

~Gracie~

Lil' Miss Flasher

It's hard to believe I was convinced to tag along on this camping trip to a place in NoWhereVille, USA that no one else wanted to go.

Trish and I have hiked so far from where her jeep was parked, only a bloodhound could retrace our steps. Insects have lavished my entire body, leaving behind a trail of itchy welts like a road map. I may as well have a sign proclaiming: 'Free Cootie Smorgasbord!' imprinted on my forehead. Furthermore, Trish should have sent up warning signals pertaining to the pitfalls of wearing new hiking boots before breaking them in. My backpack – also brand new assuring I will have nasty chaffing to go along with my blisters – was completely crammed with camping gear that made me feel like I was carrying fifty pounds of crap in a five-pound bag. I am sweaty, exhausted and had an extra helping of bitch flakes for breakfast, thank you very much.

Catching up to Trish, I expressed my feelings like any grown-up, first-grade teacher would under similar circumstances. I poked out my bottom lip, spurt out a grunt load of unladylike words, sunk down on a large rock and refused to take another step. So excuse me all to hell because I threw a titty tantrum of major proportion. No judging now. I am not the outdoorsy, rugged Annie Oakley-type of woman and never claimed to be. Mints scattered on a pillow in five-star hotels is the only way I would remotely consider myself a, 'happy camper'.

I wasn't originally scheduled to be included in this trip, nor subjected to the abuse Trish refers to as 'camping'. I find myself in this predicament because my self-centered older brother Doug chose to elect me on the eve of this adventure. Doug, he with the love-sick heart for my best friend. Doug, (of whom I refer to as Dougie at times because it irks the hell out of him), was the intended victim to accompany Trish today and traipse through the pits of glorious Bum Friggin' Egypt.

Trish and Doug have had this on again, off again love relationship for as long as I can remember. What Trish remotely finds appealing about him and why she forgives his repeated indiscretions, I simply cannot comprehend. Once a cheater,

always a cheater as far as I'm concerned. Doug is my brother and I love him, but it surely doesn't mean I have to like him.

After unearthing more about Doug later on, you'll get the picture.

Trish and I are polar opposites. She thrives in the wilderness and actually earns a prosperous income immersed in what she loves. Trish is a *Certified Adventure Travel Guide*. She leads backpack excursions, white-water rafting trips, wilderness camping expeditions (such as this) and nature hikes. Living in Hollow Springs for the better part of our existence, we reside in an ideal location for her business to flourish. A picturesque community nestled at the base of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range in Northern California where the tourist traffic was high no matter the season, and as far as vacations go, Trish considers every day at work as time off. Adjoining our historic gold-mining town are vast wilderness areas as well as rivers and lakes known to attract water enthusiasts. It has all the earmarks of being perfect, but at this moment, I would sell my sorry ass for a modern hotel room; or trade an eyeball for an air-conditioned mall with a kiosk operated by a gracious person who will lovingly rub my feet until I am on the brink of an orgasm. Indeed, that is what I'm talking about. When that fine person finishes diddling around with my feet, then I could proceed on to a fellow with magical hands who will relieve this painful tension shooting up my back and down my shoulders. When I'm finally feeling up to snuff, I would mosey on over and treat myself to some much-needed retail therapy consisting of perhaps some new shoes from Macy's. A woman can never own too many shoes, right? As I am envisioning all this loveliness, Trish abruptly – and rudely, might I add – diverts my attention from these soothing thoughts with the beginnings of a bitch-fit.

"Shit, Gracie! If I had known what a craptastic sidekick you were going to be, I would've done this excursion solo!"

She was glowering at me in a shaming way to which I only stared back at her blankly. Trish sighed. "Oh, what the hell, right here appears to be a good enough spot. We'll set up camp here. Happy now?"

Actually no, I am *not* happy—not in the least. And judging by the glare I shoot in my friends direction, Trish receives my answer loud and clear without a word leaving my lips.

Evidently, she's thinking I need an attitude adjustment, which makes me all the more irritable. Naturally, she is relentless and continues preaching to deaf ears. "Give it up, Gracie ... just cease with your diva drama, will you? From the moment we left home you've done nothing but piss and moan. Look at yourself with your butt homesteaded on that rock, whining and carrying on like a spoiled brat. Really, and how old are you?"

Trish glares at me with a look that could make a grown man cry for his mama and the look on her face challenges me to answer. I realize she is thoroughly bent

out of shape as she pitches her backpack several feet away. Trish doesn't intimidate me in the least, however, so I respond in a like manner.

"Well you know Trish, this camping gig was your blowhard idea. Might I remind you, I'm only here as a favor to you. God-forbid we're not spending our valuable weekend exploring back-country terrain along with every creepy-crawly known to man. Big Whoop, not my cup of tea, you know. Not to mention, I take offense at your holier-than-thou attitude. Now, here's what's going to happen. I'm going to go pee, and before I return you better stop to re-assess who you're actually pissed at. Then you had better get rid of that nasty-ass attitude of yours. If not, we'll march right out of this 'Deliverance' nightmare and journey on home ...kapish?"

With that, I tromp off into the bushes before realizing I did so without formulating a plan for a back-out scenario. However, nature is calling in a manner that can't be ignored a moment longer, and there was no way in hell I was about to retreat my steps and ask Trish about outdoor female peeing etiquette. Hence, my pride keeps me trudging further away from our future campsite. First off, I didn't consider bringing any toilet paper with me. No problem. I read somewhere that survivalists use leaves when in need. I reckon that will have to suffice.

I choose a spot with some scruffy bushes and decide it's as good as any other to cop-a-squat. Modesty has me looking right and left several times to assure privacy before quickly dropping my britches. Now I have to admit, I don't frequent a gym so with a small grunt, I assumed an undignified squat-position that would've been easier if my thigh muscles were accustomed to some type of exercise. Grimacing, I now feel twigs and weeds scratching and tickling my bare butt, so I attempt to step sideways which results in pee squirting on my new hiking boots. *Just Perfect.* Criminy, where is an outhouse when one is drastically needed? I freeze in my most-unbecoming position when I hear what sounds like someone approaching. Oh Hell's Bells, may the Earth open wide and swallow me up this instant! I quickly attempt to jerk my pants up while simultaneously trying to prevent my pee from flowing. My bladder is really, *really* full and will not cooperate. I'm finding it extremely difficult to accomplish these two tasks at once—especially while in full panic mode. As a result, I clumsily reach one hand towards the nearest bush to seek support for balance. Unbeknownst to me, the dumb-ass bush isn't sturdy enough to accommodate the bulk of my weight so it immediately snaps apart as I lean against it. Now completing my squat-dance of degradation, first my face collides with the ground followed immediately by the remainder of my body. To my utter and complete humiliation, I find myself lying sideways with dirt and leaves assaulting my face; not to mention my bare ass is on full display for the fellow who just arrived into the clearing sitting atop a horse. Oh, for the love of God, could this day possibly get any worse?

I struggle to get upright and conceal my lady parts as a hand is extended to assist me off the ground. In my out-and-out embarrassment, I swat at the hand

repeatedly while continuing with my independent, unsuccessful struggles. I could well imagine I probably looked like some pathetic half-turtle, half-naked woman as I struggle to right myself.

“Would you mind turning your back? Seriously, this is not humorous in the least and I’d appreciate you showing some courtesy by leaving right now! You heard me! Vamoose this instant!”

I am all but hissing so my words (along with clumps of dirt and leaves) are spewing from my mouth.

Unbelievably, the big buffoon has enough balls to laugh at my utter humiliation. The heat radiating throughout my body is a sure indication that my face is the color of a ripe tomato. I can’t get a good look at this guy because quite frankly, I have dirt up to my eyeballs. Despite my attempts at elegance in an impossible situation, a good description of my progress was by now more likened to a fish floundering out of water than the previous turtle-woman. I wish this day would end because thus far, it's proven to be one big bag of suck.

“Here, you really should allow me to give you a hand,” he said. He paused a moment, the humor in his voice evident. “You *do* realize that's poison oak you’re wallowing around in, right?” The unidentified annoying peeping Tom reaches his persistent hand out once again, offering assistance. At least his laughter had calmed down to intermittent chuckles.

Now I am so mortified I only wish to rise to a standing position, be fully clothed, and get the hell away from this man. It’s the single reason I reluctantly place my hand in his and thankfully find myself on my feet again. In record time, my knickers are up where they’re supposed to be (covering my ass) and I’m now furiously brushing dirt from my face, hair and well ... from all over my being.

Next thing I know, that same male hand is outstretched towards me again. “Dylan Sanders, and my apologies for catching you at a bad time. You know, with your pants down and all.” The humorous tone had not left his voice.

Under normal circumstances, this arrogant son of a biscuit would have me swooning. He is seriously ‘drop your panties and beg for his body’ eye-popping gorgeous. Tall with broad shoulders, biceps that indicate he maintains a gym membership, brown sun-streaked hair that seems both purposely messy and handsomely perfect at the same time, and white, straight teeth. He is the living, breathing picture of what most women would refer to as, *man-candy*. This guy has it all going on and is probably fully aware of it.

I’m certainly not feeling giddy, nor inclined to do my well practiced bat my eyelashes and pucker my lips routine with Mr. Hottie. He invaded my personal space, viewed my bare behind, and then had the audacity to snicker at my predicament.

I rudely ignore his outstretched hand, do an about face and proceed hiking toward my campsite.

“Wait. Hold up there Lil' Miss Flasher, for lack of your real name. I actually do need to speak with you, so please stop for just a second.”

This Dylan fellow is a persistent bugger but I've had just about enough of him, this God-forsaken wilderness and these painful boots. I choose to continue ignoring him while making my way back. Just when I assumed he had given up and the campsite is only around the bend, I hear him and the horse he rode in on approaching. We arrive at the edge of the campsite at the same time. We find ourselves completely taken aback at the sight before us. Oh my word, what in the world?

At the perimeter of the clearing, there is a man standing beside a tree, looking just as smug as can be. His long legs are spread slightly apart with his bulky arms folded across a broad chest, a stance screaming of testosterone running rampant. His dark, wavy hair is askew, hinting of a recent struggle and he's sporting a shadow of growth on his face that appears as though he's missed a meeting or two with his razor. It would be safe to assume this fellow frequents a gym as much as Hottie Numero Uno positioned next to me. As startling as all this is to take in, I'm viewing more; much more. What is so jaw dropping is that my bestie Trish has her arms wrapped around a tree with her wrists handcuffed together to keep her in place. I can personally state for the record she seems angry enough to spit nails. I can hardly believe the vulgar language spewing out her mouth being directed towards the dark-haired male Adonis. Quite honestly, I don't even know the definition of some of the words screeching from her mouth. Maybe she's making up the words as she goes along. With this scene before me, fear is now invading my senses. The realization strikes me like a ton of bricks that in reality, we're two women alone in the middle of nowhere with two unknown men who are so massive in size they can easily squish us like insects. There is not another soul around to hear us scream for mercy. It's as if we've landed ourselves in the middle of a low budget slasher movie.

Evidently, the studly guy standing beside me is sensing my impending panic attack and reaches inside his coat pocket to retrieve and flash what appears to be a law enforcement badge in front of my face. Oh, thank you Lord in Heaven.

“Don't get your panties in a twist again. We aren't here to harm you. I'm Detective Dylan Sanders and would've introduced myself to you earlier if you had given me a chance. Detective Justin Tanner over there is my partner.” He motions towards the dark-haired Hottie with a quick nod of his head.

While I attempt to wrap my brain around this tidbit of information, Trish vehemently continues her indignant, foul-mouthed rampage. She is loudly

protesting about being handcuffed and I wholeheartedly agree with her. I don't hesitate to have her back by adding my two cents in for all it may be worth.

"Why would you find it necessary to handcuff my friend, Detective Tanner? I can't imagine she was breaking the law. She wasn't now, was she? I surely don't see a convenience store she may have knocked off; certainly not one located way out here in Granny Clampett territory. So would you care to explain yourself, detective?"

No sooner had the words exited my mouth than both Detective Tanner and Trish began speaking at once, each aiming to be louder than the other. If my first-graders exhibited similar behavior, they would be placed in time-out chairs. Seriously, one would never have guessed these two were adults.

A loud, ear splitting whistle emitted from the man standing adjacent to me, silenced the squabbling banshees immediately.

"Enough already! One at a time. Why the handcuffs, Justin? What's up with that?"

"Let me tell you why," Justin spat out. "This loose cannon, motor-mouth evil..." He paused a moment, pointing a shaky finger at my friend Trish, "*witch* attacked me! I no sooner got off my horse to assess the situation and she jumps on my back and tries to scratch my eyes out, kicking and snapping her big teeth at me like a demented psycho-bitch. What would you expect me to do? Play tiddly winks or Parcheesi with a bottle of crazy sauce like her? Oh hell no, she got handcuffed which is exactly what she was asking for!" With an indignant harrumph, the detective crosses his arms again, resuming his belligerent stance.

The words had no sooner left Detective Tanner's mouth before Trish determined it was time to recount her version of the incident. "Un-friggin'-believable! I was defending myself! You show up out of nowhere all sneaky and looking like a scuzzball. Then you take the liberty of pilfering in our stuff. I was hiding in the bushes, watching you. My friend had been gone for entirely too long so I could only assume you or an accomplice had done something heinous to her. It all fit, so I did what needed to be done."

Trish focused her notorious stink-eye directly on Detective Tanner following this statement. It received no reaction from the detective other than to invite the reappearance of his taunting smirk.

Trish continued recounting her version of the story. "Gracie and I are here unaccompanied and I wasn't going to allow you to get the jump on me first. In these woods, I have been trained to survive, which is precisely what I was demonstrating. In my assessment at the time, you posed a serious threat, so I didn't allow you to gain the upper hand. It's as simple as that. You know, all this could have been avoided if you would have just identified yourself as a cop, dick-wad!"

Trish's challenging statement was like adding fuel to an already roaring flame and a verbal Tug-O'War escalated, bringing it to full-blown, infernal mode. The detective insisted he didn't have time to identify himself as an officer of the law because he was too busy reminding himself that the harpy bitch was a woman, so flat-out punching her in the face – which he did consider for moment – was not an option but locking her ass to the nearest tree, was. He followed this with saying while he was containing himself from knocking her from here to the nearest convenient planet, she had been taking her best shot at scratching his eyes out. Of course, that remark sets Trish's temper off all the more so she rudely informs the officer he is fortunate his balls are still intact. The verbal insults continue on and on until once again detective, 'Stare-at-my-bare-ass' intervenes and shuts everyone the hell up.

"Look, both of you just knock it off," he commanded to both Trish and his fellow detective. "Here's the thing, we have to escort you two women back to your vehicle. You can't be here right now, which is the reason we approached your campsite in the first place. I can assure you, it wasn't for this childish drama, so let's just put a lid on it."

Trish's eyes turned to flinted steel. "Oh *hell* no, we aren't going anywhere. Gracie and I didn't hike nearly all day for you two to climb on your macho high horses and rush us home. Think again, because it's not happening. Absolutely not! We're not going anywhere—especially not with either of you two bossy, scum-suckers. I'll have you know, I'm a taxpaying citizen. I pay your salary so you should be taking orders from me!"

Oh my Lord, Trish is in a foul mood. Nevertheless, those are the last words she should have spoken aloud, much less *really* loud. Of all the comments to shout to a cop, that's probably one of the least favorite phrases they enjoy hearing. What is she thinking? Evidently, she isn't the least bit fearful of being thrown in county lockup. Judging by the look in his eyes, it seems like nothing would please Detective Tanner more than to throw her sorry butt in the slammer and dispose of the key. I'm motioning for Trish to shush her mouth but to no avail. I'm intentionally being ignored. It's not as if Trish ever listens to my advice even under the best of circumstances, so this comes as no surprise. However, at this particular moment, I'm wishing she would consider using better judgment because *I* certainly don't wish to go to jail. On top of that, I honestly wouldn't mind in the least being sent home where my comfortable bed awaits. If I'm lucky, these two detectives may not assume Trish and I are partners in crime. I love Trish and all, but don't desire to be her cellmate. I will present her with cookies on visiting days though because that's just what best friends do.

Detective Sanders was doing his best to keep his voice even. "That's it! Ladies, we are leaving now and trust me when I say it's for your own safety. I can't elaborate any more, so let's get moving. Let me rephrase, you will get yourselves on

the back of these horses and we'll escort you to your vehicle without further delay, or I'll place you under arrest for obstruction of justice. Have I made myself clear?"

When Trish opened her mouth to obviously protest, the detective cut her off in an authoritative voice that clearly booked no argument. "I will repeat this one more time and then you will be read your rights, young lady. Your handcuffs are going to be removed, and then your butt had better be on the back of the horse beside you or you'll be arrested. Got that? Same goes for you, Ms. Flasher Gracie. Come on ... let's get a move-on. Chop, chop! Don't make me have to mirandize you. You get me?"

Oh yes I get it, and my fully-clothed ass is on the back of that four-legged beast before Detective Hunka-Hunka can think twice about throwing me in lockup. At the very least, it would create the need for some major explaining with the school board, the PTA, and the always-inquiring minds of my first-grade students. Oh no, I want no part of any scandal. It isn't difficult to miss the sanctimonious expression on the other detective's face when I glance to my right. It's quite similar to the expression my students get just before they stick out their tongues to ridicule a fellow classmate. Detective Tanner is now directing his smirky smug expression in the direction of my best friend. Ultimately, Trish knows when to accept she's lost a battle, but the look in her eye also makes it clear she will make it her singular mission to win the war. Poor, poor Detective Tanner hadn't the slightest clue of the trouble he has coming his way.

The detective grudgingly sets Trish free of her handcuffs. The two new enemies square off, eyeing each other suspiciously for a brief moment until she climbs on the back of his horse.

The two police officers quickly gather up our backpacks and assist us with putting them on our backs. Detective Sanders helps me with this task while Detective Tanner simply shoved the backpack in Trish's direction, leaving her to her own devices.

Detective Sanders realizes it will be less awkward if I disembark from the horse to allow him on first, so we play musical seats. When we're finally both situated on the four-legged beast, he instructs me to wrap my arms around his waist and hold on tight. I'm not ashamed to admit he doesn't have to repeat those instructions.

Since I was a child, I have harbored a fear of horses. My phobia stems from a time in my childhood when a big brute of a horse (okay maybe it was a pony) bit my ear. There I was at a petting zoo, excited about riding this animal when it reached his big teeth over and chomped on my ear. Seriously, it hurt like a thousand nails shooting in my head and to commemorate the experience, the beast left a permanent scar on my ear. Therefore, you can understand my fear of these horrid, ear-munching creatures.

I've managed to board the intimidating horse with my ear intact and am clutching Detective Sanders really, really tight and all the while my girlie parts are

thankful for an opportunity to cop a feel of such a finely-toned studly body. I mean seriously, what single, straight woman is going to pass up a 'hands-on' opportunity when it presents itself? Certainly not me! I haven't experienced action in my nether regions for a very, very long time. At least, no activity not induced by a battery-operated device. The detective and I may have started off on the wrong foot, but I'm willing to begin anew as if this day never happened if he is agreeable to the idea. I wondered to myself if he's already spoken for; my brief daydream may be a moot point, after all.

Detective Tanner and Trish lead slightly ahead of us on the dirt trail and I can't help but notice she isn't holding on to the detective ... no siree. Obstinate Trish is grasping the saddle in lieu of Mr. Hottie McTottie. For his part, Detective Tanner seems to be purposely aiming for every pothole and tree branch, ducking before the branches smack him in the face without forewarning Trish of the impending branch. Many times, Trish's reactions are not as quick and it's a wonder she manages to remain atop the horse. It's obvious these two obstinate beings either despise each other or a spark had been lit and neither one of them were willing to leap into that flame first.

When we arrive back at Trish's vehicle and begin loading the jeep, Trish and Detective Tanner are still avoiding each other like a deadly plague as Trish is all but throwing the camping gear in the back. However, Detective Sanders seems in no particular rush and quite honestly, neither am I.

"Say Gracie," Detective Sanders begins as he pulls his horse closer to me, "I know we got off to an unusual start and all. I'm sorry I laughed at you ... really sorry. You know, all the laughing and invading your privacy. Well, all that."

It looks like big macho Detective Dylan Sanders is tongue-tied so I chose to have him squirm a tad bit longer by remaining silent, sporting a distant blank look on my face.

"Guess I'll just get to the point, no reason for beating around the bush. I'm assuming you live in Hollow Springs, or near there. I admit to getting the low-down by calling to request information from your friend's license plate before we began the search. You do live in Hollow Springs, right?"

I nod my head while remaining in silent mode, leaving him stuck on the speaking podium. It's not yet quite time to show mercy to this man. I haven't forgiven him for neglecting to cover his eyes when my bare ass was up in the air on display. One would presume it would be a requirement for law enforcement officials. It's not as if they're doctors and should be privy to people's private parts. He had no business getting an eyeful and then enjoying my humiliation. No sir, he isn't forgiven, regardless of the fact he seems to have defrosted my reproductive organs. Defrosted? Hell, they've melted from deep freeze hibernation, and are now sizzling in anticipation of welcoming some little swimmers before

shriveling up and missing the opportunity to strut their stuff. To say I have been caught by surprise is an understatement.

Dylan continued, "I live a few miles away from Hollow Springs, in Rose Hill." He studied my still-blank expression and laughed a little to himself. "Okay, now I'm rambling. Look Gracie, here's the thing ... I would like to take you out and get to know you. So, if you aren't seeing anyone, would you like to go for dinner or lunch or have something to eat with me? No pressure, but if you agree, I promise it'll be a better day than today."

For a bad-ass detective, this man certainly gets tongue-tied when asking a woman out on a date. I suppose it's time to cut him a break, even if he did gawk at my pasty, white naked butt.

"In answer to your question detective, I am not dating anyone." Great, may as well have shouted out, *Take me I'm all yours because I'm a loser and this should be no surprise to you!* I seem to be oozing of man repellent.

Smart, Gracie. Real smooth move.

"Sure thing, I'd love to eat a meal with you," I reply coolly. "Weekends are my first choice. You see, I teach school during the week. Yes, that's my job, I'm a schoolteacher. However, if you work weekends, then dinner on a weekday works as well, but it would have to be an early night. What do you think, detective?" What an idiotic putz he must think I am. Now who's guilty of rambling?

"Calling me detective is unnecessary. Dylan is what I prefer. Anyway, I'm scheduled to have weekends off this month, so how about we plan to meet up for lunch next Saturday? I can pick you up say around noon and we can go out for lunch and then maybe just hang out for the rest of the day. We'll play it by ear and surely end up finding some type of entertainment. Agreed?"

Nodding, I extend my hand, anticipating the contact of his skin on my own. As he raises his left eyebrow questionably, I play it coy with a tiny bit of sassy teasing thrown in the mix and request his cell phone. A quick batting of the lashes, followed by the tip of my tongue slowly moistening my top lip and my mission was successful. There is a noticeable change radiating from his eyes that is rather un-detective-like to be sure. When the blood returns to his brain, it's as if a light came on in his mind. He has received the message that I'm waiting to enter my contact information into his cell phone. I include my address in his phone's contact area, as well. My horny hormones were doing the salsa so I neglect to obtain details on how to reach this sexier-than-should-be-legal man. It qualifies as an oversight that will return to bite me in the ass.

"So, your last name is Watson, huh? Gracie Watson has a nice ring to it. I like it. See you next Saturday, Gracie Watson." He bent down from his horse he had just mounted and there was humor in his eyes as he said in a conspirators whisper, "Oh, and just so you know, I had no intentions of taking you to jail."

"Has anyone ever complimented you on your convincing poker face? You certainly could have fooled me. Your partner seemed hell-bent on escorting Trish and I to county lockup. You know as well as I, it was his intention. Admit it."

"Nah, his bark is worse than his bite. Trust me, you weren't in any danger of having your prim and proper schoolmarm reputation tarnished. Besides, technically I'm his boss. He's been a good friend of mine for several years so everyone imagined us working together would jeopardize our friendship. But you know what, it hasn't happened yet."

Dylan reached down and gently brushed some loose strands of hair behind my ear, just some of many several displaced curls from the bun atop my head dancing in the wind. It's to be expected after bouncing my bones to damn near breaking point atop a giant ear-chomping, four legged, smelly beast until my body was screaming for mercy. As much as I had enjoyed squeezing the bejesus out of Dylan, I feel as if I've taken a beating from one of those monstrous scary dudes on those wrestling smack-down television shows. I've watched plenty of those wrestling matches, certainly more than any dignified woman should have been subjected to. Doug won the physical battle for remote control privileges in our house every time. Every. Single. Time.

I am immersed in Dylan's aura as I revel in the warmth enfolding my entire body. Our eyes lock, no words spoken, prolonging the conclusion of these magical sparks. I sink deeper into the welcoming intense heat radiating from his aqua green eyes. My life is in store for some colossal changes. There is certainty in my heart about this. You may call it intuition, hope, or even determination. Never in my life had I experienced an instant attraction such as this. I'll admit it frightened me, but the fear was overshadowed by curiosity and eagerness. I have a powerful thirst to embark on this journey and discover where the road will lead us. I refuse to sabotage my chance of developing a relationship with Dylan. He isn't remotely like my ex-fiance, Nick The Prick. Not all men are self-centered, thoughtless dweebs. Is it safe to release my heart from self-imposed lock-down? Maybe. Baby steps. Yes, baby steps.

Dylan clicked at his horse, turned it around and looked back at me with a warm smile before he and Detective Tanner went on their way, deeper into the forest.