

Author Notes: This latest *Gethsemane* story, which is a CWP #2.10 (Celebrating Trixie Camp 2008) submission, is meant to celebrate my 10th Jixaversary. How can it be 10 years already?!? Thank you so much to everyone in the Jix community who makes me feel like a member of the BWGs themselves! Susan pointed out that she was tickled that I did one of the #10 CWPs, which I didn't even realize I had until she said something--and that's completely coincidental as I wrote this nearly 2 years ago and had fully expected (hoped?) to post it long before this. And then her comment prompted another realization—this is the 10th *Gethsemane* story. I planned it that way. *Really* *BAG* Many thanks to Susan and her superduperfabulous edit! Which was NOT at the last minute this year! Whoo hoo! I'm growing as a person! Or something!

With Me by Dana

*I don't want this moment to ever end
Where everything's nothing without you
I'll wait here forever just to see you smile
'Cause it's true, I am nothing without you*
—Sum 41, “With You”

Once again, Mart found himself lying in his bed, staring at the ceiling, and thinking of Diana. He reflected that this particular pastime was getting old, but he knew he'd never be able to completely abandon it.

Di had left for her year abroad just that morning, and Mart was replaying her good-bye in his mind over and over again. It had been as painful as he had thought it would be in many ways—and not as painful in others. It had been a lot...different than he had expected. He certainly had not expected that Di would pull him away from the rest of the group and say good-bye to him alone. And he certainly had not expected her to apologize.

But what had shocked him were the three words that she had said to him so fervently and earnestly.

I love you.

He had wondered whether he'd ever hear those words uttered from Diana's beautiful red lips again.

Diana still loved him. Everyone around him had been trying to tell him that she did, but Mart hadn't been so sure. In some ways, his friends wanted it to be true just as much as he did. It certainly would make things easier when all seven of the Bob-Whites were back in Sleepyside at the same time. Of course, as time went on, that was becoming a more rare occurrence. It was hard to believe that he was already about to start his junior year at Cornell University. His college career was half over? It didn't seem possible.

But what seemed even less possible was that Diana wasn't even in the country right now, nor would she be for quite a while. She had promised to come home for the Christmas holidays, but

that was four months away. A lot could happen in four months. Look what had happened during the first four months of school last year. Mart shuddered to think about it. His whole world had been torn apart in less time than that, so he knew all too well what could happen in four short months.

Mart went back to reliving his good-bye with Diana rather than think about what the raven-haired beauty might experience in Europe. He closed his eyes and remembered her warm hands on his face and her beautiful violet eyes as they had stared deeply into his own. Her eyes had been so beautiful...and so heart breaking. There was something in them that reminded him of a lost little girl. They were filled with regret and longing, and in that moment, Mart had almost told Diana not to leave. That he wanted her to stay. That they could work through this together. That they could help Di find herself together.

But Mart had also realized that part of the lost look was because Di needed to find herself alone and on her own terms. Self-discovery was not a journey that she could take with him.

And that knowledge had broken his heart.

Mart had seen something else in those violet eyes. They also had been filled with love.

And *that* sudden knowledge had made him feel buoyant. There was still love there—he was sure of it. And even if he was not sure that Di would come back to him, at least he could hold on to *something*.

Just then, the phone rang. Mart looked over at the cordless phone charging in its cradle and then back at the ceiling.

Why bother? It's not like I want to talk to anyone.

And then he realized that there was one person that he desperately wanted to talk to, and a quick look at the digital alarm clock that glowed bright blue from his nightstand told him that it might possibly be Diana. Her plane had been scheduled to land an hour before.

His hopes soaring, he hurriedly got up and snatched the phone receiver from its cradle

“Hello?” Mart knew his voice was pathetically full of hope, but he didn’t care.

“ Mart?” a tired but very familiar voice asked.

“Diana,” Mart breathed, thrilled to hear her voice and to know that she had chosen to call *him* when she had landed. “How are you? How was the flight? How’s England?”

Di laughed, and Mart smiled, loving the sound of her delightfully melodic tinkling laugh. “The flight was fun. I’m pretty sure the other passengers were not thrilled to be on a seven-hour flight with a bunch of college kids, but we college kids had a lot of fun, let me tell you.”

Mart chuckled. "I can imagine."

"I just cleared customs, and now I'm waiting for everyone to get through, and then we'll all be transported to our temporary dorms. It's nice to have other people to travel with so I'm not wandering around some foreign country alone."

"I'm glad you're not wandering around some foreign country alone, either, Di," Mart said, suddenly imagining that her need to find herself could have ended up with her in the deepest, darkest corners of Zaire, completely alone. He shuddered at the thought.

"I'm hoping I won't be too jet-lagged and can start to explore tomorrow. I can't wait to see the city. I was always so envious of you guys for getting to go to London with Miss Trask," Di said.

"I wish that you had been able to go, too," Mart said. "That was the one thing I would have changed about that trip. I kept wishing I could share everything with you every minute I was there."

"That's really sweet, Mart," Di said, and Mart could have sworn he heard regret in her voice. There was a pause, and then Di asked, "How was everyone after I left?"

"Jubilant," Mart deadpanned. "We couldn't wait to get rid of you." It was so different from Mart's usual brand of humor that Di gave a shout of surprised laughter.

"Well, then I'm glad I could oblige," she said, and Mart could hear the laughter in her voice.

"Seriously," he said, "everyone was sad and missing you already, but we were happy that you were having such a fabulous adventure, especially considering how many times you got left at home when the rest of us went on trips. Dan even decided that since he didn't get to go on that many trips that he should be jetting off to Europe, too."

"Honey said that she wanted to come along with me, too."

"Does John Jay have a study-abroad program?" Mart asked.

"Honey wasn't sure, but we thought it would be awesome if she could study with Scotland Yard and get some hands-on experience."

Mart snorted. "Honey has already had a lot of *hands-on* experience thanks to my nutty sister. And also thanks to my nutty sister, she's even had hands-on experience with Scotland Yard. Not once, but twice!"

"Oh, Mart," Di said, her voice suddenly distracted. "It looks like we're all ready to board the bus now. Plus, Mummy and Daddy warned me not to use my phone too much. And I still have to call them, too!"

“I understand,” he said, any disappointment he might have felt lost in the elation of finding out that she had called him *first*. “Have fun, Di. Stay safe. I...care about you very much, and I just want you to be happy.”

“I...care about you, too, Mart. You stay safe, too. I’ll be in touch. I promise,” Di said and the line went dead.

Mart placed the phone on the nightstand and then lay back down on his bed. Once again, he found himself staring at the ceiling, but this time he felt happiness cascading over him. Knowing Di still loved him—had called him *first*—made him feel as though a weight had been lifted off of him, as though he had turned a new corner. And, instead of this knowledge of her love binding him closer to her, he felt something akin to a small measure of closure.

* * *

Mart was sitting in front of the television the next day watching a sitcom rerun when Coop emerged from his bedroom and wandered into the living room. “You okay?” he asked.

Mart turned to look at his roommate. “Yep, believe it or not, I am.”

“Who was that on the phone last night?” Coop casually asked, hoping he had guessed right about the caller, as he headed into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator looking for something to drink. He pulled out a carton of orange juice and grabbed a glass from the nearby cupboard.

“Believe it or not,” Mart said for the second time in less than a minute, “it was Diana.”

Coop set the orange juice carton down and returned to the doorway. “Diana?” he prompted.

Mart grinned. “Yeah. She had cleared customs and was waiting for the rest of their group to get cleared.”

“That’s awesome that she called you, man,” Coop said as he returned to the kitchen to pour his juice.

“Yeah, she hadn’t even called her parents yet.”

Coop put the carton of orange juice away back in the refrigerator, grabbed his glass, and headed back to the living room. “She called you first?” he asked, his brows raised as he sank into the couch and then took a swig. “That’s really great, Mart. Maybe she’ll realize what a bonehead she was for breaking up with you, and you’ll get back together.” Coop was only being a little facetious, and Mart knew it.

Mart grinned. “From your lips to the ears of God,” he said. “And don’t call her a bonehead.”

Coop took a long gulp of his orange juice and then just grinned innocently at his blond friend.

Mart changed the subject “Got plans with Emily today?”

Despite the fact that they didn’t seem to have a lot in common, and Mart was sure the couple wouldn’t last, Coop and his girlfriend Emily still were together. Mart and Di had been sure that her roommate, Brooke, and Coop would begin dating, but that had never materialized. Di had confessed to Mart that Brooke was attracted to Coop, but Mart had never informed his roommate. He had been biding his time until Coop and Emily broke up for good, which Mart considered inevitable, although he’d never tell his friend that.

Anyone could see that Brooke and Coop were much more suited for each other than he and Emily, but now Brooke was seeing someone else, too. Di had told Mart that the guy was nice enough, but she didn’t think that they had a “spark.”

Coop was shaking his head. “Nope, no plans with Emily today. Apparently, her aunt and uncle are in town for some alumni fundraiser over at Ithaca College, so she’s going to spend the day with them since she rarely gets to see them.”

“Anything for free food, right?” Mart grinned.

Coop chuckled. “Not everyone has your appetite, Mart. Or should I call you Mr. Hollow Legs like Bobby does?”

“Please don’t,” Mart said with a grimace.

“Anyway, Emily is actually really super close with her aunt and uncle, but she doesn’t see them as much as she’d like to. She practically thinks of them as a second mother and father, since she spent a lot of time with them growing up. So that leaves me with a free day.”

Mart noted Coop’s use of the word “free” in describing a day without Emily and wondered if he could read any subtext into that. He didn’t comment and instead asked his roommate, “You wanna see if John has recovered from his beer pong tournament and maybe go see that new movie that came out, that action one with what’s his name?”

“Wow, for a man who is supposed to know his way around the dictionary, that was particularly eloquent,” Coop teased.

“You know which one I mean. We were just talking about it two days ago,” Mart retorted.

“Yeah, which is why I’m surprised that you don’t remember it yourself,” Coop said.

“Too many other things on my mind,” Mart said in a dismissive tone. Coop knew exactly what had been on Mart’s mind and didn’t push it. “Anyway, we could go to a matinee or something and then head out and get something to eat. What do you say?”

“Sure, sounds good. I think I heard John’s shower going, so maybe he’s already got plans. But at least we know that he’s alive and didn’t imbibe too much last night,” Coop said.

Mart grinned. “You know he’s got beer pong skills.”

Coop snorted. “Of course, he does.”

Coop looked at Mart, unsure whether the suggestion he wanted to make next would fly. Ever since Di had broken up with Mart, particularly since she had announced that she was going to Europe, Mart had practically been a recluse. Not that he had ever really been a partier, preferring to hang out at more low-key places or at home with his friends. He had used to like going out to listen to local bands every so often, so Coop hoped that maybe his friend would feel like it tonight. It was worth a try, Coop thought, since Mart seemed to be in such a good mood.

“You want to head out tonight? Maybe hit a few bars and hear some good music?”

Mart shrugged. “Anyone good playing? Have you heard?”

Coop responded, “I think I read that Big Blue Couch was playing at one of the clubs tonight. And that Randy guy who’s really making a name for himself with his guitar and *a cappella* versions of popular songs is scheduled to be at the Chapter House, if I recall correctly. We’ve never seen him live, so that might be worth checking out. What do you think?”

Mart started to decline out of habit, but then he realized that going out to listen to some new music sounded good to him. He was shocked. It had been a long time since he had really felt like going out, even to just go listen to some music. He looked at Coop and grinned.

“You know,” he said, and Coop could hear both the surprise and desire in his roommate’s voice, “I actually think I would. Let’s go check that Randy guy out, since neither one of us has ever seen him. Plus, Big Blue Couch will be packed, and I don’t feel like dealing with that. Sound like a plan?”

Coop grinned, glad that his roommate was on the road back to the person he had been when Coop had met him during their freshman year. “Sounds great. Maybe we can get John to go. Or how about Hannah and Brit? You wanna see if they want to go?”

Hannah Morgan and Brittany Whitaker were the two girls who lived across the hall from Coop, John, and Mart. They were really nice girls, and Coop and Mart enjoyed hanging out with them. Hannah went to Ithaca College, and Brittany went to Cornell. Both of them were going to be seniors this year, and Mart and Coop were bummed that the pair would be graduating and moving on to greener pastures. They had been really great, really fun neighbors.

“Yeah,” Mart said, brightening. “I feel like I’ve hardly seen either of them this summer, with Hannah busy with school and two jobs and Brit busy with her family. We should definitely hang out with them if they’re available.” Mart shook his head. “Where did this summer go?”

Coop did not tell him that it had slipped by while Mart was moping about a certain black-haired beauty's impending move to London. The sunny summer days had not matched Mart's dark, grim mood, so he had stayed in his room a lot when he wasn't working. It had not been a pretty sight, but Coop was glad that Mart appeared to be leaving that dark place and joining them again in the human realm.

Just then, John emerged from his bedroom, and looked at them, grinning. "Guess what?" he asked.

"You're the reigning beer pong champion of Cornell University?" Mart guessed.

John nodded and his lopsided grin grew even bigger. "Dude, it totally rocked."

Mart and Coop laughed, and Coop asked. "So, are you ready to hang out with your lowly roommates now that you've been crowned champion?"

John nodded. "Sure, I guess I could deign to hang out with the little people. What were you guys thinking of doing?"

"Well, to get poor Mart here out of the apartment for a change, we were going to go see a matinee of that new action movie, and then because Mart will act as though he's half-starved even though he will have single-handedly consumed an extra large bucket of popcorn with extra large amounts of butter, an entire movie-theater-sized box of Good and Plentys, and an extra large cherry Coke, we'll probably need to eat afterward."

Mart clutched his heart and pretended to look wounded, but John just threw him a knowing glance and a grin. "Can it, Mart," he said, "I've been to the movies with you, remember?"

Mart stopped his antics and grinned unashamedly.

Coop grinned himself and then continued. "Then, tonight, we were thinking about checking out that Randy guy. The one who does popular songs *a cappella* on the guitar. I'm pretty sure that I read that he's playing at The Chapter House."

"Big Blue Couch is playing The Haunt," John offered.

"Yeah, but Mart and I have never seen Randy, and he's supposed to be pretty good, so we thought we'd check him out. Should be a lot less crowded, especially with Big Blue Couch playing this weekend."

"Okay, sounds cool. I haven't seen this Randy guy, either, but I keep hearing from everyone that he's supposed to be pretty good."

"Yeah, that's what we've heard, too," Mart said, and Coop nodded.

“We gonna get anyone else to go with us?” the reigning Cornell University Beer Pong Champion wanted to know as he and Coop shared a look. Coop could tell that John, too, was happy that the old Mart was reemerging

“We were going to go across the hall and ask Brit and Hannah if they wanted to go with us,” Coop explained. “We were just saying that we haven’t done anything with them lately.”

“That would be cool,” John said, then he brightened. “Hey! It’s almost time for the school year to start. They should be about ready to have their end-of-summer back-to-school party.”

The annual party that Hannah and Brit threw was legendary. Everybody knew about it, everybody wanted to attend, and everybody always thought it was one of the best parties of the year. It was a yearly ritual at this point. If their apartment could hold more people, it would be even more well-attended than it already was.

Mart got up and headed over to ask the girls out with them while Coop and John rehashed last year’s party. Brit, a cute brunette, opened the door in answer to Mart’s knock and smiled widely at him.

“Hey, Mart!” she greeted him enthusiastically. Mart thought, not for the first time, how perky she always was. “How have you guys been? Man, I feel like I haven’t seen you all summer!”

“We were just saying the same thing,” Mart said, “and we were hoping to rectify that.”

“What did you have in mind?” she asked.

“Have you seen that Randy guy? The one who’s been performing *a cappella* at a few of the bars?” Mart asked.

“Yeah, I’ve heard he’s good, but I haven’t seen him. I don’t think Hannah has, either,” Brittany said.

“That’s what we’ve all been saying,” Mart said. “He’s playing tonight at the Chapter House, so we were thinking of heading into town to see him. “You guys busy?”

Brit shook her head. “Nope,” she said. “As a matter of fact, Hannah and I haven’t had the same Saturday night free for ages. We were just trying to figure out how to take advantage of that. We’d love to tag along! At least, I’m 99 percent sure that Hannah will want to, but I guess I shouldn’t speak for her.”

“I wouldn’t exactly call it tagging along, Brit,” Mart pointed out. “I just invited you to come with us. Hey—we’ll even let you walk next to us. And, maybe, if you’re *really* lucky, we’ll even act like we know you when we get there!” he joked. Brit laughed and called to her roommate, who appeared in the doorway a few moments later.

“Hey, Mart. How’re you? It feels like it’s been forever since we’ve hung out.” Like her roommate, Hannah had dark hair, but that’s where the similarities stopped. Hannah was tall and willowy, while Brittany was short and curvy. Hannah was fun but refined at the same time; Brittany was outgoing and vivacious.

Mart smiled at Hannah’s words. “Coop, John, and I were just saying that, and then Brit said the same thing.”

“Great minds and all that,” Brit said a grin.

“So, what’s up?” Hannah asked.

“The three of us are going to go see that Randy *a cappella* guy at the Chapter House tonight, and we were hoping you and Brit could *tag along*.” He said the last part with emphasis and a wicked look at Brit, who stuck her tongue out at him.

“Clearly, I’ve missed something,” Hannah observed, “but if it’s good with Brit, it’s good with me.”

Brittany nodded. “I’m totally onboard, and I figured you would be, too.”

Once they had settled on a time, Mart returned to his apartment, feeling oddly happy, and reported to Coop and John that Hannah and Brittany would be coming along, too.

* * *

The three young men headed across the hall to pick up the two young women at eight o’clock that evening. Brittany was ready and reported that Hannah would be a few minutes.

“You know Hannah never can leave the place without flossing her teeth!” Brittany said with a grin.

While they waited, Mart noticed how great Brittany looked, and he told her so. She beamed at him. “Thanks,” she said. “I just bought this outfit, so I thought I’d give it a whirl tonight.”

Soon, Hannah joined them in the living room. “Sorry I’m late, but you gotta have good dental hygiene, right?” she asked, grabbing her purse and herding everyone out the door of the apartment and to the parking lot toward her car. She had a monstrous boat that had been her parents’ years before, so everyone piled into it instead of choosing that instead of John or Brittany’s more compact cars.

Mart ended up sitting next to Brittany in the back seat, their legs touching. Mart suddenly realized that it was nice to be close to a girl, even one who wasn’t Diana. It was a good feeling, and Mart was surprised that he did not find it the least bit uncomfortable. The group chatted

animatedly during the ride from the apartment to the pub, which was located just off of Cornell's campus, but Mart was quiet, reveling in this new feeling.

Hannah found a parking space at a meter fairly close to the Chapter House, so they didn't have to walk very far. When they passed one of the local gyms, they all teased John at his obsessive visits there, but he countered that Coop and Mart were just jealous of his "ripped bod."

True to what they had expected, the crowd was much lighter than it would have been for Big Blue Couch. The sign out front proclaimed Randy's last name to be Mitchell. The sign also announced that he was a "gitar" master. Mart, of course, couldn't resist pointing out the misspelling and silently congratulated himself that Brian would be proud, considering Mart's own struggles in the area of spelling.

Once inside, Hannah and John went to the bar to get the first round of drinks, and Brittany, Coop, and Mart went in search of a table. They managed to get one with a decent view of the stage.

True to what they had heard, Randy was good. Everyone had a chuckle at the guitar player's t-shirt, which said "Paddle Faster" on the front and "I Hear Banjo Music" on the back. The five friends thoroughly enjoyed the two sets that he played. Even after Randy had left the stage, the five continued to sit, enjoying their drinks and the conversation, catching up with each other on what they had been doing over the summer.

"We made so many plans to hang out," Hannah said, "and then we hardly ever did. I don't understand how the summer could have gone by so quickly. The new semester is starting soon!"

"I know. It sucks," John said unceremoniously as he took a swig of his beer. Like Brittany and Hannah, he was a senior and old enough to legally drink.

"You know, we haven't even started planning our back-to-school party," Brit commented.

"I didn't know you guys planned for it anymore," John commented. "I thought that it was so legendary that everyone just knew to show up."

"Well, it has gotten to that point, but we do plan what music we'll play and stuff like that," Hannah explained as she opened her purse and pulled out a pocket calendar. "And we need to plan what day it will be. That's the most important thing."

"Let's see," she muttered while turning pages until she reached the two-page spread for August. "Classes for Ithaca start here," she said, tapping a slender, perfectly manicured finger on the calendar, "but Cornell starts a week earlier, so the best time to have it would be the weekend before Cornell starts, which is in two weeks." She looked up. "Yikes! That doesn't leave us a lot of time. *Where* did the summer go?" She looked back down at the calendar, while the other

four shared a smile. “Saturday is probably better than Friday as far as people returning to campus who have been away all summer.”

“I took the weekend off at both of my jobs ages ago,” Brittany said. “I didn’t want to be stuck working the whole weekend before school started, plus that’s traditionally when we have the party.”

“Well, at least one of us was thinking!” Hannah stated. “I have to work that Saturday morning, but that’s no big deal. I’ll be off in time to help with the preparations.”

Brittany said, “We should totally do something kick ass this year, since it’s going to be our last year.”

“Yeah!” Hannah agreed enthusiastically. “Like what?”

“Like Jell-O wrestling?” John suggested. Everyone at the table looked at him. Mart and Coop just rolled their eyes, used to John’s comments. Hannah and Brittany both stared at him with open mouths, but Hannah looked excited and intrigued, while Brittany looked appalled.

“That’s an awesome idea!” Hannah cried at the exact same time that Brittany cried, “That’s an awful idea!”

Everyone laughed at their simultaneous but completely opposite reactions, even the girls.

John asked Brittany, “What’s so awful about it? You know that one of the co-ed service fraternities does Jell-O wrestling every spring as a fundraiser. Why not bring it to the masses for the fall semester at your party? It would be fun!”

“Jell-O wrestling for charity at least has *some* redeeming social value,” Brittany pointed out.

“Jell-O wrestling for *your* entertainment at our end-of-summer party does not. Then, it’s just a gratuitous activity with no redeeming social value whatsoever.”

John said, “Hannah liked the idea.”

“Yeah, but Hannah also slept with you, proving that she has no taste,” Brittany said sweetly, batting her lashes and taking a long drink of her beer while she smirked at him over her glass.

Coop and Mart burst out laughing while Hannah spit out her beer.

“I knew that there was a reason that I liked you, Brit!” Coop said, reaching over the table to give her a high five.

“Definitely!” Mart agreed. “She tells it like it is!” He was sitting next to Brittany and offered up his hand for another high five, noticing the mischievous twinkle in her doe-brown eyes. She was always attractive, but Mart thought she looked positively radiant expressing her humor.

“Thanks a lot, Brit!” Hannah attempted a sarcastic voice, but it was obvious that she really didn’t care that her sex life was being broadcast across the table. Of course, everyone at the table *had* already been privy to the fact that Hannah and John were both free spirits...and friends with benefits.

Brittany wagged her fingers at her roommate in mock apology and said, “Anyway, back to planning for the party. What should we do that would be special?” She turned and glared at John. “*Besides* Jell-O wrestling,” she said sternly.

“I have another idea,” John said. Four pairs of eyes looked at him doubtfully. “Trust me—it will be a big hit. Temporary tattoos are *always* a big hit.”

Hannah looked at him and deadpanned, “I do trust you, John, but that sounds ominous.”

“Ominous?” John asked.

“Because the idea is coming from *you*,” she said, and everyone at the table laughed, including John.

“Fine, fine,” he said. “I know when I’m defeated.”

“Yeah,” Coop said with a chuckle, “because you have issues.” He pronounced the word with a soft “S”, so it sounded like iss-ooze.

John rolled his eyes. “Whatever.”

“Shush,” Hannah said mildly. “We’re trying to think.”

“Why do I have to shush?” John said, trying to sound irritable, but the twinkle in his blue-gray eyes gave him away.

“Because Hannah said so,” Mart retorted. “Now shush. And think. Or *try* to with that weakened grey matter you call a brain.”

John gave Mart a withering glance, but he remained silent.

The five of them sat and thought. Mart was trying to think of special things that the Bob-Whites had done for their parties, but he was quite sure that nothing that they did would be suitable for a large crowd of strangers. There were picnics by the Wheeler lake or horseback rides through the labyrinthine trails of the preserve, but those obviously weren’t options.

“You know,” Mart said, “this is your *senior party*. You don’t *have* to do anything to make it special. The fact that it’s your last one, and the fact that most attending will know that will make it special enough. You don’t need to pull out some fake stops to prove it.” He looked sidelong at John. “Not even Jell-O wrestling.”

“Mart does have a point,” Coop said. “You don’t have to do a lot to make it special, because it already *is* special. No gimmicks—but maybe a theme would be cool.”

“A heaven-and-hell party?” Hannah suggested. “One bedroom could be heaven and one could be hell, and the drinks could be planned accordingly?”

John shook his head. “The fraternities do that theme to death because they have houses and can do the basement as hell and the upstairs as heaven. Not special enough,” he said.

“Hot guys in loin clothes would be pretty special,” Hannah said with a smirk. “Let’s have a party with a bunch of *them*. Yum.”

All three of the men sitting at the scarred wooden table snorted. “Talk about sexist!” Coop said.

“Hey, it’s *our* party,” Hannah pointed out. “The plan sounds fantastic to me.”

“It would,” John said with another snort.

“A bon voyage party?” Mart asked, thinking of the recent party that the Bob-Whites had thrown for Diana right before she had left for Europe. “You’re heading off for your senior year, which is a voyage of sorts. You could have travel-related decorations, and the drinks could be exotic ones from different lands or something.”

Hannah and Brit nodded slowly, considering Mart’s idea.

“That’s not bad,” Hannah finally said.

“It *would* be fun to do,” Brit stated. “Travel stuff is so fun. And it would be easy to do, too.”

“What else? What kind of drinks would you serve at a bon voyage party?” Hannah asked.

“Where are you guys going after graduation?” Mart asked. “Do you have any idea?”

Hannah nodded. “I’m going to grad school. I’ve applied and gotten my early acceptance to Pepperdine, out in California.”

“Wow,” John said. “That’s a long way to go.”

“Well, I went east for college, so I wanted to go west for grad school. This way, I’ve gotten to experience both coasts.” Hannah was originally from Nebraska.

“What are you studying?” Coop asked. “Aren’t you an American studies major?”

Hannah nodded. “Yep,” she confirmed. “I’m going to study international relations at Pepperdine.”

“That’s awesome,” Mart said. “Pepperdine. In southern Cal, right?”

“Yep, not too far from Los Angeles. It sits on the top of a hill and has the most gorgeous view of the Pacific Ocean. Interviewing there was a pleasure,” Hannah said.

“Okay, sunny Southern California. The ocean. Surfers. You could do a surf theme for those drinks,” Coop suggested enthusiastically.

Mart nodded. “That’s exactly what I was thinking.”

Hannah went on, “I had thought about taking a year off and traveling through Europe, but now I think I just want to get on with my studies and then travel Europe when I’m finished, before I go to work in the real world. I wanted to go after high school, but my parents wouldn’t let me back then. They said I was too young, but honestly, I think that they were afraid that I would fall in love with it and never come home and go to school.” Suddenly, Hannah seemed to realize what she had said. She clamped a hand over her mouth and looked at Mart with horrified eyes.

“Oh, Mart,” she said with a gasp. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to imply that that will happen with Di.”

Mart waved his hand airily because he didn’t want Hannah to feel bad, but his insides clenched. It wasn’t the first time he had felt that way when thinking of the possibility of Di falling in love with Europe and never coming home, but he didn’t want Hannah to know that.

“It’s fine, Hannah,” he said, and he managed to infuse his voice with a lightness he did not feel. “Don’t worry about it.”

Brittany placed a reassuring hand on Mart’s knee under the table and squeezed it. Mart was grateful for the gesture. Then she said, “So, should we do a European theme for another room? In honor of the trip Hannah will make one day?”

Hannah nodded. “Sounds good.”

Coop turned to Brittany. “What plans do you have, Brit?”

“Well, they’re nowhere near as exciting as heading off to California and then Europe in a few years. Honestly, I don’t know what I’m going to do yet. If I don’t get into vet school, I’ll have to decide between finding a job or going to grad school. If I don’t go to grad school and can’t find a job right away, I may have to move back into my parents’ place.”

“In New York City, right?” John asked.

Brittany nodded.

“Well, there’s always the classic Manhattan to represent New York,” John said.

“Appletini? For the Big Apple?” Hannah put in.

“New York is so boring, though! Not like California or Europe,” Brittany lamented. “And possibly having to go home and live with your parents?” She shuddered to emphasize her point.

“You don’t know that that’s going to happen,” Mart reassured her. “I’m sure you’re going to get into vet school, even though you keep saying how competitive it is and how you’ll never get in.” Brittany grinned sheepishly while Mart continued, “Have faith in yourself. You’re smart, you’ve got good grades, and you’ve been working with animals since high school.”

Brittany smiled at Mart. “Thanks,” she said softly. Then she thought of something else and was back to lamenting, “Well, even if I do get into vet school, that’s still boring for the party! I might just be staying at Cornell in their vet program.”

“But you also might be going to Colorado, Iowa, Washington, or Michigan,” Mart pointed out.

John looked at Mart. “How do you know all that?”

Mart looked surprised. “Why wouldn’t I? Brit’s told me where she’s applied to vet school.”

John grinned. “Sounds like you’ve been getting together without the rest of us for some cozy time.”

Mart, used to John’s teasing—and jumping to conclusions—merely rolled his eyes, but Brittany blushed and exchanged a look with Hannah. Mart and John didn’t notice the interaction, but Coop did, and he wondered what was up. He’d noticed that Brittany, although outgoing and friendly with everyone, seemed to have a special affinity for Mart. Did she really like him?

“How about a U.S. road trip theme?” Coop asked, trying to get the conversation back on track before John put his foot in his mouth again.

“Oh!” Hannah said enthusiastically. “I would *love* decorating for a road trip theme! We could have Route 66 signs and maps and lots of 50s’ nostalgia stuff!”

“And old-time postcards!” Brittany enthused.

“What kind of drinks?” John wanted to know.

“That could be a non-alcoholic station,” Mart said. “Milkshakes, malts, root beer floats—that kind of thing.”

“I like that!” Brittany and Hannah exclaimed simultaneously.

The five of them continued to enthusiastically plan the decorations and menu for the party, while Mart was feeling something awaken inside of him. John’s offhanded comment had made him realize how much he had enjoyed hanging out with just Brittany. Usually, there was some sort of group present when they hung out, but the few times he had seen her over the summer, it *had* been just the two of them. Mart had been moping so much that Brittany had taken to coming

over when she had spare time between her two jobs and trying to cheer him up. And during those conversations, Mart had discovered that beneath the perky exterior was a really smart and charming girl.

He thought about how he had felt when Brit had squeezed his knee in support. Something had come alive within him, something he hadn't felt since before Di had broken up with him. He was very aware that every few minutes Brittany's eyes would stray toward him. He was aware of this because his eyes were constantly straying toward her. He felt as though they had turned a corner in their relationship, and he wondered if she felt the same.

After the five friends had finished planning, they left the pub and headed for Hannah's car. It was a nice evening, rather balmy for August, and it felt wonderful after the particularly hot and humid summer they had been experiencing. John walked along, flirting with Hannah, who flirted back. Coop was on the other side of Hannah, navigating their flirting with his usual casual banter. Behind them, Mart walked casually next to Brittany. He felt a sudden urge to hold her hand.

While he was debating whether or not to take her hand, Brittany solved the matter for him, reaching out and placing her small, soft hand in his larger, roughened one. He looked down at her, surprised but pleased, and she looked back up at him, a tentative smile on her face. He smiled warmly at her and squeezed her hand. Instantly, Brittany relaxed and a bright smile replaced the tentative one. Their conversation resumed, and again Mart thought about how much he enjoyed conversing with Brittany. She was smart and funny and witty.

Mart also realized that he had to take his "Diana blinders" off. For so long, he had not really seen any girl except for Di, but now that she was an ocean away finding herself, it was time for him to notice other girls. And maybe even find himself along the way.

And so, on that balmy August night, holding hands, Mart and Brittany smiled at each other, and something special and indefinable grew underneath the summer stars.

* * *

"So, are you going to see Brittany, today?" Coop tried to sound casual as he threw the question out there. He had seen the interactions between Mart and Brittany the night before at the pub, and he hadn't forgotten about that look Hannah and Brittany had exchanged.

The two roommates were hanging out in their living room the following afternoon. Mart was reading a magazine, and Coop was looking through the Cornell University course catalog and the fall semester course schedule to determine what course he could use to replace another course that had been recently cancelled.

Mart looked up sharply. "Why do you ask?"

“Because you guys looked cozy last night.”

Mart said nothing and looked back down at his magazine.

“C’mon, Mart. I think it’s a good thing.” Coop tried to coax his roommate. “You looked happy last night, which is great.”

Mart looked up again. “Was it obvious?”

Coop shook his head, a lock of his brown hair falling onto his forehead. “If you’re worried about John, don’t worry. He’s still oblivious.”

“I don’t know what to do,” Mart said. “I’ve really never considered anyone but Diana. I’ve been in love with her since the first grade!”

“The first thing you do, if you like her, is to go ask her out.”

“Like on a date?” Mart raised an incredulous eyebrow.

Coop laughed. “Yes, like on a date.”

“I don’t know if she’ll go out with me.”

“Well, maybe you should go across the hall and find out,” Coop retorted.

“I would never compare you to John under normal circumstances, so please don’t be so pushy that I’m forced to make that comparison,” Mart said dryly.

“I’m not trying to be pushy,” Coop protested. “I’m just afraid you’ll lose any momentum that you had coming off of last night.”

“I won’t,” Mart said.

Coop looked at him skeptically. “Really? Because if you sit here all afraid because you don’t know what steps to take, that’s exactly what will happen. Go over there and ask her out!”

“Yep. Definitely pushy,” Mart said.

Coop grinned. “Hey,” he said, a twinkle in his dark blue eyes. “I push because I care.”

Mart just snorted in return.

* * *

As soon as Coop headed into downtown Ithaca to look for some books for the upcoming fall semester, Mart headed to the bathroom, brushed his teeth for the second time that day, and

checked his appearance in the mirror. He was being silly, he knew, but he couldn't seem to help himself.

Satisfied that he looked presentable, he left the apartment and quickly crossed the hallway, taking a deep breath before he knocked on the door of the apartment of the two young women. He said a little prayer that it would be Brittany and not Hannah who answered the door. Fortunately, luck was smiling on him, and it was indeed Brittany who answered his knock. Mart was surprised at how excited and warm he felt inside when he saw her. She smiled brightly at her visitor, and Mart smiled back in return.

"Hi, Mart," she greeted him.

"Hey, Brit," he returned. Then the two stood in the hallway and stared at each other, grinning.

"Do you want to come in?" Brittany finally asked.

"Sure," he answered, stepping through the threshold of the door as she held it open for him. He wandered into the living room as he had done countless times before, but this time felt much different than any of his previous visits. It didn't take a genius to understand the difference. This visit was filled with expectation.

As they sat down on the couch, Mart thought that Brittany looked slightly nervous. She cleared her throat and asked in an uncharacteristically shy manner, "Would you like something to drink?"

"Sure, that'd be great," Mart answered.

Brittany went to the fridge and called, "What would you like? We have lemonade, iced tea, milk that looks like it is about to expire, beer, Coke, and red pop."

"Red pop?" Mart asked, his sandy eyebrows shooting into the air. "I thought my wacky sister was the only one crazy enough to drink that stuff."

Brittany laughed. "Hannah absolutely loves the stuff, but I think it's gross myself."

Mart got up off the couch and entered the kitchen, grinning at Brittany. "A woman after my very own heart. What are you having?" Mart asked.

Brittany looked at him in a rather appraising manner. "I was thinking of having a beer and watching some preseason football on TV. Would you like to join me?"

"That sounds great," Mart said. "Who's playing?"

Brittany reached into the refrigerator and pulled out two beers. "I'm not sure," she admitted as she set the bottles on the counter and reached overhead to get down two pint glasses. "I hadn't gotten that far yet."

What Brittany did not tell Mart was that she had been primping in front of the mirror, changing her outfits one after the other until she found one that was casual but pretty and showed off her figure to advantage, hoping that Mart might show up that day. She had finally tired of her battle with fashion and was beginning to give up hope that he would drop by. She had just decided that some football and beer would be just the things to occupy her mind when Mart had knocked on her door.

After Brittany had poured their beers, the two settled on the couch for an afternoon of pigskin. Three hours later, Mart was impressed with Brittany's knowledge of football.

"How do you know so much about football?" Mart asked her.

"My dad played college football at Stanford University. When he moved to Manhattan for his job, he bought season tickets to both the Giants and Jets." She laughed. "He never wanted to have a Sunday off. We went and saw a lot of the West Point games, too."

"Impressive. He's lucky you took to the game so well." He grinned mischievously at her, his blue eyes twinkling merrily as he gave her a light, playful punch on the arm. "You know, you being a *girl* and all."

She laughed and swatted him. "Being a girl has nothing to do with it. I could kick your butt any day of the week."

"Oh yeah?" Mart said, his full attention on her now. "Is that so?"

"Yes, it is," Brittany, said. Her brown eyes held a clear challenge.

Before Mart knew what he was doing, he had tackled her. The two of them rolled around for a while, playfully wrestling, and Mart was surprised that she was holding her own. Any gains he made were hard fought, but in the end, he was the victor. He had had too many wrestling bouts with his older brother to not win. When he had her pinned, he looked down at her. Her cheeks were flushed, and her beautiful doe-brown eyes held a happy sparkle, despite her defeat.

"Admit that men are superior," Mart said, his blue eyes locked on her brown ones.

"Never," she said defiantly, all the while smiling at him. The contrast was provocative and before Mart knew what he was doing, his lips were on hers in a soft kiss. It was tentative at first and then gradually deepened. Mart completely lost himself in that sweet kiss. All of the worries that he had harbored before about what would happen if he were to be with someone other than Diana receded, and all that he felt was the sweet sensation of his lips on Brittany's soft and tender ones.

* * *

“Is that a lipstick smudge on your shirt?” John asked in disbelief when Mart entered their apartment an hour later. Mart froze, his deer-in-headlights look not helping his case. Coop immediately appeared from the kitchen.

“Did I just hear that right?” he asked, a grin lighting his handsome face.

Mart looked down at his shirt to see some pink smudges, and his heart sank. How was he going to get out of this one?

“I think it’s just marker,” he lied. Mart had never been good at lying, but a strong sense of self-preservation kept him moving forward with the excuse that was not believable even to his own ears.

John grinned wickedly, knowing that his prey was cornered. “That is not marker, Belden, and you know it. Come clean.”

“It is so marker,” Mart insisted. “I was helping Mrs. Spencer’s niece upstairs. She was coloring a poster.”

The story was so outrageous that it might actually be true, and John paused for a moment, unsure what to believe

“Oh, really?” Coop asked, a bowl of cookie dough in one hand and a wooden mixing spoon in the other. “Because I just talked to Mrs. Spencer and her niece in the hallway the other day. We chatted for a while.” Coop was intentionally dragging this story out, watching Mart squirm. “They were on their way out. Mrs. Spencer was very specific about where they were going.” He paused for a while, looking Mart directly in the eye and giving him a knowing look, watching the dull red creep along Mart’s cheeks. “It was to JFK because her niece was returning to North Carolina following her visit here.”

John let out a loud whoop and pointed at Mart, shaking his index finger at him. “Busted. You are so busted, dude.” He grinned and waggled his eyebrows. “So, how was it?”

“None of your business, John,” Mart fairly growled, finally entering the apartment past the entryway where he had remained frozen. He gave Coop a withering glance.

“Hey, just think of being with a new chick as an adventure, Belden,” John teased in a good natured manner.

“I’m having too much adventure right now, and I don’t think I like it!” Mart muttered as he tried to push past Coop, but Coop wouldn’t let him by.

“I take it you were with Brittany?” Coop asked.

As mad as Mart was at his friend and roommate, he could not help but smile given the happy turmoil of emotions that he was feeling inside. Was it only two days ago that he had been devastated at putting Diana on a plane to Europe? The last thing he felt right now was devastated. On the contrary, he felt like anything and everything was possible. Apparently, his feelings were reflected on his face, because Coop smiled.

“You don’t even have to answer,” Coop said. “Your face says it all.”

“Yeah, I bet it does,” Mart grumbled as Coop finally let him past.

“I’m glad,” Coop called, but Mart did not respond as he disappeared into the bedroom.

“Hey, Mart! Come back!” John called. “Don’t be such a party pooper!”

Mart was sitting at his desk looking through a local guide for the area when Coop joined him a half-hour later.

“Sorry about that, man,” Coop said. “But there was no way that I was letting you get away with the marker story out there when everyone in that room knew better. Especially since you really need to own up to this. I know that it must be weird to be with anyone other than Di, but you’ve gotta face it.”

Mart sighed. “I know. And now that I’ve gotten over a lot of my fears, I feel a lot better and like I can even talk to you about it. But before...” He shrugged and let the sentence dangle.

Coop nodded. “I understand.” He gestured at the book that Mart was looking through. “What are you looking at?”

Mart picked up the book he was holding and showed it to Coop. “Brittany has never been horseback riding, and she really wants to. She found it fascinating that two of my best friends had a stable full of horses and a game preserve that we rode the horses through practically every day. So, I want to take her. I think it’ll be a lot of fun.”

Coop grinned at his roommate. “I bet it will be.”

* * *

On Brittany’s next free day, Mart took her horseback riding at a riding stable that he had found about a half-hour northeast of Ithaca. It was a quaint little farm, and Mart had been happy that he had been able to find it. Brittany was excited to be on a horse for the first time, and Mart was thrilled to be the one to give that experience to her. No matter what happened in the future, he would always be the person who made her first horseback ride possible.

The two chatted as they rode through bridle trails, Mart on a frisky strawberry roan named Shortcake—who reminded him of Strawberry back home—and Brittany on a sweet little copper bay mare named Penny.

Mart loved that talking to Brittany was easy, every bit as easy as talking to Diana. After so many years of being with just Diana, it had been hard to believe that he could have the same easy conversation with another girl. But, then again, a week ago he never would have believed that he would kiss another girl, so who knew what was possible?

All too soon, Mart realized that their time was up, and it was time to return to their horses back to the stable.

As they climbed into Brittany's bright yellow Ford Focus, a gift from her parents when she had left for college, Brittany said, "I had a really nice time. Thank you for bringing me horseback riding, Mart."

"Any time," Mart said. "If you liked it, we can go again. I miss not being able to wander over to the Manor House stables to saddle up a horse and go riding."

Brittany smiled at him. "I'd really like that," she said.

The car ride back to their apartment was pleasant, with the two college students keeping up a cheerful and relaxed banter.

"Do you want to come over to my place and watch a movie tonight?" Brittany asked as she found an empty spot in the lot and parked the sunny car. "Hannah has to work."

"I'd love to," Mart said without hesitation. "Any particular movie you have in mind? Some smarmy chick flick?" he asked with a grin.

"Not exactly what I had in mind, Belden," she responded with her own teasing grin as the two exited the car and headed into the apartment building. "Ever heard of a little movie called *The Replacements*?"

Mart thought for a moment. "The one where football players go on strike and a bunch of misfits replace them?"

"That's the one," Brittany said. "Have you seen it? It's really funny. Actually, it's one of my favorite movies."

"I haven't seen it, but I'm willing to give it a whirl." Mart thought for a moment. "It's one of your all-time favorites, huh?" he asked. "And if I don't like it, what does that mean?"

Brittany grinned. "That I'll never be able to speak to you again. You'll be dead to me," she responded promptly and pertly. "Absolutely dead."

Mart pretended a look of mock despair and clutched his heart. “Oh no!” he said in mock horror, throwing his body into the outer wall of Brittany’s apartment. “Guess I’d better like this movie if I want to stay in your good graces, huh?”

“You’re getting the hang of this, Belden. Maybe there’s hope for you after all,” she said as she took out her key and unlocked her apartment door. “See you tonight,” she said with a grin, shutting the door on him.

Mart threw back his head and laughed. He really liked how feisty Brittany was. She looked so cute and innocent, but she had a real wicked sense of humor behind the perky exterior. “I’ll keep that in mind!” Mart called through the closed door.

“See that you do!” Brittany called back.

Shaking his head and with a wide smile, Mart unlocked the door to his apartment and entered.

* * *

That evening, Mart appeared at the door of Brittany’s apartment carrying a pizza and a six pack of Coke.

“Martin Andrew Belden reporting for duty, ma’am,” Mart said when Brittany answered the door, giving her the best mock salute that he could muster with his hands full of pizza and Coke. “I’m ready for my indoctrination into the world of *The Replacements*.”

Brittany grinned and reached out to take the Coke from his hands. “Well, Private Belden, it’s so nice to see you reporting for duty so enthusiastically.”

“Private?” Mart said, following her into the apartment. “Can’t I at least be a lieutenant or something?”

Brittany headed toward the kitchen to put the Coke in the fridge while Mart headed into the living room and set the pizza box down on the low coffee table.

“We’ll see if you can be promoted depending on how much you like the movie,” Brittany teased as she returned to the living room, a Coke in each hand. The two settled down on the floor in front of the coffee table. Brittany started to reach across Mart for the remote, but he stopped her and impulsively kissed her. She immediately kissed him back.

When the kiss ended, she looked at him, her brown eyes sparking. “You’ll do just about anything to get promoted, won’t you?”

Mart smiled and reached out to place a few stray strands of Brittany’s shiny brown hair behind her ear. “I just really wanted to do that. Is that okay?”

Brittany nodded happily. “Yeah,” she said rather breathlessly. “It’s okay.”

After that, the two settled into watch the movie and eat pizza. Halfway through the movie, the power suddenly went out. The waning light filtering in from the windows provided some light for them to see, but it was getting dark quickly, and soon the room would be bathed in darkness.

“Do you have flashlights and candles?” Mart asked, sitting up and automatically taking charge. “We need to set them up before it gets dark. It also might be a good idea to check...” His voice dwindled as he noticed the amused expression on his companion’s face.

“What?” he asked. “What’d I say?”

Brittany laughed. “You’re just so take-charge about this power outage, making sure we have the proper equipment and everything.”

Mart laughed a little self consciously. “I guess it is just ingrained in me. This is exactly how my father reacts when there’s a power outage at home.” He smiled ruefully. “I always think of Brian being so like my dad, but I guess I picked up a few things, too.”

Brittany gave him a quick kiss. “Don’t worry about it. I think it’s cute.”

“Cute?” Mart snorted. “*Cute?*”

Brittany laughed. “Okay, fine. I think it’s very manly of you, and I am so glad that I have you here to protect me, you big strong man, you!” She batted her lashes exaggeratedly at him. “My hero.”

Mart grinned and pumped his arm to emphasize his biceps. “Now, *that’s* the proper way to address a man,” he said. Then he looked around. “So, *do* you have flashlights?”

Brittany laughed as she stood up. “I’ll go get them,” she said and disappeared into the kitchen, returning a moment later with a Maglite and a smaller plastic flashlight. “Will this do?” she asked, displaying the two torches.

“Most definitely,” Mart said. After that, Brittany got some candles from her room, lit them, and placed them on the coffee table as she settled back down next to him.

“Now, how are we going to keep ourselves busy until the power comes back?” Mart asked.

Brittany smiled and leaned in toward him. The two were still kissing when the power returned some time later.

* * *

Over the next several days, Mart and Brittany continued to hang out when they both had free time. If Mart was not at his work-study job at the Cornell library, it was a good bet that he could be found with Brit. John continued to tease him, but he was genuinely happy that Mart had finally started to move on following Di’s departure. It had been hard for John to watch Mart

mope following the break up. Not only did he hate seeing his friend in that state, but he did not understand how anyone could mourn the loss of a young girl that way, never having been in love himself.

Coop might outwardly grumble about how he never seemed to see Mart anymore, but inside he also was pleased that Mart had moved on. Brittany was a great girl, and her outgoingness and feistiness really brought Mart out of the shell into which he had retreated after his breakup with Di. Coop had hung out with them a few times, and he enjoyed watching the two of them interact, although it was a little weird seeing Mart with someone other than Diana.

Another time, the three of them headed to the local bookstore to browse. Coop had watched as Mart had found a book of ghost stories local to upstate New York and read some of the stories to Brittany in an animated voice because he knew that Brittany loved ghost stories. It was fun to watch, and it made Coop realize what a romantic Mart truly was and how glad he was that his friend was back to his old self.

* * *

It was on the following Sunday that Mart decided that he needed to get organized for the upcoming semester. He began organizing his old course work and notes in file folders and placing them in boxes in his closet. The next thing he knew, he was organizing his room and all of the boxes in the closet. He was reasonably sure that he could safely get rid of some of his freshman course work that he had been saving “just in case.”

He eventually came to a box that he had put away the previous spring. He set it on the floor in front of him, knowing exactly what was in there and wondering whether or not he should open it. The devil must have been riding him, because he opened it, feeling like Pandora. The items inside the box evoked a myriad of memories and emotions that assaulted him with their bittersweetness. It was almost too much for him to handle, and he very nearly put the lid back on the box.

As if compelled by some unseen force, Mart continued to dig through the box, pulling out mementos of his life with Diana. There were pictures of the two of them dressed to the nines for their proms. There were the tickets from each of their senior proms, which had been engraved invitations inviting the seniors to the wonder of prom.

Mart thought back to his senior prom, that night of moonlit enchantment when he had been convinced that he and Diana would be together forever. He dropped the invitations back into the box with a derisive grunt.

Happily ever after...not, he thought. He pawed through movie stubs from the Cameo, a menu from Wimpy’s diner, Di’s graduation announcement from Sleepyside Junior-Senior High, more pictures of happy times at the Wheeler lake...in Iowa...in Idaho camping with the Belden

cousins...at Pirate's Inn...at Mead's Mountain... The pictures seemed never ending, documenting all of the special times that he and Di had shared together. As the memories flooded over him, Mart realized that he had tears flowing down his cheeks.

In that moment, he realized that despite the wonderful time that he was having with Brittany, he was kidding himself if he thought that he was over Diana.

Mart Belden was not over Diana Lynch at all. Not by a long shot.

My carryover items were: a new outfit (#2.1), calendar (SA#5), gym (#2.2), lipstick smudges (#2.3), finding a sweet memento from someone's past (#2.4), fundraiser (SA#6), somebody in the act of doing something realizes that it is what his/her father always did (#2.5), power outage (#2.6), the phrase: "I do trust you, (insert name), but that sounds ominous." (SA#7), relatives you don't see often (#2.7), someone with "issues" (pronounced with sharp S instead of sh; "iss-ooze") (#2.8), a party pooper/humbug (#2.9), a yearly ritual (SA#8).