

the secret life of Samantha
McGregor
BOOK TWO

beyond reach

a novel

melody
carlson



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Author's Note

I normally don't include a letter in my books, but because *The Secret Life of Samantha McGregor* series treads on some new territory, I want to make a few things as clear as possible. First of all, this book is *fiction*—it's simply a story that's meant to entertain and to possibly point out some spiritual truths—but it is *not* a theological study on the proper use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. While I do believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and that God wants all of us to do many wonderful things, I also realize that Samantha's gift, her ability to receive dreams and visions from God, is extremely rare and unique—but it does make for a good story!

Second, my hope is that you won't envy Samantha's unusual gift or seek it for yourself, since that would be totally wrong! Don't forget that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift, and *He's* the One who decides who gets what and when it's appropriate to use. If you go around searching for your own gifts, you can put yourself at serious risk. Satan masquerades as an angel of light and delights in tricking those who look for gifts in the wrong places. Don't let that be you.

More than anything, I hope you'll follow Samantha's example by seeking out God and a committed relationship with Him. I hope you'll desire to walk closely with God every day, to make Him your best friend, and to be ready for whatever adventures and gifts He has in store for you. Just make sure they come from God!

And finally, remember that the Bible is our ultimate source for answers to all of life's questions. That's why I've included more Scripture in this series than usual. Also, please check out the resources and discussion questions in the back of this book.

I pray that this fictional journey will draw your heart closer to God and that He will be your lifeline—for today and for always!

Best blessings!

Melody Carlson

A Word from Samantha

The first time it happened, I thought it was pretty weird but kind of cool. The second time it happened, I got a little freaked. The third time it happened, I became seriously scared and had sort of a meltdown. That's when my mom decided to send me to a shrink. She thought I was going crazy. And I thought she was right for a change.

Turns out it was just God. Okay, not just God. Because, believe me, God is way more than just anything. Still, it was hard to explain this weird phenomenon to my mom or the shrink or anyone. It still is. Other than my best friend, Olivia, I don't think most people really get me.

But that's okay, because I know that God gets me. For that reason, I try to keep this part of my life under wraps. For the most part anyway.

A Word from the Word...

And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed. And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. (Joel 2:27-29, RSV)

Mission accomplished. Kayla Henderson is safe. After a typical holiday delay, the plane has just taken off from Phoenix, and Ebony and I are flying back to Oregon now—just in time for Christmas.

After discovering there's no in-flight movie, I recline my seat, close my eyes, and slowly exhale. I am so ready to kick back for a while. Our flight won't arrive in Portland for a couple of hours, perfect for a nice long snooze. It looks like Ebony is one step ahead of me. I let out a deep sigh and feel myself sinking into a state of what I hope will turn into comatose slumber...

I'm barely out when I feel a sharp metallic jab on my elbow and look up to see the stainless steel beverage cart attempting to rattle its way past me.

"Excuse me, miss," says the blond flight attendant. "Your arm is in the way."

"Sorry." I pull in my arm and sit up straighter, rubbing the sore spot where the cart rammed me. You'd think they'd be more careful with those things. Anyway I'm wide-awake now. So much for my nap, although it looks like most of the other passengers are fast asleep. Lucky them.

I watch the blond flight attendant slowly working her cart up the aisle, and I can't help but think that it must be a fairly boring job. Not only does her career seem somewhat tedious, but I've noticed that a lot of the passengers, particularly during the holidays, can be pretty rude and impatient.

She parks her cart at the front of the plane, then pours a cup of coffee, sets it on the little tray, and walks back a few rows. Then she leans over to give it to a dark-haired man sitting on the aisle. As he reaches for the cup, the little tray tips slightly and the coffee cup slips off and empties its hot contents right over the poor man's front. He instantly leaps to his feet and attempts to brush the brown liquid off his white shirt, which now looks less than white. He's saying something, which I can't hear, but I see his arms flailing about, and it's obvious he is angry about this little incident.

Naturally, the flight attendant apologizes profusely, attempting to dry him off with some beverage napkins. Finally she ushers him up by the bathrooms, where I assume she will find a towel to dry him off. Poor guy. Not only did he get scalded, it looks like his stained shirt is sopping wet too. She really should be more careful.

Then, just as I assume the little scene has settled down, the man suddenly grabs the flight attendant by her arm, and I'm thinking that this is turning into one serious case of air rage. I start to nudge Ebony in case this goes any further. I know that as a cop she's trained for this sort of thing. But in that same instant, the angry man wraps his other arm tightly around the flight attendant's neck, almost like he intends on strangling her.

Her frightened eyes are bulging, as if she can barely breathe. But the worst part is that I notice a silver glint in his other hand. He has a knife! And it actually looks like he's threatening to kill her. All this over a cup of coffee? I give Ebony a sharp nudge with my elbow. This is crazy!

"*Nobody move!*" yells the dark-haired man in a strong Middle Eastern accent. "*I have a bomb!*" Just then I hear a woman scream from the back of the plane, and I turn my head in time to see another man, who also appears to be Middle Eastern, running up the aisle toward us. I glance at Ebony and she's wide-awake, looking just as shocked as I am.

I don't say a word, but I wonder if she can help, although I know her handgun is packed in her carry-on bag, which is stowed a few seats behind us in the crowded overhead storage. Not exactly easy to access without being observed.

Then I hope perhaps the man moving down the aisle is actually an air marshal who is armed and prepared to stop this crazy thing, although his appearance suggests just the opposite. He's only a few feet away when I notice that he's also armed with a knife! I'm about to stick my foot into the aisle to trip him when I feel Ebony give me a nudge from the other side.

And that's when I wake up!

"Are you okay, Samantha?"

I blink and study Ebony's concerned bronze face for a moment, then turn back to look around the plane. All is calm and appears perfectly normal. And everyone is still

asleep. No knives, no bombs, no mad terrorists running down the aisle screaming...just peace and quiet. "I was asleep," I say, feeling stupid.

"Bad dream?" Ebony asks with sympathy.

I nod and take in a deep breath, slowly exhaling. "Yeah, thank goodness. It was just a dream." I sort of chuckle when I think of how freaked I'd just been. All because of a silly dream. But then I notice the same blond flight attendant up front, and she's pouring a cup of coffee for a dark-haired guy, and suddenly I'm not sure. Was it just a dream?

"Ebony," I say with alarm. "It was a dream...but maybe not *just* a dream." Then I quickly retell her my dream. But as I stumble over the words, trying to get it all out before it actually unfolds for real, my eyes stay locked on the scene up in front. My heart is pounding frantically, and I'm almost afraid to look as the flight attendant lowers the hot beverage tray and the dark-haired man simply takes the coffee without any problems.

"It didn't spill," I whisper to Ebony.

"Is that the same man as in your dream?"

I consider this, trying to remember the exact details. "No. The man in my dream was in the third row from the front. And he didn't have a bald spot on the back of his head either. Plus his hair was a bit longer, with a little bit of curl on the ends." I close my eyes, focusing on the images from my dream. "He had on a white shirt, and as I recall it wasn't tucked in. The guy up there has on a suit jacket."

"Do you see the guy from your dream anywhere on the plane, perhaps in another seat?"

I glance around then shake my head. "And that elderly woman is sitting in the seat he was in in my dream." I sigh with relief. "See, it really was just a dream."

"What about the other man? The one running up the aisle? Do you see him?"

I consider this. "I can't really see clear to the back of the plane."

"Want to take a walk?"

"Sure." So I unbuckle and get out of my seat. Everything's still pretty quiet, and no one seems to wonder why I'm going to the rear of the plane to use the restroom when there's a perfectly good one much closer in the front.

Still, I slowly walk down the aisle, carefully but inconspicuously checking out all the passengers. Most of them are sleeping or reading or listening to headphones. I'm sure they're on their way to visit relatives or returning home for the holidays. And not one of them looks anything like either of the terrorist men in my dream. As I recall, the guy in the back was wearing an olive green sports jacket. Soccer I think. Probably for an international team. His hair was cut shorter than his cohort, combed smooth.

It was only a dream. Why obsess? I return to my seat.

"See anyone suspicious?" Ebony asks as I sit back down.

"No," I tell her as I buckle my seat belt again. "It really was *just* a dream."

She smiles and pats my hand. "Well, thank God for that."

I nod. "Yeah. How creepy was that dream though? Terrorists on Christmas Eve? Really sad timing, huh?"

She sighs. “Well, it could happen. Terrorists like to hit where and when it hurts.”

I try not to think about that as we both settle back into our seats. Whatever my dream was about, it was obviously not about me or this flight. Even so, I pray about it. I ask God to protect all the people traveling during the holidays—to get them safely to their destinations. Then I tell myself to forget about it. God can take care of it much better than I can. And thankfully I finally do fall asleep again.

I wake up to another nudging. It’s the blond flight attendant again. Not thumping me with her cart like in my dream, but telling me to put my seat forward. “We’re about to land,” she says with a smile.

“Thanks.” I adjust my seat and look around. Still, all is normal.

Soon we are taxiing, and then we’re getting off the plane. The blond flight attendant wishes us a Merry Christmas as we leave.

“Merry Christmas to you too,” I say to her, and since the people in front of us aren’t moving very fast I ask, “Do you have to work during the holidays?”

“Just the return flight back to Phoenix, and then I’m off until New Year’s Day.” She smiles happily. “The longest break I’ve had in years. I even promised to take my five-year-old to Disneyland next week.”

“Have fun,” I tell her as the line starts to move again.

Then, as we’re emerging at the gate, I see something that sends a chill clear to the pit of my stomach. But I

pretend like nothing is wrong, walking away from the gate then stopping a couple of gates down.

“Why are you stopping—” Ebony stares at me. “Sam, you look like you just saw a ghost.”

“The guys—the ones—you know, in my dream,” I manage to stutter.

“Really?”

“The one in the white shirt with the tails out,” I say quickly. “And the one in the olive green soccer jacket. Arab-looking.” I grab her arm and motion with my eyes toward the seats at the gate we just exited from. “They’re on the flight to Phoenix—with the blond flight attendant.”

“Third row from the front?” Ebony says quickly. “Aisle seat on the right?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll go take a quick look. You wait here.”

It feels like an hour, but it’s really only a couple minutes before Ebony returns. “Let’s find security,” she says in an urgent voice.

It doesn’t take long to find a uniformed guard. Ebony shows him her badge. “We have reason to believe there are terrorists on the next United flight to Phoenix.”

He looks appropriately alarmed, immediately gets on his radio, and then directs us to an unmarked door where he pushes a security code. We’re ushered into a small office and introduced to Officer Banks, a plainclothes security person who’s sitting at a desk with a computer.

“There’s no time to explain everything.” Ebony shows Officer Banks her badge, then gives quick descriptions of

the two dark-haired men, which gate they're waiting at, and which seat the man in the white shirt should be assigned to if my dream is correct.

Officer Banks immediately picks up the phone, dispersing more instructions and details, and then hangs up and just looks at us. I can't tell if he thinks we're kooks or what. Then he asks if we have checked bags, which we don't, and he relays this information to yet another person.

"So, did you get the guys?" I ask. "Are they terrorists?"

"We're checking on them."

"But you won't let them on the flight, will you?" I persist, thinking about the blond flight attendant's plans to take her child to Disneyland next week.

"We'll hold them long enough to do a thorough search," he tells us in a business-as-usual sort of voice. "If we have reason to detain them further, we will."

Then he asks us some questions about ourselves, and Ebony explains how we've been down in Phoenix working on a case with the FBI. But he looks pretty skeptical as he tells us to hand over our photo IDs, which he photocopies. As he's entering this information into his computer, I take out my cell phone and start to dial my mom.

"You'll have to give me that." He holds out his hand. Then he confiscates Ebony's cell phone too, but he allows us each to make one phone call on his landline to inform family and friends of our unfortunate delay.

Shortly after that, a female uniformed officer comes into the office and confiscates our carry-on bags. "For a routine check," we're informed. Then we just sit there in

the stuffy little office, listening to elevator-style Christmas music as we wait and wait and wait. Even when we need to use the restroom, we are escorted by the female officer. I am feeling more and more like Ebony and I are the ones being treated like criminals here. What is up with this?

More than that, I'm extremely worried that those two terrorists could be out there running around free, possibly even boarding the plane by now. Or for all I know, maybe they're already in flight, getting ready to blow up the plane.

"Can we go now?" I ask with obvious irritation.

"Not yet," says Banks as he punches something else into his computer keyboard. Maybe he's e-mailing his friends, wishing them happy holidays.

"But it's Christmas Eve," I point out. "How long do you plan on keeping us here anyway?"

"Until I am authorized to release you." He gives me a long, hard look that I suspect is a warning of sorts.

"But we—"

"It's okay, Samantha," Ebony says in a soothing tone. "I'm sure this is simply procedure."

She turns to Officer Banks, handing him what looks like an FBI business card, probably from Tony Mendez, the Phoenix agent in charge of the Kayla Henderson case that we just helped to solve. "If you have doubts about our story, you might want to give this man a call. He can verify who we are."

He peers at the card with a furrowed brow. "You ladies want something to drink?" He sounds a little friendlier now. "Coffee, soda, water?"

We both ask for water, which he sends for, and then we drink it and wait some more. Finally, his phone rings and he listens and nods, and his eyes show that he's actually surprised by something. "Is that so?" He listens some more, glancing at Ebony and me, seemingly impressed, but also a little suspicious. Finally he hangs up.

"Well, I'll be." He places both palms on his desk as he studies the two of us.

"They *were* terrorists?" asks Ebony.

"They don't have all the details just yet, but it seems to be a real possibility." He peers curiously at us. "How did you gals know about this anyway?"

Ebony glances at me. "It's a long story."

"Well, if you ladies want to be home by Christmas, you'd better start telling it to me now." He holds up a small recording device. "And you need to know that this will be recorded."

To my relief, Ebony offers to speak first. She tells him about my special gift—how God gives me visions and dreams that can sometimes be useful in solving criminal cases. Of course, he has a hard time believing what's sounding pretty far-fetched even to my own ears.

After she explains my dream on the plane to him, he picks up the phone and actually manages to connect with Tony. Naturally, we can't hear Tony's end of the conversation, but apparently it's sufficient to verify my "gift," which is feeling more like a curse at the moment.

"So you're like that medium on TV?" Banks finally asks me after he's finished up his little inquisition.

"No," I say quickly and firmly, my exasperation and weariness clearly showing now. "My dreams and visions come from God. I have no control over them, and I am *not* a medium. I'm a Christian who just happens to have a gift." *Thank you very much!*

"God reveals things to Samantha," Ebony explains in a softer tone. "He gives her some important pieces of information. It's because she has a very unique connection to Him. It's hard for others to understand this, but it's simply the way God designed her."

Just then, some other security personnel come into the office to meet us, congratulating us and thanking us for our help. Luggage and phones are returned. But to my dismay, Officer Banks proceeds to tell these people about my gift, and naturally more questions follow. Thankfully, Ebony fields the queries for me. I'm afraid my patience has worn painfully thin—I just want to go home.

"So, you really did catch the guys?" I finally ask Officer Banks. I mean, we heard they were detained and all, but I want to be sure they're really locked up. "The flight's okay and no one's going to be hurt?"

"Don't worry," one of the younger guards assures me. "Those two dudes won't be hurting anyone tonight."

"Unfortunately, there are a bunch of disgruntled passengers who won't be making it to Phoenix tonight either." Then the female security officer briefly explains how the plane and all the checked bags must be moved to a safe and secure place and thoroughly searched. "And with the shortage of flights this time of year, they might not even

make it home by tomorrow. I'm afraid this is going to spoil a whole lot of Christmases."

"Not as much as being blown up in the sky would spoil them," Ebony points out.

"I'm curious," I say. "With all the security checks and X-ray machines and stuff...how did those guys get through with bombs and knives?"

"There's more than one way to get down to the gates," says Officer Banks. "Sure, passengers have to go through some tight security, but we also have food service people and various deliveries that come through other avenues. And sometimes passengers, perhaps even our terrorist fellows today, have friends on the inside."

"Friends who can sneak in knives and things," says the young guard.

"Nothing is absolutely certain yet, but there will be a thorough investigation," the female officer assures us.

Then, after asking and answering a few more questions, we are finally allowed to leave the airport.

"Free at last," I say as we head for the parking lot to hunt for Ebony's car. I can hardly believe we parked it there just two days ago, back when we set out on our mission to Phoenix. Was it only this morning that we were out on the desert searching for Kayla and her kidnapper? It seems like two years must've passed since that time. What a day!

"You might've just saved a whole lot of lives tonight, Sam." Ebony opens the trunk of her unmarked police car. We both set our bags inside, and she closes it with a thunk.

“Not me, *God*.”

“Yes, but you were listening, Sam. You were tuned in.”

I consider this as she drives us back to Brighton. I suppose I was tuned in. But really, it seemed like I didn't have that much to do with it. I mean, besides being on the receiving end of things. But then I guess that's how it is with God's gifts. They just come—unexpected.

Even so, I'm ready for a little break just now. Or maybe even a big break. I'm not saying I want to tune out completely, but I wouldn't mind a few nights (maybe even a few weeks) of dreamless sleep. I silently beg God to give me some time off during Christmas break—it doesn't seem too much to ask. It's not like I'm telling Him to get lost. I just want Him to leave me alone for a while. Just give me a break. That's all.