



# RISING OF A NEW DAY

## *Vignettes*

DIANE GREENWOOD MUIR



*Bellingwood - Book 32*





# Book Thirty-Two Vignettes

DIANE GREENWOOD MUIR

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THANK YOU!



## INTRODUCTION

These vignettes originally came about as a way to keep readers engaged while I was writing the next book. Talk about ravenous readers! Each short, short, short story (vignette is published on either the website ([nammynools.com](http://nammynools.com)) or in the email newsletter that comes out on the twenty-fifth of each month.

Be sure to sign up for the newsletter so you don't miss anything, especially the latest vignette.

I realized how much fun it was to expose little bits of the background stories that happen every day in Bellingwood. Because the Bellingwood books are written from Polly's perspective, unless she is directly involved in the action or with a character, we miss activities in other people's lives. These characters have developed enough that they enjoy telling their own stories, so this is their little bit of fame.

I have compiled the vignettes relating to Book 32 — Rising of a New Day — into one collection. These four short stories feature different characters from Bellingwood who get an opportunity to offer a little slice of life from their own perspective.



## **Vignette #1**

### **Playing Dressup**

"Help me with this," Beryl said.

Rebecca set her wig back on the dresser and walked over to the mirror where Beryl was adjusting hers back and forth. It was so weird to see her friend in flaming red hair, but it was the perfect color for Beryl. Long, with a flip at the end and perfectly arranged bangs, she looked like the Jayne Alistair she was playing. Dressed in a long-sleeve, straight cut black shift, gold buttons on the front and on her cuffs, Beryl was having a blast. She wore enough makeup to soften some of her wrinkles, with smokey eyes and long lashes. For the right man, this woman would be quite the catch.

On the other hand, Rebecca's role tonight was that of Jayne's innocent out-of-town granddaughter, Lillybeth Manderson, in Boston to see how the rest of the world lives. Her wig was a pile of bouncy brunette curls and she was made up with bright red cheeks, rosy lips and red and gold eye shadow. She wore a tea-length, full-skirted dress with red roses spattered across a white background and an immense green sash at her waist that tied into what felt like an even larger bow at her back. Rebecca was fairly certain that she'd rip that thing off before the end of the evening.

After they were both ready to go, Beryl looked at her phone with a grin. "Just one picture for posterity. Not too many or we'll get caught."

"But Drea knows now," Rebecca said. Polly's friend from Boston was picking them up in less than twenty minutes to take them to a couple of jazz clubs.

"So does Polly. I think we're safe. Besides, Drea promised to keep our secret."

"Do you think she'll dress up?" Rebecca asked.

Beryl cackled. "I'd love to see what she comes up with. She seems a little staid for something like this."

"I don't want to carry this." Rebecca held up a little black

handbag Beryl lent her to complete the outfit. "What if I forget it?"

"Where will you put your phone?" Beryl asked.

Rebecca stared at Beryl's bag. "In there? Please?"

"You little brat," Beryl said with a laugh. "Okay. What else do you want me to haul around for you?"

"Just my phone and my driver's license." Rebecca patted her left breast. "Any cash I need is already tucked away nice and safe."

"What if it falls out? Wouldn't that be embarrassing."

"It won't. I carry cash in there all the time."

Beryl opened her bag. "Put whatever you want in here. I'll be your Sherpa tonight."

"I can carry your bag. I just don't want to be responsible for leaving mine behind."

"But, my sweet girl, I'm the dingbat in the group."

"Not with your purse," Rebecca said. "You only play at being a dingbat. I notice things like that."

"Don't be too sure. You know how lost I get."

"I also know that if you bothered to pay attention, you'd never get lost. You're just too busy looking at the background. And you do crazy things so that you can divert people's attention to you rather than an uncomfortable situation someone else might be going through. And you let your friends think they're so much more together than you so they feel good about themselves. I've learned a lot from you, crazy lady. Mostly about how important it is to take care of your friends and family and never let on that you are doing it on purpose."

Beryl brushed at an eye. "Don't make me mess up this makeup. I didn't spend all that time putting on falsies to have mascara streak down my face."

"I wish I could wear these in Bellingwood," Rebecca said, blinking at herself in the mirror. "They make me look so different."

"Henry would have a fit at how grown up you look." Beryl slipped an arm around Rebecca's waist. "But they'll still likely card you, so no alcohol."

Rebecca opened her mouth in shock. "I wouldn't even try."

"Uh huh. I know better."

"When we're in the UK and Europe this summer, the legal drinking age is eighteen."

"And what, you want me to explain to Polly and Henry how we ended up in the back of a farmer's hay truck because we were so drunk they had to haul us out of town?"

"Just once or twice, please? If I'm going to be there, I should experience the whole thing, shouldn't I?"

"We'll talk to Polly."

"But not Henry," Rebecca said.

"Polly can talk to him."

A knock on the hotel room door pulled their attention away from the mirror. Rebecca darted over and looked through the peep hole. She turned to Beryl. "I'm sure it's Drea, but she totally dressed up. You aren't going to believe this."

"Open the door." Then Beryl put her hand up. "Wait. Don't pull the chain. Open it just enough and ask if it's her."

Rebecca opened the door as far the chain would allow and said, "Who is it?" in a sweet, innocent voice.

"Let me in, you silly girl."

"But who are you?"

"It's me. Drea. Let me in. Come on."

Beryl was howling with laughter and nodded to Rebecca, who slid the chain off and opened the door.

"I wasn't sure if it was really you," Rebecca said.

"Who else would be dressed like this?" Drea gestured down her front. She looked amazing. Starting with four-inch high black boots that came up to her knees. Then she had on tight black leather pants, a hot pink sweater and a leather jacket with silver studs along the collar, the wrists, and the pockets. Drea had found a black wig that was much shorter than her regular hair. It was straight with a flip at her cheek.

"You look amazing."

"If you two girls are playacting tonight, I didn't want to be left out." Drea sidled up to Beryl. "I think I could be your black-sheep daughter. Little Miss Cutey-pie's mother is my sister, the perfect child. She did everything you wanted her to do and I couldn't live

up to her standards, so I moved out of the house when I was fifteen and moved up to the North End with my boyfriend, Dusty Marano."

"You've really thought this out," Beryl said. "I'm impressed."

Drea shrugged. "I had to think of something while I was shopping for this getup. It was kinda fun. Now I need to figure out how I can wear it more often."

"You need a Dusty Marano to take you out on the town."

"Yeah, that isn't happening. Are you two ready to go? My car is out front."

Beryl headed for the door and Rebecca took one more glance around the room. Everything was unplugged that needed to be unplugged and she'd left the light on between the beds. She poked her head into the bathroom to make sure nothing would burn the building down, then followed Drea and Beryl into the hallway.

"Do you have the keycard?" she asked Beryl, holding the door open.

"It's in here."

"I want to see it. Remember ..."

"Yes, yes, yes. I remember. One time and she'll never let me forget."

"Then, how about ..."

"Okay, okay. Two times."

"And ..."

Beryl rolled her eyes dramatically and Drea laughed. When Beryl tugged the keycard out of a pocket inside her bag, she whispered to Rebecca. "See, I really am a dingbat."

As the three of them walked through the lobby, Rebecca glanced around and smiled that all eyes were watching. Beryl and Drea hadn't seemed to notice.

Drea lifted her hand and a black Lincoln Continental pulled up in front of them. Rebecca's mouth dropped open and she looked at Beryl.

"What?" Beryl asked. "That's cool."

A man dressed in a black suit got out of the driver's side and came around. He opened the back door and then the front door.

"Good evening, ladies."

"What is this?" Rebecca asked.

Drea laughed. "This is the benefit of having two brothers who own a security company. They have an entire fleet of limousines. Our driver is Bruce Anthony. He's ours for the evening."

Beryl slinked over to him and ran her fingers up and down the lapel of his suit coat. "Ours for the evening, eh? What are my limits?"

"You wouldn't know what to do with me," Bruce said with a grin.

"Oh, honey-pie," she replied, "you have no idea who you're talking to."

"I'll sit up front," Drea said. "That sounds like it will be safer."

Beryl turned her face up to Bruce. "Fine. I'll sit in back and stare at him adoringly. He's adorable." She slid across into the far seat and moaned as she wiggled in the leather. "Oh, dear lord, what is this paradise? Why don't I own a car like this? Little Lillybeth, you need to remind me to buy one when we get home."

"You'll need a driver, Miss Jayne," Rebecca said.

"There are some pretty boys who wouldn't mind driving me around. One of them is sweet on you. He could use it to take you out on Friday nights. Wouldn't that be something?"

Rebecca nodded. "It would be something, that's for sure."

Beryl leaned back, sighed, and smiled. "Can you imagine what people at home would say if I rode around town in one of these? And my family. They would have a conniption. No one is supposed to show off their wealth."

"You don't."

"Sometimes I wish I could. It is frustrating to know that no one respects me. I could buy them all, but they have no idea."

Rebecca reached over and took her friend's hand. She knew it was hard on Beryl. At least her friends knew how important and special she was, but no one else did. At least not enough people to make her life in Bellingwood pleasant. Maybe that's why she was so flamboyant and nutty. She was hiding her pain at being ignored for her talent.

"I love you," Rebecca whispered.

"I know you do, sweet girl."

The Lincoln pulled in front of what Rebecca could only call a dive. Flashing neon lights on the outside invited them in for old-school jazz and blues.

When Rebecca reached for the door, Bruce said, "Allow me. I'll be right there." He opened the door for Beryl, then escorted her around to the sidewalk and opened doors for Drea and Rebecca. "I hope you enjoy your evening."

"You can join us," Drea said.

"No, thank you. I have my tablet. Studying, you know."

"Studying?" Rebecca asked.

"Working on my master's degree. These evenings allow me the quiet to study alone. I'll be just down the street. Send me a text and I'll be right back to take you to your next stop."

He stood at the car as the three walked into the club. Drea pulled the door open and Rebecca couldn't believe she was here. They were treating her like an adult, not a kid. She was used to that with Beryl, but now Drea, too. It felt great.

## Vignette #2

### Brothers

Noah sat in the front seat of Jack's beat-to-heck pickup truck. They were waiting for Elijah to come out of the music store, which was where he spent afternoons. Noah liked spending time with Jack. It was usually quiet and if they talked about something, it was interesting, not just kid-talk. Jack liked to talk about the future and making plans to do big things and he was interested in what other people had to say.

Everyone thought Jack was just shy or uncomfortable around his new family and people in town, but Noah got it. Sometimes you just didn't want to talk. And bringing up ideas that get brushed aside because someone else has to tell their story first gets old and boring.

Noah chuckled. Elijah always had to go first. It was one of his favorite things about his younger brother. He was so excited and enthusiastic about everything he did. Elijah tried to be interested in what others wanted to share, but his brain couldn't slow down and neither did his mouth. So he blurted out whatever was going on in his brain. As much as Noah loved that about Elijah, it drove him nuts, too.

"What's that?" Jack asked. "You laughed."

Noah looked over at him. "Just thinking about how different Elijah and I are."

"That's interesting. What way?"

"He likes talking about himself. I don't. He loves performing. Jack, I would hate doing what he does. It terrifies me."

"So, don't do it."

"When we were little, everyone thought we were the same. Elijah went out for sports, so I had to, too."

"Who told you that?"

Noah frowned. "I don't know."

"Polly and Henry made you play sports because Elijah did?"

That earned a wry grin. "I guess not. I just assumed they expected it. One night I heard them talking about a band with all us kids on different instruments. Do you really think they'd make me do that? I didn't like playing soccer and I don't want to be on stage with a band."

"Your parents would never make you do something like that. They have high expectations for their family, but it's all about helping you find what you love to do. I thought you liked playing the saxophone. You're getting really good."

"Elijah thinks I should learn how to play the guitar. I don't want to."

"Elijah thinks a lot of things," Jack said. "Tell him you'd rather play the ukulele and he'll find a way to get that into your hands and then try to talk you into playing it in his band."

Noah smiled. Jack understood. "You should play in the family band."

That made Jack chuckle.

Elijah burst out of the front door of the music store and raced across the parking lot. He yanked the door open and pushed at Noah to get his brother to move into the middle. "I got new music today! It finally came in. I can't wait to get home and play it!"

"Hello to you, Elijah," Jack said.

"Hello." Elijah was oblivious.

Noah poked him with his elbow.

"What?"

"Rude."

Elijah frowned and held up a bag. "But it's here now and I've been waiting forever."

Jack pulled out of the lot and headed down the street. "Does this mean you're going to be spending the night at the piano?"

"Just for a while." Elijah patted his backpack. "I have a ton of homework. I was thinking, Noah. You wanna go sledding tomorrow? Help me talk Dad into taking us up to Grandma's house after school."

"I'm going to the barn," Noah said. It drove him nuts that his brother never thought that the thing he loved to do was important.

"But you can get out of it. It's not like it's your job or anything."

Jack stopped at a stop sign and softly nudged Noah's shoulder. Noah glanced at him and saw Jack nod and send a look Elijah's way.

"It's what I do. You know how Mom and Dad are about being responsible for our choices."

"Well, I'm not responsible," Elijah huffed. He tried to cross his arms over his chest, but his bulky winter coat and the cramped front seat made it difficult. "I'm only in sixth grade and I shouldn't have to be responsible all the time." He made air quotes around the second use of the word responsible.

Noah shook his head. His brother was about to go off on a rant about something stupid and Polly wasn't around this afternoon to make him clean a bathroom or anything.

"I'm still going to go to Grandma's house tomorrow," Elijah announced. "I'll bet JaRon and Caleb want to go with me."

There was no reason to say anything. It would just wind Elijah up further. Sledding would be fun. And Grandma Marie made hot cocoa and sometimes Grandpa Bill built a big bonfire. Eliseo wouldn't care if he didn't go to the barn. Eliseo said he spent too much time there, but he liked being able to run over after school and see the horses. Sometimes if the work was done before he was picked up, Jason took him to his apartment and they played video games. If Jason wasn't around, Eliseo made him do his homework.

"Tomorrow's a school night," Noah said, trying one more time to talk sense into his brother.

"So what? The snow will be gone by the weekend. I want to sled now. Come on. You want to, don't you?" Elijah leaned forward. "You'll go too, right, Jack?"

"Jack's already working out there," Noah said, adding a little scorn to his voice. See? Elijah never paid attention to anything.

"I know, dummy. It's just that if he's out there, he should sled with us. It's not like we have great snow every day of the year."

Jack pulled into a spot beside the garage at home. Without a word, he opened his car door.

"Jack?" Elijah asked. "Don't you want to?"

Jack stepped to the ground and looked back into the truck at the two boys. He smiled. "We'll see."

Noah unbuckled his belt and slid across the driver's seat. Elijah was still trying to figure out how to get himself, his backpack and bag of music in hand. Noah reached behind the driver's seat and snagged his own backpack. He'd done most of his work before Jack picked him up, but there were still some reading in social studies he had to finish. What would it be like to not have to study for a grade, but just learn stuff?

"Dreaming again?" Elijah pushed past him and ran to catch up to Jack at the side door.

Noah slammed the truck's door shut. It was the only way to get it to latch right. He waited to hear it catch and then strode across the drive after slinging his pack over his shoulder. Five more years of school in Bellingswood. Four years of college and then maybe he could think about not having the pressure of studying for a grade.

Jack stood at the door and held it open. "You okay?"

"Just thinking."

"Didn't answer my question."

"Yeah." Noah braced himself for his favorite dog's leap of affection. Georgia jumped into his arms as he dropped the pack and knelt for her. He couldn't believe this little dog loved him like she did. When she moved into the house, he just knew that she needed to stay with him. And he couldn't believe that his parents let him have her. Everyone else thought she was just part of the family, but at night, when she curled up against his back, Noah knew that she loved him.

By the time he and Georgia got reacquainted and he had his coat hung up on the peg and headed into the kitchen, Elijah was passing around his new music so everyone could see it. He jabbered about how impressed everyone was with how great he was playing; that he was advancing so fast. Jack was already gone. He was working on high school equivalency and spent a lot of time in his room studying. That's where Noah wanted to go, but Lexi pointed at a big bowl of freshly made chocolate chip cookies on the island.

JaRon, Caleb, and especially Cassidy were watching Elijah with

fascination. That would last until one of them tried to talk over him and then he'd get pouty and then he'd realize he was being selfish and get over himself. It didn't take any time and no one bothered to wait for Elijah to figure it out.

"Did you have a good day?" Lexi asked Noah.

"Caleb has a girlfriend," JaRon announced.

Caleb blushed bright red and punched out at his brother.

"Caleb," Lexi said. "You know better and JaRon, you know better than to tease him."

"I'm not teasing. It's true. They walked to lunch together. I saw them."

"It's Caleb's story to tell when he wants to tell it," Lexi said.

Noah took a bite of a cookie and then headed back out to the porch to get his backpack.

Lexi caught him. "Where are you going?"

"Homework," he said, shrugging away from her touch. He didn't mean anything by it. He just wanted some quiet of his own. If he hurried upstairs, Elijah would be in and out to change his clothes and then Noah could read by himself until dinner.

"Did you have a bad day?" she asked.

Noah shook his head. "No. Sorry. I just have a lot of reading to do."

"So do I, sweetie. I get it. Elijah's pretty excited."

"Yeah. No kidding."

She smiled at him and slid a cookie into his hand. They weren't supposed to eat anywhere but the kitchen and dining room and sometimes in the family room. They especially weren't supposed to take food to their rooms because someone kept leaving it out to spoil. Oh yeah, that someone wasn't Noah, either.

He headed for the back steps and Elijah caught up to him. "Hey. Was I really rude?"

"Yeah. But who cares?"

"Are you mad at me?"

Noah stopped halfway up the steps. "No. I'm not mad. I'm just thinking."

"What about?"

"Stuff."

"What kind of stuff?" Elijah bounced past him and shot to the top, bouncing on his feet as he waited.

"Stuff-stuff," Noah said.

"Are you going to be in a better mood later?"

Noah rushed his brother, but Elijah must have seen it coming and the two raced down the hallway to their bedroom. Good thing no one else was around. Elijah hit the door and turned the knob and they barreled into their mostly messy room. There were a few places Noah could keep in order. Elijah was under strict orders to stay away from his desk, but the rest was usually a disaster.

"Come on, come on," Elijah said. "Gonna be in a better mood later? I have to go downstairs and practice, but we can play, can't we?"

Noah dropped his backpack on his chair, then spun on his brother. Elijah's mouth dropped open, thinking he was in deep trouble. He was. Noah's height gave him a small advantage over his wiry brother. He leaned forward, picked Elijah up enough to dump him on his bed and then jumped on top of him. Elijah squealed and they wrestled until they rolled onto the floor laughing.

## **Vignette #3**

### **Wine and a Fire**

Tab Hudson was relieved to be finished with today. JJ had to work late tonight at the winery and he promised to have a fire going in the fireplace, wine at their table, and told her to come hungry. He was cooking.

Their table. Even the thought of that idea felt weird. But JJ insisted that they had one table in the lodge where no one but the two of them would ever occupy. She could invite friends to join her there and it was where he hosted business meetings. But the best times were when the two of them sat together. Somehow, JJ had set it up so that while he could keep an eye on the rest of the place, they weren't bothered by the noise around them. There had been more than one evening when they'd stayed long after the rest of the staff turned the lights off and said good night.

She loved talking to him - about their dreams for the future, his plans for the winery, and just life in general. Tab had never known anyone who could talk about things going on in the world or interesting bits and pieces of history. They'd even had strange and wonderful discussions about poetry. That one threw her. She wasn't much for that type of literature and just this last year had discovered how much JJ was into it. Oh, he'd quoted verses of poetry during their time together, but then he revealed how much he loved it. All of his books of poetry were here at the winery on shelves in his office. She'd never paid much attention until she realized it was such a passion. Not that it made a big difference in her own life. There was still so much of it that she didn't understand, but he loved talking about the poems, explaining what the author was trying to tell the reader.

JJ Roberts had been a real surprise, that's for sure.

When she'd talked to him a few hours ago, she'd been nearly in tears. Too much stress. Everything from a fire set by a twelve-year-old who was fighting with his mother to a drunken idiot beating on

his wife and eldest son. Then there were the normal curses and bad attitudes from people who were committing obvious crimes. She loved getting called to the stores to deal with shoplifters. Especially those who insisted they'd done nothing wrong, even after she found the stolen items in their pockets. One high school girl spat in Tab's face. All of that chaos over a bracelet ... in a thrift store. Good grief. Oh and then there was the fist fight between two owners of a local coffee shop. Right behind the counter where customers could see the entire event.

Tab was worn out. The minute she drove into Bellingwood, though, she forced her shoulders to relax and took a few deep breaths. In through the nose, out through the mouth. In through the nose, out through the mouth.

As she drove down the street leading to Secret Woods, she anticipated seeing the lodge emerge from behind the trees. With snow on the ground and leaves off the big old trees, Tab could see the wooden walls through the branches. While the parking lot wasn't as packed as it was on summer weekends, there were plenty of cars there. She drove around back to the employee's entrance, parked, turned off her car and sat back in her seat. More breathing. Anything to release some stress before walking in and smiling at everyone. Tab knew better than to close her eyes. She'd fall asleep and it was too cold for that.

She shivered at the cold wind and rushed to the back door, looking forward to the warmth of the fireplace. That thought had been on her mind all day.

The heat from the kitchen was nothing compared to the loud shouting in the employee locker room / storage room. Tab poked her head in the door to see what was up, even though she knew better. This wasn't something she wanted to be involved in. Especially not after today.

Surprisingly, the two people yelling at each other were Dani Mixan and the new host and sommelier that had started working here about a month ago.

When he pointed his finger in her face, Tab coughed to make her presence known. "Something wrong?"

Dani rolled her eyes and slapped away the hand that was still in place. "Nothing. I'll deal with it myself."

The girl was generally even-tempered, making her a perfect fit for the front boutique at Secret Woods. Customers rarely got under her skin and she had a good relationship with the other employees. What had this guy done?

Adrian Moffitt's face was red and he shrugged off the encounter, stalking past Tab.

"What in the world?" Tab asked Dani.

"The jerk blamed Annie for a guest being upset about not getting the right bottle of wine. Everyone knows it is his job to present the wine list and answer any questions, but he was too busy talking on the phone to deal with it. And JJ insists that we stay off our phones while we're on shift."

Tab nodded. The whole world was too caught up with their faces in their phones. That had been another annoyance today. While she was dealing with those stupid shoplifting girls, they all kept looking at their phones, barely paying attention to her when she was talking.

"Okay, how did you get involved? You really made him angry."

"He made Annie cry in front of customers. And then he walked away after telling her that she had to fix it or he would have her fired. I grabbed his fancy white jacket and dragged him back here to tell him that he didn't have the right to speak to anyone like that."

"Where's JJ?"

"Oh!" Dani said, remembering something important. "I'm supposed to tell you that he'll be right back. He had to run out for something. He was afraid you'd get here before he returned."

That explained that. JJ would never let one of his employees tear another one apart in public. "Are you going to tell him what happened?"

"I don't know," Dani said. "I feel like it's tattling. That's not how I want to behave. We're adults, for heaven's sake."

The back door opened and closed. JJ walked past the room, stopped, and came in. "Are we plotting a takeover?"

"You need to create a general manager position and give it to

Dani," Tab said.

Dani grinned and shook her head as she walked past them to the door. "I'm happy being manager of the boutique. I'd better get back to it. Have a nice evening."

"How long have you been here?" JJ asked.

"Only a few minutes. I walked into a rather heated argument between Dani and Adrian." Tab kept her voice low, not knowing who might be listening outside the door. "I'll tell you about it later. What's in the bag?"

"Something fun for dessert. How's my favorite cop?" He leaned in and kissed her cheek.

"Bone weary and chilled. Take me to the fire as fast as possible."

"You're pretty amazing, you know. After a long, hard day, instead of running home to a hot bath and the bed, you're willing to spend time here with me."

"I am amazing. Where's that fire?"

JJ smiled, took her hand, and kissed the top of it, then led her through the kitchen and into the large open dining area. They walked past small groups and couples, smiling and nodding. He deposited her in a comfortable chair by the fireplace after taking her coat.

Tab leaned back and sighed. Perfect. Then she put her hand out.

"What's that?"

"Wine. Where's my wine?"

"Coming right up. Then, will you tell me what is going on with Adrian?" JJ glanced over his shoulder as the host stood in front of a table speaking politely with a group of young women.

"He made Annie cry." Tab smirked and closed her eyes, shutting him out. "Wine before interrogation. I insist."

She peeked as he walked away, shaking his head. Darn it, she forgot to ask what he'd gotten for dessert.

While he was gone, Dani brought another couple in to be seated. She glanced at Adrian, who pointedly ignored her. This was full-time entertainment. Tab looked around for Annie and found her at the far end of the room, speaking quietly with a table filled with what looked to be a group of young, self-important business men

and women. Empty wine bottles were scattered across the table and when Annie tried to gather them, several in the group shooed her away. She smiled and left them.

"Here you are," JJ said, holding out a glass to Tab. When she reached for it, he drew back. "Talk first. Rewards will come your way. What happened?"

"I don't have all the details."

"Because you weren't carrying your little notebook. Couldn't ask all the questions you wanted to ask, could you."

"Wine or that's the last words you'll hear from me tonight." Tab put her hand out again and he gave her the glass. "From Dani's perspective, Adrian wasn't doing his job and when a customer got upset, he blamed Annie and dressed her down in public. Dani yanked him to the back room and took him out. I walked in when he was jamming a finger in her face."

JJ stepped back and blinked. "He what?"

"That's the only thing I saw. Dani doesn't want to tattle. She might not have said anything and you can bet Annie isn't going to speak up about it. The poor girl likely feels as if the whole thing is her fault. So, what's for dinner?"

He sat down beside her and turned his head, his eyes landing on Adrian. She watched him process her words. "I hate this part of owning a business."

"Managing idiots and rude employees?"

"Yes. Especially when it interrupts a nice evening with you."

"How about you let it go for tonight. Everyone is doing their job. You can talk to them tomorrow when I'm lying about in bed at home." Tab was looking forward to her next two days off. There was so much to do, but mostly, she just wanted to rest. After several months, Polly Giller had done it again and she was working another murder. At least things were never boring.

"You're right. Let me check on dinner." JJ leaned across and this time, Tab leaned toward him and kissed his lips.

"What's for dessert?"

"I asked Sylvie to make tarts for my girl. You have choices. I love having her bakery in town."

"You went up there just for tarts for me?"

"Well, there were a few other orders there to be brought back, but yes. I did that. Another kiss for a reward?"

Tab leaned back in and kissed him. How had he made her so comfortable with all of this? It wasn't like her at all, but she loved every minute of it.

## **Vignette #4**

### **A Good Sale**

Simon Gardner heard the front doorbell. He walked into the main aisle from one he'd been dusting and rearranging. A complete set of beautiful dinnerware had been unpacked the day before yesterday and he needed to put it into a better spot than tucked into an out-of-the-way shelf. What he needed was one of those pretty hutches along the side wall. Tomorrow morning, he'd empty the hutch he wanted to use and ask Paul Bradford from the hardware store next door if a couple of his employees would help move it. That would work. He thought fondly of the days when he was able to manhandle nearly every piece in this place by himself.

"Hello, ladies," he said, tipping his head to three women who were coming his way. "Is there anything I can help you find today?"

"Mr. Gardner, it's been too long. It's good to see you again." The eldest of the three, he thought her name was Justine Hicks, strode forward and put her hand out.

He graciously took it and smiled. "It's good to see you, too."

"We are spending the day together and wanted to see what new items you might have," she said. "You remember my friends, Dora Levitt and Marybelle Sacker."

"It's good to see you both. There are many new things hiding among the shelves," he said, doing his best not to show them how eager he was to move on from this conversation.

A flash of memory made him blush as he heard his sister-in-law, Jean's voice in his head telling him that Dora Levitt had a crush on him last year. She was as uninteresting as a doorpost. This was a girl who had sailed her way through her youth with looks and by batting her eyes at any boy who would look up. Simon had never been interested in that type. He wanted to spend time with a person interested in deep intellectual conversations. The worst thing was that though she tried to cover it with too much makeup, she was not the attractive girl she'd once been. But that was her issue, not

his.

The doorbell tinkled again and he said, "Excuse me, I need to greet other customers."

"We'll be fine, dear," Mrs. Hicks said. "We're just browsing. I doubt that we'll find much to purchase. In fact, between the three of us, we probably have enough junk to open our own antique shop."

That's exactly what Simon needed to hear. Treasures that he spent hours caring for were nothing more than junk in an old lady's house. Excellent. He smiled and walked away from the ladies as they entered an aisle filled with old dolls. Where were their grandchildren to keep them occupied on days like this?

"Hello, Mr. Gardner," Noah Sturtz said shyly. He was accompanied by his three brothers. They were such polite boys and he knew them well enough from being invited into their home that the boys were all comfortable with him.

"Hello, boys. How are you? I haven't seen you in here before as a group. Are you looking for something special?"

Elijah peered down an aisle filled with toy farm equipment. "We're looking for something for Rebecca. We have an assignment."

"An assignment? What kind?"

"She's going to Scotland." That came from the youngest, JaRon. Sometimes Simon wanted to scoop that round little face into his hands and kiss it, he was so adorable. It sounded ridiculous when he thought the words out loud in his mind, but still. That face was going to win lots of hearts when JaRon grew older.

"She is. That sounds like fun."

"With Mrs. Watson," Noah said. "Over spring break."

"That's still a few weeks away. You have time to find a great gift."

"We were hoping you might help us. We don't have a lot of money, but we put it all together." Noah took a wad of cash out of his pocket. Single dollar bills and two five-dollar bills. He laid it out on the front countertop. "There should be twenty-five dollars there."

"The four of you are putting that much money down for a gift for your sister?" Simon asked. "You love her quite a bit, don't you."

The younger boys nodded. Caleb rarely spoke up, but he was always interested in being part of things.

"We're supposed to do something for her to help her remember this trip," Elijah said. "We're having a bon ... a bon ... What is it, Noah?"

"A bon voyage party with the whole family. Everyone is either making something or buying her something," Noah replied.

"Do you want to look around the shop first and then if you have any ideas, we can talk about the cost. Everything is negotiable."

"It's okay if we do that?"

"Of course it is. Anything you think she would like, just bring it to the counter. If you come up with four or five different items, we'll discuss them and then you can choose. How's that sound?"

"Thank you!"

The four boys took off in pairs and walked through the aisles of the store. Simon could hear their excited babbling as they looked at the variety of things he had on shelves. It made him smile to think that these little boys chose his shop to buy their gift for Rebecca. He hadn't heard that she was going to Scotland yet. His network was failing him. He'd have to corner Mary Bradford, the wife of Paul and one of the local letter carriers. She always told him what was happening around town. He did know that Rebecca and Beryl Watson were planning a trip to Paris and Rome this summer. Oh, how he yearned to travel like that again. Mrs. Watson was fortunate to have a young person to take with her on these trips. It would make traveling so much easier at his age.

Dora Levitt and the third woman, Marybelle something, scurried to the counter. Dora leaned across and whispered. "Do you know there are little hoodlums wandering through your aisles? They're going to steal something from you, I just know it. You should keep a better eye on your inventory."

Simon frowned. "Hoodlums? The four boys who just came in?"

"There are four of them? Marybelle, we need to leave. What if they steal our purses or are pickpockets? We could lose everything. They could get our keys and break into our houses ..." Dora's voice trailed off in shock and surprise.

Surely they'd seen the Sturtz kids around town. Surely they knew who Polly Giller was. This type of thinking frustrated Simon beyond belief. And Jean wanted him to ask the woman out on a date. Not in this lifetime or any other that he ended up spending on earth.

"Ladies, those boys are Polly and Henry Sturtz's boys. They're no more hoodlums than you are. In fact, I trust them with everything in this shop." He glanced at Dora's stuffed tote bag and saw a miniature doll on top of it, the tag still in place. "Did you have something in there you'd like to purchase today, Mrs. Levitt?"

She looked at him in shock and then at her tote. "I was only carrying it around to see if I wanted to buy it." Putting it on the counter, she said, "I'm not interested. If you're letting those types wander your aisles, this might be the last time I come in. I'm sorry, but it just isn't safe."

"I understand that," Simon said. "You have to do what you will."

She turned to her friend, "Please get Justine. It's time we move on with our day. There's nothing of interest here."

Marybelle looked at Simon with what might have been an apology. She moved away and Dora shook her head. "I don't know what the world is coming to. I assumed you were smarter than this. You can trust our money is good."

He picked up the twenty-five dollars that had been entrusted to him by Noah. "Their money is good as well. They are spending it on a gift for their sister. They are sweet boys and I'm very proud of them."

She shook her head in disgust and walked toward the door. By the time she was there, her two friends had joined her. He breathed a sigh of relief when the door closed behind them. That type of thinking was still so prevalent with too many people.

Four dejected little faces showed up at his counter again.

"You didn't find anything?" he asked the boys.

"Nothing."

"I found an airplane, but Caleb said that was more for me than Rebecca," JaRon said. He slumped his shoulders. "He's probably right, but she is flying on an airplane across the ocean."

"Maybe you can buy the airplane for yourself someday," Simon replied. "I have an idea." He'd been staring at it the entire time and it wasn't until just now that he realized it would make a perfect gift for the boys. Unlocking the glass case under the counter, he slid out two trays of locket.

"Those are pretty," Elijah said. He reached out to touch one, then pulled his hand back. "May I?"

"Of course. Which one are you most interested in?"

It didn't take long for Elijah to get a consensus from his brothers. The silver heart pendant was their choice.

"That's what we want," Noah said.

"Do you know what a locket is?" Simon asked. He touched the button at the top and the spring mechanism opened the pendant, revealing two spaces for photographs. "You put a photo in here so that the recipient will remember the moment."

The boys looked at him in awe. "We want to do that, but we have to get some pictures," Noah said.

Elijah touched the pendant, closing it and then opening it again. "And they have to be little. How are we going to do that?"

"What if it were pictures of you boys. Two of you on one side and two on the other?" Simon asked.

"Cat could do it. That way we wouldn't have to tell anyone else," Noah said.

Simon smiled and handed over four business cards, one to each of the boys. "Tell you what. My email address is on there. I have a photo printer here. If you ask Cat to send me the photographs, I will print them to fit. Then you can come in and we'll put the entire gift together. I'll have a gift box and wrapping paper all ready for you."

JaRon's eyes grew wide. "How much will it all cost?"

"I think twenty-five dollars will take care of everything."

Elijah shook his head in awe. "I want to always buy my presents from you. You have the best ideas."

"I'd like that very much. Now, do you want to leave the locket with me so it doesn't get found by someone who shouldn't see it until the party?"

"Thank you," Noah said. He pushed the cash toward Simon. "Keep this, too. We don't want to spend it on anything else."

"But you can pay for it when you pick it up."

"If you give me a receipt, I'll know we paid for it," Noah replied. "It's better this way."

Simon grinned at the boys and quickly wrote up a receipt. "You boys have just made my day much brighter. Thank you for stopping in. Any time you want to come see me, please feel free. And if all you want to do is look at the locket again, come on in. It will be here waiting for you."

"Thank you, Mr. Gardner," the boys all said as they left the store. Even Caleb turned and waved at him before exiting. Those were the types of customers he would prefer any day.

## **Vignette #5**

### **New Life**

"You got this okay?" Eliseo asked.

Jason Donovan waved at him. "Go ahead. I'll put everyone to bed tonight."

"If you need anything ..."

"I'll call. Don't worry." Jason shook his head and Eliseo's eyes lit up with laughter. They did this every single time. He really needed to trust the boy. He was no longer a boy. Jason was nearly finished with his vet tech degree from the community college and while his friends were partying in college, he was working two jobs, paying for an apartment, and preparing to ask a girl to marry him.

Well, one of these days he would. Charlie wasn't going anywhere. She loved the boy and that seemed to give him permission to wait as long as she'd allow. It made sense in a strange way. Jason looked much like his father and he worried that he might turn out the same way, as an abusive drunk. The kid didn't have the heart for that. He was tender and loving with the animals, both here at Sycamore House and up at Elva's stables. He was willing to do anything and had learned simple construction, electricity and plumbing, just by helping Eliseo, Scott Luther at Sycamore House, and Roger Nelson up at the stables. He asked good questions, then waded right in and got his hands dirty.

His brother, Andrew, was nothing like that. He didn't care if he ever learned how to hold a hammer. Sylvie had begged Eliseo to include him in household fix-it projects, and though Andrew never refused, he didn't care at all. He did the work, but nothing ever sank in. Eliseo hoped he made enough money as a writer to hire a full-time handyman. Rebecca was used to having people around who were practical and knew how to take care of small projects.

He knew better than to mock Jason for not marrying Charlie. Sylvie had informed him early in their relationship that she wasn't prepared to commit to another marriage yet. She had too many

ghosts haunting her heart. Sylvie's parents hadn't stayed together; she barely remembered her father. Her husband, Anthony, was a horrible man, and she didn't think that she'd make a good wife.

All Eliseo knew was that he loved her. He had never thought that he would find someone to love after the fire that scarred him so badly. If only it hadn't been his face. That stopped women from getting close to him most of his adult life. Not only women, but men, as well. He didn't have friends beyond his military buddies before coming to Bellingwood.

The strange thing was, as soon as he was hired at Sycamore House, it all changed. All it took was for one or two people to look at him like he was a real human being and soon, everyone accepted him. That was still a surprise. He had friends. He had a woman who cared where he was and what he was doing. He was still floored by the fact that she loved him.

Even in the beginning, when she dated Alistair Greyson, she told Eliseo that she only did so because she was afraid of a commitment. It wasn't that she didn't care, it scared her that she did care so much. And now ... now, he was too hesitant to press the issue. They'd been together long enough that they were comfortable talking about everything under the sun. Except marriage. It would keep.

As Eliseo went to his truck, he clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth and his three dogs, Khan, Kirk, and Sylvie's dog, Padme came running. He opened the door and they jumped in, then climbed across into the back seat, each dog in its normal place.

Poor Padme had gotten lost in the shuffle as the boys grew up. Jason would have taken her to live with him at the apartment, but she was the family dog. Andrew loved her with everything he had, but the kid was gone all the time. It was his senior year in high school and he was busy. Sylvie was just as busy as anyone. She spent hours and hours at the bakery. Not only because she had to do the work, but it was her favorite place in the world. That woman was at her happiest when she was baking. If she hadn't managed to perfect a recipe during the day, some evenings he would come home and find the kitchen in a complete mess, with baking dishes and mixing bowls scattered everywhere. That always meant that

he'd have good treats to share with his friends the next day. At least she didn't toss out the things she made just because they weren't perfect. Sylvie was much too frugal for that.

He couldn't help himself. When he thought about Sylvie, he smiled. The evening he walked in and she had butter stuck on the top of one ear was hilarious. She hadn't realized that she brushed back a strand of hair with butter still on her finger. Everything about her made him smile. Even when she was furious with him for one thing or another.

Eliseo drove past Sweet Beans, heading north. He resisted the urge to wave. She wouldn't see it and if anyone was watching, they'd worry he lost his mind.

Judy Greene and he had been working on seedlings for the Sycamore House gardens over the winter. They were fortunate to have a greenhouse in the family. This year, he wanted to plant more varieties of vegetables to sell at the Farmer's Market. Rachel Endicott, in the kitchen at Sycamore House was thrilled to be able to offer fresh produce on her menu. It made him happy to be part of that. Sam Gardner, his friend and retired professor from Iowa State had helped research squash, tomatoes, and other fruits and vegetables, recommending different types. Eliseo felt a little bad for Judy. Once Sam got involved with something, he was part of it from beginning to long past the end. He loved going to the greenhouse, just to play in the dirt. Of course, that also gave him the opportunity to chat her ear off when she got near. The old rat had figured out her schedule and made sure to be there when she wasn't busy with something else. At least they spoke the same language.

He went past the corner that led to his house. Elva and her family lived there now and surrounding the house was land that had been transformed into a wonderful place for them and the animals they cared for. Her kids were happier, more confident, and according to his sister, healthier than ever now that they were out of the life they lived while she was still married. They worked hard and made friends at school who loved to come out and see the animals.

While growing up, the two had never been friends. They loved

each other, he supposed. The way a sister and brother were supposed to, but when he left and then returned because of his burns, the divide between them grew. She tried to have a normal life with a man who wanted a trophy family.

Eliseo took off once he was free. When she showed up several years ago, desperately needing family to help her, he was glad to do what he could. It never dawned on him that she would finally settle in, do what she loved, and they would become friends. His family had grown since he came to Bellingwood. He no longer was able to be a recluse, hiding behind his scars. His family needed and wanted him around.

A mile north of that corner, he turned right and drove around the lane to the greenhouse beside the bed and breakfast. Judy came off the porch and waved at him.

"Let the dogs run," she called out. "It's a beautiful day and I have two bowls of water in front of the greenhouse."

"Thank you. How's the day going?"

"Not bad. We had a strange short in the electricity in the bottom level, but I called Roger. He found the problem right away and it's all fixed up. Say, I was talking with Sam and we wondered about putting up another greenhouse behind this one. Maybe even cutting a door between the two. Would you take a look?"

Eliseo smiled. He knew what she wanted because Sam had already talked to him about it. With all that was coming her way, she needed a bigger facility. "I've looked. It's completely doable. Let me talk to Polly and Henry to see what they think."

She looked concerned. "Will they have a problem with it?"

"That's not what I meant. They just need to know what we're planning. It's likely Henry can get the supplies for us."

"Oh," Judy said with relief. "That makes sense."

He held the door open for her and she stopped. "I am ready to plant things outside. I know that I have to wait, but I want to see these gardens filled with color again. The bulbs are one thing, but I want my flowers."

"I understand. Nancy Burroughs and Deb Waters have been hovering over the corner garden at Sycamore House for the last

several weeks, making plans for it. I can only imagine what they're doing at home. We are teased by a little warm weather and then it gets cold again.

"Mother's Day," she said. "By Mother's Day I think our wait will be over."

The rain and generally warmer temperatures had brought the grass and trees to life. Bushes were blooming, fruit trees were blooming and trees had moved from buds to leafy green. Color was returning to the world. Judy's gardens were glorious and the B&B had become a popular spot for graduation and wedding photography. It took a little doing to keep groups from trampling everything in sight, but she was stronger than she looked and didn't hesitate to call people out on their bad behavior.

"How are things at the gallery?" Eliseo asked.

Judy lit up. "Reuben is so happy. He doesn't get many customers when he's in the shop, but the people he sees there always look forward to spending time talking about the different pieces for sale. He is building a nice clientele. As long as he is happy doing that work, I'm thrilled for him. I knew that returning to Bellingwood was the right thing to do, but it is better than either of us hoped."

Eliseo nodded and followed her to the back of the greenhouse where healthy plants were growing. "Mother's Day, huh? I can wait that long to put things in the ground. I'll get Ralph Bedford to help me turn the ground one of these days and we'll be ready to go. Do you think you might bring things in for the farmer's markets this year?"

"I should," she said. "I never think about it. That's a great idea."

"It's going to be a good year."

Judy smiled. "I believe you. How can it be bad when the world is returning to life all around?"

She was right. Life was good here in Bellingwood. He was happy and knew love again.

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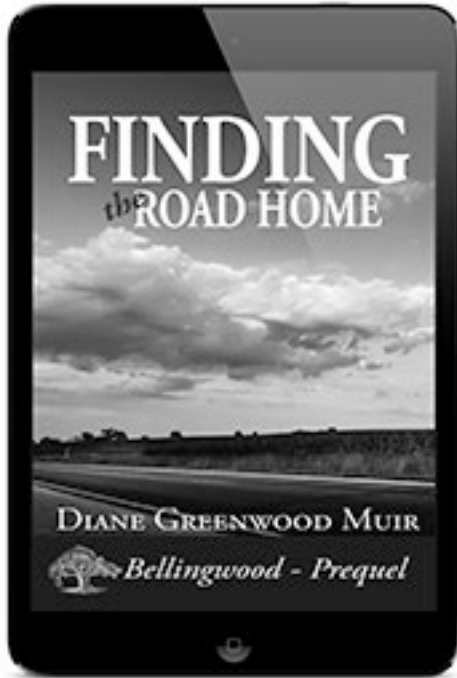
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# THANK YOU!



I'm so glad you enjoy these stories about Polly Giller and her friends. There are many ways to stay in touch with Diane and the Bellingwood community.

You can find more details about Sycamore House and Bellingwood at the website: <http://nammynools.com/>

Join the Bellingwood Facebook page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/pollygiller>  
for news about upcoming books, conversations while I'm writing and you're reading, and a continued look at life in a small town.

For information on Diane's other writing projects, like her Facebook author page:  
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Recipes and decorating ideas found in the books can often be found on Pinterest at: <http://pinterest.com/nammynools/>

And if you are looking for Sycamore House swag, check out Rebecca B's Etsy store at: <http://tiny.cc/Bellingwoodetsy>  
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*Finis*