



# The SOUNDS of HOME

## *Vignettes*

DIANE GREENWOOD MUIR



*Bellingwood - Book 27*







# Book Twenty-Seven Vignettes

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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 has been 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.

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 27 — The Sounds of Home — 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**

### **What Happens at the Barn**

Eliseo and Jason looked at each other, then took off running at the second yell of "Nooooo" from Noah. They got outside in time to see Tom, with his mouth on the rigging they used to hitch the two donkeys to a cart, pulling Noah across the pasture.

Eliseo hated laughing at the boy, but the sight was too funny.

Jason couldn't help himself either and howled with laughter, even as he ran to rescue the younger boy.

Poor Noah saw nothing funny about the situation and probably wouldn't for a long time. He struggled to stop the donkey's momentum, seeing his imminent demise as Tom headed straight for a pool of mud in the back of the pasture.

Eliseo put his fingers between his lips and let out a sharp whistle. Every animal within hearing distance stopped what they were doing and looked at him. That gave Noah just enough time to get his feet back under himself and yank on the rigging, obviously angry with the donkey.

At that, Tom set his feet, reared back and pulled, knocking Noah to the ground. They were off again.

"No, Tom, no!" Noah yelled. "Stop, you stupid donkey. You know better than this."

Noah Sturtz had grown like a weed this last summer. He'd just started sixth grade and was taller than most of the other kids in his class, something that embarrassed him to no end. Eliseo had tried to assure him that the others would catch up, but it wasn't surprising the poor boy couldn't see that. For Noah, like any other kid his age, the only thing he thought about was the immediate problem. And this year, the immediate problem was that he stuck out. He was gangly and awkward and still trying to figure out how to manage those long limbs.

Jason Donovan had been the same way, but on the other side of the equation. He'd felt like it would take forever for him to grow.



But once he started, he'd grown into a big, strong young man.

When Jason caught up to Noah and Tom, he grabbed the rigging, snapped his tongue at Tom, and the donkey came to a stop. Tom wasn't finished, though. He tossed his head twice, knowing that would jerk Noah back and forth.

"Tom," Jason scolded, his hands firmly on the rigging now. "You can let go, Noah. I've got him."

"I want to take him back," Noah said.

Jason glanced at Eliseo, who nodded. Noah had it exactly right. If he didn't deal with Tom right now, he'd never be able to handle the donkey.

"Take this part of the rigging, then," Jason said, showing Noah where to put his hand. "That way you're in control, not him."

Noah idolized Jason. Fortunately, Sylvie's oldest son and one of Eliseo's favorite people, had a heart as big as the Percherons, who were standing on the other side of the pasture, watching everything take place. Humans had to be entertaining to them, especially when those silly humans didn't quite know what they were doing.

The two young men walked Tom to the back side of the barn. Eliseo followed and found Huck munching happily on his pile of hay.

"What happened here?" Eliseo asked Noah.

When the boy looked up at him, his eyes were filled with tears. "I'm sorry. I thought I could do it. I've helped you and Jason a million times. You said you were going to work in the garden, so I wanted to hitch them to the cart and surprise you. Tell me I didn't hurt Tom."

Eliseo and Jason worked to remove the rigging that had become twisted in the chaos.

"Not at all," Eliseo said. "How about you. Are you okay?"

Noah dropped his head. "I'm fine. It didn't hurt me. I was more worried about him, even if he is a stupid donkey." When he brought his hand up to swat at Tom, Eliseo caught it.

"Don't take it out on him. He only did what any normal donkey would do in that situation. He took advantage of you. It's always on us to make sure that these animals never have that opportunity.



They are very smart, but we have to be smarter. Make sense?"

Noah put his hand back down and darted into the barn.

"Should I go talk to him?" Jason asked. "I made some dumb mistakes when I was a kid." He chuckled. "I still make dumb mistakes. It's no big deal, right?"

"Give him a few minutes to catch his breath and wipe his face," Eliseo said. "He's embarrassed."

Jason nodded. "Yeah, I've been there. When I was his age, I cried a lot because I didn't know what I was doing with the horses. I felt like such a dummy."

"Everyone has to learn," Eliseo said. "None of us are born knowing how to do everything."

"How to do *anything*," Jason agreed. "And some of us have to learn everything the hard way. So, should we hitch the donkeys up?"

"No," Eliseo said, his eyes glinting with laughter. "Noah's stubbornness will bring him back outside. That's going to serve him well in the long run."

"Especially with this stubborn boy," Jason said, rubbing Tom's forehead. The donkey nuzzled Jason. "Yes, I'm talking about you. I don't know what got into you, but you were a brat. You know better than to act that way."

Eliseo chuckled as he untangled the rest of the rigging.

Sure enough, Noah made his way back out to them. "I'm really sorry. I should have asked for help."

"When you hitched the donkeys up every other time how many people did it take?" Eliseo asked.

Noah looked at him and frowned. "Well, two, but I thought that was because you were helping me learn, not because you needed me."

"Eliseo could do it by himself," Jason said. "He's like, a master, but when we do it together, we are more in control."

"You never have to try to impress me, Noah," Eliseo said. "You're learning the ropes down here and I'm proud of what you do every day."

Jason grinned as he slipped the collar over Tom's neck. "This



won't be the last mistake you make. Trust me. You do Huck's collar." Tom looked over his shoulder at Jason and brayed.

"Whatever, you brat," Jason said. "You're going to be a good boy from now on."

"Why don't you tell Noah about some of your gaffes?" Eliseo said.

"Oh, you mean like the night I didn't get Demi's stall door latched and when Eliseo came in the next morning, it looked like the feed room had been broken into? Or when I thought I'd tightened the girth enough, but the minute I got on Daisy's back, the saddle slid to the side? I thought I was a goner. Then there was the time I tried to make Nat walk and when he wouldn't go anywhere, Eliseo told me he was still tied to the post. Or when I slid into the muck pile in the back because I was playing chase with Nat and he backed me right up into it. I swear that horse laughed at me."

Eliseo nodded. "We all laughed at you."

"And it was cold outside, so when I washed up in the barn, the water was really cold. Thought I was going to die. I swear I have a million of those stories."

Noah watched Jason with his eyes wide in surprise. "Am I going to do all those things?"

"And more," Eliseo said. "I've been around longer than Jason, so I have even more stories of doing stupid things with horses and donkeys. But it's okay. These animals are very forgiving."

"The best part about working down here is that you don't have to do anything alone," Jason said. "I wouldn't be doing vet tech school if I hadn't learned so much from Eliseo. He's always around to make sure that we're safe and learning how to take care of these animals the right way."

"Are you going to tell Polly?" Noah asked.

Eliseo tilted his head. "About what?"

"That I screwed up with the donkeys because I tried to do it by myself?"

"Why would I tell Polly?"

"Because she's my mom."



"Look, Noah," Jason said, patting the boy on his back. "Eliseo is dating my mom and if he told her about all the dumb things I did down here, I never would have heard the end of it. What happens at the barn stays at the barn, right Eliseo?"

"Most of the time. If I think your parents need to know something, I'll tell them, but none of these stories are worth spreading. This is an education. You learn new things every time you work down here. You're going to make mistakes. All that means is that you are learning. If you make the same mistakes over and over again ..." he stopped and grinned at Jason. "Like leaving the horse tied to the post, we'll have a conversation."

"You did it more than once?" Noah asked Jason.

"I wasn't going to tell him that," Jason said, rolling his eyes at Eliseo. "Thanks a lot. Let's finish getting these boys hooked to the cart. Then you can help Eliseo in the garden."

Noah nodded.

Eliseo watched the two boys work together for a few minutes, and went back into the barn. The last thing he'd ever thought he'd do in his life was mentor boys growing into young men. What a gift he'd been given when he landed in Bellingwood. He stopped in the feed room and took a small bag of carrot chips out of the refrigerator. Noah needed to find his comfort level with Tom again. These would help.



## **Vignette #2**

### **We All Scream for Ice Cream**

"Are you ready to go, Miss Cat?" Caleb asked.

She bent her knees and whispered, "Thank you."

He nodded with a smile on his face. "Did I do it right?"

"Yes, you did, sweetie. Just perfect."

Today was her first day as a student teacher at Bellingwood Elementary and there had been a great deal of discussion about how Polly's boys would address her while at school. That had caused Cat to consider what she wanted to be called by all of the students. She'd settled on Miss Cat. She just couldn't come to terms with Mrs. Harvey yet. It made her sound like an old lady. Someday, but not today.

It wasn't like everyone didn't know that she lived with Polly's family, so no one would have been upset if the boys forgot and simply called her Cat, but Polly had asked what she preferred and once she made up her mind, that was what would be expected of the boys.

Of course, Cassidy was a different story. She had so many new things to handle this year. While they'd told her to try, when she couldn't make sense of it, both Polly and Cat gave up. Cassidy could call Cat whatever she wanted.

"Where's JaRon?" she asked.

Caleb shrugged. "I didn't see him, but I hurried."

"Did you, now."

"Miss Cat?" Maude Wallers, the third-grade teacher Cat was working with this year, stepped out into the hallway.

"Well, hello there, Caleb. How are you?" She put her hand out and Caleb smiled and shook it.

"You remembered," Mrs. Wallers said. "That's terrific. How do you like fourth grade?"

He nodded and looked at his shoes.

Mrs. Wallers bent her knees and took his hand. "Mrs. Hastings



said you are a good student. She likes having you in her class."

That brought his face up, beaming with pride. "I like her."

"So do I. You keep doing a good job. I'm proud of you."

Mrs. Wallers straightened up. "Wear comfortable clothes tomorrow," she said to Cat. "I forgot to tell you earlier. We'll be on the floor during reading. I have mats to sit on, but you won't want to be in a dress."

"Thank you," Cat said with a chuckle.

"Every Tuesday. Just plan on it."

Cat lifted her eyebrows as Mrs. Wallers returned her attention to Caleb. "Stop in and see me any time. I want to hear how your school year is going. Got it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Wallers," he said.

"I'll see you tomorrow." She patted Caleb's shoulder, smiled at Cat, and went back into the classroom.

The woman was nothing if not organized. Cat thought she was planful, but she had nothing on Maude Wallers. "Let's find your brother."

"Chief Wallers is her husband," Caleb said. "He comes to school on Tuesdays sometimes to read to us."

"Did you like having him come to your classroom?"

"I never knew a teacher married to a policeman."

"It's different to have a teacher's spouse come to school, isn't it?"

They walked down the hallway and Cat heard JaRon chattering in his classroom. She stopped in the open door as he talked to his teacher, John Phelps. She'd only met the man in passing, but he seemed nice enough.

He looked up and waved her in. "Hello, Mrs. Harvey. JaRon and I were discussing the finer points of ice cream. Cone or dish?"

Cat blinked. "Me? I like mine in a dish. That way I can put toppings on it."

JaRon smiled at her. "I like ice cream cones. Big waffle cones. They hold more."

"I understand you are taking them to the General Store to celebrate your first day at Bellingwood Elementary."

"I am. The rest of the kids have somewhere else to be and there's



no one I'd rather celebrate with than my family." Cat unconsciously put her hand over her stomach. When she realized what she'd done, she dropped it back to her side. No one other than Polly, Henry, and Hayden knew she was pregnant. She was wearing loose tops now because the bump was definitely there. It wouldn't be long until she wouldn't have a choice but to tell her family back in West Liberty. As soon as she told her parents, then she would feel free to tell everyone in Bellingwood.

"JaRon tells me that your family likes homemade ice cream," Mr. Phelps said. He'd been sitting on the edge of his desk while talking to the little boy, so stood and walked with JaRon over to Cat and Caleb.

Cat took JaRon's hand and smiled. "The boys love ice cream, that's for sure."

"How are you, Caleb?" he asked.

"I'm good."

"It's good to see you. Have fun with Mrs. Harvey."

Caleb nodded and stepped back, waiting for Cat and JaRon to join him in the hall.

She looked down at JaRon. "Nothing to take home?"

He looked up in shock, dropped her hand, and ran back to where he'd been standing in front of Mr. Phelps' desk. His backpack had slid under the desk; he leaned down to get it, then slung it over his shoulder. These boys had grown up so much since Cat had first met them. The adorable little child was growing into a boy. Cat wasn't sure if she was ready for this to happen to her and Hayden. Polly kept saying that time went by too quickly. Now it was happening right in front of her.

"Thank you," she said to Mr. Phelps, who stood just outside the door. He flipped the light off after JaRon came back out and walked down the hall the other way.

"What flavor do you think they have?" JaRon asked.

The General Store always had chocolate and vanilla, but their flavors of the day were popular, no matter what they made.

"I hope it's peach," Cat said.

Caleb looked up with a grimace. "I don't like peach."



"Why not?"

"You can't put chocolate and peanuts on it."

"You could," she said.

"But it wouldn't taste very good."

The two boys had grown since they'd come into Cat's life. Caleb's limited vocabulary and terrible speech patterns had been a real stumbling block. Last January, Heath convinced him to read out loud to Cassidy as his New Year's resolution, hoping to help him become more confident with words and sentences. It had worked. Caleb didn't read to her every night, but when Heath was around at bedtime, he spent time reading with Caleb after Caleb was finished with Cassidy.

That little girl loved the attention and never once did she interrupt or criticize her older brother. Even when he stammered and stuttered over unknown words, she patiently waited. Cassidy knew the books he read to her better than he did, since she had a few favorites that were read over and over by whomever she could sweet-talk into reading to her.

Cat pushed the front door of the school open and the boys ran out into the sunshine. She pointed at the far end of the parking lot. "My car is over there. You two climb into the back seat and buckle in, okay?" She was glad she'd driven today. The kids were confused when they walked and she drove, but unless she took the Suburban, there was no way she could drive everyone they picked up along the way. And this morning she'd been too nervous to take a slow walk to school.

She unlocked the car and smiled, even as she yawned. Caleb and JaRon ran to the car, scrabbled a little at each other until JaRon finally ran around to the other side. Last night she'd tossed and turned, worried about today, even though all she was doing this first week was observing and helping. And Mrs. Wallers was wonderful. Cat had no doubt that the woman would push her, but she was kind and gentle, both with Cat and with her kids.

Gentle, hah. The woman had an iron will. Two boys had run right up against it today. Little David Berry thought he could get away with taunting Sander Moster under his breath, when neither



Mrs. Wallers nor Cat were watching. But Mrs. Wallers had eyes in the back of her head. She called the two boys up to her desk. David expected to lie his way out of it. Sander was fired up and ready to fight. Mrs. Wallers never raised her voice, but she marched the two boys out of the classroom. She didn't shut the door, so Cat saw them in the hallway. They returned within ninety seconds, Sander looking chagrined and David with tears in his eyes. That was impressive.

She pulled her seat belt on and turned to look at the boys. "Are you buckled in?"

They both held out their belts to show her they were taut and she started the car and drove out of the parking lot.

"Did you ever get in trouble with Mrs. Wallers?" Cat asked Caleb.

He looked at her in the rearview mirror with a knowing smile. "Yeah."

"Caleb got in trouble a lot," JaRon said.

"I did not."

"Did so."

"Did not."

"Boys, don't fight. The reason I'm asking is I'm trying to learn how to handle kids that need discipline. What did she say to you?"

Caleb gave a little shrug. "She told me that she didn't want to tell Mom and Dad that I was in trouble because she thought that I was a good boy who made a bad choice. Then she asked me what I could have done differently."

"What did you tell her?"

"I don't remember. I remember that she made me say *sorry*. I had to say it to her. And I had to look her in the eye and everything. That was hard."

"Did she ever tell you she was disappointed in you?"

He heaved a huge sigh. "I forgot about that. She looked sad, like she was going to cry. I didn't want her to cry. Some of the other kids did other stuff, but after Chief Wallers came to read to us, we all kind of talked about it. We didn't want him taking us to jail."

Cat smiled. What a great deterrent. Chief Wallers was only there



to do something nice and get to know the kids, but the kids made up their own rules about his attendance in the classroom. Maybe she needed to buy Hayden a uniform and a badge when she finally got a teaching job. He was tall and intimidating. She pulled into a parking space right in front of the General Store. "Okay, boys. Let's make a bet about what the special flavor is today. I think it's going to be peach. What about you?"

"Peanut butter," JaRon said.

Caleb frowned. "I was going to say that."

"Come up with another one. Something wild and crazy."

He wrinkled his eyes as he thought. "How about bubble gum?"

"Perfect. If one of us chose the right flavor, that one gets an extra scoop."

She waited for the boys to unbuckle their seat belts and get out, then walked inside with them. Their eyes were immediately drawn to the whiteboard on the wall.

"Mint chocolate chip," Caleb read out loud, disappointed.

"You love that flavor."

"Yeah, but I don't get an extra scoop."

JaRon's face was downcast.

"Since nobody won, maybe we should all get an extra scoop," Cat said. "Remember, it's a celebration."

"Really?" JaRon asked.

She helped him climb up onto a stool in front of the ice cream counter, then gave Caleb a hand while he did the same. "Two scoops all around," she said to the girl behind the counter. "We're having a party."

Caleb turned to her and leaned just enough that she caught his body with her arms. "I'm glad you're at our school," he said. "I'm glad you live at our house, too."

"Me, too," JaRon said.

"That's just because I'm buying you ice cream," Cat said flippantly. She knew Caleb wasn't comfortable with shows of affection.

He looked at her. "It's because I love you."

Cat swallowed. He rarely said those words. "Can I hug you



boys?"

JaRon smiled. He was always ready for a hug. Caleb turned his stool toward her and put his arms out. Cat had spent so much time with these two this summer. She couldn't believe how fortunate she was to have them as part of her family. She wrapped her arms around Caleb and squeezed until she felt him let go, then climbed back down and went around to JaRon, who leaned against her shoulder as she held him.

"I love you boys, too. I'm glad we're family. Now, tell the girl which flavor you want. I don't want to have to scream for ice cream."



## Vignette #3

### As You Wish

Rebecca threw herself face down on Cilla's bed. "Why does it have to be so difficult?"

"Because they're idiots," Cilla Waters said. "What did you expect?"

"A little respect. Not a lot of respect. Just a little. But no." Rebecca turned over, sat up, then flung herself back down. "All I did was ask if we were working on the float this weekend and suddenly ... drama! It was a simple question!"

"Evidently, it wasn't quite as simple as you thought."

"Who knew? She called me a despot. I can't believe she even knows what that word means. And then, all day long, every time one of her petty little girlfriends saw me, they chanted 'despot, despot, despot.' How did they learn that word?"

Cilla laughed. "World History."

"Oh, thank goodness. I thought maybe they actually read a book."

"Anything past *The Little Engine That Could* would tax their little brains. Did Pammy-poo tell you why they couldn't work on the class float this weekend?"

Rebecca tossed one of Cilla's pillows in the air. "Duh. They have to go shopping for their Homecoming dresses."

"All weekend?"

"Well, there are the shoes and then they have to test their up-dos and scope out where they're going to have dinner and ..."

"I get it," Cilla said. She propped the stray pillow back in its place on her bed. "They're too busy. Why doesn't everyone just get together without them?"

Rolling her eyes, Rebecca sat up and blew out a loud, dramatic breath. "Because Shannon is bringing her father's flatbed and Jules's father is bringing the hay bales and ... do they just want to do it by themselves?"



"Probably." Cilla laughed. "But we all know that once it comes down to the real work, they won't want anything to do with it. We're marching in the band anyway. Why do we care?"

"I guess I don't anymore," Rebecca said. "I thought it would be fun to get involved in something that I don't usually do. How hard is it to take a breath and let someone new participate? Anyway, you're busy with the Thespians float. You don't have to think about this. At least you're part of that clique."

"You could be too. You're in Thespians."

"Yeah, but I wanted to meet someone new. Get involved with the class stuff."

"You fool," Cilla said, picking up the lisping tempo of Vizzini from *The Princess Bride*, "you fell victim to one of the classic blunders."

"The most famous of which is 'Never get involved in a land war in Asia,'" Rebecca replied with a laugh.

Cilla grinned. "But only slightly less well known is this: 'Never go in against a Sicilian, when death is on the line!'"

Rebecca got up, wandered over to Cilla's bookcase, and pulled out the *Princess Bride* DVD. "We haven't watched this in forever. Let's take it over to Kayla's tomorrow night."

"We are men of action," Cilla replied. "Lies do not become us."

"Why do you still have all the DVDs in your room?"

"Haven't taken them downstairs yet. I figure about the time I'm ready to go off to college, we'll finally have this house in order. At least Mom and Dad's new room is done. That gave us a ton more space, but we jammed things wherever there was an extra inch. I still haven't found my old Paramore CDs."

Rebecca turned to look at her. "You still listen to CDs?"

"No, but one of them was signed. I think Justin stole it."

"Probably one of your sisters. I swear, if Polly didn't make it a criminal offense, those boys would be in my room all the time. It's like everything that I own is interesting to them. Seriously, boys, it's just Spongebob."

"But it's a big Spongebob," Cilla said with a laugh.

"One time they took it out of my room and Han was dragging it



around by the foot. I nearly came unglued. It's one thing for me to ask Noah to take care of the cats when I can't get home on time, but the rest of them have no reason to be in there. What is so stinking interesting?"

"Do you hide love notes from Andrew?" Cilla asked.

"Well, yeah, but not in my bedroom. I'm not dumb."

"Wait, seriously? You have love notes from Andrew that you've hidden in your house? Where are they?"

Rebecca laughed. "Like I'd tell you."

"Oh, come on. He writes you love notes?"

"Sometimes."

"Like lovey-dovey stuff or sweet, romantic sonnets?" Cilla put her hand over her heart. "Oh, my love is like a red, red rose that's newly sprung in June. My love is like the melody that's sweetly played in tune."

"Stop it."

"You have to tell me what he says to you."

Rebecca frowned. "No I don't."

"Really?" Cilla asked. "He gives you poems and love letters? Do you write those things to him?"

"Sometimes."

"Really?"

"Yeah. What's wrong with that?"

"And they're cogent and poetic and make sense and use big words? Not like 'Roses are red, violets are blue, that's what I said, I do love you' stuff?"

"You're very bad at this."

"Tell me what he writes to you."

"Tell *me* who you're going to the Homecoming Dance with." So far, Cilla had been taciturn about her date to the dance. Yeah, Rebecca like that word. One of her best friends refused to tell her something that would be revealed in just a few weeks anyway.

"I don't have a date," Cilla protested. "There's no one."

"You have to find someone. Barrett is taking Kayla."

"I know, I know. It's just not that big of a deal. So what if I don't go with anyone? Maybe I'll go with Deirdre and we'll make it a



girl's night."

"Deirdre isn't going, remember? She's doing a big protest about societal norms and gender issues."

"Maybe I'll protest with her."

Rebecca shrugged. "She'd love that. Maybe we should all protest."

"Andrew would kill you."

"He doesn't care what we do. I think Kayla *would* kill me, though. She finally has a great date and you should see the cute dress she and Stephanie bought. Just come with us, date or no date. You know that all you'd have to do is smile at Kev and he'd fawn at your feet."

Kevin Larchmont was part of the theater crowd and adored Cilla. He did his best to remain aloof around her, but it was obvious to everyone that all she would have to do is crook her little finger and he'd be there to do her bidding.

"Kev is another high school boy," Cilla said.

"So?"

"So, they're just boys. No maturity, no common sense, no interests other than video games and ..." Cilla shook her head in disgust. "They're just boys. I want to meet a man."

"Andrew is still a boy" Rebecca raised her eyebrows.

"You have him well-trained. But you've put in years of work with that one. I don't have that much time left. I want a man who knows how to woo a woman, how to figure out a tip in his head, how to read a whole book. I want someone who understands that Broadway is more than just musicals, that theater is serious business. I want someone who sees the world through a bigger lens than what football team is playing on Friday night or how far they can spit a wad of paper."

"That's gross."

"I know. High school boys are gross. Heck, some of them are barely showering on a regular basis. Why would you not take a shower after gym class? Ewww."

"Kev is clean and I've never seen him spit. He's smart and he knows about actual plays on Broadway. If you'd give him a chance,



he'd woo your socks off. And he reads everything. I've known him for years. He'd be great for you."

"He doesn't even drive."

"Because his parents can't afford a car for him. He has his license. Why are you so resistant? He'd be a great date to Homecoming."

"Why? Why? Because if I go to Homecoming with him, he'll think that we're in a relationship and then he'll never go away. If I don't start with him, I won't have to break up with him."

"What if you like him? Give the guy a chance."

"I don't want to start a relationship with a boy here in Bellingwood. What if we fall in love? Then I have to base my decisions on where to go to college on whether I can live without him. I don't want to go to school in Iowa. Will Kev follow me wherever I go? How difficult will a long-distance relationship be? I don't need that when I'm trying to focus on my career. I don't need the distraction."

Rebecca chuckled.

Cilla stood up and paced around her room. "What? Why are you laughing at me?"

"What do you want, Cilla? Is it because he's just a high school boy and not mature enough for you, or is it because you might fall for him and then have to figure out how to manage your future?"

"I don't know." Cilla sat down hard on her bed and punched her pillow. "I want someone to tell me what to do."

"No, you don't."

"No, I don't. But I hate having to figure it out by myself. You're so lucky. You have Andrew and Kayla, and you have Polly." She nodded. "You even have Mrs. Watson. I don't have anyone."

"Do you even hear yourself?" Rebecca asked.

"What do you mean?"

"You have your mom."

"She's too busy worrying about Dad."

"You know better than that. The two of you are tight. And you have me and Kayla. You love your job at the quilt shop. Mrs. Dykstra is like a second mom to you. You have her. And Polly would talk to you."



"Henry thinks I'm a moron."

"He does not."

"Yes, he does. I'm forever doing some silly dramatic thing whenever he walks into the room. He has to think I'm a fool."

"Hate to tell you, Cilla, but he probably doesn't even notice you."

Cilla looked at her in horrified shock. "Not notice me?"

"Yeah. He's thinking about a million other things. My friends are only important to him because they're my friends."

"I'm not working hard enough," Cilla muttered.

"Because he doesn't notice you?"

"Apparently."

"You are a moron. You want it both ways."

"Yeah, so?"

"Yeah, so, life isn't like that."

Cilla nodded. "I know. Have I distracted you from asking about my date to Homecoming?"

"You're a sneaky one. Seriously, you should go with Kev. Andrew likes him."

"He's still really young."

"He's our age."

"That means he's like four years younger than us when it comes to maturity."

"Give the boy a break, Cilla. You don't have to make a lifetime commitment. It's just a dance."

"We'll see. So, do you want to come out and work on the Thespian float with me this weekend?"

"Will Kev be there?"

Cilla shot her a look. "Don't push it, toots."

Rebecca sat down beside her and gave her friend a small push in the shoulder. "I'm pushing, I'm pushing. Because I'm pushy like that. You never know, this could be the best thing that ever happened to you."

"One thing you know when you're ten," Cilla said, flipping the Princess Bride DVD out of Rebecca's hands, "is that no matter what, there's gonna be a happy ending."

"As you wish," Rebecca replied with a smile."



## **Vignette #4**

### **Ch Ch Ch Changes**

"Your mother wants to talk to you."

Henry looked up from the blueprints he'd laid out on a workbench. He and his father were going over the cabinetry for a kitchen remodel. "About what?"

"Something we've been discussing," Bill Sturtz said.

Henry glared at him. "What have you been discussing?"

"Your mother should talk to you about it." Bill chuckled. "If you make me talk about it, I'll tell you, but then you'll ask questions and wonder if Marie is on board and on and on. It's easier just to let her tell you."

"How long do I have to wait for this conversation?" Henry shook his head. His dad loved to yank his chain whenever he got the opportunity.

"Now would be a good time." Bill pointed at the front door where Dick Mercer was walking in.

"Bill, you old coot," Dick said. "You tell your boy what we're cooking up?"

"Thought I'd leave that to his mother. Henry, here, will accuse us of come up with another one of those dumb ideas we get."

"We have great ideas. All we have to do is wait for the little ladies to pay attention long enough to make them all their own. Then, things get done."

"Little ladies. Old coots. Do you two really talk like this when you're alone?" Henry asked. "Mom and Aunt Betty would never put up with it."

Dick took Bill's hand and clapped him on the back. "Raise him poorly, ya did. The boy can't e'en talk like a good ole boy anymore."

"It's that little lady of his own that got him all citified," Bill said.

"Citified, dandified, and gentrified," Dick retorted, grinning at Henry. "Tall shame we had to lose him to all that edumacation."

"Tall shame, indeed," Bill agreed.



Henry picked his tablet up from where it had been holding the edge of the blueprint flat. He shook his head as he rolled the print up. "You two are a riot." With the rolled paper, he tapped his father's chest. "We aren't going to get anything more done on this, are we?"

"Leave it with me," Bill said. "I know what you're looking for. Been doing this a long time. I can read the print and build the layout. I'll have the cost for you before the end of the day."

"But I wanted to talk about the cabinets on either side of the dining room doorway. She wants something different there."

"We'll talk. I'll figure it out. I always do. Don't you trust me, boy?"

Henry scowled. "Boy?"

"You'll always be my boy," Bill said. "Ain't that right, Dick?"

"If you don't want him, Betty and I'll adopt him. He's a good 'un."

Bill had been moving the three of them toward the front door of the shop. "Everyone will be back from lunch in a few minutes. Best we get out of here or we won't be able to hear ourselves think. Marie made a rhubarb pie last night. If she and Betty haven't eaten the whole thing, we'll have a treat with our coffee."

Henry followed his father and uncle from the shop to the house. He couldn't imagine what his parents needed to talk about with him. If his aunt and uncle were here, it might have something to do with the land where they planned to build the new shop.

Right now, Sturtz Construction was spread out across the county. The shop itself was here, but Henry was storing equipment in any building he could find to rent. They'd finally agreed to buy a piece of land from Dick and Betty to build storage facilities and a new shop. Whatever their reason for bringing him to a meeting today had him a little nervous, though.

"Molly's upstairs taking a nap," Marie said in a hushed tone when she greeted the men at the back door. "You boys have to use your inside voices. Understand me?"

Bill and Dick looked at each other and shrugged, then both men turned on Henry. "She means you, boy," Bill said. "You're the troublemaker here."



"I know, Dad. If I promise Mom that I'll be good will you let me in the house?"

"Wipe your feet," Marie scolded, pointing at Dick's boots. "And leave my good boy alone." She took Henry's arm. "How did Cassidy do yesterday? Any better?"

"It was a good day for her," Henry said. He gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. "Polly says she always takes a nap after school, but that makes sense, right?"

"Absolutely. Those little bodies have to build up stamina to get through a whole day. I'm glad she's doing okay. Come on in. Coffee?"

"Thanks, Mom. What's going on?"

"We four want to talk to you about some ideas we've been tossing around. It's all good. Nothing bad. Before we make any decisions, you need to know what we're thinking."

"The four of you together? That's never good." He leaned against the refrigerator. "Unless you and Betty are in charge."

"Trust me. We are. The boys are only along for the ride." She handed him a cup of coffee. "There's pie on the dining room table. Would you like ice cream? Bill and Dick are already set up."

"I can get it," he said. "You go on in and sit down. I'll be right there."

Marie waved him back from the refrigerator, opened the freezer and took out a bowl already filled with ice cream. "You think I'm helpless?"

"No, ma'am," Henry replied. "Far from it."

"I'm still your mother and I can take care of you when I'm in my own kitchen. Now, scoot. We have things to discuss."

When Henry walked into the dining room, Betty Mercer, Bill's sister, jumped up from her seat. "There's my favorite boy. How are things at your house?"

He gave her a hug. "Good. The kids are back in school, Polly's busy, I'm busy."

"How's Cassidy doing?"

"She's better every day. We like her teacher." He smiled. "I don't know if Cassidy realizes that this is how her life is going to be from



now on, but she's pretty good about doing what's expected of her. That Agnes Hill, though, she's been a godsend. She comes over after school a few times a week and gives Cassidy her undivided attention. I don't know what they talk about, but it helps us out a lot."

"Good for Polly for not feeling like she has to be everything to her kids," Betty said. "That's one smart cookie you married, there."

He nodded. "I like her."

"Sit down, boy," Bill said. "You've got your mother hovering with a cold bowl of ice cream."

"I'm sorry." Henry dropped into the seat beside Betty.

Marie shook her head and put the bowl on a place mat in front of him. "Don't listen to him. One slice of pie or two?"

"One," Henry said. "Thanks."

"See, boys. I told you there would be an extra piece for you to split." Marie handed the pie plate to Bill, who, in turn, handed it to Dick.

"Be right back," he said. "Need more ice cream."

Marie put her hand out to stop him. "No, you don't. Sit back down. If you want that piece of pie, fine. But no more ice cream."

"But it's better with ice cream," Bill whined.

"Sit," Betty said. "Don't argue. You know better."

"Getting old's for the birds," he muttered as he turned and went back to his seat.

"So tell me," Henry said, "What's this meeting about?" He put a bite of pie and ice cream into his mouth and tried not to sigh at how wonderful it tasted. His mother could bake. He gave her a smile.

"Your mother and I want to move," Bill blurted out. "She doesn't want to live here any longer."

"Bill," Marie scolded. "Talk about making it sound bad. That isn't it at all."

"Yes, it is," he retorted. "We want out of this house. If you're moving the shop away, there's no reason for us to live here any longer."

Henry looked at Marie. "Mom?"

"It isn't what it sounds like."



Betty spoke up, "It is kind of what it sounds like."

"Are you moving back to Arizona?" Henry asked, suddenly concerned.

"No, no, no," Marie said. "Nothing like that. Now, you know I've been saving."

"Sure," he replied.

"Once we paid this house off, I decided to keep putting that amount away every month. We're talking about building a little ranch house on the land where you're putting the shop. Bill and I are going to get real tired of all the steps in this big place and we don't need it for family. You and Polly live in town. It isn't like you've ever spent a night here."

"What about Lonnie?"

"Well, we'll design the house so the basement will be a nice place for her and her family to stay. Your kids can stay down there if they spend a night with us. And we're right next door to Betty and Dick. They still have rooms available."

"You'd move out to the country?"

"What's wrong with the country, boy?" Dick asked, crossing his arms in front of his chest. "You city kids don't know what you're missing."

"We'll have to adjust to living out there," Marie said, ignoring her brother-in-law, "but it really makes sense. You know I like being able to keep an eye on your father ..."

"Because he's such a troublemaker," Betty said.

"And it would be nice for him to be close to the shop. Jessie will be working out there and I'd like to be available to Molly during the day, even though she'll be starting school soon. We're right down the road from Elva and her family which means Eliseo is close. And Judy and Reuben Greene are just up the way from there at the bed and breakfast."

"And we like the idea of them being close to us," Betty said. "It was either they move out by us or we find a place in town. I don't much like the idea of moving into town."

"What will you do with this house?" Henry asked.

Bill reached around and took a manila envelope off the buffet.



He slid it across to Henry. "When we moved to Arizona, we transferred ownership of the house to you. It's your house. We probably owe you rent."

Henry huffed a laugh. "I don't think so. What about Lonnie? This doesn't seem fair."

"Don't you worry about your sister," Marie said. "We're taking care of her, too. It's fair. What do you think about this?"

"It's what you want?" he asked.

She smiled. "I was ready to quit taking care of this house five years ago. I'm more than ready now. A little house in the country, next to my family and next to where Bill grew up. It's perfect. You'll be there all the time anyway since you're putting your office out there."

"Probably more than I'm here," he agreed.

"We'll have a big open space for your kids to come visit. The animals at Elva's place are right next door."

"What about Dad's model railroad?"

"We're adding a room on the shop for that," Bill said. "You just haven't seen the plans yet. A bunch of my buddies think it would be a hoot to have a place next to a shop where we can work on scenery. You okay with this? I know you're buying the land from Dick and Betty, but we just need a little chunk of it. And you'll build the house, okay?"

"Of course it's okay," Henry said. He looked around the room. "It's hard to imagine this house without you. I didn't like it when you moved to Arizona. I didn't change anything."

Marie put her hand on his forearm. "You have a lot of family that will soon need their own places to live. Cat and Hayden can't live with you forever."

"Polly thinks they can," he said with a smile.

"Or maybe Heath and his family will move in one day," she continued. "And if you want to sell the place, that's fine with us, too. It belongs to you."

"When do you want to move?" Henry asked.

"We were thinking maybe we could build the house next spring when you're putting the rest of the buildings up," Bill said. "We



aren't in a hurry."

Henry pushed his empty bowl back. He didn't even remember finishing the pie. "Polly isn't going to believe this."

"What?" Betty asked.

"That you're moving. That we own another property in town. You choose. But I'll do whatever you want. Have you found a house plan?"

Marie smiled. "Who do you think you're talking to? I want you to look at it, then we'll get started. I'm going to borrow your boys this winter to help me clear out the attic and basement."

"And closets," Bill said. "We don't want to take anything with us that isn't useful. It's time to purge."

"Good thing we aren't going anywhere, right dear?" Dick asked.

"You're the one who collects the junk, dear," Betty said. "Marie and Bill will store their things in our barn as they pack them up. We'll make room."

Henry sat back in his chair. "How long have you guys been planning this?"

"Most of the summer," Marie said. "We didn't want to say anything until you made the deal to buy land from Dick. I wasn't going to be the reason you chose that property."

"It's the right property," he said, nodding. "Man, all I can think is ... ch ch ch changes. Bellingwood used to be a sleepy little town where nothing ever changed. I can barely keep up with it now."

His mother rubbed his arm. "We're not going that far."

"You're right. This makes a lot of sense. Let's see the house plans you've found."

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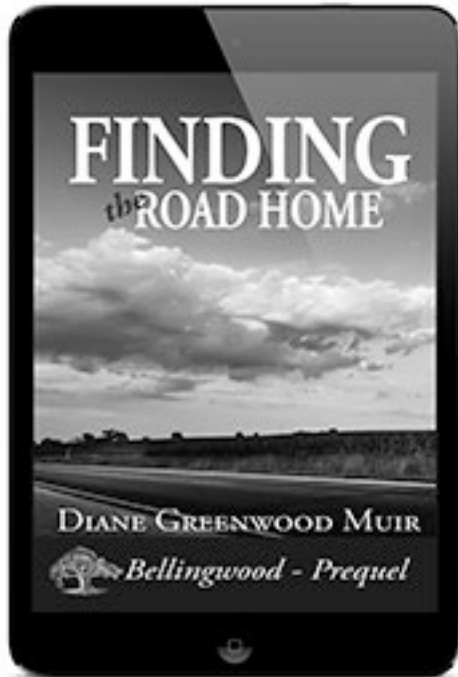


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