

Author's Notes: This is rated Jix Yellow Star as a result of some minor profanities. As always Susan rocks for her speedy edit, and, as always, I got creative with my use of commas. ;)

Right To Be Wrong

by Dana

*I've got a right to be wrong
My mistakes will make me strong
I'm stepping out into the great unknown
I'm feeling wings though I've never flown*
-Joss Stone, "Right To Be Wrong"

"So...you have a boyfriend?"

"Nope," Di said, but she didn't bother to explain that, until recently, she did have a boyfriend whom she loved very much. Something inside of her tightened as she saw the calculating look appear on her companion's face at her answer.

"Cool," he said, taking another drink of his beer.

Diana was beginning to wonder why she had traded her Friday nights with Mart for this meat market.

College had awakened a lot of feelings within Diana. Feelings that she was not entirely sure how to deal with, and when they had overwhelmed her, she had simply run with them, not knowing what else to do. One thing that had bothered Diana was Mart's lack of desire to go out on Friday nights. When they were in high school, they had always gone out on Friday nights. Diana had assumed that not only would those Friday nights out resume when they were both together again, but that they would also be a thousand times better in college than high school. After all, there were so many more places to go in Ithaca than in Sleepyside, there were no curfews, no parents. But instead, after a week of classes, studying, and working at his job, Mart didn't want to go out. Since his roommates generally went out every Friday night, he wanted to stay in with Diana, where they could enjoy the apartment all to themselves.

Di's friends, however, went out every Friday night, and they wanted Di to go with them. Mart was always invited, but he rarely wanted to go. Diana had had to turn them down time and time again, and it began to wear on her.

Tonight was Diana's fourth Friday night as a "free agent," as everyone wanted to call her newly single status. One Friday night had been spent in Sleepyside during the Thanksgiving break, but the other three Friday nights had been spent in various bars and clubs in Ithaca with her friends.

With her long, thick, shiny, blue-black hair, violet eyes, and beautiful Irish pixie looks, guys naturally gravitated to Diana. It wasn't like high school, where they had been too afraid of her beauty to approach her or were aware of her relationship with Mart Belden. Here at college, fueled by liquid courage, the guys in the bars did not hesitate to approach her.

Sometimes, she was chatting with her friends and could gracefully side step their advances. Other times, like now, all of her friends happened to be on the dance floor, and she was alone at the table. These times were when Diana felt like she had a neon sign over head that brightly flashed, "Hit On Me."

The guy who had decided to join her tonight was rather attractive, if annoyingly drunk. He had said his name was Ken. Or maybe it was Glenn. Ben? Diana decided that she didn't care. She continued to do what she had been doing since he had sat down, that is, her eyes continued to scan the dance floor and elsewhere in the small club to see if she could catch one of her friends' eyes and signal to them that she needed backup. It was that that had caused her to miss the guy's introduction of himself.

I gave up my Friday nights with Mart for this? Diana asked herself, startled to realize that she felt that way. Mart had told her that the bar scene in Ithaca was no great shakes and mostly just a meat market, and that was why he did not particularly care to experience it every Friday night. But Diana had wanted to experience it anyway. Mart had been right, of course, but Diana knew that she had to be allowed to make her own mistakes.

No matter how costly they might turn out to be.

"So, where are you from?" Ken asked.

"New York," Di said, rather shortly as her eyes continued to roam the bar.

"Cool. Me, too," he said as if he had found a kindred spirit. "This is such a change from the big city."

"I didn't mean New York City," Di said. "I just meant New York in general."

"Well, we're *in* New York," the guy said with a bit of an attitude. "That doesn't tell me anything. We're *all* from New York."

"Oh, really," Di said with mock sweetness, batting her eyes. "My roommate happens to be from Canada. That's a whole other country, in case you weren't aware."

"Whatever, dude," Ken said, rolling his eyes. "If you don't want me here, all you have to do is say so."

Diana turned and looked at him, her violet eyes flashing. "I say so," she said tartly.

Whatever the guy's name was, he looked furious. "Beautiful girls are such frigid teases," he spat out.

"You're the one who sat down uninvited," Di retorted, pretty furious herself.

"Just because you're good looking doesn't give you the right to treat me like I'm some peasant boy not good enough to gaze upon you," the guy spewed.

"And just because you're a drunk asshole doesn't mean you have the right to hit on a girl just because she happens to be sitting alone," a male voice said from behind Di.

Di and Ken/Glenn/Ben each whirled around toward the sound of the newcomer's voice, surprised.

"Jason!" Di said, grateful that she finally had backup.

"I thought you said you didn't have a boyfriend," the drunk guy said accusingly as he stared at Di through slitted eyes.

"I don't," she said, glaring at him and feeling much more comfortable now that she was not alone.

Jason stared down at the obnoxious guy. “Look, I don’t have to be a girl’s boyfriend to realize that she doesn’t want to have anything to do with you. So, do yourself a favor and get out of here,” Jason stated in a low voice, but one that clearly meant business.

“You gonna make me?” Ken sneered.

“If I have to,” Jason said evenly.

“Jason, please don’t let this guy suck you into a fight. It’s not worth it,” she said, her violet eyes pleading with her friend. She was absolutely mortified that this was happening at all, but she could not even imagine how she would feel if a fight broke out and she was the cause.

“He’ll need to get up quietly and leave then,” Jason said, unwavering.

Ken stood and looked at Jason menacingly. “I don’t think so.”

“What’s going on here?” Josh, another one of the Ithaca College art majors, joined them just then.

“Is there a problem?” Brian, another Ithaca College student with whom Di hung out, walked up just behind Josh.

“Hey, guys, what’s going on?” Kelly and Sam wanted to know, joining the crowd at the table.

“Nothing at all,” Di said lightly. “Ken here was just keeping me company while you guys were all out on the dance floor, but he was just leaving.” She turned and looked at the scowling man beside her. Her face and voice were pleasant, but her eyes shot daggers at the boor. “Weren’t you, Ken?”

Ken looked around, clearly unhappy with giving up, but realizing that he was most definitely outnumbered. “It’s Kevin,” he said defiantly. “But, yeah. I was just leaving.” He picked up his beer and slunk away.

“What was that about?” Sam asked as she sat down next to Diana.

“Unwanted company again?” Kelly asked sympathetically as she sat down on the other side of Diana.

“Something like that,” Di said, not particularly wanting to talk about it, especially not in front of Jason, Josh, and Brian.

“We’ve really got to stop leaving you alone,” Sam remarked, making Di feel as if she was a toddler who needed babysitting.

Kelly was nodding. “You’re just too gorgeous. Guys will never leave you alone,” she said matter-of-factly, reaching for a mozzarella stick that was leftover from the appetizer platter that a few of them had ordered earlier before heading out to the dance floor.

Diana did not know what to say to that, so she sat rather awkwardly hoping that someone would change the subject quickly. It was Jason who came to her rescue once again.

“So, now that you babysat the table for these losers, what do you say you take a turn on the dance floor? Wanna dance?” Jason asked casually.

Di nodded happily. “Yeah, Jason. I’d like that,” she said as she stood up and moved around the table. Jason offered her his hand, and she took it. The two headed for the dance floor.

A particularly energetic song was playing, and Di threw herself into it. It was as though she was desperately trying to dance away all of the doubts she was feeling about herself and her decisions and her life in general. The harder she danced, the less she had to think about the creepy guys who hit on her, or how she could be cuddling Mart and watching a movie right now, or how her friends always seemed so willing to leave her sitting at the table to watch it while they were all dancing, or how all any guy seemed to see was her looks and not what was on the inside. All of that went away as she danced harder and faster and more furiously.

The song changed, and Di toned her dancing down somewhat, but she was still enjoying the frenzied release that it was providing. Di was barely aware of Jason dancing with her, but somewhere along the edges of her consciousness, she did note that he was a good dancer.

After about three songs, Di could not keep up the frenetic pace and finally slowed down. Jason looked at her, amused.

“Feel better?” he asked with a slow grin.

She smiled back, a tad bit embarrassed. “Yeah, actually, I do.” She shook her head and laughed self-effacingly. “I don’t quite know what came over me.”

“Frustration,” Jason said matter-of-factly.

Di nodded, not even bothering to wonder how Jason was so sure of that fact. He had to be just as frustrated with that lout’s obnoxious behavior as Di herself was.

After another song, Di was willing to admit that not only was she rather tired but that her anger and frustration—at the situation, at her decision, and at her life in general—had slowly ebbed away through her frenetic dancing, and she was ready to return to the table. Jason followed her.

When they returned to the table, Di and Jason found their friends engaged in a lively debate about Picasso’s Blue Period and its intricacies versus Van Gogh’s unique style.

“Only a bunch of art majors!” Jason said, pretending to be exasperated as he found a seat at the crowded table and grabbed a French fry from the newly delivered platter that sat in the middle of the scarred, wood table.

“*You* were an art major the last time I checked,” the tiny Lara, who looked demure but had the sharpest, wittiest tongue of the bunch, said dryly.

“Art education,” he corrected casually.

Kelly turned to Di, who had slid into a seat next to her. “Damn, girl! You can dance! You looked possessed out there.”

Di laughed, trying to downplay her exhibition on the dance floor. “Kevin irritated the heck out of me. I had to get all that negative energy out some how.”

Kevin—Lara’s Kevin—looked up, surprised. “What did I do now?” he asked.

Di shook her head. “Not you. Some drunk jerk named Kevin decided that it was more fun to sit and harass me than stay and get drunk at the bar.”

Lara looked disgusted. “Some guys just don’t get it,” she commented.

“Well, Jason came and saved the day,” Diana said lightly, once again wondering why this topic of conversation just would not die, “so all is good.”

“It was nothing,” Jason said. “And personally, I prefer Salvador Dali’s creative scenes more than anything from Picasso’s Blue Period any day.”

His comment was greeted by a chorus of “Salvador Dali? Are you kidding?” “You’re absolutely nuts!” and “An interesting observation. I’ll have to think about that one some more.” And the group was off debating the relative merits of Salvador Dali’s wild scenes versus Pablo Picasso interesting use of angles and cubes.

For the third time that night, Di realized that Jason had come to her rescue yet again. First, he had backed her up against that boorish Kevin, then he had taken her dancing when he sensed that she needed to get away from the table, and just now he had to have realized how uncomfortable she was and how she did not want to discuss Kevin’s behavior again. Why else would he have an inflammatory statement about Dali versus Picasso that was sure to get everyone talking about that and not about her earlier experience?

Di did not particularly have any opinions about Dali or Picasso, so she was happy to sit back and let the conversation and debate flow around her as her thoughts drifted.

And the direction in which they drifted surprised her.

* * * * *

Brooke and Diana were walking across campus to one of the snack shops for their Sunday evening dinner. The dormitory meal plan did not include Sunday dinner, as all of the cafeterias on campus were closed, so students had to fend for themselves. A lot of students elected to order pizza, and the many pizza places near campus did a brisk business on Sunday evenings. A lot of times, parents were returning their kids to campus after a weekend spent at home, and so they took their kids out to a restaurant in Ithaca or one of the nearby towns. A lot of kids opted to head to the snack shops on campus or simply subsist on microwave popcorn cooked in their dorm room microwaves. Usually Di and Brooke ordered pizza, but neither of them was in the mood for pizza that night, and they were both in the mood for a walk. The early December weather had become unseasonably warm with temperatures in the fifties, and after the cold spell that had gripped central New York for the last few weeks, it felt downright balmy. Brooke and Di were happy to get some fresh, spring-like air.

“I can’t believe that finals are next week,” Brooke commented.

“I know,” Di agreed. “Our first semester of college is just about over. In some ways, it feels like it just started yesterday, and in other ways, it feels like a million years ago.”

“I know what you mean,” Brooke murmured.

“I bet you’re looking forward to seeing Katie,” Diana said.

Brooke smiled, a happy, genuine smile. “Yeah. I’ll be so happy to see her with my own eyes. I remember how worried I was when I left Thunder Bay. I thought I’d never last a whole semester. I thought I’d be worried to death, but I survived.”

“And so did Katie,” Di said with satisfaction, even though she had never met her roommate’s younger sister. But Diana absolutely adored Brooke, and Brooke adored Katie, so Diana knew she was a special girl.

“And so did Katie,” Brooke repeated. “*That* is the important thing.” She was silent for a few moments and then said, “Actually, she’s thriving. She really took to her medication and with that new boyfriend of hers, she’s on top of the world.” Although there was happiness and pride in her voice, Diana, always in tune with this sort of thing, detected a bit of worry and tension underneath.

“But...” she prompted.

Brooke looked at Di with a somewhat startled expression on her face. She then relaxed and laughed. “I forgot what a mind reader you can be sometimes.”

Di smiled. “I’ve been told that before.”

“I’m just worried that something will happen, that Jimmy will break up with her or something, and her down will be a bigger down than ever before, you know?”

Di nodded. “I know what you mean, but you just have to keep a positive attitude about it. And if he does break up with her or something, she has your parents and her doctor, and you’re always just a phone call away.”

Katie did frequently call Brooke, and the two enjoyed a very close relationship. Di had even spoken to Katie a few times when Brooke had been at the library or elsewhere, and Di was impressed with Katie’s intelligence and sincerity.

“I know, but...” her voice trailed off.

“But you don’t want her hurting at all. I know,” Di said with a sigh.

Brooke looked at her roommate with a critical eye. “You’re talking about Mart, aren’t you?”

Diana nodded. “Yeah. I hate that I hurt him. I hate that more than anything on this earth,” Di’s voice reflected the agony she still felt over hurting Mart.

Brooke nodded in understanding. “I know, but you needed to do what you needed to do.”

Diana stopped in the middle of the pathway and faced Brooke, her face serious and anguished. “But what if I didn’t have to?” she whispered, her voice ragged.

Brooke shook her head violently. “Di,” she said, “you can *not* think that way. Everyone knows that you always regret the things you didn’t do, not the things that you did. What kind of relationship could you and Mart ever hope to have if you were always wondering ‘what if’? And he would always know that he didn’t have all of you. That there was some part of you not there in the relationship with him. And *that* would be worse.”

Di’s violet eyes filled with tears. “So, because I’m a stupid idiot who thought she needed something that she didn’t, it’s okay to hurt the person I love more than anyone on this stupid planet of ours?”

“You weren’t stupid,” Brooke assured her. “You needed to explore your feelings. And you needed to do that on your own terms. If you didn’t, if you tried to do it on someone else’s terms, or if you didn’t do it at all and tried to suppress what you were feeling, it would have been a lot worse. And I still don’t think you’re done exploring. You may feel like you made a mistake and that you’re done and all that, but you haven’t given yourself a chance. You need to stop worrying about what you’ve done and embrace *why* you did it,” Brooke reasoned as the two began walking toward the snack shop again.

“Maybe,” Di said, but she didn’t sound very convinced. More than anything, she wished that she had never broken up with Mart. But after some thought, she did have to grudgingly admit that Brooke was right about at least one thing. She thought back to how she felt at the beginning of the semester, and there was no way that she could have continued like that, with her feelings eating her away from the inside.

“At any rate,” Brooke was saying, “if you and Mart are meant to be, you will be, and if you aren’t, you won’t be, and no mild identity crisis as you enter college is going to affect that either way.”

Brooke sounded so confident and so assured, and her words echoed what Honey had told her earlier that fall, that Di took her words to heart, murmuring, “I guess you’re right.”

As they arrived at the snack shop and Brooke pulled open the door, they made a mutual yet silent agreement that all serious talk would cease immediately. Instead, they would revel in the Sunday evening gaiety that characterized the Ithaca College snack stations each Sunday evening. It was hard to be serious when the place was so loud that the noises rocked the rafters, college students were laughing and flirting with each other, and the heavenly smells of pizza, ice cream sundaes, and Buffalo wings filled the air.

And so, in the exhilarating and stimulating chaos of it all, Diana managed to forget for a little while that her life was not “perfectly perfect” and enjoy just being an eighteen-year-old on the brink of the rest of her life, something that should have been an exciting prospect.

And, as she and Brooke enjoyed their cheeseburgers and chocolate shakes, the shy but cute boy from her Introduction to American Literature class caught her eye and smiled. And the next thing Diana knew, she and Brooke were suddenly having ice cream sundaes at his table with him and his roommate.

As Brooke and Diana walked back from the snack station to their dorm building, Di reflected on how sweet Greg, the boy in her Introduction to American Literature class, was compared to the louts in the bar like Kevin and the countless others who decided that Di was dying for their company. She had noticed Greg all semester in their shared class but had never really gotten to know him.

She had been surprised to find out that he was from Croton-on-Hudson, just a hop, skip, and a jump away from where she had grown up in Sleepyside. Their high school sports teams had played each other frequently, and Greg had admitted that he was on the basketball team. Trixie, Honey, and Di had been to see several Sleepyside Junior-Senior High basketball games their senior year. Croton and Sleepyside, in the same high school athletic conference, had played each other twice, and Diana had actually been at one of the games. It was weird to think that she had seen him play, and now she shared a class with him, a few hundred miles and several hours away from where they had both grown up. It was also weird to think that they had grown up a few miles apart and were only meeting now that they had both left Westchester County. They had even talked about getting together during the upcoming winter break.

Brooke had watched the interaction between Greg Hartley and Diana, and she could tell that somehow, meeting him and comparing notes and teasing each other about their high school rivalries had somehow calmed Diana’s doubts. The dynamic between Greg and Diana had not been romantic, but it had somehow opened Diana to being receptive to understanding that she did not have to persecute herself for wanting to spread her wings and fly a bit. Brooke had been pleased at the transformation that she had seen in Diana as the meal had worn on.

And Greg's roommate is also cute, Brooke reflected with a smile. Brooke did not want to get tied down with any one person and had been aware of Diana's *almost* subtle attempts to hook her up with Cooper Houghton, Mart's roommate, and Sam and Liz's completely obvious attempts to hook her up with Jason, musician and artist extraordinaire. She was extremely grateful that she had decided not to get herself hooked up with Coop, although the prospect had actually been a pleasant one. But how awkward would that be to be dating Mart's roommate now that he and Diana had broken up?

And, although she did not have any solid proof, she got the feeling that Jason was attracted to someone else—and Brooke suspected that someone was Diana herself, although she knew she could be completely wrong on that count. She also had Jason pegged as a sort of defender of damsels-in-distress kind of guy, and Di's gorgeous looks, delicate nature, and recent vulnerability lent themselves to feeding that kind of a nature in men, despite the fact that Diana was, in reality, no damsel in distress. So, Jason actually may have not felt anything personally toward Diana, and he was just acting in his nature. Either way, it had been rather easy to resist Liz and Sam's awkward attempts at matchmaking.

But Billy Warner, Greg's roommate...well, Billy could have her rethinking her decision to stay away from guys until the end of her freshman year, when she knew if she could handle the workload of college. Billy was from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and had gone hunting and fishing in Thunder Bay many times. He loved the area, respected the Canadian way of life, lived for hockey, and had a rugged realism that really drew Brooke. Cooper had appreciated all of those things as well, growing up near the Canadian border as he had, but there was a chemistry with Billy that she had never felt before, which, quite frankly and surprisingly, left her a little breathless. It frightened Brooke a bit, because this did not fit into her carefully planned timetable, but it also exhilarated her. And Brooke never really believed that life could be pigeon-holed into schedules and timetables and planning.

Billy and Greg lived in the Quad dormitory complex in Tallcott Hall, not very far from East Tower dormitory where Diana and Brooke lived. Billy was in a different section of the science class that Brooke was taking, and he had already offered to get together to study with her for their upcoming final, which was to take place in a mere nine days. Likewise, Greg had offered to get together with Diana to study for their Introduction to American Literature final, which was coming up in eight days.

In terms of finals, Diana was lucky. Only three of her five classes had traditional written finals. Her Introduction to Drawing class required her to turn in a portfolio of her drawings sketched throughout the semester, and Di was already finished with that. Her philosophy class had a take-home essay exam that she would have one week to work on. It needed to be turned in by the time the final exam for that class would have ended had the professor decided to utilize the traditional exam format and time. He would give them the essay questions at their last class session.

Di knew that the take-home essay test would not be any easier than a traditional exam, and that it might even be harder, but having a full week to work on it gave her a sense of relief. Diana had never tested very well, and studying for traditional exams had never been her strong point. Mart had tried to teach her study techniques and tips, but the ability to study effectively for exams was a somewhat naturally inherited trait and not necessarily something one could learn. Diana, being extremely right-brained, was sure of this, no matter what Mart said. Mart was naturally left-brained and very organized and often could not understand why Diana just did

not “get” some study techniques. And it had nothing to do with not being smart or intelligent, because, despite some popular notions, Diana *was* smart.

But Diana was not thinking of left-brained or right-brained or studying or upcoming finals or even Mart Belden. She was thinking about spreading her wings, trying new things, and meeting handsome and articulate guys who could change your thinking in a mere hour or so over ice cream sundaes.

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“Mart? It’s Di. Please don’t hang up,” Diana said quickly into the phone after Mart had answered. Di noted that he sounded rather cheerful, and she was relieved that he seemed to be feeling better.

Mart, who *had* been feeling rather cheerful for the first time in a long time over an exceptional grade in his crop and soil science class, stiffened.

“I’m a little bit more mature than that,” Mart said scathingly. Diana, on her end, winced at his tone.

“I know that,” she said, wondering why she had thought this was a good idea.

There was a moment of silence on the line as Mart waited to hear what Di had to say, and Diana tried to regain her composure and say it.

“I was...I was hoping that maybe we could get together and talk, before we both get caught up in studying for finals and head back to Sleepyside,” Di said, closing her eyes and holding her breath as she waited for Mart’s response, although she pretty much knew what that response was going to be.

“I don’t see what the point would be, Di,” Mart finally said.

Di opened her eyes. “The point would be that no matter what, we were always friends. And we promised each other that we would always *be* friends. And I hate that we’re not friends right now.”

“You hate it, do you?” Mart asked, not even trying to keep the bitterness out of his voice. “Well, I hate it that we’re not friends, too. I hate it that you’re not my girlfriend. I hate it that I looked forward for so long to the day that you and I would be together on campus and that turned out to be a joke. I hate that you dumped me. And I hate wondering *who* you dumped me for!”

Mart was angry enough to let that slip, when he had vowed that he would never sound so pathetic in front of Di. He shook his head, furious with himself.

On the other end of the phone line, Diana was actually shocked into silence. It had never occurred to her that Mart might have actually thought that she left him for someone else, because it had never occurred to her to leave him for someone else. Although, she realized, that line of thinking on Mart’s part was understandable. That was probably a lot easier to believe than Diana “just needed her space.” Even though that had been the absolute truth.

Mart mistook her silence for an admission of guilt. “You know what, it doesn’t matter what his name is. I don’t really care.” What Mart hated the most was that he *did* care. And the fact that he knew that it was obvious to Di that he cared also made him furious.

Di felt an initial surge of anger that Mart would just assume that about her, but it was quickly followed by the knowledge that he was in a lot of pain and reacting to that pain. The anger ebbed out of her, replaced by a profound sadness.

“There is no one else, Mart. I swear,” Diana said softly.

It was the softness of her voice that gave Mart pause. And, inexplicably, it caused his anger to fade away as well. To the point that he found himself saying, “Where and when do you want to meet, Di?”

Di was so surprised that she did not answer at first.

“Di?” Mart asked. “Where and when?”

“Umm, you know how you said Coop was willing to loan you his car anytime he didn’t need it? I know this is kind of forward, but if he’s not using it, well, do you think, that is, maybe...” *Just spit it out, Di!* she scolded herself and then proceeded to do just that. “Do you want to pick me up, and maybe we can go for a drive? We haven’t done that in a long time.” As soon as the words were out of her mouth, she regretted it. They had not done *anything* in a long time. And that was *her* fault and no one else’s.

“That’s fine,” he said, and Di could hear something akin to defeat in his voice. The sound caused involuntary tears to well up in her eyes. “Coop walked up to the library, and he left his car keys. He told me if I needed to run errands, I could use it.”

“Okay, I’ll see you in a little bit,” she said, feeling a bit subdued herself, although she was also feeling very grateful and appreciative that he had accepted her invitation.

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The drive was a pretty one, even without the colorful fall foliage that always made this particular route a spectacular scenic drive in the fall. Diana and Mart spent a lot of time looking at the rolling countryside and the evergreens, the cows in their pastures, and the horses in their fields. As pretty as the scenery was, it was not the reason for their silence. Truth be told, neither one of them particularly understood the silence.

Mart knew that Diana had wanted to talk, and he had—foolishly it seemed—assumed that she would actually, you know, *talk*. Diana had not truly believed that Mart would actually agree to meet her, and she suddenly found herself tongue tied in his presence.

“So, how does your final exam schedule look?” she finally asked, figuring it was a safe topic.

“I’ve kept up pretty well during the semester, so it shouldn’t be too bad,” Mart said as he negotiated a hairpin curve in the road. “My nutrition class should be pretty easy. It’s a required course for my major, but I really looked forward to taking it so that I could kind of get a perspective about how the students at Jim’s school might view nutrition, depending on their backgrounds. I thought that might be a good insight to have.

“I had to take organic chemistry this semester as a prereq for a course I’m taking in the spring, and, boy, is it killing me! There’s just something about learning all of those aldehydes and ketones and things that’s a hang up for me for some reason.”

Di shuddered. “I don’t even like *hearing* words like aldehydes and ketones, let alone being tested on them!”

Mart laughed. “Count me in on that sentiment! Although, Professor Ganem is pretty cool. And the lab course is actually helping me out a lot, too. I’ve already done the practical in that one and got an A.”

Di smiled, happy to hear Mart actually laughing—and in her presence no less—and even happier to hear that he had gotten an A in one of the classes that had been worrying him since before the semester began. “That’s great, Mart,” she enthused. “What about the rest of them?”

“My communications class isn’t too bad,” Mart said. “It’s been pretty interesting. I’m not worried about that one. And my hums class isn’t bad.” Mart pronounced “hums” as “humes,” short for humanities. “I just have to balance my studying between my math class and my organic chem class. That will be the challenge. What about you? How are your first college finals shaping up?”

“Well,” Diana began, “my philosophy class has a take-home essay exam that we have a week to complete. I already finished my drawing portfolio for my Intro to Drawing class, so I just have to turn that in to the department by next Tuesday, the day that the exam for that class would be if we had a traditional exam. That just leaves my poli sci class, my art history class, and my English class to study for.”

Mart nodded. “That beats having to study for all five your first time out,” he commented.

“Yeah, Brooke has four classes, but she has traditional exams in all four of them. And they’re science and math and stuff.” Di wrinkled her nose, indicating how she felt on that subject.

After exhausting the subject of final exams and how their roommates were doing, Mart and Di fell back into silence. But, this time, it was a more comfortable silence than before. The conversation had been a lot like their friendly conversations in the past, and it did a lot to remind them that they had been friends before they had become lovers. It was a reassuring thought for both of them.

Mart negotiated a few more turns, and Di stared at the scenery outside her window.

“I miss you,” she said, surprising herself with the ease with which she said it. But it felt right. She continued to stare out the window, though, scared of what Mart’s reaction might be.

Mart himself closed his eyes briefly and then turned his concentration back toward the road.

“I miss you, too,” he finally said.

Di closed her eyes in relief and smiled.

“I know I hurt you. I know I can never take it back. I’m sorry,” Di said, gaining courage.

Mart sighed. “Do you want absolution, Diana? Are you asking for my forgiveness? What are you looking for?”

Di turned to look at him, her violet eyes wide. “Of course I want your forgiveness. But I’m not for asking it, and I know that I don’t deserve it. I...I just wanted you to know that I’m

sorry. If I could have done what I... what I needed to do...without hurting you, I hope you know that I would have.”

“I would like to think that, Di, but...” Mart paused. “Well, I guess I just don’t understand why you needed to do what you did, so I don’t understand why I had to be hurt at all. I don’t understand why you couldn’t do what you needed to do as my girlfriend. It makes me feel like I must have stifled you somehow.” Diana started to protest, but Mart anticipated her argument. “I know that you said that that’s not true, but you have to understand where I’m coming from,” he stated.

Di was silent for a moment. “I know that this has got to be confusing for you. It’s confusing for me,” Di admitted. “And I don’t even think I can put it into words. I know that I was incoherent mess the night that I...” Diana trailed off, somehow unable to say the words *broke up with you*. “The night that I tried to explain why I needed to be by myself to figure things out. I know I made a mess of things. It’s hard to explain something when you don’t fully understand it yourself.

“But I’ve had time to think about things since then, and I think maybe I can be a little more coherent. You may never fully understand it, Mart, because I’m not sure that *I’ll* ever fully understand it. But, even though I didn’t understand what I was feeling, I *did* know what I needed to do. And talking to some trusted friends of mine, I realized that I had to trust that instinct.”

“And you followed that instinct,” Mart said. “You broke up with me.”

Di nodded. “Yes,” she whispered. “I know you don’t believe me, but it *did* hurt me. I was confused, I knew I was hurting you, and yet something inside me kept propelling me forward. It was like watching a train wreck, and *I* was driving the train.”

Di took a deep breath. “I guess it’s because I was always Trixie’s friend or Mart’s girlfriend or half of ‘Mart and Diana,’ and suddenly I had this opportunity to be just Diana, and that feeling just kept growing. I want to try being just Diana for a while. And it’s not a reflection on you. You’ve been the most wonderful boyfriend in the world. But I can’t be Diana if I’m half of Mart and Diana.

“And I may very well regret that decision in the future, but I thought that I would regret it more if I didn’t follow my heart. And I didn’t know how I could be a good girlfriend to you if I had all of this... this...*stuff* in my head. And I thought you deserved better.”

During Diana’s speech, Mart had pulled the car off to the side of the road so that he could concentrate fully on what she was saying. Now, he looked at her for a long time before he finally spoke.

“I guess I understand a little better now. And I’m glad that it wasn’t over some other guy,” Mart admitted. “But as much as I love you, Di, I don’t know if I can wait for you to work through whatever this is.”

Di swallowed. “I know. I understand. But I want you to know that no matter what happens, I love you. And you’re still my best friend.”

A lump arose in Mart’s throat. “I love you, too,” he said hoarsely. “And you’re still my best friend.”

Di gave Mart a tentative hug that soon turned into a warm and loving embrace. Both of them knew that no matter what happened, whether they got back together or not, they were going to be okay. And the bond of their friendship could never be broken.

The two finally pulled apart, and Di looked at him. “I may be wrong, but, well, I’ve got a right to be wrong. I need to make my own mistakes, and I need to know they’re my own.”

Mart nodded and pulled her back into the warm embrace.

I'm feeling wings though I've never flown...

More Author's Notes: Again, never attended Ithaca College, never even visited the campus, yadda yadda yadda. Any mistakes I've made in portraying student life at Ithaca College are my own based on my own experience at Michigan State. If I looked up my question on the Ithaca College website and could not find an answer, I improvised based on my own college experience.

Lyrics from "Right To Be Wrong," performed by Joss Stone from the album *Mind, Body, and Soul* (copyright © Joss Stone, 2004, S-Curve Records), quoted without permission.