

Finding Happiness, by Trish Gwaltney (Harlequin Heartwarming)

“It never occurred to me that he might be looking for anything more than a couple of eggs over easy, that’s all...” She tossed her favorite purple tank top into the battered suitcase.

“Seriously, Melanie?” Sarah rolled her eyes and let out a long, low sigh. “Lloyd comes in every single day...”

“So? A lot of our customers are regulars.” Mel studied the worn flip-flops in her hand.

“Yes. But tell me you didn’t notice that he always sits in your section.”

“Okay, so what if he does? I’m fast. And efficient. And I always remember how he likes his eggs.” Melanie tossed the worn flip-flops into the trashcan in the corner. She’d be heading inland next and wouldn’t necessarily need them. Traveling light. That was key.

“Mel, it wasn’t about the eggs and you know it!”

“Well I know it NOW!” Her eyes scanned the room, searching for a plastic bag to drop her unwashed jeans into. Dirty laundry in her suitcase was the one thing she hated about always leaving places in a hurry...

“Why do you think he always left a ten when his breakfast was never even five dollars? A one hundred percent tip and it never dawned on you that the man might be flirting?” Sarah’s tone softened. “Besides. A girl could do worse than Lloyd. He’s sweet. And cute. And a hard worker.”

Melissa looked out the windows. The tide was coming in. Gulls were screaming for their dinner. The sun was hanging low over the ocean. She’d been here six months. With her history, that was a lifetime. It was going to be hard to leave this job... this place...this house with its beautiful view of the sea. But “no ties,” was her mantra. It’s what had kept her safe these last three years. It had been the best three years of her life. Maybe the worst too, if she thought about it long enough. Which is why she never did.

Editor's Critique:

Thank you for submitting your first page!

This opening scene gives rise to many questions in the reader's mind, which is great. We learn that for the past three years the heroine never stayed in one place for long. Why not? And where is she going now? Why is she in such a hurry? Will she even end up going now that Sarah has helped her realize that Lloyd is interested? Why were the last three years of her life the best but also the worst? I certainly want to know more.

The dialogue between Melanie and Sarah comes off as natural and tells us a lot about their friendship without giving too much away at this early stage. We get the sense that Sarah knew all along that Melanie was only in town for a short time, and while she's not pushing her to stay she is gently encouraging her about Lloyd in hopes of getting her friend to put down roots here. This makes me think that Melanie has a decent social life in this place—and, coupled with the fact that she has a house and a job here, too, I'm all the more intrigued by the reason she's leaving.

I did notice that Melanie's name changes to Melissa near the end of page one, so you must still be deciding which name best suits your heroine. "Mel," in any case, is a cute nickname for her!

Thanks again for your entry.