

Cypress Cove: A Little Adventure. A Little Romance. A Little Suspense. A Big Dog. by Elizabeth Parker

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Chapter 1-A Chance Encounter

“A quarter for your thoughts?”

“A quarter? Isn’t it usually a penny?”

“Inflation, ma’am. Prices are rising everywhere, your thoughts included.”

She looked around the park. In the distance, she observed two teens playing basketball. Further down, she glanced onto the playground and noticed parents gathered around, sipping coffee while their children played on the swings. One little boy went down the lime green slide and giggled. His tiny voice carried so she could hear the echo of his laughter.

“Ma’am?”

Her attention had temporarily been diverted, and she turned back toward the man. He was quite a few years younger than her, or so she thought.

The sun had not yet set. There was possibly an hour left of daylight. Maybe two. Earlier that day, she had committed to take a walk every day. As luck would have it, her first day of this commitment proved to be a chore. She was headstrong, however, and waited until work was over.

Work consisted of a hybrid schedule, commuting three days into the office and two days out of the luxury of home. Today was the latter.

At 5 p.m., she had closed her laptop and ruffled the scruff of her dog’s fur, promising to take him for his walk once she was done. He wagged his tail and howled, urging her to hurry up.

She loved her walks with Toby, but he stopped every five seconds to sniff a blade of grass here or search the bushes for tennis balls there. To him, it wasn’t about the exercise. No, it was more a canine version of social media. When there were people out and about, he made it a point to greet each one. Phire needed to get actual exercise without distraction and promised him she’d be back soon, assuming he had understood. She grabbed her keys and a small water bottle and left the house. In her pocket, she kept her cell phone. Like most, she felt naked without it.

The man in the park insisted. “So, what do you say?”

“I’m sorry, I have to get going.” She knew she should leave, but something about this man piqued her curiosity.

She studied him and his posture, relaxed and confident. He wore a sandy brown hooded sweatshirt over a black T-shirt. On his left wrist, tan lines covered where he usually wore a watch. He had a full head of light brown hair. It was not much different from the color of his sweatshirt. Judging by how much hair he did have, she figured him to be in his mid-twenties. Nothing stood out about his blue jeans. His sneakers were brand new. She thought they were New Balance but couldn’t get a closer look without staring. On his back was a rather large knapsack.

She wasn’t fearful of him, yet she heard of all the scams that people pull on those who are unsuspecting. She surveyed the landscape around her. She looked in the bushes, wondering if he had some buddies camping out, ready to jump her.

To her knowledge, they were the only two in this spot.

“Come on, play along. I tell you what. I’ll waive the quarter fee. But you have to pay me if I can sum up what you are currently thinking.”

She’d be lying if she said she wasn’t intrigued. The hairs on her neck didn’t rise to attention, and she didn’t feel the need to bolt. She had a little time. She’d play—so much for not getting distracted.

“Ok. Fair enough. A quarter if you can guess my thoughts. Are you a psychic? A spy?”

He chuckled. “Nope. Just an observer.”

“Ok, let’s hear it.”

“Great. Let’s see. You lived here your entire life.”

“What gave it away?”

“I’m not done.”

Taken aback, she smiled. “Okay, please proceed.”

“You work hard but want to make more time for yourself. You love this city, but you hate the traffic. You love the community but are growing bored and want to explore. How am I doing?”

“Ok, well, those are easy. I mean, anyone that’s lived in one place for too long can get bored.”

“True. But you want to make a big change. Not just a vacation. You want to move out of Cypress Cove. And you don’t want to move to a neighboring city, or state for that matter. You want to stretch the limit. Possibly move to another country.”

Slowly, she felt in her pockets and then looked around. She had purchased a pocket-sized German dictionary online not too long ago. She’d been studying in her free time. She wondered if she accidentally had it in her coat pocket or maybe dropped it along the way. In her mind, she

retraced her steps when she left the house. She distinctly remembered the dictionary resting on the antique finish coffee table.

“Fascinating.”

“Still not done.”

Amused, she raised her hands as if to say, “Well, don’t let me stop you.”

“You like your job, but it’s no longer a challenge. You’ve mastered everything you needed to learn. The monotony is making you feel, let’s say, no longer alive. Breathing, but not living. You have a dog, and he is your life.”

Dog hair. She didn’t go anywhere without it. No matter how hard she tried, it clung to her. She thought, “Well, that was an easy one.”

“Shall I go on?”

“No, I think you did fairly well in all actuality. So, I will commend you on one thing and one thing only. The rest, well...I felt the rest was fairly obvious.”

He smiled.

“But, moving far away. How did you pick up on that?”

“Magic.”

She nodded. “Ah. Is that what they call bullshit these days?”

He nodded and laughed.

“Okay, okay. Busted. Well, the truth is, I study a lot. The library is my version of school. I read a lot of different genres, from medical books to self-help, from gardening to cooking, from Spanish to Latin, from World Wars to Star Wars, from horror to thrillers to love stories. No, I’m not afraid to admit that. Some love stories have real attention-grabbing scenes tucked between those pages!”

She tried not to laugh, but he was right. She enjoyed a couple of those herself.

“My favorite genre, however, is psychology. I love everything about it. My most recent discovery was a book on reading people. Their body language. Their facial expressions. The movements in the eyes. Placement of their hands. It’s fascinating. At first, I didn’t see how this could help me. So, I put it to the test. I am a self-proclaimed expert people-watcher.” He paused for a moment. “Hmm, now that I’ve let those words escape my mouth, it uh, sounds pretty creepy, huh?”

“To be honest, in a word...yes.”

“I know. But not in that way. You looked like a good subject to study, no offense.”

“Well, not sure how I should take that. A good study?”

“Your posture while you walked was slow and easy, as if you had nothing on your mind. Your eyes, though, were faraway and determined. Hence, I picked up that you were thinking about where you were. No, in your mind, you were somewhere else.”

He continued. “Your clothes are stylish, but I’ve never seen anyone else wearing that brand or even talking about it here. However, having been to Europe, I noticed you were wearing a brand name I’d seen while quickly passing through Germany: Die Formen. I never got to explore the country, though. That’s still on my list.

“Wow. Okay, you just impressed me. No one has even noticed or at least has never asked me about my clothes. Yes, I am in love with the German style. I was there a few years ago, and I guess it had quite an impact on me. Die Formen is a top brand there. Translates to Shape or Form in English.”

“So, Germany then?”

“I’m sorry?”

“Is that where you’d like to move?”

She looked at the sun slowly descending and noticed the shadows changing positions on the trees. She had never even told her friends and family her thoughts on moving. She knew she’d get some grief from them, especially moving so far away and by herself.

“Well, I’d love to continue this conversation on psychic reading,” she mused, “but as you pointed out, I have a dog waiting for me. I gotta get going.”

“Aren’t you forgetting something?”

She cringed. Oh no, here was where he tried to attack her. Defensively, she asked, “Excuse me?”

“My quarter.”

Relieved, she shook her head. “Oh, you really were serious about that. And wait, aren’t you supposed to pay me a quarter for my thoughts?”

“Sure, I was serious. And usually, yes, you’re supposed to get paid, but I did all the work. So, looks like you owe me. Hey, gotta pay the bills somehow.”

She reached into her jacket and felt around for loose change. “One quarter.” She dropped it in his hand. “I think you’ll need a few more of those to pay the bills.”

He rolled his eyes playfully. “Well, I’m retired. I won’t tell you my sad sob story about my inheritance from my beloved uncle, but...well, I was his favorite nephew. He was my favorite uncle and filthy rich. He knew the stock market well and successfully bought and sold real estate. He knew how to make money. That’s for sure. Never married or had kids of his own. When he passed away, he left everything to me. I guess I’m a lucky guy.”

She wanted to leave but also wanted to know more about him.

“No kidding?”

“No, I’m serious. It’s not as glamorous as it sounds. It can get kind of lonely when the rest of your family and friends work for a living. Hence, I go to the library and talk to pretty women like you in the park. Gives me purpose and keeps my brain from turning to mush by forty.”

“How...” She hesitated and ignored his compliment. “How old are you?”

Thinking he’d say twenty-five at the most, he shocked her. “I’m thirty-seven.”

“You’re thirty-seven? There’s no way. You’re a year *older* than me!”

“Well, it’s true. Good genes, I guess.”

She now studied him for a moment. “Well, I better be going.” She started to head in the direction of home.

“I didn’t catch your name.”

Looking back, she caught him smiling, spinning the quarter between his fingers. “I think you know enough about me for one day. Maybe we’ll cross paths again. But until then, have a great day.”

Other Books by Elizabeth Parker

Unwanted Dreams

Phobia

Evil's Door

Faces of Deception

Occupational Hazard-Perfect Lies

Finally Home: Lessons on Life from a Free-Spirited Dog

Final Journey: Buddys' Book

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Paw Prints in the Sand

Paw Prints in the Sand: Mission

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Dog Book: It's All About the Dogs
Dogs Behaving Badly
Goldie: A Day in the Life of a Blind Dog
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Pet's Medical Journal
Cypress Cove
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