

Author's Notes: Welcome to the first story in this series of universes that is not a Jixemitri CWP. Many, many, many thanks to Susan, who edited this when she had a ton of other editing and writing to do herself! Love you, sweetie!

What's Up?

by Dana

And I scream at the top of my lungs, What's going on?

4 Non Blondes, "What's Up?"

"Hello?" Di yawned sleepily into the phone. She tried to focus her eyes on the glowing red numbers in her digital alarm clock, but everything was blurry. She heard soft breathing on the other line, but no one said anything. "Hello?" she said again.

"Hi," a timid voice, barely above a whisper, finally said. "Is—is Brooke there?"

All of a sudden, Di was wide awake. This must be Brooke's sister, Katie. And the fact that she was calling in the middle of the night could not be a good thing.

"Katie?" she asked.

"Yeah," the voice on the other end of the phone sounded surprised.

"Let me see if Brooke's around. I think she might be in the study lounge," Di said. A glance down from her top bunk had revealed that Brooke was not in her bed.

"At midnight?" Katie squeaked, surprised.

Di had to laugh. "Yeah, I think she's crazy for studying at all hours of the night, too," Di said and then winced. Had she just used the word *crazy* with Brooke's sister?

Fortunately, Katie laughed. "Yeah, she always was a night owl."

"Hang on, and I'll go get her," Di said. "It's just down the hall, so it shouldn't take long."

Di hoped that Brooke was in the study lounge, that is. Otherwise, she would not know where to begin to look for her roommate at this time of night.

Wearing her flannel pajamas, she padded down the hallway and looked through the window of the door to the study lounge. Brooke was sitting at one of the flimsy Formica-topped tables in the study room, her head bent in concentration as she stared at her science textbook.

Di opened the door slowly so as not to startle her roommate. "Brooke?" she said softly.

Brooke turned around. "Di?"

"Katie's on the phone," Di began. At Brooke's startled exclamation, Di rushed on. "She didn't sound bad. She even laughed a bit."

Brooked was already up and across the room and through the door.

"Do you want me to gather your books and stuff?" Di called to her roommate's retreating back.

“Please!” came Brooke’s faint, terse response. Di realized that her roommate was already entering their room, having taken about four strides to get there in her worry and panic over her younger sister. Di understood that. She was the oldest of five; Brooke was the oldest of four. Both of them felt a fierce protectiveness toward their younger siblings. And Di’s younger brothers and sisters were in the best of health, both physically and mentally, and were only a couple hours’ drive away. She could not imagine how Brooke must feel—in a foreign country, thousands of miles from home, when her sister was not well. Di didn’t think that she could do it herself.

She walked over to the table, carefully closed Brooke’s textbook, and collected her yellow and pink highlighters, her pencil, and her purple, blue, and red pens. Di smiled despite her worries about Brooke and Katie. That was just one more small thing she had found that she had in common with Brooke. They both liked taking notes in various colors, essentially color coding their notes. She gathered the notebook and loose papers with the writing utensils and textbook and headed back to their room. She was not sure if she would be intruding, so she hesitated outside her door.

It was after midnight, but a lot of other students were up and about. She saw thin slivers of light from underneath doors and heard laughter from various rooms. Actually, now that she thought about it, she realized that a lot of her dormmates generally were in the study lounge at this time, and she was surprised that she had found Brooke alone that particular night. Then again, it was Thursday night, and a lot of students were out at the bar, thinking about more worldly things than studying.

Diana finally entered the room and offered Brooke a cautious smile. Brooke looked up briefly and tried to smile, but the corners of her mouth were tight and her eyes looked worried. Di set Brooke’s books down on her desk and softly tiptoed out of the room. She had decided that she definitely did not want to intrude as soon as she heard the words “hurt yourself” come out of Brooke’s mouth in worried tones.

Di smiled encouragingly at her roommate as she quickly backed out of her room, closing the door with a soft click.

Now what? Di thought, looking each way down the hall. She decided to see if Liz was awake. The sophomore often did keep late hours, especially on Thursday nights. She had been able to arrange her schedule so that she did not have any Friday classes, and Sam—Liz’s best friend—didn’t have a class on Fridays until one in the afternoon. Of course, it was entirely possible, actually probable, that at midnight they would still be out in Ithaca at one of the bars.

But, as she had nothing to lose by checking Liz’s room, Diana found herself once again padding down the hall in her green fuzzy socks and blue and green plaid flannel pajamas. She passed a couple returning home from the bar and, even though it was perfectly normal to be walking down the hall in pajamas, Di felt slightly self-conscious. Still, she smiled at the couple, and they smiled back. Di recognized the guy as from her brother floor, but the girl she had never seen before. She grinned to herself as she wondered whether the guy had seen her before tonight either.

As she approached Liz’s room, she saw that the door was closed, but that there was golden light spilling from underneath the door. Di didn’t get her hopes up, though, as Liz often

left her light on even when she and her roommate were not there. It could also mean that her roommate was home, but not Liz.

As Di got closer to the door, however, she could hear laughter coming from the room, and then she recognized Liz's voice as well as Sam's. She was immensely relieved, because she did not know what she would do otherwise. Sitting out in the hall did not appeal to her, and hanging out in her room while Brooke talked with her sister was even less appealing.

Di optimistically knocked on the door and received a hearty "Come in!" in stereo.

She opened the door, and Liz and Sam both squealed in delight. "Di!" Liz exclaimed.

"I thought for sure that you'd be sleeping right now!" Sam added.

Di had met Samantha—Sam for short—in her art history class. Sam and Liz were practically inseparable, and Liz also happened to live on Di's floor in East Tower, one of the dormitory buildings on the campus of Ithaca College.

"I was," Di confirmed as she entered the room and settled into one of Liz's bright pink bean bag chairs. "But Brooke got a phone call, and I wanted to give her some privacy." Brooke had only told Diana about her sister's bipolar disorder, so Di was careful not to give any hints as to the nature of the call. Of course, this vagueness on Di's part meant that Liz and Sam's minds went in a predictable direction—boys.

Sam gave Diana a knowing grin that was decidedly delighted, and Liz leaned forward eagerly. "Oh, reeeaaally?" she said rather breathlessly.

"Do tell," Sam urged.

Di smiled indulgently. "There's not much to tell," she said, trying to sound enigmatic. Suddenly, Di felt like having some fun.

"Oh, come *on*, Di! You can't hold back on us!" Sam protested.

"Yeah!" Liz agreed. "Who was it, Di? Who called Brooke?"

Di smiled teasingly. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

"Yes!" Liz and Sam chorused, and then all three girls laughed.

"Okay, I'll tell you," Di said in her best conspiratorial voice. "But you have to promise not to tell anyone."

Liz and Sam both leaned forward. "Promise!" they said.

"Okay, well, it was a call from home," Diana said, trailing off and waiting for Sam and Liz to take the bait.

"I didn't know she had a guy back home!" Sam squealed. "Why am I always the last to know?"

"I didn't know, either," Liz said. "And I was totally hoping to set her up with Jason!"

Sam looked at Liz in surprise. "I *know*!" she exclaimed. "I was totally thinking the *same thing*!"

Di felt laughter bubbling up inside her. *If they only knew*, she thought.

Both of them turned back to Di, eager looks on their faces. “So, dish, woman!”

Di laughed. “Her sister, who is fifteen and therefore very angsty, needed to talk to her big sister,” Di said, happy that she could tell the truth and still not give away her roommate’s secret.

Sam and Liz both let out peals of laughter while simultaneously groaning. Di thought it was a unique sound known only to teenage girls.

“Diana Lynch!” Sam protested. “And if I knew your middle name, I would most definitely use that, too! That was so *not fair!*”

“You are so toast!” Liz added to her friend’s laughing indignation.

Diana dissolved into giggles with her friends. “I’m sorry!” she gasped between peals of laughter. “You were both so sure it was a guy. I couldn’t help it.”

“You’re dead, Diana whatever-your-middle-name-is Lynch,” Sam sputtered while still convulsing with laughter.

“Look at the bright side,” Diana finally said when the gales of laughter finally died down.

“What?” Liz and Sam demanded in one breath.

“You can still set her up with Jason,” Diana said.

And that was their downfall. All three of them dissolved into uncontrollable laughter.

The three were still giggling and gabbing several minutes later when Brooke came looking for Di. Di immediately tensed, wondering if everything was okay. Fortunately, Liz and Sam’s attention was elsewhere, and they didn’t notice Di’s reaction.

Meanwhile, Brooke was feeling a little awkward, as she was not as close of friends with Sam and Liz as Di was, and she was sometimes intimidated by the vivacious and outgoing upperclassmen. But she had figured that if Di was anywhere, it was here in Liz’s room, so she had screwed up her courage and knocked on the door.

“Hey, Brooke!” Sam and Liz greeted her together.

“Are you here to collect your wayward roommate?” Sam added.

Brooked laughed, a genuine laugh that put Di instantly at ease. If Brooke could sound that cheerful and relaxed, then Katie must okay.

“Yes, I decided that I couldn’t inflict her on the world at large any longer, and I needed to come in search of my ‘wayward roommate.’ Diana Marie Lynch, it is time to return to your rightful room now,” Brooke said.

“Marie!” Sam exclaimed, and Liz and Sam dissolved into giggles once again.

Di rolled her eyes.

“What? What’d I say?” Brooke wanted to know.

“I’ve been scolding Di all evening long,” Sam said, clearly using the phrase “all evening” very loosely, “and I’ve been wanting to use her middle name every single last time.” Sam emphasized each word as she spoke. “And now I know it!” she said triumphantly, her grin lighting up her face.

Di rolled her eyes again. “Yeah, now you know. Marie. Have fun with it.” She smiled slyly at her friend with a triumphant look of her own. “I still totally won tonight.”

Liz poked Sam. “She totally did!”

Di stood, and she and Brooke said their good nights to the older girls, who chorused theirs back.

As Di and Brooke walked back toward their room, Di looked at her roommate. “Katie’s okay?”

Brooke smiled at her roommate, appreciating how loyal she was. “Yeah. She just wanted to talk. About fifteen-year-old angst stuff. She’s worried about some boy in her class asking her to some dance that’s coming up at school,” Brooke said as she grinned. “That’s all. Nothing to do with anything else. She’s just worried about boys like any normal fifteen-year-old girl.”

Di smiled warmly. “I’m so glad.”

* * * * *

Di sank into the chair, upholstered in a putrid green, nubby fabric, and tried to pretend that she was sinking into the lush chair in her bedroom. She loved sitting in that chair and just whiling away the hours, daydreaming or talking on the phone to Honey or Trixie or Mart. But here at school, there was no chair that rivaled her chair at home in any way. Not for the lush blue color that almost bordered on purple. Not for the soft fabric that felt like silk to her skin. Not for the thick, soft, fluffy cushion into which she absolutely disappeared. And certainly not for the privacy. If she wanted privacy, she had to lounge in her upper bunk in her room, and that just was not satisfying for Diana. If she wanted a fairly comfy chair, then she was welcome to lounge in Liz’s brightly colored bean bag chair, but that meant that she had no privacy. Of course, she loved visiting with Liz, but she could never just sink into the bean bag chair and lose herself in her thoughts with Liz, and usually Sam, chattering away.

And then there was the chair in the study lounge on the floor of her dorm. Sometimes she could get privacy when she came in here, and other times someone, or several someones, had already claimed the room for studying or playing Monopoly or whatever.

Right now, Di had been lucky enough to find the room empty, but there was no guarantee that she would have the room to herself for more than the next ten seconds or so. Di reminded herself to appreciate the tranquility of the silent room right now while she had it all to herself and not to worry about the “what ifs” or the “might bes.”

She leaned back against the chair and closed her eyes. While part of her longed for the privacy of her bedroom back in Sleepyside with all of its creature comforts, which, thanks to her father’s wealth, were quite extensive, the greater part of her was happy to be out of the house, making her own path. Here, she was not Edward Lynch’s daughter, or Trixie Belden’s pretty friend. Here she was Diana Marie Lynch. A freshman at Ithaca College majoring in art education with a minor in art history.

Well, that was who she was academically.

“Who am I really?” she murmured out loud. “Who is the *real* me?” she wondered, even as she realized that the question might not have an easy answer—or any answer at all.

As she rested in the chair, a poor substitute for her chair at home, her mind raced to assimilate the things she had experienced since leaving Sleepyside nearly two and a half months ago and starting what essentially was a new life here in Ithaca. She had learned how to be disciplined and study when her parents were not around to order her to do it. Of course, loving most of her classes and homework the way she did, that was not all that difficult.

She had met scores of new people and realized that people liked her for her and not because she was pretty or came from a wealthy family or was a Bob-White or was Trixie Belden and Honey Wheeler’s friend. For shy, insecure Di Lynch, that had been an amazing thing to discover. When she first left for college, she wondered if she would have any friends at all, but from the very day that Sam had approached her after her first art history class, Di had learned that she could make friends on her own, even when she was not gravitating in Trixie’s and Honey’s orbits.

She could stay out as late as she wanted, and there was no one to tell her not to. She could go to class or not. She actually had a whole schedule full of interesting classes instead of suffering through math and science and living for her art or poetry classes.

All of these new-found freedoms had threatened to overwhelm Di when she had first said good-bye to her parents and found herself alone, hundreds of miles from where she had grown up. She was sure that all of that freedom—that sudden, unbridled freedom—would be a bad thing. For some, she supposed that it was. But she had learned to strike a balance. For every time that she postponed her studying and went out to the bar with her friends, there were at least two or three times that she buried herself in her reading or in creating her drawings and paintings for class and didn’t go out with her friends.

The fear of failing, of abusing the freedom that had been thrust upon her with a swift suddenness that had taken her breath away at first, had receded. Di was an adult now, and she was doing her best to live up to all of the expectations and responsibilities that being an adult entailed.

But she was still left with that ever-present question.

Who am I?

Diana had the distinct feeling that that question was so important to her lately because of Mart. Mart Belden had been the most wonderful, devoted, loving boyfriend imaginable. He was sweet, smart, cute, funny, caring, romantic, and a tender lover. She had known him since she was a little girl and trusted him completely. He had been her friend before her boyfriend, a fact that carried a lot of weight with her. She saw so many of her dormmates go to the bar, hook up with some strange guy, date for all of a week-and-a-half, and then break up, wondering what had gone wrong. Di knew what went wrong—those girls could not build a relationship with a guy when they did not have the foundation of friendship.

Martin Belden and Diana Lynch had that.

So what was the problem?

Di had felt herself drifting apart from Mart almost as soon as she had arrived on campus. His schedule had been busier than hers at first, and she had been hurt and even the slightest bit

resentful that he could not make time for her. And that resentment had fueled guilt. The first few weeks of adjusting and then realizing that all of her expectations of seeing Mart daily once she was in Ithaca were not going to materialize had been distressing for Di.

And then Di had been caught up in creating art projects for midterm portfolios, studying for exams, and researching materials for long essays about Ming dynasty ceramic art, and she had slowly realized that she was doing just fine without Mart's constant presence. She should have realized that earlier. She had spent her entire senior year at Sleepyside Junior-Senior High separated from Mart, and for the most part, she had been just fine. Of course she had missed him. But she had not allowed herself to wallow in loneliness and misery. She had gone out. She had kept herself busy. But that was because she *had* to. Her separation from Mart at that point could not be helped.

But now it could be. And even though Mart was only a few miles away, she was now perfectly happy going all week without seeing him and just seeing him on weekends. Of course, the weekends more than made up for the week apart, especially if his roommate had chosen to go home for the weekend. Their nights of loving could not be matched.

She loved Mart. He loved her. So why did that not feel like enough anymore? Why did Di have this constant need to spread her wings and try new things?

A need that included flying away from Mart.

Di's thoughts were interrupted when she heard the door to the first floor study lounge open, and she opened her eyes. A tall and sturdy strawberry blonde girl that Di vaguely recognized from around the dorm entered, throwing Di an apologetic smile.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to wake you," she said as she sat down at one of the study tables and set her books down. "My roommate has her three very loud friends over, and I have a calculus test tomorrow that I need to study for."

"It's no big deal," Di assured her. "I wasn't really sleeping. All my roommate and I have in our room is just our desk chairs, no chairs for lounging, so I was just kind of relaxing in this one." She looked down at the horrid green chair in which she was sitting. "Of course, this one isn't so very relaxing," she said wryly.

"I think that chair has been there since the Kennedy Administration," the strawberry blonde commented with a dubious look at the chair.

Di laughed. "No kidding. I'm Di, by the way."

"Hi, Di," the girl said with a friendly smile. "I'm Marilyn." She rolled her eyes. "And yes, like Monroe. My parents were somewhat obsessed with her, and they decided to torment their only daughter by naming me after her."

"Yeah? My dad tells me that if my mom had her way, I would be 'Elizabeth.' After Elizabeth Taylor. Apparently, *National Velvet* and *Lassie* were her two favorite movies growing up."

Marilyn laughed. "Hey, it could be worse. You could have been named after the dog or the horse!"

Diana laughed, too. "That's a really good point!" she acknowledged, instantly drawn to Marilyn's quick wit and sharp sense of humor. "My mom's grandmother was Diana, as well as my dad's aunt, so they ended up going with the family name."

Marilyn was studying Diana with a critical eye. "You know, you actually look like a young Elizabeth Taylor. Your coloring anyway."

"I've been told that before," Di said with a smile. She stood and stretched and then picked up her purple backpack. "Well, Marilyn, it has been really nice meeting you, but I need to let you study for that dreaded calculus test, or I'm no better than your roommate and her loud friends. Plus, I have to meet my roommate for dinner. But I'll see you 'round!" Diana was already across the study lounge and to the door.

"Yep, see you 'round!" Marilyn said cheerfully.

"Hey, if you ever need to escape your roommate, or you want to head to the cafeteria, stop by," Diana said impulsively as she was backing out the door. She gave Marilyn her room number, and the girl's face lit up.

"Thanks, Di! That would be great," she said happily.

As Di walked down the orange-carpeted hall, she thought of the look of gratefulness on Marilyn's face at her offer and realized that Marilyn was probably shy and appreciative of Di's offer of friendship.

As Di was usually the one who waited for girls to approach her, being shy and rather insecure herself, she felt rather good at making someone else feel at ease and appreciated.

And with that satisfactory feeling buoying her and her mood up, she entered her dorm room with a genuine smile on her face. No matter what was ahead, Di knew that she would be able to handle it. It was a good feeling and made the gnawing doubts that she had been experiencing in regards to Mart somewhat easier to deal with.

* * * * *

Honey Wheeler was lying on her couch in the living room of her apartment on the fourteenth floor of the Marymount Manhattan College Residence, her relaxed position belying the intense concentration she was directing at her chemistry textbook. This would be the third time that she was attempting to read this chapter, and she wasn't sure that she was going to understand it any better than she had the first two times. She had a set of problems at the end of the chapter that she was going to attempt to complete after this reading, but she wanted to give herself a chance at really understanding the chapter material before she attempted the problems.

She was only in the first paragraph when the phone rang. A part of her felt a bit of frustration at being interrupted, but the greater part of her felt relief at the unexpected reprieve. She set the heavy textbook down and stood to get the cordless extension in the kitchen. With any luck, it was Dan telling her that he was bringing over a pizza and a movie and going to spend the evening cuddling with her.

"Hello?"

"Honey, it's me," a very familiar, feminine voice said from the other end of the line.

"Di!" Honey cried with pleasure at hearing from her high school friend. "How are you?"

“I’m doing okay,” Di said. “How’s the Big Apple?”

“It’s big,” Honey stated. “How it remotely resembles an apple, I will never know. But it’s very exciting. It’s hard for me to believe that I’m living here full time again. But without a governess!”

Di noticed that she did not say “without my parents,” but she did not comment. Honey’s parents may have been distant when Honey was younger, but the move to Sleepyside—and encountering the force known as Trixie Belden—had changed all of that.

“It sounds exciting,” Di agreed, although she was very happy being in a rural setting, much like her hometown. Exciting was for a weekend trip, not for a comfortable existence. At least, Di had thought so.

“So, what’s up?” Honey asked.

What’s up? Di echoed in her mind. *That’s what I want to know.*

Out loud, she said, “Not much. I’m just...well, I don’t even know what I am.” She tried to play off her confusion with a laugh, but Honey, who knew her friend well, was not buying it.

“Is everything okay?” she asked.

“Oh yeah, I’m fine,” Di rushed to assure her friend. “College is great. I love my art classes, and I’m doing well. I’ve met some really nice people. The campus is nice. Everything’s going along smoothly.”

“But...” Honey prompted.

Di took a deep breath. “But things with Mart and I are ... different.”

“Different?” Honey asked, confused. “Different how?”

“I’m not sure,” Di admitted. “He’s wonderful and sweet and attentive. We’re not fighting or anything like that. But, despite the fact that we’re a lot closer physically than we were all last year, I feel like we’re growing apart. And, well, I was wondering if you and Dan are going through the same thing. You know, adjusting to being together again after being apart.”

“Well, Dan and I didn’t really feel like we were apart last year since we got to see each other so often, so maybe our experience isn’t really comparable,” Honey hedged, wanting to put her friend at ease but not really being able to relate. If anything, she and Dan were closer than ever. “But Trixie and Jim *were* separated, for a very long time and by a greater distance in fact, so that’s got to be weird for them,” Honey continued.

Di sighed. “I know, but I didn’t want to talk to Trixie about this because it’s her brother. I didn’t want her to feel weird when she talked to Mart. Or worse, say something to him!”

Honey laughed ruefully. “That’s right. You never know when Trixie is going to resolve to try and mind her own business or rush forward and try to fix things. I take it you haven’t talked to Mart about this.”

“No, not really. There was a bit of tension between us during the first month or so. I kept expecting him to have free time to go out and stuff, but he always seemed to have to study. I kind of lost my temper, I’m ashamed to admit. We talked it out, and I resolved to be a better

girlfriend and try to understand that his classes were a lot more demanding than mine and took a lot more effort. Things got less tense then,” Di explained.

“Well, that’s good,” Honey said, relieved to hear something positive.

“Well, yes and no,” Di said.

“What do you mean?” Honey asked.

“Well, then I started to really get involved in my art classes and midterms and hanging out with my roommate and my art friends. I was only seeing Mart on the weekends and realized that only seeing him that infrequently didn’t bother me,” Di said.

“And the fact that you realized that you weren’t bothered, bothered you,” Honey concluded.

“Exactly,” Di said, glad that she had called Honey no matter what the outcome.

“Well, that’s not necessarily a bad thing. You’re growing up. Adults generally don’t have the same clingy need to be with their significant other that teenagers do. At least the mature and healthy ones don’t. It probably just means that you’re mature and healthy. And that’s a good thing,” she said brightly. “Plus, seeing him every weekend is more than you used to see him, so maybe subconsciously your brain realizes that weekends are better than once a month.”

“I know, and normally I would agree with you,” Di’s voice trailed off.

“But?” Honey prompted again.

“But I also have these other feelings,” Di admitted.

“What other feelings?” Honey asked, an unexpected sense of dread settling in her stomach.

Di took a moment to collect her thoughts and try to explain the feelings that she did not fully understand herself, and Honey misinterpreted her silence.

“Diana Lynch! Do you have the hots for some other guy?” Honey screeched, her voice mirroring the horrified expression on her face.

“No!” Di gasped out. “Of course not!”

The shock and indignation in Di’s voice convinced Honey. She could not really believe that Diana could have feelings for another guy, but Di’s hesitation had confused her.

“Then what is it?” Honey asked.

“It’s hard to describe. I’ve just got all of this freedom, and I want to spread my wings and try new things. I love flying solo without my parents. And…” she trailed off.

“And you think you might want to fly completely solo,” Honey finished. “Without Mart.”

“I think so,” Diana whispered, horrified and yet simultaneously relieved to have the feeling put into words—and by her old friend. This was not something she could discuss with Liz or Sam or even Brooke. They did not know the “Di and Mart” that Honey did.

“Oh, boy,” Honey said, sinking down to the floor as she clutched the phone.

“Yeah, that’s how I feel,” Diana said ruefully.

“Okay, I think that’s actually a pretty normal thing to feel,” Honey tried to reassure her friend.

“Then why aren’t *you* feeling it?” Di demanded.

“I said it was normal, not universal,” Honey returned. “And who knows? Maybe I will. If this chemistry doesn’t kill me first. I don’t have time to rethink my position in life—I’m too busy trying not to fail chemistry,” she joked.

Di smiled, grateful for her friend’s attempt to lighten the conversation. “You’ll do fine. Even if hearing you say the very word ‘chemistry’ makes me want to break out in hives.”

Honey snorted inelegantly. “You’re not the only one. Imagine how I feel actually getting graded on this stuff!”

“But you’ve been determined to be a detective for years,” Di reminded her. “And you’re a hard worker. You’ll do what it takes to become a detective. Including chemistry.”

“Thanks,” Honey said, grateful for her friend’s confidence in her. “But we’re not here to talk about me and my chemistry woes. We’re here to help you.”

Di sighed. “I know. But maybe there is no help for me.”

“You’re being too hard on yourself!” Honey protested. “Di, you’ve had a major change in your life, and it’s going to take time to get used to that big change. Don’t worry about how you’re feeling, or you’ll just make things worse. Feelings aren’t right or wrong, they just *are*. It’s what you do with them that counts. So, don’t stress over how or what you’re feeling. Go with it, and follow your heart. Just be true to yourself.”

“Wow. You sound so smart,” Di said admiringly.

Honey laughed. “I don’t know about that, but I’ve had time to look back and analyze how I acted in boarding school. I sat around being miserable, and I acted miserable. Of course I was unpopular with the other kids. But if I had taken that misery and used it to my advantage instead of letting it get to me, I would have been a lot happier.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Di admitted. She had experienced the same thing after her father had made all of his wealth practically overnight. She had gone around miserable and hating her father’s money, when she just really needed to accept her feelings and her father’s wealth and move on. Honey had a very valid point.

“If you’re feeling like you need to spread your wings, don’t obsess over it, just go with it,” Honey continued. “And if that means trying things without Mart, then you may just have to accept that. If you and Mart are meant to be, you’ll be. If you aren’t, then trying to stay with him for the sake of staying with him isn’t going to help a bit anyway.”

Di took a deep breath. “As much as it pains me to say it, Honey, I think you’re right.”

Honey closed her eyes. She whole-heartedly believed what she had said, and she did not want to encourage Di to stay with Mart if she was having doubts, but she hated to think that Mart and Di might break up. They had been the first of the Bob-Whites to start dating, and their attraction had been obvious years before they had even taken that first step toward each other. They seemed so perfect for each other, so well suited. Their differences complimented each

other so well, and their values were so in sync that it was hard to imagine a stronger or better matched couple.

If a couple like Mart and Di break up, are Dan and I going to be able to make it? Honey could not help but worry.

Honey opened her eyes and then broke the silence. “We’re all here for you,” Honey said, unsure of what else she could possibly say. Although there was pain in Di’s voice, there was also an undercurrent of peace, a peace that replaced the agitation and anxiety that had been in Di’s voice at the beginning of the conversation.

“What about Trixie?” Di whispered. “She’ll hate me.”

“She will *not* hate you,” Honey said emphatically. “She may be disappointed that you guys couldn’t work it out, but she won’t hate you. She won’t even be disappointed in you, just the situation. But she’ll understand. Don’t underestimate her.”

“I’m not underestimating *her*,” Di explained. “I guess I just feel disappointed in *myself*.”

“Well, don’t,” Honey said matter-of-factly. “Remember what I said about not judging your feelings? Just go with them. Accept them. Embrace them.”

“Accept them. Embrace them,” Di repeated.

“Right,” Honey said.

“What will this do to the Bob-Whites?” Di asked in an anguished voice.

Honey didn’t answer at first, wondering about that herself. But then she realized that, with the seven of them spread across New York and the Midwest, it would not have the same kind of impact that it would have had if they were all still in Sleepyside. After all, the Bob-Whites had continued strong even after she and Brian had not ended up together, like everyone had assumed they would.

“Nothing,” Honey finally answered, her voice confident that she was telling Di the truth.

“Nothing?”

“Nothing,” Honey repeated. “Did you think Brian and I would end up together?”

“Well, yeah. We all did,” Di admitted.

“And when he started dating Lexi, and I started dating Dan, nothing happened. The Bob-Whites didn’t implode. We were fine. We’re Bob-Whites—we’ll *always* be friends, no matter what.”

Diana felt as though a great weight had been lifted off of her shoulders. She had been so worried about a division in the Bob-Whites, but Honey was right. After the shock of seeing Brian with Lexi and Honey with Dan had worn off, everything had felt, well, pretty normal, Di had to admit.

Then, by silent, mutual agreement, the girls changed the subject. They spoke of classes and new friends and their activities and what Trixie was up to at Michigan State—as Honey had just spoken to their sandy-haired friend a couple of nights before—and the upcoming Thanksgiving break, until Di said that she would let Honey go back to her chemistry studies.

She thanked Honey for her advice, and Honey gave her words of encouragement, and the two said their good-byes.

Di hung up the phone and glanced at the clock. Mart should be home from classes by now if he had not decided to go to the library to study.

She closed her eyes, inhaled and exhaled deeply several times, and gathered all of the courage that she possessed. In a somewhat state of Zen, she dialed the phone, listened to it ring, and then heard a familiar voice on the other end greeting her.

“Mart?” she said into the phone. “It’s Di. Can I come over? There’s something I want to talk to you about.”