

Chapter One



Patches of sunshine dotted the departure lounge of the Calgary International Airport. Jolene and her brother Michael made their way among them, pausing to let a small electric cart pass. The driver, wearing a white cowboy hat and red vest, waved and smiled. Jolene watched the cart disappear behind a nearby smoothie bar and heard the whir of the engine cease. She veered right and two moving sidewalks transporting summer travellers came into view.

Michael sprinted towards them. “Race you to the washrooms,” he cried, jumping aboard a black conveyor belt.

Jolene grinned. “Okay,” she called, bypassing the moving sidewalks and crossing the corridor to the washrooms opposite.

“Hey! No fair!” Michael scrambled to run against the

motion of the sidewalk. He leaped free of the conveyor belt and joined Jolene outside the washroom doors. “Those people-movers are cool. We should have installed one between school and home.”

“To save you walking a whole three blocks,” said Jolene, grinning at her brother who trained seven times a week as a speed swimmer during the school year.

“Yeah.” A smile stretched between Michael’s dimples. He bent over the water fountain as Jolene pushed the door of the ladies room open. She held it ajar for an elderly woman clutching a small leather suitcase who was making her way out of the washroom.

“Thank you,” murmured the woman. She shuffled past Jolene, the corner of the case jamming against the door-frame and twisting before thudding to the ground. “Oh dear!” The woman bent stiffly to retrieve the bag.

“I’ll get that for you.” Jolene reached for the leather case, but one of the handles had torn away. Grabbing the other handle, she tried to lift it, but the case was heavy. She felt the second handle strain. Quickly she set it down just outside the door. “One of the handles is broken.”

Worry lines etched the woman’s forehead. “It’s not surprising, I guess,” she said, surveying the damage. “That case is as old as I am.” She looked up at Jolene and Michael, who had now joined them. “Why, you’re twins!” A sudden smile replaced her look of distress.

Jolene joined Michael in a polite nod — their typical response to the predictable reaction of strangers.

“Can you carry it with just the one handle?” Michael asked his sister.

“The case is too heavy. The other one will rip.”

A timid laugh escaped from the case’s owner. “It’s full of family photos, old cards and journals. The only things that really matter now.” Eyes the colour of the ocean regarded them and Jolene felt a tinge of sympathy for the old woman.

“Do you have far to go?” asked Michael as his sister crouched down to examine the bag more closely.

Digging into her purse, the woman extracted her boarding pass. Holding it at arm’s length, she strained to read it. “Gate 49.”

Jolene scanned the corridor for the gate numbers. “At the very end.”

The woman’s polished black shoes shuffled awkwardly. “I should have checked it as luggage, but then I thought what if they lose it? All those things are irreplaceable.”

Jolene glanced around the departure lounge. “It’s too bad there isn’t a trolley here.” Her eyes lit up. “Where did that cart go?”

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than Michael was off and running in the direction of the smoothie bar. A motor whirred to life and the cart they had seen earlier drove into view. Michael was perched on the passenger seat beside the driver in the white Stetson.

“Your carriage, ma’am,” he announced, leaping from his seat and indicating the cart with a dramatic gesture of his hand. The cart idled to a stop in front of them. The woman’s

lips rounded in surprise, but she happily accepted the hand Michael offered her and climbed into the vehicle. Jolene slipped her hands beneath the corners of the case and deposited it in the back compartment of the cart.

“How clever!” The woman’s tiny hand still clasped Michael’s large one. “How charming and thoughtful.” The driver inched the cart forward. “Thank you,” called the woman, releasing Michael’s hand. She looked back over her shoulder at Jolene and waved.

Jolene readjusted the straps of her backpack and watched the moving cart with a mixture of satisfaction and irritation. The woman’s praise and gratitude had been directed primarily at her brother, despite the fact that the cart had been her idea.

“That was easy!” Michael said, striding towards the mens room.

Jolene pushed the adjacent door open, deep in thought. Inside, she stopped to study her reflection in the mirror. There was no mistaking that she and Michael were twins. They had the same deep green eyes inherited from their grandfather, the same features, the same dark wavy hair, except hers was longer, reaching almost to her shoulders. She had decided to grow it out this summer — and Gerard had even commented on the change last time she had seen him. The thought of Gerard made her cheeks flush and her dimples appear. Tall, shy and soft-spoken, he had caught Jolene’s attention the moment he had arrived at their school in February and been assigned to her table. He was differ-

ent from the other boys in their grade six class — older and more sophisticated somehow. And unlike all her other male classmates, he had gotten to know her before he'd become friends with her ever-popular twin brother.

Jolene pulled a tube of lip gloss from the small purse that hung over her shoulder. Everyone liked Michael and it was easy to understand why. His bubbly optimism was contagious and his happy-go-lucky nature made him easy to get along with, most of the time. She applied the raspberry lip gloss, making her lips shimmer in the fluorescent light. For the last six years they'd attended a small French immersion school. Most of their school friends were mutual friends. Jolene twisted her small crystal earrings and scrutinized her image. She smoothed her hoodie over the subtle curves of her hips. Next year would be different. In the fall, they would start junior high in a big school with students from all over north Calgary, with new teachers, new subjects and new friends. Friends who would know her as Jolene, before they knew her as one of the Fortini twins. She was looking forward to it.

Two middle-aged women entered the washroom and Jolene slipped back into the lounge, making her way to a nearby window. A big jet was rolling down the tarmac. Men with red vests directed the pilot, their ears covered, their hair whipping wildly about. Jolene watched as the nose of the plane inched forward until its door was aligned with the loading ramp.

“Jolene?”