

JENNY OLDFIELD

Bright Star

With illustrations by
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Barrington  Stoke



At last Morgan's mom showed up. Her name was Lacey and that's what she liked Morgan to call her.

"OK, let's go," Lacey said.

Lacey drove Morgan along the early morning streets between the tower blocks. Soon they were out of Chicago and heading to O'Hare airport.

"Did you say goodbye to Gayla?" Lacey asked.

"Nope," Morgan mumbled.

"Brooke?" Lacey asked.

"Nope."

Lacey rolled her eyes. "Didn't you tell any of your friends you were leaving?"

"No, I didn't," Morgan said. "What would be the point?" She stared out of the window.

There was silence until they came to the airport.

“You got everything you need?” Lacey asked, when they had parked.

“Yep,” Morgan said.

“Your phone?”

“Yep.”

“Aunt Anne Marie’s number?”

“Yep.”

“Call me as soon as you land,” Lacey said. “And give me a smile, why don’t you?”

Morgan sighed. She was leaving the city for who knew how long, to live in some god-awful ranch in the Rocky Mountains with her aunt, Anne Marie. What was there to smile about?



Lacey came with Morgan to the check-in desk. “Hug?” she asked.

Morgan hugged her. Then she showed her ticket to the woman behind the American Airlines desk.

“Bye!” Lacey called as Morgan headed for her Departure Gate.

All of a sudden, Morgan felt scared. She turned and waved, hoping her mom would still be there.

Her mom waved back.

Morgan waved again. Then she turned and walked on down a long, shiny walkway past long lines of passengers waiting to board their planes. She was alone and on her way.

In the plane at 30,000 feet, clouds spread below Morgan like a fluffy cream blanket.

The cabin crew served peanuts and Diet Coke. The fat guy in the seat next to her snoozed and snored.

At last, the Fasten Seatbelts sign came on.

“We’ll have you on the ground in Denver in around ten minutes,” the pilot informed them as the plane began to dip down past the clouds. Morgan felt a bump when the plane hit the ground, then she heard the sharp whine of brakes. Out of the window, she could see mountains in the distance. It was late June, but the peaks were still white with snow.

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A tall guy in a dusty cowboy hat stepped forward to greet Morgan at Baggage Reclaim.



“Anne Marie couldn’t make it,” he said.
“Sunday means new guests arrive at the ranch.
She’s busy, so she sent me instead. I’m Ryan.
Hi.”



A cowboy hat! No kidding – he was wearing a real live Stetson and cowboy boots. Morgan had only ever seen them on TV. When she shook his hand, it felt rough.

“Morgan,” she said. She felt herself blush bright red.

“Let’s go.” Ryan took Morgan’s bag and led her to an old Ford truck. He waited for Morgan to climb into the front, then they set off for the ranch. Along the way, Ryan played country and western music, stopped for gas, and bought Morgan a bag of spicy corn chips and a bottle of water.

After an hour and a half, the road rose out of the flat Denver plains up into the mountains. “We’re halfway there,” Ryan told her.

Morgan saw a dead deer by the side of the road, a few trailer homes just off the highway, and miles of pine forest. The highway was

