

Author's Notes: Many, many, MANY thanks to the lovely Susan for editing this while supporting her mom in her fight against breast cancer AND when she was up to her eyeballs (actually, I think she was way past her eyeballs) in group story stuff. She is a true Bob-White, and I am forever grateful that she is my friend. Also, many thanks to everyone in this wonderful community who makes Jix what it is—Cathy, Admin, Mods, Authors, MB Members, and Lurkers alike. This is a Jixemetri Circle Writing Project Special Anniversary #6 submission in celebration of Jixemetri's Eighth Anniversary and the 60th birthday of the Trixie Belden series.

Basic Chemistry
Part One: Mental Chemistry
by Dana

Through some strange and powerful principle of "mental chemistry," which she has never divulged, nature wraps up in the impulse of strong desire "that something" that recognizes no such word as "impossible," and accepts no such reality as failure.

—Napoleon Hill

Honey Wheeler stared in frustration at her chemistry textbook. Currently, she was finding it hard to believe that she had actually enjoyed her general chemistry class last semester. This semester also had been going relatively well—until the section devoted to organic chemistry had reared its ugly head.

No matter how much Honey studied, reading and re-reading the material over and over again until she was ready to tear her hair out, she just could not seem to get it.

"Aldehydes and ketones and alkanes, oh my!" she muttered out loud as she violently flipped through the pages of her textbook. "I'm going to learn this if it kills me!"

And it just may kill me, she thought ruefully in the aftermath of her violent outburst. She had been concentrating so hard on the book in front of her that she hadn't even realized that she had inadvertently left the television on earlier. She crossed the room and switched off the awards show that was airing, thinking that although she hadn't noticed the background noise, maybe its absence would help her concentrate better.

She sat down and found the beginning of the section, taking a deep breath. "Okay," she said out loud. "Read this. Study this. Know this. Understand this."

She decided to use a technique that one of her first-semester professors had suggested: reading the material out loud to increase the number of senses used, which in turn increased learning and retention. She smiled as she remembered the professor telling the class that doing a little dance along with the reading would further help. "I don't think I need to go that far," she said with a giggle. Honey began to read aloud the principles set forth in the book, but after twenty minutes, she didn't feel as though she had learned or retained anything.

"I'd be just as well off sitting here reciting silly tongue twisters," she muttered. "Six sick slick slim sycamore saplings. Six sick slick slim sycamore saplings. I give up. I need help."

Honey thought of who she could call. Her friend and lab partner, Angela Christensen, was almost as hopelessly lost as she was and would be of no help. As a matter of fact, the two of them usually leaned on the lab partnership that shared their lab table, Ron Dewitt and Shane Roper. Ron, a handsome blond freshman, was extremely smart and played a mean game of tennis. He was a little lacking in social skills but very nice. Shane Roper was a rugged-looking

freshman with dark eyes and dark hair. He was extremely smart but had been born with a healthy dose of social skills. He was quick with a smile or a joke and had a wicked sense of humor. He and Ron always knew what was going on in lab and were always happy to help out Honey and Angela when they needed it, which really was not that often. Until they had hit the section introducing organic chemistry. Both girls seemed to have a mental block when it came to aldehydes, alcohols, ketones, alkenes, alkanes, and hydroxyl groups. Shane and Ron had been happy to step in and help the girls with not only their lab assignments, but the accompanying classroom work as well.

Honey knew that she could call Shane or Ron for more help, but she already felt as though she had leaned on them too much in their shared laboratory class.

Her boyfriend, Dan Mangan, was also a student at John Jay, but he was a criminal justice major and had not been required to take many science and math courses; his classes were more social science and law based. She continued to wrack her brain, and suddenly someone came to mind.

Someone who was a patient teacher. Someone who was tireless in explaining things to others. Someone who had had almost four years of science classes. Someone who had aced all of his organic chemistry classes. Someone she had known for years. Someone who would help her at a moment's notice. Someone she was not sure that she wanted to be alone with.

That someone was Brian Belden.

Honey wondered if it was prudent to call him. She thought about her own relationship with Dan, and Brian's relationship with Lexi. On the surface, everything was as it had always been between them: friendly and light. Underneath it all, though, there was an undercurrent—an undercurrent of unexplored possibilities, of thwarted dreams. She and Brian had never discussed it, but she knew that they both felt it. It was there, between them, in the sudden awkward silences that would crop up.

This is stupid, Honey admonished herself. Why shouldn't I call my old friend for chemistry help? Who cares what used to be between us?

Lexi and Brian's story was well-known to all of the Bob-Whites. Even though it had broken her heart, Lexi had loved Brian so much that she had refused to let him sacrifice himself for her after she had moved back to California to care for her father after his stroke. Brian had never gotten over the loss and had made the grand gesture of traveling across the country on a train just before Christmas to make things right between them. Neither of them had forgotten the other during the year they were apart. Not the way Brian had forgotten Honey almost immediately after leaving for college...

Honey looked down at her chemistry textbook once again. All of those symbols for chemical bonds and charges and free base pairs might as well have been Greek symbols to her tired eyes and mind at that point. She needed to pass. More than that, she needed a good grade. Her academics were much more important than anything else. Besides, Brian had been her friend *first*.

Not exactly feeling mature, and actually quite surprised at that last petulant thought, Honey stood up, determinedly crossed the apartment to the wall phone in the kitchen, and picked up the receiver. She needed the help, and her academic career was too important for her to not call him. As she looked at the list of Bob-White phone numbers that hung above the phone and

began to dial Brian's, her heart suddenly started pounding. She realized that her body was suddenly in "fight or flight" mode, but she could not fathom why she was reacting this way to the simple act of calling an old friend.

"This is ridiculous. We're not going to talk about anything except for basic chemistry," Honey muttered to herself, as she defiantly put the phone to her ear and wondered why a vision of Dan suddenly flashed before her.

Honey and Dan shared a kinship that was surprising given the differences in their upbringings. One thread that ran through both childhoods, however, was abandonment. Dan was an orphan in reality, and Honey was an orphan in practice. Dan had lost his parents at a young age, his father to a jeep accident while he was stationed with the Army in Korea and his mother to a debilitating illness. Honey had been shunted from nurse to governess to boarding school to camp and had barely known her parents growing up. In some ways, Dan had been the luckier one, considering the close relationship that he had shared with each of his parents before their deaths. Each of the pair had essentially been loners growing up, Dan on the streets of New York City, and Honey, pale and sickly and unpopular with the other students at her camps and boarding schools. As a result, both treasured family and friends—and both Honey and Dan had found family and friendship in Sleepyside. The phoenix from the ashes, their relationship, was beautiful and real, no less real for the fact that it had not been expected by anyone, least of all herself, and no less real for the fact that everyone had thought that she and Brian would end up together.

After the second ring, Brian answered in a deep, confident baritone. After Honey identified herself, the tone of Brian's voice changed.

"Honey? Is everything all right?"

"Yes, everything is fine," she answered. "Well, sort of. I mean, nothing serious is wrong. I just don't understand my chemistry class. I mean, I was understanding it just fine up until recently. Then we hit the organic chemistry part of the class, and I've been having a little bit of trouble." Honey sighed. "Actually, a *lot* of trouble. Angela, my lab partner, isn't much better at it than I am, so we have been kind of muddling through it together, but she doesn't understand it well enough to really help me, and we've been having to get a lot of help from these two guys who share our lab table, and—" Honey knew that she was babbling, even more than usual, but she couldn't seem to stop. A torrent of what was affectionately called "Honey speak" was flying out of her mouth, even more rapidly than usual, and she was grateful when Brian finally interrupted.

"I got good marks in organic chemistry," Brian said, ignoring the fact that he had met his girlfriend because of that class, and the two had spent more than a little part of their early relationship together studying organic chemistry.

"I figured that you must have," Honey said. "You always get good grades in every class you take, Brian, but I know how important science is to you, because you are going to be a doctor and all, and so I just assumed that you must have gotten very good marks in your organic chemistry classes, and—" Honey knew she was doing it again, but the torrent of words just kept coming, and she was powerless to exert any kind of control whatsoever over them. She was relieved to hear Brian chuckle.

"I can help you," he said simply.

“Thanks, Brian!” Honey gushed. “That’s perfectly perfect, because I know how good you are at explaining things so that people will understand them.”

Again, Brian had a mental image of himself explaining organic chemistry to Lexi and her friend the very night that he had met the two of them in the library. All three of them had taken refuge there to study for an upcoming test. Lexi’s friend had recognized him from her section of the class and called him over to study with them. The rest had been history.

Now Honey wanted help...with organic chemistry of all things. He couldn’t help but draw parallels between the two situations. When he had been helping Lexi with organic chemistry, he had been attracted to her, but he had not expected anything to happen between them. There were many reasons for this, but one reason was Honey herself. He had always thought, even while he dated other girls at college, that eventually he would end up with Honey. Everyone had expected it, and he had, too. After he fell in love with Lexi, however, he had known better—he wasn’t meant to be with Honey after all. It didn’t matter what his friends and family wanted and expected. All that mattered was the fact that Brian loved Lexi. Things had been awkward between he and Honey after that, but now Honey needed help. He liked to teach, and he liked to help out his friends. Here was a chance to do both. If Honey needed his help with organic chemistry, then he wanted to help her. Plus, maybe it could help them get past the awkwardness.

“When do you want to get together?” Brian asked.

“When’s good for you?” Honey wanted to know. “You’re doing this out of the kindness of your heart, so I want to be as little bother as possible.”

“You’re not a bother,” he reassured her. “I don’t have any classes tomorrow. What about you?”

“Ahhh, the life of a senior, being able to schedule entire days without classes,” Honey teased. “My last class ends a little after one, and I could make it up to where you live by two. Would that be okay?”

“Yep. Do you know how to get here?”

“I know you’re on Broadway,” Honey answered.

“Yeah, just south of campus. The building is located at the corner of Broadway and West 113th. It’s on the northeast corner of the intersection, about four blocks or so from the 116th Street/Columbia University subway stop. Or, if you’d rather, I could meet you on campus, and we could go to the library.” Again, Brian tried to dispel the mental image of himself and Lexi ensconced in the library, leaning over an organic chemistry textbook together.

“Your dorm is fine. Unless...do you not want me to come to your place?” Honey asked and then nearly bit her tongue off. What had made her say that? Not only was it tactless, but it was also rather challenging.

“No,” Brian responded, sounding confused and unsure. “I was just trying to make things easier for you since the library is closer to the subway stop, but if you...”

“No, Brian, that’s fine,” Honey interrupted, sad to hear the bewilderment and even a touch of hurt in Brian’s voice. “I don’t know what made me say that. If you don’t mind, though, I would like to come see your dorm room. I’ve been back in the City for almost eight months, and I haven’t even seen where you live.”

“We’ll rectify that tomorrow,” Brian said.

“That sounds good,” Honey said. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Brian. And I do really appreciate the help. Will Lexi be around?”

“No, she has a lab class,” he explained. He didn’t mention that he had purposely suggested that Honey come over at a time when he knew that Lexi would not be around. He didn’t understand why he felt the need to meet when he knew that his girlfriend was busy, and he didn’t want to think about it. Another thing that he didn’t understand was why he was suddenly nervous at the thought that Honey Wheeler was coming to his dorm room tomorrow. Why should he be nervous at the thought of spending an afternoon studying with an old friend? It wasn’t like it was a date.

“Okay, well, at least I will get to see you tomorrow then,” Honey said, completely oblivious to Brian’s turmoil, and herself trying to understand her own maelstrom of emotions, including the unexpected feeling of relief that Lexi wouldn’t be around.

“Okay,” Brian echoed. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow,” Honey murmured thoughtfully as she hung up the phone and stared at the white wall of her kitchen. “Tomorrow.”

* * *

“Tomorrow” dawned a beautiful early spring day. The weather was starting to become warm and balmy as it shook the chill of winter off. The sky was a little more blue and a little less gray, which fit Honey’s new mood. The thought of failing her general chemistry course because of one stupid section had been hanging over her head, much like a gray cloud. Now, knowing that she was going to get help from an old friend, she felt that the cloud had gone away and blue sky replaced it.

When she had awoken that morning to see that the sun was shining, she had been almost giddy. Feeling slap-happy, that morning in the shower she had talked to herself non-stop as she washed her hair. “Unfortunately, I’m failing general chemistry. Fortunately, I have a friend who can help. Unfortunately, things have been kinda weird between us. Fortunately, we’re good enough friends that that doesn’t matter. Unfortunately...” And so it had gone on, Honey playing a game with herself in her silly mood.

After her last class, she had hurried to the subway to take the Uptown train toward Columbia. She now was walking down the street from the subway stop and watching the numbers on the buildings. As the numbers got closer to matching the address that she had for Brian, she was pretty sure that she could see the building in the distance. It was a newer building and rose fourteen stories above the bustling street below. It was light tan brick, and the frontispiece of the building held three archways above wide doorways. Each doorway was lined with a pseudo column on either side, and Honey had to admit that the effect was impressive. It was not how one would picture the average college residence hall, but Honey found that she liked it.

She entered the lobby and looked around. The entrance ceiling curved upward slightly above a floor of stone tiles. Like the frontispiece outside, the attention to detail displayed in the lobby also was impressive. Although Honey was surrounded in new and relatively luxurious

surroundings in the Marymount Manhattan Apartment, she still liked this building, called the Broadway Residence Hall, and found it comfortable-looking and yet somewhat stylish.

Brian had promised that he would be waiting for her in the lobby, and as she looked around, she saw him sitting in one of the ubiquitous sofas that seemed to adorn the lobby of all New York City apartment buildings. They looked inviting, but still had the utilitarian, institutionalized look that public furniture always seemed to have.

Brian saw her then, stood up, and crossed the room with a quick step. “Hi, Honey,” he greeted her. “Did you find it okay?”

Honey nodded. “I did. It’s very convenient to the subway line, as you said.” After an awkward pause where they both stared at each other for a moment, Honey finally spoke again. “So, it’s good to see you,” she said, meaning every word. “I haven’t seen you since...well, since Christmas, I guess.”

“That’s when I saw everyone last,” Brian said, and Honey knew that “everyone” referred to the Bob-Whites. “None of our spring breaks seemed to line up. Did you go home for spring break?”

“Mother and Daddy had some events here in town they wanted me to attend with them, so I stayed in the penthouse for the first weekend. Dan had a project that he was working on with some partners, so that worked out well. And then we both spent the week in Sleepyside after that. Dan stayed with Regan above the garage for a couple of days, because Regan asked him to. I think he wants him to be closer than Mr. Maypenny’s when he comes home to visit now.”

“I bet you like it when he’s that much closer to the Manor House,” Brian said with a knowing grin.

Honey laughed at that comment. “Well, it doesn’t hurt.” *But it’s not like you and Lexi, staying under the same roof at Crabapple Farm when you go back to Sleepyside,* she thought, with a bitterness that surprised her. Out loud, she said lightly, “But no one can get as close as you and Lexi, seeing as how you are both under the same roof when you go home.”

Brian looked a little uncomfortable at this statement, and Honey was puzzled as to why. It was certainly a true enough statement. After her father had died, Lexi had decided to rent out their little bungalow in Pacific Palisades, California, to help pay for the mortgage and school. As a result, during breaks and times that Columbia University dorms were closed, Brian’s girlfriend stayed in the downstairs guest room at Crabapple Farm. As always, Mrs. Belden proved how stretchy the walls of her home were and had extended her legendary hospitality when she learned that the young orphan needed some place that she could call, if not home, then at least home base. At the time that Lexi had moved in, Honey had experienced a tinge of jealousy, which had confused her, given her solid relationship with Dan Mangan. In truth, that niggling of jealousy still baffled her.

Finally, Brian broke the awkward silence. “So, do you want to come upstairs?”

Honey nodded. “I do. I don’t think I’ve ever been inside the dorm room of a resident assistant. You’re big man on campus, huh, Brian?” She grinned up at him, and Brian found that he liked her good-natured teasing.

“Yep,” he said, pretending to strut and preen, “that’s me, BMOC. In fact, I’ve been tagged with the title, and that’s all they call me around here.” His dark eyes twinkled mischievously.

Honey giggled as the two of them headed toward the bank of elevators. “I bet they do,” she said as she watched Brian stab the “up” button. The two rode up to the eighth floor in companionable silence before stepping out of the elevator car and into a plainly decorated corridor. It was just a short few steps until they were standing in front of the room designated each year for the resident assistant.

Brian used his key, and soon Honey was standing on the other side of the door, thinking how much this room reflected Brian’s personality. She found it comfortingly reassuring that Brian had not changed so much in his nearly four years at school. Science and medical textbooks lined the shelves, and the room was done in dark blues. A wooden desk sat with an open laptop computer, some sort of essay displayed on the computer screen. Next to the laptop was a book that surprised Honey, as it was not medical or scientific in nature. She wondered why Brian was reading *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy*. She hadn’t known that Brian had an interest in the Navy.

Her eyes continued to roam about the room. A calendar was hung above the desk, presumably a calendar featuring sea life, as March’s picture was a pair of lobsters in their underwater habitat. Papers with chemical notations and formulas and still more papers with anatomical notations were scattered across the desk, a testament to Brian’s busy study schedule. A half-filled *Times* crossword puzzle was a testament that Brian’s relaxing pursuits were still of the scholarly variety.

Windows overlooked a busy New York City street below. Honey crossed the room, her footsteps quietly treading on a dark blue rug remnant, and looked out the window. Even from her remote viewing position of eight stories up, Honey could feel the hustle and the bustle of the thriving metropolis below her. In the distance, she could see the campus of Columbia University. Although the buildings of the campus did not look particularly academic, she could appreciate that they were hallowed halls of education steeped in tradition.

She turned and smiled at Brian as she gracefully slid her backpack off of her back and onto the floor.

“I like it. It’s very you.”

“Very me?” Brian’s eyebrows shot up in surprise, and Honey could not help but think how much he looked like his younger siblings when he did that, despite the difference in coloring.

Honey nodded. “Yes. Whenever I see this particular shade of deep, dark blue, I always think of you.” She lifted her hands in a gesture toward the shelves of scientific and medical books. “And no room of yours would be complete without a collection of books devoted to science and medicine.”

Brian grinned. “I suppose that you could probably say that about any student about to enter medical school.”

Honey laughed. “Touché. But you know what I mean.”

Brian chuckled with her. “Yeah, I think I do.”

“By the way, I hear that you got accepted to the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. That’s really impressive, Brian.”

Brian blushed, and once again Honey was reminded of Trixie, who invariably blushed at compliments. “Thank you,” he said. “I was pretty happy to get accepted. Although, now that I am looking at the terrifying loans that go with medical school, I’m wondering if I’m crazy.”

“I wouldn’t worry about that,” Honey said. “You’ll be able to pay them off when you’re a famous doctor. You’ll discover a cure or invent some new technique to do a heart transplant or something.”

“You have a lot of confidence in me,” Brian said.

“Yeah, I do,” Honey replied softly. The comfortable feeling they had been sharing suddenly fled, and awkwardness descended on them once again. The undercurrents running between them were palpable, and each of them wondered exactly what the other was thinking. Ever since Brian had started dating, there had been a white elephant in the room each time that they found themselves in the other’s company. This had been going on for far too long, and Honey briefly wondered why they had never bothered to clear the air before. Certainly, a friendship such as theirs deserved at least that. Honey was about to open her mouth and broach the subject, but Brian spoke first.

“So, do you want to get down to business?” Suddenly, Brian looked embarrassed at what he had just asked, and Honey was confused for a moment. “I mean, with the organic chemistry.” At those explanatory words, Honey realized what Brian must have been thinking, and a rosy blush tinged her cheeks as the room became suddenly uncomfortably warm.

“Yeah, with the organic chemistry,” Honey echoed as she slipped off her jacket and carefully set it over the desk chair, her back to Brian. It was then that she noticed the watch that she had given him a few Christmases ago sitting among the pile of papers. *Mementos of things past*, she thought. *Things long gone*. She took a deep breath to steady herself and then turned toward him. “So, do you, umm, want to study here, or should we go to a study lounge or something?”

“I don’t mind staying here and studying if you don’t,” Brian said. “The study rooms generally have a little bit of activity going on in them, and it always seems to be enough to wreck my concentration. There is more room there, though, if you want to go there.”

Honey shook her head. “No. If you have to keep explaining things to me, then we would only be disturbing those in there who want it to be quiet. This is fine.”

“Okay,” Brian said. Both were keenly aware of the tension remaining in the room, but as neither one of them knew exactly what to do to diffuse it, they each swallowed their nervousness, spread their books and papers out on the floor, and began to tackle chemistry.

After two hours of Brian’s tutelage, Honey was starting to feel like she might have a grasp, if tenuous, on the introductory organic chemistry material. She definitely had a grasp on the structure of aldehydes versus ketones and was beginning to get the nomenclature of organic molecules down cold. Even the various mechanism reactions were starting to seem a little less like Greek.

The two were sprawled on their stomachs next to each other on the floor, their books and papers strewn about around them, when Honey rolled away from Brian onto her back and

stretched both her arms and her legs into the air. She finally settled down on her back and stared up at the ceiling.

“Had enough yet?” Brian said with a grin, trying to ignore how Honey looked in her low-rise jeans and tight-fitting green sweater.

Honey smiled in return. “I have, but unfortunately, I think I still need to keep going.”

“How about a break then?” Brian asked. “I can get something from one of the snack machines if you want.”

“I definitely could use a break,” Honey agreed. “But I’d like to stretch my legs, too. Mind if I came with you?”

“Well, the kitchen with the snack machines is just across the hall, so it won’t give you much of a chance to stretch your legs,” Brian said.

“Well, what about if we took a longer walk?” Honey asked. “Maybe go to a kitchen on another floor?”

Brian’s eyes strayed involuntarily to the clock, an action that Honey did not miss. The meaning of the glance was not lost on Honey, either.

“If you have some where else that you have to be...” Honey began.

Brian immediately shook his head. “No, it’s not that at all. I just don’t want you to have to go back home in the dark.”

Honey smiled. Brian was always so thoughtful. Of course, he’d be worried about her getting home safe. “That’s nice of you to worry about me, Brian, but I’ll be fine.”

“I know, I know,” Brian said ruefully. “I’m worrying for nothing, acting like the voice of reason, the older brother and all-around party pooper of the Bob-Whites of the Glen. Of course you’ll be fine. You grew up here, and you’ve been living here for the last eight months.”

“For one thing, I would never call you a party pooper. And being the voice of reason for someone like your sister is not a bad thing.” She grinned at that. “Actually, what I meant was that Dan is meeting me, and we’re going to go out to eat at a place that he really likes near here. So, I’ll be Dan’s problem, not yours.”

“You could never be a problem, Honey,” Brian said, even as he felt a small pang at the mention of Dan. He refused to stop and analyze why hearing the name of one of his best friends would cause such a pang. He was used to seeing Honey and Dan together. Plus, he was very happy with Lexi. Why should he care that Dan was meeting Honey for dinner?

“Well, tell that to Dan,” Honey said with a laugh, bringing him out of his reverie.

“I am most definitely sure that Dan does not think you are a problem,” Brian said, standing up. He held out his hand and helped Honey stand up from her prone position on the floor. She stood with her usual grace.

“So, do you want to take a walk around the residence hall?” Brian asked. “I could take you up to the fourteenth floor. It has a few different lounges and a kitchen, plus a pretty good view.”

“It sounds good,” Honey said, not bothering to explain that she lived on the 23rd floor of her building and had a pretty good view herself. She followed Brian out of the room to the

elevators. As the two waited for the elevator to arrive, they made small talk about recent visits to Sleepyside and news from her brother and his sister, who were both attending college at Michigan State University. The topic of Brian's graduation came up, and Honey found herself wondering if she would get to see her old childhood friend accept his college diploma. The elevator arrived, and the two stepped into the crowded space. It stopped on almost every floor, so it took some time for them to arrive on the fourteenth floor. Two students exited with them and headed toward the open lounge while Brian led Honey on a tour around the floor, including stops to look out of the windows to get their birds' eye view of New York City.

Honey appreciated the simple décor in the rather new building, Columbia's newest residence hall. It managed to be modern and classic at the same time, but no matter how well-appointed and tastefully done it was, the décor could not shake its institutional origins.

The two students eventually made their way around the top floor of the residence hall, and Brian led Honey into the kitchen, where they chose sodas from the soda machine and trail mix and Fig Newtons from the vending machine. Honey glanced at the bulletin board, which advertised summer sublets, book sales, local concerts, and a flyer for a residence hall fundraiser, which advertised a mock beauty pageant and a bachelor auction.

"You going up for auction?" Honey asked with a teasing grin, waving a delicate hand toward the bright pink flyer.

"Residents assistants are running the thing. I'm exempt," Brian said with an answering grin.

The two decided to sit down in the closest lounge and eat their snacks rather than take them back to Brian's room.

"There's nothing better than a snack that mixes good sources of protein and iron with candy," Brian commented as he threw a handful of trail mix, complete with candy-coated chocolate candies, into his mouth.

"Oh, yeah?" Honey asked.

"Yep. Iron is a great source of energy, which helps you study, and the nuts and raisins are full of them. And who doesn't want a little chocolate when they're studying?"

Honey had to agree, and the two relaxed while finishing their snacks and sodas. Honey looked at her watch and realized that it was much later than she thought that it was.

"It's almost five. I'd better get downstairs and get packed up so that I can meet Dan at the restaurant."

"He's not going to meet you here and walk with you?" Brian asked, his eyebrows shooting up in surprise.

Honey herself was surprised at Brian's reaction. "No. Why?"

"Oh, well, it's just that it'll be dark out soon, and..." At Honey's grin, Brian stopped and his own lips curved into a rueful smile. "Responsible and boring Brian at your service, huh?"

"No, I don't think that you're boring at all, Brian. Responsible? Yes. Boring? No. I like that you worry about your friends. It means you care," Honey said.

“I do care, Honey.” The intensity of Brian’s declaration surprised them both, and Brian immediately backtracked. “I mean, well, all of the Bob-Whites of mean a lot to me,” he added lamely.

“I know we do, Brian. And, like I said, I appreciate that you worry about us. But I’ll be fine, I promise. The restaurant isn’t far from the subway stop, so it just seemed like a waste for Dan to walk all the way here just to walk all the way back. Plus, with Daylight Saving Time going into effect so early, it’s not so dark.”

“I know you’re a big girl, Honey, and that you can take care of yourself. Like I said, I know that you grew up here and all, but it *is* going to get dark out pretty soon.” Brian stopped his speech abruptly and said, “Anyway, would you mind if I walked you to the subway stop?”

“But, Brian,” Honey protested, “I’ve already taken up too much of your time. I’m sure that you must have a lot of homework and studying of your own to do.”

Brian shrugged. “Like I said yesterday, I don’t have any classes on Thursdays, so I was able to spend a good portion of the morning studying.” He grinned at her in a decidedly un-Brian way. “Besides, I think I have senioritis.”

Honey gave a shout of surprised laughter. “Brian Belden? Senioritis? That takes the cake. Well, I feel the need to encourage your senioritis for some perverse reason, even though I guess I should be talking you out of it, so I will accept your kind and generous and lovely offer to walk me to the subway stop.”

The two of them, feeling much more comfortable around each other after Brian’s senioritis confession, laughed companionably as they threw their empty soda cans into the recycle bin and their wrappers in the trash and headed back to the eighth floor. Once back in Brian’s room, Honey quickly gathered up all of her papers and books and hurriedly stuffed them into her backpack. Brian handed Honey her coat and shrugged into his.

“Are you sure you want to walk me to the subway stop?” Honey asked as she pulled her long honey-colored hair out of the back of her jacket before picking up her backpack and hefting it onto her shoulders.

“Absolutely,” Brian assured her. “Plus, I can surprise Lexi outside of her lab class and walk her home.”

Honey did not allow her smile to falter at the mention of Lexi. “Okay, then. Let’s go.”

With his own smile, Brian followed her out the door thinking how nice it had been to spend a few hours with just Honey. Something he had not done in a very long time.

Additional Author’s Notes: Ron and Shane are homages to my two favorite lab partners from my days at Michigan State. Ron, who did play a mean game of tennis, was an invaluable help in organic chem lab. “Shane” was the best microbiology lab partner a girl could ever have—so much so that we remained lab partners for two whole years because we kept ending up in the same microbiology lab classes. My carryover items were: Fig Newtons (#2.1), a calendar (SA#5), an essay (#2.2), Daylight Saving Time (#2.3), and finding a sweet memento from someone’s past (#2.4).

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