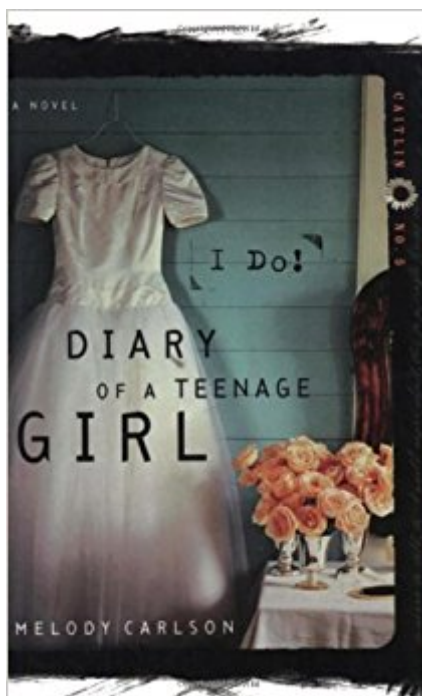


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I Do! (Diary Of A Teenage Girl: Caitlin, Book 5)



Synopsis

Saturday, October 22 My life changed today. It's as if I got up this morning as one person and will go to bed as someone else. Okay, maybe it's not THAT drastic. But I'm so excited I'm not sure I'll ever go to sleep tonight. Josh Miller asked me to marry him! First she "kissed dating goodbye." Now, several years later, Caitlin O'Conner is getting married to the guy she's loved all along, Josh Miller! It's her senior year of college, and she has seven months to plan her wedding...but according to Josh's mom, that's not enough time. Meanwhile, Caitlin's roommate, Liz, has ditched her to move in with a boyfriend. Her new roommate and old friend, Jenny, is toying with anorexia again, and just when Caitlin needs her most, Beanie heads off to a New York City design school. On top of all this, an issue from Josh's past rocks Caitlin's emotions. Can she handle it all? True to form, Caitlin is more concerned with following God than having the perfect wedding. But it is her big day. Can Caitlin have a lovely ceremony without spending a small fortune? Will she remember it's the marriage and not the wedding that lasts forever? Story Behind the Book "My teenage years remain vivid in my mind. It was a turbulent time full of sharp contrasts - love and hate, pain and pleasure, trust and doubt. Then, just as I reached my peak of questioning, rebelling, and seeking, I found God. And I found Him in a really big way! My life turned completely around and has, thankfully, never turned back. Hopefully this story will touch and change hearts - speaking to teen girls right where they live, reminding readers that God is alive and well and ready to be intimately involved in their lives right now! Caitlin provides a very positive role model for girls. And her wedding is a great way to teach them about the things that really matter in life - their relationship with God and their willingness to be used by Him."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Melody Carlson has published over 90 books for children, teens, and adults with sales totaling more than 2 million and many titles appearing on the ECPA Bestseller's List. Several of her books have been finalists for and winners of various writing awards. Her Diary of a Teenage Girl series has received great reviews and a large box of fan mail. Melody has two grown sons and lives in Central Oregon with her husband. They enjoy skiing, hiking, gardening, camping, and biking in the beautiful Cascade Mountains.

CHAPTER ONE Saturday, October 22
My life changed today. It felt as if I got up this morning as one person and will go to bed as someone else. Okay, maybe it's not as drastic as all that. But believe me, things are definitely different now. Excitingly different even. I'm not sure that I'll ever be able to go to sleep tonight. And ironically, here I am in my old bedroom in my parents' home, the very same place I was when I began writing in my very first diary almost five years ago. And as a result of what happened today, I think it's time to break out a brand-new diary. Okay, this one isn't exactly "brand-new," since it's actually one that I've been saving for quite a while. It's a rather ordinary looking diary (really, more like a journal), but my friend Josh Miller gave it to me on my nineteenth birthday, just a couple of years ago. I thought it was sweet of him at the time, but I was also right in the middle of writing in another diary, so I tucked this special leather-bound book into my top bureau drawer to save for another time. Another time has come, and that time is now because: Josh Miller asked me to marry him tonight! Okay, okay, let's start back at the beginning of this incredibly romantic day. I'd come home from college this weekend to attend a wedding. Two friends of mine were getting hitched—Willy Johnson (the manager of the incredible rock band Redemption) and Elise

Curtis (mother of Redemption drummer Allie Curtis). I replaced Elise, last summer, when I traveled as a chaperone for Redemption. And as a result, these three gifted girls feel like family to me. Especially Chloe Miller, who will become my sister-in-law sometime next year. Wow, it's still sinking in! God is so amazing! The Johnson-Curtis wedding was absolutely beautiful. Oh, it was nothing lavish or fancy or over the top. And only about a hundred guests were there. But the ceremony felt very real to me, and the love between Willy and Elise was written all over their happy faces. I actually cried it was that sweet. Chloe, Allie, and Laura were bridesmaids, all wearing the most gorgeous gowns designed by none other than my old best friend Beanie Jacobs. The dresses were autumnal colors with lots of beadwork and lace, but not a bit frilly. Just really elegant and classy and like something you'd see in a movie. Beanie's majoring in textile design now and is rumored to have the kind of talent that will take her places. I'm so proud of her! All right, I will admit that I had a brief fantasy during this particular wedding ceremony. I mean, what girl doesn't dream about her own wedding day? Especially when you hear those familiar notes of "The Wedding March" starting to play! Dum, dum, da-dum. I'm sure I've been humming that tune since I was a little girl putting my mom's old white negligee over my head like a wedding veil. And okay, I did wonder how I would feel to be the one standing up there in a scrumptious white gown and repeating my vows to well, I even had a particular guy in mind. In fact, that guy was actually one of the groomsmen standing up there with Willy and looking totally awesome in his dark brown rented tux with velvet lapels. It was in that exact same moment that I realized Josh was actually staring back at me. It seemed as if our eyes locked for about five minutes, although I'm sure it was only a few seconds before I looked away. Maybe that's what made me cry. I suppose I was sort of embarrassed to be caught gaping at the same guy I have consistently pushed away over the years. It's hard to believe that it all started back in high school, when he was a senior and I was a junior. But then our relationship went sideways, and it was time to break up. Oh, we're friends now. And better friends than we've ever been before. We've even had a few talks that made me wonder but then I always remember how many times I made it perfectly clear to Josh (especially back during my first year of college when he says I broke his heart) that I couldn't be serious with him. Not that I wouldn't have liked being serious with Josh. I mean, all you have to do is to read my other diaries to know that this guy totally gets to me. Believe me, there's always been a strong attraction to that boy. But even so, I knew that I had to keep him at a safe distance. Let's just say that it was a God-thing. Because I'd committed myself

to abstaining from sex until marriage, and as a result, gave up dating in general. So there was no room in my life for Josh as a boyfriend. Consequently, I think I've really learned about priorities these past few years. God is always first, family and friends next, and then school (since that's sort of my "job" at the moment). And that's a full load. Getting serious with a guy just did not fit into that picture. Even so, I never stopped loving Josh. And there have been times (like dozens!) when I was so scared that Josh would forget all about me and just write me off and marry someone else. I mean, there had to be hundreds of girls out there who knew what a catch this guy was. Not only is Josh cute (have I mentioned he looks like Matt Damon?) with blue eyes and the greatest smile ever, but he loves God with his whole heart, and he's the most honest and sincere guy I know. But enough about that for now since I can feel my pulse rate increasing! Anyway, each time I'd start to freak over the possibility of another girl snatching up the guy I loved, I tried really hard to give this fear to God. And it wasn't always easy. But it usually boiled down to trust. I knew I needed to trust God completely. I had to believe that my life and my future (as well as Josh's) were in His hands. That was my lifeline. Back to today's wedding. Following the ceremony, we all traipsed down the stairs for a fairly no-frills reception in the church basement, which is nothing to write home about. I mean, our church is about as plain and boring as they come. It's in an old department store building downtown, but due to recent remodeling, the "sanctuary" is fairly spacious and the basement (which still smells like cardboard) actually has pretty good acoustics. That came in handy since Redemption played a few songs for the wedding guests. Just a few quiet numbers that made both Willy and Elise teary eyed. I was slightly surprised that there were no decorations—no ribbons or candles and very few flowers. But Chloe informed me that Willy and Elise wanted to keep everything as simple as possible. "It's supposed to be lowkey," she said, as if she knew I had noticed that the room looked somewhat Spartan. Not that you need hundreds of roses or miles of satin ribbons and greenery, but I suppose that most of the weddings I've gone to have been pretty elaborate affairs—not to mention quite expensive. "Yeah," Allie said in a hushed voice. "Believe it or not, the cake is from the grocery store bakery where my mom used to work." "It looks nice," I said. Okay, it was a bit boring, and I suspected it wouldn't be too tasty. But it had the traditional three tiers with the little plastic bride and groom on top. And when Willy and Elise sliced into it, I'm sure it didn't matter to them whether it came from Albertsons down the street or the finest French bakery in Manhattan. And it didn't matter to me either. Mostly I just enjoyed visiting

with my church friends and a few old high school buddies, and finally congratulating Willy and Elise. "I'm so happy for you two," I told them as we hugged. Elise was absolutely glowing. "We are too." Then she frowned slightly. "I hope you don't feel bad that this means Davie and I will be going back on the road again." She held up her wedding ring finger. "Now that we're no longer scandal material." Willy laughed. "Yeah, I'll bet some people think that this is just a marriage of convenience so that we can have Elise back as the chaperone again." Elise leaned over and kissed her groom on the cheek. "Let them think what they like." "Not that you weren't a great chaperone, Caitlin." Willy said, as if he suddenly remembered that I was still standing there. "You know you'll always be welcome." I laughed. "Don't worry, you two. I had to give up the chaperone gig for now anyway. My plate's pretty full with my senior year." "Still doing the double major?" Willy asked with a slightly concerned look. I nodded. "Yeah. I like the pressure." "What are you taking?" asked Elise. "It's kind of an odd combo. Journalism and child development." Willy smiled. "Well, if you graduate and end up jobless, I'm sure that the girls would welcome you back as their chaperone by next summer." "You can say that again," Allie said with a mischievous grin. Of course, knowing Allie, I'm sure she'd prefer having me to her mom. Not that she likes me more than her mom, but she probably thinks she can get away with more stuff with me. Not that I ever let her. If anything, I think I was pretty strict with those girls. Then just as Beanie and I were about to leave the reception, Josh stopped me. He and I already had one very brief conversation that had been interrupted by the photographer wanting to get some group shots of the wedding party. "Don't leave yet," he said to me as he waved to someone calling his name from across the room. "I want to ask you something first." I smiled at him. "What's that?" "Are you busy tonight?" I shrugged and glanced at Beanie. I'd already asked her to do something tonight, but she'd informed me that she needed to spend some time with her mom. "Not really," I said to Josh. "Why?" "Do you think you could grab a bite with me?" He smiled in that cute but sly way of his (like he's keeping something from me). "You know, just two old friends catching up?" "Of course," I told him. "I'd love to." So he said he'd pick me up at six. "You guys have a good time

tonight, Beanie said when I dropped her off at her mom's place. Since Beanie's dad left when she was a baby, it's so cool that her mom finally found and married a great guy. And they have a house that's so much nicer than where they used to live. I know Beanie appreciates it when she comes home to visit. "Thanks," I told Beanie, but something about her expression made me wonder. It's like she had this secret joke going on. Okay, maybe I realize this more in retrospect. You know, that old twenty-twenty hindsight kind of thing. But I do think I started getting a bit suspicious when Josh picked me up. I had already changed into jeans and a sweater (okay, they were cute jeans and a nice sweater), but Josh had on a sleek-looking sports jacket and a tie. Josh hardly ever wears a tie. "You didn't tell me it was formal," I said, feeling a little uncomfortable. "You're fine, Caitlin." I tried to suppress my feelings of being underdressed as I admired how handsome he looked. "So are you starting to dress like a pastor all the time now?" He smiled as he navigated his Jeep Wrangler through traffic. "From what I hear, most pastors can't afford to dress too well." "Oh, so you're making the most of it before you're forced to start digging through the missionary barrels then?" He laughed. "I guess." "So, how's it really going, Josh? Do you like your new job as the youth pastor? Chloe and Allie say that you're a natural." "I pay them to say that." I laughed. "No wonder pastors are so poor." Then he turned more serious. "I think my parents are still a little disappointed by my career choice." "Really? But I'd think with all that's happened with Chloe | I mean, doesn't that make them more appreciative of ministry related jobs?" He shrugged. "Don't forget that Chloe's ministry brings in the big bucks, whereas my parents are fairly sure that I've signed on for a lifetime of poverty." I nodded. "Yeah, I guess my parents still feel like that about me too. They usually just change the subject if I mention things like wanting to go down to Mexico to work with the orphanage after I graduate." "Same here." After that Josh got very quiet • I mean, dead silent and suddenly I got worried that something was troubling him. Maybe even something serious. Like was he about to tell me he only had six months to live? Finally the silence was killing me. "Where are we going?" I asked abruptly. We'd already driven past most of the eating areas downtown. "Someplace special." Well, I thought this seemed a little odd, but then I don't spend much

time in this town anymore. For all I knew, there might be some new restaurant out this way. But now I really wished I had worn something nicer. I remember looking down at my feet; at least I had on a new pair of shoes. A really cute pair of Nine Wests that I had gotten while touring with the girls last summer. It was the first time I had worn them. Josh pulled into a parking lot at the park, and with that same funny sort of half smile, he hopped out and opened my door, then began to lead me down one of the dirt paths. The sun was just setting, and the park was pretty soggy from an afternoon rain. But I decided not to question this strange little escapade. I knew he was up to something, but I still had this horrible feeling that he was about to break some really bad news. As a result, I am sure that my heart was starting to pound a little harder. We walked a ways, and Josh managed to make small talk the whole while. I can't even remember what he said just idle chatter about the weather and time of year kind of thing. Suddenly we came to a clearing near the water, and it was plain to see that someone was having quite a lovely little picnic down there by the lake. The watery scene was so beautiful in the dusky blue light. The sun had just set into the trees on the other side of the lake, and there was this amazing white cloth-covered table set with china and silver and lit by a lot of softly glowing votive candles. I could even hear music playing classical with lots of violins. Josh! I whispered as I grabbed him by the arm. We can't intrude on this. Let's turn back. It must be a party for us. It's for us, he said with a huge grin. For us? Now I am sure my mouth must have fallen open just then, because Josh actually started laughing at me. He nodded. I had this all set up for us. Then he went over to the table and pulled out a chair. Have a seat, mademoiselle. So we sat at this sweet, candlelit table next to the lake, and several high school aged guys that I recognized from church began to politely serve us a lovely dinner my favorite pesto and linguine, as well as a bunch of other delicious things. Josh confessed that someone else had done the cooking. Kind of a relief, since I am sure I would have been intimidated to discover that he cooks better than I do. We were both just starting to loosen up and to actually enjoy this whole crazy thing when I felt a raindrop. Josh frowned and looked up. We haven't even had dessert yet. Maybe we can get it to go. And then it began to pour. I had a thick cotton jacket over my sweater, but it was anything but warm and was quickly getting soaked. I didn't even want to consider my new shoes, which had gotten pretty soggy walking through the park. Then Josh hopped up from his chair, and removing his sports coat, he gently placed it

over my shoulders. "Let's not go just yet." He went down on one knee, right there on the ground that was quickly turning into a puddle, and the next thing I knew, he took my hand in his. "Caitlin Renee O'Conner," he said, his face lit by the few candles that had survived the downpour. "I love you with all my heart. Will you do me the honor of marrying me?" Well, I just lost it. First, I started to cry, then I threw my arms around Josh and hugged him tightly. But here's what I haven't told anyone during this brief moment in time (a moment I will remember forever), I shot up a prayer, asking God what I was supposed to say. Then feeling certain that God was up there smiling down on us, emphatically said, "Yes!" Sigh | It still feels like a dream to me. Well, other than this beautiful diamond ring on my finger. That's a pretty good reminder that it's for real. It turns out that Beanie helped Josh to pick it out. She suggested like a ring that was a classic style, and Josh decided on platinum. And they were both right. It's absolutely perfect, and I totally love it! Of course, Beanie was also in the loop about tonight's dinner plans. I can't believe she kept all this from me. And finally I am so tired that I can barely keep my eyes open. I'll have to continue the ongoing saga of Josh Miller and Caitlin O'Conner tomorrow. DEAR GOD, THANK YOU • THANK YOU • THANK YOU! THANKS FOR THIS AMAZING NIGHT! AND THANK YOU FOR FINALLY BRINGING JOSH AND ME TOGETHER LIKE THIS, ALL IN YOUR PERFECT TIMING. I'M SO GLAD THAT I WAITED ON YOU. SO GLAD THAT YOU'VE KEPT US BOTH IN YOUR HANDS. SO GLAD THAT YOU ARE TYING OUR HEARTS TOGETHER FOR ALL TIME. PRAISE YOU! THANK YOU! YOU ARE AMAZING! AMEN.

I started these books as a teen and stopped after the third book because I could not find the next ones at the Christian bookstore. Finally, in my twenties, I still wanted to know how Caitlin ended up, so I ordered the last 2 books and was so glad I did.

Good read

Great series for teenagers. I'm a mom and read them all before my daughter and loved them.

My girls aren't big reader but loved loved loved this entire series. Great values presented and real current kid issues explored but with an option of issuing your faith to help you through.

I would recommend this book and series to any of my friends. It honestly has such a great story line that holds a surprise around every corner.

Granddaughters had to have the sequels in this series.

You will not go wrong with this series. My girls love them. Great stories, nothing bad, good Christian books to read.

I can not keep the books in my classroom! As soon as one is returned it is checked out again. High school students love the stories!

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