



PAGES *of the* PAST



Vignettes

DIANE GREENWOOD MUIR



Bellingwood - Book 9



Book Nine Vignettes

DIANE GREENWOOD MUIR

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THANK YOU FOR READING!

INTRODUCTION

These vignettes originally came about as a way to keep readers engaged while I was writing the next book. Talk about ravenous readers!

At some point, I realized how much fun it was to expose little bits of the background story. Because I write from Polly's perspective, unless she is directly involved in the action or with a character, we don't see everything. These characters have developed enough that they enjoy telling their own stories, so it's time to make that happen.

I have compiled the vignettes relating to Book 9 – Pages of the Past - into one collection. These four short stories feature Doug Randall & Billy Endicott, Joss & Nate Mikkels, Sal Kahane & Mark Ogden and finally, a look at the brotherly love between Jason & Andrew Donovan.

Book 9 - #1

Three's Not Really Company

Low man on the totem pole made for some chilly days. The only reason Doug Randall could bear it at all was that his buddy, Billy Endicott, was right there with him. They'd spent the day pulling electrical wire in a new apartment complex southeast of Sycamore House.

His nose was cold, his lips were cold, and the only reason the tips of his ears weren't cold was because his mother had knitted up ten watch caps for him as a Christmas gift. At least they weren't done in ridiculous colors this year. Three years ago, when she was just learning how to knit, she'd been excited to give him a rainbow colored hat. It was his first winter on the job and the other guys had spent the entire project calling him Mommy's Boy. They teased him about living at home and about not having a girlfriend and ... the hat.

Then came the merciless teasing after he'd seen Polly Giller's pretty purple panties. He brought it on himself. He should never have said anything. But that had turned out okay in the end. Polly took it well and even played along. Even though they'd both been embarrassed that day, she didn't hold it against him and was even cool when he'd asked about playing video games at her place. She liked him and didn't think it was weird that he was still living with his parents.

"Dude, do you remember when we moved into our apartment?" he asked Billy.

"Yeah. That's been cool," his friend replied.

"We haven't had a game night in forever. We should do that sometime."

"Uh huh. Sure."

Billy hadn't been much for game nights lately, even though that's where he met his girlfriend, Rachel. Those two hung out

together all the time. Mostly in the apartment on the couch. But they watched television or made stupid googley eyes at each other. Whenever Doug asked if they wanted to bring up a game of *Sword Lords*, they were too busy.

"Rachel's brother keeps asking when we're going to play. Jason wants to play, too."

"They're just kids," Billy said. "If you want to play with them, fine. Do it."

"What do you mean by that?" Sometimes Billy's obsession with growing up annoyed Doug. "You used to have fun playing. It didn't matter how old anybody was."

"It doesn't matter. I just have better things to do than hang out with high school kids."

Doug stood up and stretched. He'd been running the lower outlets and his back hurt. "Seriously, dude? When did you get so old and boring?"

"We have to grow up sometime. And stop with the *dude* thing. Rachel hates it."

"*She* hates it? This is the chick with tattoos, crazy colored hair on any day of the week and piercings in strange places? She hates that we use a word? That's classic. You're so whipped."

"Yes, I am. Just because you can't get yourself a girlfriend doesn't mean you can take it out on mine."

Doug wilted. "That's harsh. I'm not taking anything out on your girlfriend. I like her. A lot. I just don't think it's right for her to be judging me. She has her thing and I have mine."

"Whatever." Billy stapled the wire to a stud and dropped to his knees. He fished in the back pocket of his coveralls and took out a phone, swiped it open, and shaking his head, put it away.

"Is everything okay with you two?" Doug asked.

"Yeah. No problem." Billy walked across the floor to grab another spool of wire. "Anyway, I think so."

"Then what's up? Why are you so touchy today?" None of this made any sense to Doug. He'd been with the two of them last night and everything had seemed normal. Okay, he'd gone out with Billy's dog, Big Jack, for a long walk at one point. Jack was

intent on finding all the fascinating scents in Polly's back yard. Even though Henry's new puppy had been around for a few months, Big Jack and Han hadn't had enough opportunities to sniff each other to decide who was boss.

One morning, Doug had come back in with the dog just before Henry went out with the puppy and Obiwan, the dog that Billy and Doug had given Polly nearly two years ago. He laughed when that little puppy paced round and round the patch of grass Big Jack had just marked, trying to decide how to cover the other dog's scent. Little dogs were so cute. Maybe he should get his own dog. Big Jack only slept in Doug's bed when Rachel stayed over. That didn't happen too often. Her mom was pretty strict about those things.

"Are you even listening?" Billy asked.

Doug shrugged. "No. Sorry dude. I was thinking about if I should get my own dog."

"Thanks a lot. I finally tell you what's going on and you don't even hear me."

"Whoa. What's going on? I'll listen."

"That's the thing. I don't know. Rachel was just fine and then all of a sudden, she's asking about my intentions and how long I think I'm going to hang out with you in that apartment. She also asked if you'd be okay with her moving in."

"Moving in? There isn't enough room for three of us to live there."

"That's what I told her, but she made me ask you anyway."

"Dude, are you wanting to get married?"

Billy stopped what he was doing and turned on Doug. "Married? No. I'm not ready for that. What makes you think I want to get married?"

"Because you're talking about moving in with Rachel."

"I'm not talking about it. She is."

Doug looked at his friend. "That's why she's acting weird. She's ready to move things forward and you're happy with where they are."

"Why should we move forward? It's just fine."

"Because, you moron, you've been with her for a year. Maybe more. Both of you have good jobs. She's probably thinking about a wedding and babies."

"Babies? I just moved out of my parent's house and now I'm supposed to have babies?"

"She has the babies," Doug said with a grin. "I thought you knew how that worked."

Billy waved him off. "You know what I mean. No wedding. No babies. That's all there is to it. I'm just going to have to tell her that she isn't moving in. Everything is moving too fast."

"Okay," Doug said. "What if she breaks up with you because she wants more."

"Then she breaks up with me. Whatever." Billy walked out of the room they were working in.

Doug jumped up and followed him. "Don't be stupid. You don't want to break up with Rachel. You love her. You tell her that over and over."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Fine. But don't do something stupid. You have to talk to her."

"Every time I talk to her about any of this, things go bad. She's smart. Rachel talks me into stuff like that lamp in the living room."

"It's pretty," Doug taunted.

"She says we're building up for our own home someday."

Doug shook his head. "I'm gonna miss you when you're gone, dude. Looks like I'd better get my own dog pretty soon so I have someone to talk to at night."

"Just shut up."

"Look, you're my best friend. I don't want you to move out."

"I don't want to move out. I don't want to get married. I don't want to be a dad. I just want to hang out for a little while longer."

"Then tell her that."

"Will you help me? She just ignores me."

"I'm not helping you. But don't be an idiot and screw this up." Doug strutted around the room. "Tell her you need more time to

sow your wild oats."

"Yeah. Like that's a good idea."

"Here, I know. Tell her that when she finds me a girlfriend who actually likes me and wants to date me longer than one time, you'll think about moving forward."

"You mean better than with that chick from the sheriff's office? She was perfect for you."

"Not so much. I like her and all that, but she was a little weird."

"Because *you're* so normal." Billy picked up a carton of outlet boxes. "Maybe I should get her a ring. That might buy me some more time. Don't most girls need like two years to plan a wedding? I think I could be ready in two years."

"You're gonna buy her a ring?"

"Well Valentine's Day is coming up in a few weeks. That would be kinda romantic, don't you think?"

"Dude. What are you thinking?"

Billy dropped the carton and took Doug's upper arm. "I can't lose this girl. She loves me and I'm not going to find anybody as smart and pretty as she is."

"You know that's true."

"Maybe she'll give me time to be a boy if she knows that I really do want to marry her someday."

"You got it bad."

"I know. Will you be my best man?"

"Find me a girlfriend before you leave me," Doug said. "Promise?"

"Uh huh." Billy started placing the outlet boxes around the room. "There has to be someone who's perfect for you, right?"

"That's what I'm saying."

Book 9 - #2

Make Room for Everyone

"C'mon, honey. The babysitter will be here soon. I don't want to be late."

Joss Mikkels sat on the edge of her bed with her shoes in hand. Today had been a rough day. Both babies were crawling and sometimes they moved faster than she could keep up. She'd felt guilty when Cooper pulled himself up to stand at the sofa and not only had she not taken a picture, but until this moment, she'd forgotten to tell Nate.

She looked up at him with weary eyes. It would keep. Maybe Cooper would do it tomorrow afternoon when they were all in the living room at the same time.

Later that afternoon, Sophie had been playing with her favorite soft book when her brother decided he wanted it for himself. Joss turned away for only a second and all of a sudden the two were screaming at each other. She wasn't sure why today was worse than any other day. Maybe it was because she was looking forward to a romantic evening with Nate. They hadn't had many of those since the twins had come into their lives. Or maybe Sophie and Cooper had picked up on her desperation. After eight months, though, she thought they'd gotten past all of that. It wasn't teething. She knew that sound. Oh, did she know that sound.

"Joss?" Nate was standing in front of her, holding her coat.

"Where are the babies? Why aren't you watching them while I finish dressing?"

"Cindy's here."

"Already?"

He looked at his watch. "Are you about ready?"

Joss put her feet into her shoes and stood up. "I'm sorry. It wasn't the best day around here and I need to shake it off so we can have fun this evening."

Nate helped her into the coat and kissed her nose. "You'll have fun, I promise."

"I'm looking forward to it. How late can we stay out?"

He chuckled. "First it was our parents and now it's our children. Do you miss the days when no one cared what time we got home?"

"Sometimes and not really? Does that make sense?" She wouldn't trade any point in her life for these days with Sophia and Cooper, but there were moments when she craved a little freedom.

"It does. Do you want to say goodnight to the kids?"

"Are they happy with Cindy right now?"

"Absolutely."

"Then let's slip out so they don't have to watch us leave."

He escorted her to the Impala. Joss didn't care what car they took, but whenever Nate had an opportunity to take his baby out on the road, he grabbed it. The weather had been rough enough lately that it had been trapped in the garage, but tonight was special and they only had a few blocks to drive to Sycamore House.

Nate had already warmed the car up and Joss leaned into him as he drove. She felt warm and snuggly this evening, just like one of their date nights back when they were still in college.

"Where are you going?" she asked as he drove south past Sycamore House.

"It's a nice night for a drive, don't you think?"

"You made me think we were going to be late."

"I might have exaggerated. I just want to spend some time with you, all alone."

Joss squeezed his arm. "Are we going parking? I could get into that."

"We're a little old, don't you think? Can't you just imagine Ken Wallers pulling up beside us, shining a flashlight into the back seat?"

"He knows this car. He wouldn't think a thing of it."

"Except that he'd worry that something was wrong and would

stop and check on us and there we'd be *in flagrante delicto*. And besides, there's a perfectly comfortable bed at home."

Joss let out a very audible sigh. "I knew it. We've gotten old. There's no spark left. You never take risks anymore."

"Honey," he said, patting her hand. "Don't be ridiculous. I've never been a big risk-taker. Especially when it comes to having sex in the great outdoors."

That was true. She'd tried to get him to make out with her on the beach during their honeymoon and the poor man had done nothing but look around, worrying that someone might sneak up and catch them.

Joss let him off the hook. "It's okay. You do when it's important. Cooper and Sophia were a big risk and you never flinched. Not once. You're pretty wonderful."

"Now you're just being sappy."

"I know. It's a good thing I don't have any wine in me yet." She took a breath. "When do you think we should get back on the list to adopt more children?"

She felt him chuckle beside her, and then he said, "After the day you've had with those two, you want more?"

"I told you I wanted a houseful. Did you ever meet my friend, Janet?"

Nate shook his head. "I don't think so."

"She was the fifth of twelve kids. She had two older brothers and two older sisters and then there were ... " Joss had to think. "Two more girls, three boys and then a set of twins, a boy and a girl. Their dad was a doctor and they lived in this huge, sprawling ranch house out in the country. It was always a crazy zoo out there, but they had so much fun. And now that they're all grown up, they come back with everyone for immense family reunions. That's what I want."

"You want twelve kids?"

"Maybe not that many, but a lot."

"Are you going to let Mom come out and help with all of them?" He cackled evilly.

"If I have to." Joss leaned back. "That would be so perfect,

though. When they get older, their friends will come over and the house will be complete chaos. Joyous chaos."

"You know it probably won't be just like that. There's always the potential for tons of problems."

"It can be just like that," she insisted. "It's all in how you look at it."

"That's why I love you." Nate pulled off the highway onto a gravel road, and directly into a driveway. He got out of the car and came around to open her door, offering his hand to help her stand up.

"What is this?"

He left the car's headlights on, shining on an old dilapidated two-story house with four other buildings in close proximity. Trees and brush had overgrown most of it. Nate turned on his phone's flashlight app, shining it on the concrete driveway, then held her close to him while they walked. He stopped, bent over and opened a red cooler that had been left on the ground. With a flourish, he pulled out two red roses and presented them to her.

"I was thinking this could be your sprawling ranch house. We would pull everything down except that building over there." He pointed to one of the better looking buildings. "That would be my shop. It's big enough for everything I need."

"What?" Joss was stunned. She brought the roses to her nose to give herself a moment to take it all in.

"It just came on the market and the land is a great deal. Henry would build the house. Any house you want. There are nine acres here. What do you think?"

"I don't know." Joss was glad for darkness that hid the tears in her eyes.

Nate grew quiet. "If you don't think we're ready for this, we can wait. I haven't done anything or talked to anyone. I wanted to show you first."

"No, that's not it. I just wasn't prepared for anything like this today. We can really do it?"

"Why not?"

"No reason, I guess. It's just such a big step."

"Bigger than adopting two children? We have plenty of room here for a lot of children. All that you want."

"I don't know what to think," she said.

"Talk to me."

"All of this, for us?"

"For all of us."

Joss threw her arms around her husband and lifted her lips for a kiss. Nate's lips were chilled from the evening air and they held onto each other as she finally let the tears flow into the shoulder of his coat. "You really know how to wish a girl Happy Valentine's Day," she said.

"It's okay?"

"It's perfect. Can I tell everyone when we get to Sycamore House?"

"That's up to you. All I wanted to do was surprise you with the idea. You and I will do everything else together."

Joss kissed him again. "This is amazing. Maybe we'll put a barn up and get some horses, too. That way our kids can ride over to Polly's house. We aren't that far away."

"Sweetie, that's her land right back there."

"This started out as such a rough day. Now it's turned into one of my top ten days. Thank you!"

Book 9 - #3

It's a Dog's Life

Sal swiped her phone open and looked at the pictures of the three dachshunds once more. How had she managed to live so long without having a dog of her own? She couldn't believe that Mark didn't have pets here at the house either. That was the one thing that surprised her about him. Well, there were plenty of things that had surprised her about the man, but a veterinarian without any pets? That seemed out of character.

When she'd asked him about it, he tried telling her that his hours were too strange. That was true, but still.

Last night she had shown him the pictures of the dachshunds and he'd given them a perfunctory glance before turning back to the news broadcast. He hadn't actually said no. He hadn't said anything, either positive or negative.

Sal tried to accept the fact that his life was busy. But this time of year was hard. Somebody's cow needed help delivering a calf or a horse needed help with a foal. He promised her that it wasn't always like that and if she quit feeling sorry for herself, she knew that was true. Right now, though, she was tired of being at home by herself.

This wasn't how she was used to living. When she lived in Boston, there was activity all the time. She could walk into a coffee shop and be surrounded by the buzz of conversation. There was nothing more fun than to sit back with a cup of coffee and watch people interact. She imagined all sorts of crazy stories for them. She loved flirting with the young college boys who were just a little awkward, then watching them leave with a swagger.

Sometimes all she wanted to do was feel that tension again. The passion and hysteria, the drama and commotion that filled her city. It wasn't that people were boring around here, they just moved at a different pace. She couldn't count the number of times she wanted to tap her fingers at a check-out clerk who rang up an

item and then had a conversation with Sal or another clerk or even a different customer before ringing up the next item. Polly told her to take a breath and relax. But sometimes relaxing was just another word for death.

Now she was being ridiculous. She loved it here and opening the coffee shop was another step toward normalcy. But, right now she needed something warm to love and snuggle. Mark was just going to have to deal.

"To heck with it," she said. "If this is what makes him mad, we'll lick him until he can't take anymore."

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"Yip!" The little red dachshund named Felix barked when he heard the back door slam. In a flash, the black and tan, appropriately named Oscar, joined in, both of them yipping and yapping as they ran to where they'd heard the sound.

"What is this?" Mark asked, stepping into the living room.

"I got lonely."

He bent over and scooped up a dog in each arm. "You certainly did. Two?"

"I almost had three, but the little girl was gone by the time I got to the shelter. Are you mad?"

"Because you didn't get three? No, I think two is more than enough."

"No, because I brought home two dogs today."

He handed Felix to her and dropped into his chair. Oscar stood up against Mark's chest, licking his face, then started sniffing. Not to be outdone, Felix reached out from the sofa and put his two front paws on the arm of Mark's chair.

"Yes, there are lots of great smells over here," Mark said. "Join your brother." He brought Felix into his lap and the two dogs sniffed until they settled in. All three looked at Sal.

"That is so not what I was hoping for," she said. "They're supposed to be my companions, not yours."

Mark stroked down Oscar's back. "Have you taken them to the

vet yet to have them checked out?"

"Very funny. They've been neutered and have all their shots. The paperwork is on the dining room table. I thought I'd take it up to Marnie tomorrow."

"How old are they?"

"Felix is about two and Oscar is only nine months old. They lived together, but the owner was moving and couldn't take them."

"That's why they're so comfortable with each other. I wondered."

"So you aren't mad?"

"Sal," he said with a crooked grin. "You told me the other night about them. I knew at that point we were going to have dogs."

"I didn't think you heard me."

"I hear everything you say. Sometimes I just don't respond."

"You still haven't answered my question."

"What's that?"

"Are you mad?"

Felix had climbed up his chest and was trying to lick Mark's face. "It would be silly to get mad about taking in a couple of rescues as cute as this, wouldn't it?"

"Well ..."

Mark put the dogs onto the sofa and moved out of the chair to sit beside her. He tugged at her until she was leaning back against him. The dogs went into a frenzy as they clambered up on Sal's lap, whining and whimpering in their desire for attention.

"I know you're lonely here sometimes," he said. "Your life is so different than it was a year ago. There's no way I can offer you all that excitement, and right now my life is so busy that I can't even be here for you most of the time. Why would I be mad at you for wanting a dog?"

"Or two?"

"Or two. I don't need you to sit at home pining for my return. I need you to be Sal Kahane, a wild, driven woman who thinks for herself and does what she wants to do. I like being part of your life when I can. You are the sexiest, craziest woman I've ever met."

"You're pretty hot yourself. Everyone says so, you know." She sat forward, dislodging the dogs. "But you really need to take a shower. And I think you've soiled me too." Sal sniffed and scowled.

"So you were just being sweet to me here?"

"And thankful you have leather furniture. Whew. You stink."

"I thought I'd cleaned up pretty well. At least I left the coveralls outside."

Oscar was trying to jump off the couch. He ran to the edge, stopped and turned around to see if anyone was paying attention.

"Are they house trained?" Mark asked.

"I think so. We've been out several times today and there haven't been any accidents yet."

"Yet," he said with a laugh. "And where are they sleeping tonight?"

Sal looked at him in shock. "What do you mean?"

His shoulders drooped and he dropped his head to his chest. "You just answered that question. Now my next is, what are we doing for dinner tonight?"

She looked at him coyly. "I'm cooking."

"You're what?" He asked, laughter erupting. "You're cooking?"

"Well, I thought that if you were mad about the dogs, I should do something nice for you. So I'm making dinner."

"What are you making?"

"Lasagna and garlic bread. I even made a salad and bought cheesecake."

"You're making lasagna? I had no idea you even knew how. The kitchen looked really clean."

"Well, did you know that you can buy it already made? It's right there in the freezer."

He took a deep breath and exhaled. "I feel much better now. I couldn't imagine you boiling pasta and mixing up sauce."

"Stop it," she said. "I'll put it in the oven while you take a shower. I can manage that."

He stood up and bent over to kiss her forehead. "Please don't ever change. Ever. And I'm glad Felix and Oscar are here to keep

you company. Even if they do come between us in bed."

"They'd better not."

"We'll see."

## **Book 9 - #4**

### **Boys Will be Boys**

Andrew tapped on Jason's bedroom door.

"What!" his brother snapped.

The two boys had separate rooms now that they'd moved into their new house. Privacy rules had been put in place. Neither could enter the other's room without knocking, no matter what. Jason was quite happy with the situation, but Andrew missed being able to talk to his brother.

"Can I talk to you?" Andrew asked.

Jason huffed, "I guess."

Andrew entered the room and looked around. Their mom had given both boys leeway when it came to decorating and Jason was filling his walls with posters of video games, horses, and hot rods.

"What's up, punk," Jason asked after Andrew sat down on the bed.

"Mom says you're not supposed to call me that."

"Not call you what? Punk? You're a punk!" Jason leaped out of his chair, his face alight with laughter. He landed on top of Andrew and when the younger boy put his arms up to fight his brother off, Jason turned and twisted until Andrew was upside down, his face buried in Jason's pillow and his arms locked behind his back.

Padme jumped up on the bed and bounced back and forth as the boys wrestled. Once Andrew was helpless, she sat down on the pillow beside him and licked his face.

As painful as it was, Andrew missed wrestling with Jason. He never won. Jason was always bigger, but in the last year, he'd gotten stronger and more agile, too.

"Uncle!" Andrew cried. "Uncle!"

"Are you a punk?" Jason taunted.

"I'm a punk. A slubberdegullion punk."

Jason laughed and released his younger brother. "You're a

what?" he asked. "What is that word?" He sat back down at his desk and handed Andrew a pencil and paper, then brushed his hair out of his eyes. "Spell it."

Andrew sat up, panting with exertion, and took the piece of paper. He wrote out the word and handed it to Jason. The dog nudged her head under his hand and he wrapped his arm around her neck, rubbing her ears.

"What does that mean?"

"A rascal or a scoundrel," Andrew said. "It's a noun though and I made it into an adjective."

Jason shook his head. "You and your words. I hope you're still writing stories when we're old because you're going to have to take care of me and Mom."

Andrew frowned. "You're going to make money. You're smart."

"Not like you, punk." Jason nodded and tucked the piece of paper with the strange new word on it under his math book.

"Don't you think Eliseo will take care of Mom?" Andrew asked in a low whisper. His mother wasn't home to hear him. She was still working at Sycamore House.

"I don't know," Jason said. "Maybe someday. I know he likes her a lot, but it's okay with me if she doesn't get married again."

"He's not like Dad," Andrew said.

Jason sat straight up and his lips curled into a snarl. "Good thing."

"We haven't seen him for a while. Do you think he went away?"

"I don't know," Jason said. "Mom said she was going to take care of it. I guess she did."

"Did you get any more letters?"

Jason shook his head. "Nope. And I would have returned them unopened. I hate him."

"Me too," Andrew agreed. "But I like Eliseo."

"I like him too, but we're fine here. All by ourselves. We don't need anybody else."

Andrew wasn't going to remind his brother that all of the things that needed to be done around the house were done by

Eliseo. Sometimes he was smart enough to keep his mouth shut.

Jason tapped his fingers on the pile of textbooks on his desk. "What did you want? I still have a pile of homework."

"It's Rebecca," Andrew said with a sigh.

"Your little girlfriend?"

"She's not my girlfriend," Andrew snapped back. "She's a girl and she's my friend."

"So, she's your girlfriend." Jason sang out, "Andrew and Rebecca, sitting in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N-G."

"Stop it!" Andrew jumped to his feet to leave the room, but Jason was too fast. He grabbed his brother's arm and pulled him back to the bed.

"What about your girlfriend?" he asked.

"I don't want to talk about it." Andrew dropped his face in a sulk. He really didn't want to talk about any of this with Jason now. It was too embarrassing.

"Aw, go ahead. What's wrong?"

Padme had laid down beside Andrew, but when he jumped up, she leaped to the floor, waiting for more action. When he settled on the edge of the bed again, she looked back and forth between the two brothers and then jumped up and put her head on Andrew's lap.

"Nothing's wrong," he said, bending over to kiss Padme's forehead.

"Don't be a wimp."

"She's not my girlfriend."

Jason pushed Andrew's shoulder to make him straighten back up. "So what if she is?" he asked, completely serious.

That was a new idea for Andrew. He was so used to being teased at school about his friendship with Rebecca that it had never really occurred to him to just let it be okay. "Yeah?" he asked.

"Yeah. So what?"

It was going to be easier to just spit it out. "Yeah. So what," he said. "She wants me to dance with her at the Valentine's Day party at Sycamore House. She said that if her mom got to dance, she



should too."

Jason laughed loud enough to startle the dog. She sat up and looked at him and then lay back down, nestling her head in Andrew's lap again.

"See!" Andrew said. "It's embarrassing."

"Yes, punk. That's embarrassing. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know how to dance!"

"So it's okay to dance with Rebecca if you know how to do it? Why don't you ask Polly?"

Andrew shook his head. "She's got enough to worry about. She doesn't need to spend time teaching me to dance. And anyway, Rebecca and Kayla are always around."

"What do you want me to do about it? I don't know how to dance."

"But you know everything."

Jason pulled the piece of paper with the word written on it back out and said. "Obviously I don't know everything."

"But you know about this stuff."

"Whatever. I've never danced with a girl either."

"So what am I supposed to do?"

Jason took a deep breath. "All I know is that you put your hands on her waist and she puts hers on your shoulders."

"Show me?"

Jason scooted his chair back and away from Andrew. "I'm not dancing with you."

"Oh, come on. It's just the two of us."

"No way."

"Please?"

Jason let out a loud sigh and glared at his brother. "You have GOT to be kidding me."

"Please?" Andrew pleaded.

He puffed out another sigh and stood up. "Fine. Just for a second. You're the girl, though."

Andrew pointed at Jason's laptop. "Put some music on?"

"No. Way. We're not dancing. I'm just going to show you how I see them hold each other."

Andrew sat still on the bed and crossed his arms. "Please?"

"You are totally a slubberdegullion punk," Jason said. He sat back down at the desk and found a music station. Then he stood back up and beckoned for Andrew to join him. "The girl - that's you - puts her hands on my shoulders and I put my hands on her waist."

Andrew did what Jason said and waited for his brother. Jason tentatively put his hands on Andrew's waist, holding him very lightly.

"Now what?" Andrew asked.

"I guess you just shuffle along, kind of with the music," Jason said.

"Can we try it?"

"If you tell anyone about this," Jason said. "I will dig a deep dark hole and drop you into it."

"I'll never tell. I promise. This is bad for me, too," Andrew replied.

The two brothers danced for a few moments, shuffling back and forth in front of Jason's desk. They'd started in the middle of a song and when it ended, Jason gripped Andrew's waist tighter, picked him up, then tossed him on the bed and leaped on top of him again.

Padme jumped up to join them and before Jason could flip Andrew to his stomach, the younger boy cried "Uncle! Uncle!"

## THANK YOU FOR READING!

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.

Diane Greenwood Muir's [Amazon Author Page](#) is a great place to watch for new releases and to find all of the books she's written.

Follow Diane on Twitter at [twitter.com/nammynools](https://twitter.com/nammynools) for regular updates and notifications.

Recipes and decorating ideas found in the books can often be found on Pinterest at: <http://pinterest.com/nammynools/>

And, for Sycamore House swag, check out Polly's CafePress store: <http://www.cafepress.com/sycamorehouse>