on a long necklace and kept it hidden under my clothes because I didn’t want our parents to know we secretly had promised ourselves to each other. It was very Romeo and Juliet to my artistic way of viewing life. I was so sure we were in love and that it would last for always.”

I paused and then decided to conclude my short confession with,

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

“But, hey, what do you know when you’re sixteen? Back when we had skinny little bodies brimming with hormones. You’re willing to give your inexperienced heart to the first guy who comes along, right?”

Christy’s expression made it clear that she felt my pain. “Ouch.”

“Yeah. Ouch.” I glanced out at the guys on the deck and saw that the flames in the firepit had died down and they were heading inside.

“I ended up with one of the good ones, though,” I said. “So I’m not complaining.”

“Yes, you did. You definitely ended up with one of the good ones,” Christy repeated.

“We both did,” I added. “And that is exactly why we have to make sure we give Tess the wisest advice we can. She’ll thank us later.”

Christy laughed. “At least we hope she’ll thank us.”

The sliding door opened, and the guys came inside smelling of woodsmoke. We chatted a few more minutes, and Joel and I collected our basket and part of the leftover lasagna. With the usual round of hugs, the two of us headed out into the chilly January night air.

“Looks like you and Todd were having a good conversation,” I said as Joel drove us home.

“Yeah.”

“What did you talk about?”

“Work and stuff.”

I looked out the window and thought about Christy’s comment on timing. Even though Joel hadn’t discussed any details about work with me for what seemed like forever, this didn’t seem like the right time to try to coax him into repeating everything he apparently had told Todd. It made me miss our early days. We used to stay up until midnight sipping

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

cappuccinos and playing footsie while sitting close on the sofa. We would talk about everything.

Now the few leisurely talks we had were the rare nights when the kids were in bed, and he was in the mood to bake something scrumptious, if we had all the ingredients. Baking relaxed him. Cooking didn't relax him that much anymore since that's what he did every day. But getting the crackling-crisp caramelized sugar topping just right on a raspberry crème brûlée brought out his very best smile, and he would talk with me when he was creating his art.

We turned into our neighborhood, and Joel said, "Did I tell you that Eden's dance class will be on Mondays at four from now on? There was a schedule conflict at the arts center."

"Okay, no problem."

"They handed out a flyer. I think I put it on the kitchen counter."

I thought about how cute Eden looked in her pink tutu, and the enthusiastic way she demonstrated her spins for me when Joel had brought her home that afternoon. She also had been very chatty about the new friend she had made.

"What was the name of the little girl in her class?" I asked.

"Violet."

"That's right. Did you meet Violet's mom? Maybe I can set up a playdate."

"Her dad was with her," Joel said. "We talked a little. Nice guy. A playdate sounds like a good idea." He pulled into our driveway, turned off the car, and stared out the windshield. "Our daughter is growing up too fast."

I looked at his profile as he sat in the driver's seat. I wondered if he

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

just now realized how much he had been absent from our lives over the last year or so.

“You know what I’m really looking forward to?” he asked.

“No, what?”

“Little League. That was my favorite when I was a kid. My dad took me to every practice and was at all my games.” Joel smiled. “How about if you take it from here with the ballet lessons, and I pick up all the Little League practices?”

I wanted to remind him of what he had just said about Eden growing up too fast and add how much he had missed out on already. Why was he trying to negotiate his way out of ballet lessons? Eden was so adorably happy when he had agreed to take her to that first one. If he saw how serious his parenting responsibility was, why wouldn’t he take on all extra-curricular activities for both our kids?

Before any regrettable words flew out of my mouth, I thought about how Christy had rolled with Todd letting their kids eat ice cream right before dinner. I remembered how Christy had looked at Todd when he reported on his mango shake.

A simple truth settled on me. Love grows in fields of grace, not in ruts of shame.

If I wanted to see changes in our relationship, some of them could start with me.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

Chapter 3

The next few days spooled out like so many weeks that had come before. Joel worked ten-hour days. I fell into my usual autopilot mommy mode. The minutes played out at the same pace they had for months. My head had returned to the same fuzzy space I'd been operating in. I didn't make many inroads to improve my communication with Joel, nor did we find a chance to be creative with our time together. But I did try to be less critical of him and of myself.

It lifted my spirits to think that Christy, Sierra, Emily, and Tess would be coming over on Thursday. All five of us hadn't met since before Thanksgiving. I was certain none of them had any idea what a lifeline they had been to me.

My wonderful mother-in-law volunteered to take Eden to ballet on Monday. Eden was excited, and I was grateful for the break. I put Alex down for a late nap and used the free time to take a bath. I will never again underestimate the value of a luxurious twenty-minute soak with lavender bath salts while being enveloped by spa music.

The evening got even better when Joel said he would bring dinner

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

home. Grilled salmon with asparagus and wild rice drizzled with Joel's perfect aioli sauce—my favorite dish on the menu at the Blue Ginger. We put on a movie after the kids were in bed. It had been a long time since we'd had such a leisurely evening.

"Thank you for bringing dinner, Joel. It was perfect."

Joel leaned over and kissed the top of my head. "Thanks for all the encouraging things you've been saying to me the last few days."

I wasn't sure what he was referring to. The only thing I was aware of was that I'd made an effort not to say the words, "you're never here" or "if you were home more." He hated it when I used those phrases, and they had served only as a wedge to separate us over the past few months.

Joel leaned over and kissed my forehead, my eyebrow, my cheek. I cuddled closer. He turned down the volume and encircled me in his arms.

"I love you," he murmured. Joel's kisses were soothing and persuasive, and I welcomed them. I wanted him to keep kissing me, captivating me.

"I've missed you," he said.

We kissed more intensely, and I started crying the sort of languid tears that come from the deepest wellspring of the heart and are barely noticeable by sight or sound.

Joel drew back, trying to read my expression. "What's wrong?" He looked at me the way he had many times over the last few years. I knew he was trying, really trying, to be patient and to understand my ever-shifting emotions.

"Nothing." I blinked and tried to fix my gaze on his dark eyes that were studying me from beneath his thick eyelashes.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

He turned off the TV, slipped his hand in mine, and led me upstairs, pausing halfway to draw our joined hands to his lips. He kissed my wrist, my forearm, and the back of my hand.

“You sure you’re okay?” he asked.

I nodded and managed to say, “I’ve missed you.”

He paused before lifting my chin and kissing me tenderly. I responded with a long and lingering kiss. It had been far too long since we had shared a moment like this.

The next morning the welcoming fragrance of rich French roast coffee roused me from my faraway dream and enticed me to return to the real world. My eyelids fluttered open.

“Morning, Beautiful.” Joel turned on the soft light on the nightstand. He smiled and smoothed back my hair. The mug of steaming coffee waited next to the lamp. I noticed he was already shaven and dressed.

“You’re not going to work already, are you?” I propped myself up and squinted to see the clock. “Is it really only 5:30? Are the kids awake?”

“Not yet.”

“Joel,” I reached for his arm but didn’t know what to say. *Stay? I love you? Don’t leave me? Can’t you call in sick?*

He paused, a half-grin rising on his lips. I knew it amused him that I was not a morning person. I never understood how he could be so coherent and cheerful before the sun was up.

“Joel, I . . .”

He kissed me on the forehead. “I know. Me too. See you this afternoon.”

His exit was as quiet as could be, but as soon as the front door closed

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

behind him, I heard Alex call out from his crib. With a sigh, I tossed back the comfy bedding and swung my bare legs over the edge of the bed.

Back to my real life.

Joel didn't come home until after the kids were in bed that night. It was the longest day I remember him ever working. As soon as I heard the front door open, I left the dishwasher halfway unloaded and went to meet him.

"Hi! What a long day for you!"

"It was rough."

"What happened?" I reached out to take his hand.

He gave my hand a squeeze and let go. "Just a lot going on with the new chef and some other employee issues."

"You want to talk about anything?"

"No."

"Are you hungry?"

"No. I'm going to take a shower and go to bed." He paused on the third stair and turned to look at me. "You okay?"

I nodded and forced a close-lipped smile.

He seemed to believe me and continued his climb.

I stood in the entryway for a few minutes, evaluating my options. I tried to see things from Joel's perspective and knew I shouldn't let my feelings be hurt. I'd fallen into that rut too many times.

It didn't take long for me to finish the dishes. I decided this would be a good time to think about a word for the year since the DOEs were coming over in two days. I settled into my favorite corner of the sofa, with my Bible and my barely used journal on my lap. In the past, I'd followed Christy's pattern of asking God for a word and then looking up

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

the verses where that word appeared. It seemed like a good way to pick a word once again.

I felt both expectant and hypocritical, sitting in my quiet house, about to ask God for a word. I wanted God to lead me and reveal Himself to me. Like nearly everything else in my life, though, my relationship with God had been set on cruise control. As much as I wanted to ask Him for a word, I didn't feel right asking for anything right now.

With the dishwasher's faint whirling sound in the background, I closed my eyes and prayed the longest prayer my heart had managed to pour out in months. I felt a sense of calm. The quiet always made me think of God's love, and I suddenly realized why. It was because of my mom's favorite Bible verse, the one my dad had engraved on her headstone. I opened my Bible to Zephaniah 3:17, where I'd underlined it years ago.

The LORD your God in your midst,
The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing.

The beefy fist of grief came at me in a rush and sucker punched me in the gut. I should have realized how this passage would affect me. I gave into the pain and folded over, releasing a shoulder-shaking waterfall of tears.

I don't know how long I'd been crying before I looked up and reached for tissues from the box on the coffee table. The purging had waited a

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

long time to be released. I felt spent. Bone weary and solemn. The house was quiet. Joel was undoubtedly asleep by now. I was alone and felt the thickness of the mantle of solitude as it covered me.

Drawing in a breath for courage, I reminded myself how much my mother loved God. She often told others how she surrendered her life to Christ on her fortieth birthday and how she wished she hadn't waited so long. She loved well. I wanted to love others the way she did, with kindness and generosity.

Love.

The word settled on me with a sense of finality.

Is that my word, Lord? Is "love" my theme for this year?

I wrote the word *LOVE* in large swirly letters in my journal and then wrote my mom's verse in block letters, underlining the words *He will quiet you with His love*. I put down my pen and felt exhausted. Poured out.

Putting everything aside, I turned off the lights and stretched out with my favorite cozy throw blanket covering me. I slept all night on the sofa because I didn't want to leave this space. I felt close to my mom there and closer to God than I had felt in a long time.

The next morning I was up before everyone else. The kids woke soon after. I made some coffee and started cooking oatmeal before Joel came down. He greeted me with a warm kiss, but I didn't think he realized I hadn't slept beside him all night or that I was wearing the same clothes I had worn the day before.

"There's something we need to talk about, Jennalyn." He leaned against the kitchen counter and held his coffee mug with both hands.

"Okay." I spooned oatmeal into Alex's eager mouth. "What is it?"

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

“Let’s talk tonight. After the kids go down.” His expression didn’t appear as serious as his tone, so I wasn’t sure which of the two was the stronger clue about what he wanted to discuss.

All day I wished I hadn’t agreed to wait. A slew of possible topics bumped around in my thoughts, and lots of them made me feel anxious.

When our conversation finally started a little after eight o’clock that night, I had narrowed down the possible topics to a short list. Ninety percent of them had a negative vibe. Joel appeared calm. He was stretched out in the recliner with the footrest up. I had made cappuccinos with our fancy machine just in case his mystery topic fell into the ten percent possibility of happy thoughts, the way our cappuccino conversations used to be.

“Everything is going to change, you know,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“Our lives. Vincent is working out great. His training is almost over, and we’re ready to bring him on board. This is what we’ve been waiting for.”

“Oh.” I leaned back. “That’s wonderful. I was afraid you were going to tell me something was falling apart somewhere.”

“No. It’s all finally coming together, not falling apart.” Joel smiled. “So I’ve been thinking we should take a vacation.”

I blinked and let his words sink in. Of all the topics I had sorted through that day, “vacation” wasn’t one of them.

“Now that I can finally take some time off, I thought we should get away for a while and recharge. We haven’t taken a vacation since . . .”

“Since our honeymoon?”

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

Joel leaned back. “You’re right. That weekend in San Francisco for my cousin’s wedding wasn’t exactly a vacation.”

“No, it wasn’t. I don’t think going anywhere with a teething baby can be considered a vacation.”

“True. So . . .” Joel’s eyes locked on mine. “What do you think about going to Hawaii?”

It was as if he had just tossed a handful of confetti into my life. “Hawaii? Really?”

Joel grinned and handed me his phone. “Todd told me about this the other night, and I think we should go.”

I swiped through the website’s images of pristine blue water, palm trees, and rows of vacant lounge chairs on a white sandy beach. I scrolled back to the top to see the name of the resort and saw the title of the website. All the glittering confetti in my mind vanished.

“The Marriage Rigorous Renewal Conference?”

“It’s being held at a four-star resort. They have speakers at night and workshops in the morning. We’ll have the afternoons free.”

“You think we need to check into some sort of marriage rehab?”

Joel looked hurt. “It’s not rehab. It’s a retreat. A couples retreat. Did you see the workshop topics? I thought the one on ‘Managing Expectations’ and ‘Parenting as a Team’ would be helpful for us.”

I placed his phone on the coffee table and tried to think of the right thing to say.

“What’s wrong? Why don’t you like the idea?” Joel seemed stunned by my reaction. “I thought you would be all over this.”

How could I explain to him that going someplace to work on our

marriage was not my idea of a vacation, even if the destination was a tropical island I always had wanted to visit?

Joel added, “Todd said he and Christy are thinking about going to the one over Easter vacation in April. I thought . . .”

“Christy and Todd are going?” I reached for his phone and had another look at the dates and the resort photos.

“Whoa! What was that?”

“What?” I looked up.

“I tell you about the retreat, and you act offended. I tell you Christy and Todd are going, and suddenly you’re interested.”

“Joel, when you said, ‘Let’s go to Hawaii,’ I thought you meant let’s go on a cruise or rent a condo on the beach or something. I didn’t expect you to be pitching a marriage conference. Especially one with the word *rigorous* in its name.”

“What’s wrong with getting some help? Especially with our communication? We obviously need help in that area.”

“We do.”

“I thought it would be good for us. I honestly thought you would want to go.”

“I do! I want to go. I would love to go to Hawaii.” My eyes suddenly filled with tears as a herd of rogue hormones broke loose and ran amuck.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

“Why do you always say ‘nothing’? It’s obviously something.”

“I don’t know. It’s everything lately. It creeps up on me, and I feel overwhelmed.”

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

“By what?”

“Hormones. Exhaustion. Grief.” I wiped my eyes and tried to reign in my emotions.

“Grief?” Joel picked out what must have seemed like the least expected word in the lineup.

I nodded and drew in a wobbly breath. “I’ve been wanting to tell you. I keep thinking about my mom. Little things pop up that remind me of her. I miss her. A lot. Last night I was reading the verse that’s on her gravestone, and I couldn’t stop crying.”

He lowered the footrest and came over to sit beside me, pulling me close so that my head could rest on his shoulder. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because . . .” I didn’t want to say it was because he was never home. He stroked my hair and kissed the top of my head.

“I don’t know,” I said quietly. I reached for another tissue and felt calmed. The tears had come quickly, like a springtime shower, and ceased just as fast. It wasn’t like the deluge that had poured out the night before. Still, I felt exhausted. “Grief is a thug,” I said as if it were my closing statement.

“Maybe we should get some sleep,” Joel suggested. “We can talk about all this later. If you would rather rent a condo somewhere or go on a cruise, we can do that. I just thought it would be good for us to get away. Just the two of us, without the kids.”

“I agree.”

Joel stood and stretched out his hand. “Come on.”

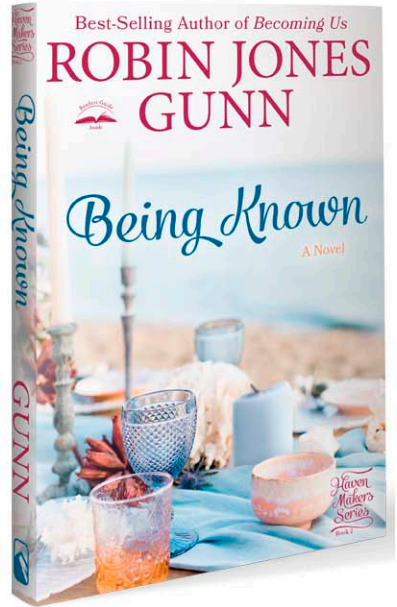
UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/BeingKnown

Continue
Reading...

Order
BEING KNOWN
now!



BUY NOW



MULTNOMAH