

This is a Jixemetri CWP Special Anniversary #3 entry.

Moonlit Enchantment

by Dana

It was supposed to be a night to remember. Everybody talked about how special senior prom was. A few years ago, Dan would have laughed at the thought of going to a school dance, *any* school dance, let alone the prom. And now, here he sat light years away from New York City—if not by physical distance, then by emotional distance—ready to go to his senior prom. And not just ready—excited. Dan Mangan, previously so aloof and so distant, was crazy in love with a girl and willing to get all dressed up in this monkey suit for her. How had he come to this?

Just a few short years ago had been the sharp, searing pain of losing his mother. And then the cold numbness of doing what he had to to survive—in any way he could. But something had intervened—fate, providence; whatever it was Dan counted his blessings every day. He had been resistant at first, sure that this little “hick town” could never offer him what the city had. And he was right, but in a way he never imagined.

Living on the streets had meant being dependent on “friends” like Luke and the other members of his gang. Living on the streets had been a daily struggle for survival, shoving his pride and sense of right and wrong deep down inside himself to be able to do the horrific things he had to do. That’s what the city had offered him.

But in Sleepyside he found an uncle, and a home, and true friends. He finally dared think about the future—to plan and to dream. And he never forgot that when he arrived in Sleepyside there were exactly two people willing to accept him unconditionally. Two people who believed in the best in him, even if he gave them no reason to. Dan knew his uncle was eternally regretful that he had not been as supportive as he could be. And Trixie still sometimes went overboard trying to make up for the rough start they had gotten. But Mr. Maypenny had always believed in him. And so had Honey.

Honey Wheeler had been genuinely nice to him when he first arrived from the city. At first he thought that her kindness was fake—just a rich girl being polite because that’s what she had learned to do at one of those fancy boarding schools—but Dan had soon realized that Honey was much more than just some “rich girl.” She, too, had once been isolated and alone, the outcast. She understood what it was like to be judged on nothing more than how you looked or how much money your daddy made, and she would never do that to anyone else. She was warm-hearted and kind, and always put herself in others’ shoes before passing judgment—not that she ever passed judgment. Honey was too sweet for that. And she had reached out to him, not because she had to or because she felt sorry for him, but because she saw the good in him. She had actually seen the good inside him before he had seen it in himself.

Dan had never forgotten that. And the more he got to know Honey, the more he found to like about her. Sure, Di was the prettiest girl in school and Trixie offered the excitement of a firecracker, but Honey had her own sparkle, her own shine, which Dan found irresistible. So, the one time bad boy and love-’em-and-leave-’em “Romeo of the Devil’s Kitchen” had fallen hard. Not that Dan ever thought that Honey could love him the way he loved her—or the way she loved Brian Belden. But being her friend was enough. Sharing rides through the game preserve or splitting a milkshake at Wimpy’s after a movie at the Cameo was enough. Dan was not greedy.

And then it happened. Honey had developed the same feelings for him that he had been harboring for her for years. Lightning struck both of them and the last three months had been better than Dan had ever imagined they could be. Their time together had been a journey of discoveries for both of them: Honey blossoming into a sensuous young woman; Dan discovering a depth of feeling he had never known before. The two complimented each other in a way that had surprised

both themselves and their friends, but when you really thought about it, realized that it could be no other way. The pairing was pure harmony, each partner's strengths and weaknesses balancing and dancing together like the ultimate yin and yang.

And that is why, on that balmy late spring evening, Dan Mangan stood fiddling with his tux, trying to get everything "perfectly perfect" for Honey Wheeler.

* * *

In her bedroom at the Manor House, Honey was dreamily applying her make-up. Just a few short years ago, she never would have dreamed about attending the senior prom—let alone someone *else's* senior prom as a *junior*. Honey was always a sweet girl, hence her sweet nickname, but the combination of her illnesses and her shyness conspired to keep her a lonely girl with few friends, always standing outside the circle, never in it. Honey winced as she remembered the cruel comment of one of the older girls about the "Wheeler politeness police." At boarding school, it seemed as though she could do nothing right—even her manners were a liability rather than an asset.

But then her father had bought the Manor House and hired Miss Trask, and Honey had met first Trixie and then Jim and then the Belden boys. School had brought Di Lynch into the fold and then later that year a new student arrived at Sleepyside Junior-Senior High.

Honey smiled as she remembered Dan Mangan's arrival in Sleepyside. It hadn't been easy for anyone involved, least of all Dan and his uncle, but Honey had always known that underneath the very large chips on Dan's shoulders, he was a person worth knowing. An attractive blush stained Honey's cheeks as she recalled just how well she had gotten to know Dan.

As Honey delicately applied mascara to her lashes, a knock sounded on her door. At Honey's invitation, the door opened and Honey was surprised to see the elegant form of her mother framed in the doorway.

"Mother!" she cried in surprised delight.

Madeleine Wheeler smiled her Mona Lisa smile. "I thought maybe you'd let your mother help you get ready for the prom. Anything I can do to help?"

"I'd love it!" Honey exclaimed. "I was just about to put on my dress and I can never manage to zip it up myself." Honey paused, confused. "Wait, I thought you and Daddy were going to a fundraiser in the city tonight."

Honey's mother chuckled. "Your father has retired to the heated leather chair in his study. It appears the vegemite he ate earlier did not agree with him. He's relaxing until he feels better." Madeleine then did something that Honey never imagined she would ever see—her refined mother wrinkled her nose in distaste and managed to look like a teenager again. "I don't know how your father eats that stuff!"

Honey giggled. "It *is* an acquired taste."

The two women then set about getting Honey ready for the prom. Once again, the teenager marveled at the changes the last few years of her life had wrought. While she may have thought it improbable she would be attending prom, she certainly *never* would have thought her mother would be helping her get ready! But here the two were, giggling together over earrings and comparing shades of eye shadow.

When they were finished, Honey stood in front of her full-length mirror and couldn't believe the sight she saw in front of her. *When had Honey Wheeler become the poised young woman in the mirror?* she thought. Her mother's hazel eyes were bright with pride and unshed tears as they met a very similar pair of hazel eyes in the mirror.

“Oh, Honey,” her mother said. “You look perfectly perfect!”

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“He walked up to me and he asked me if I wanted to dance,” Trixie Belden playfully sang to her childhood teddy bear as she danced around the room. Jim was taking the spunky blonde to the Hamilton Inn tonight for dinner, while most of her other friends attended Sleepyside’s senior prom. Her best friends were dating seniors, and therefore going to the prom, but Trixie was dating Jim, who had taken her to his senior prom two years before.

Trixie was excited to be able to see her two best friends, Honey and Di, in their prom finery, but was just as glad that she didn’t have to put on a formal and make an appearance at a dance. Jim had only been home from Michigan State a couple of days now and she would rather sit and have dinner and conversation with him than bop around a crowded dance floor, shouting over the music.

Trixie pulled on her navy blue dress pants and her white v-necked silk summer sweater and surveyed her image in the mirror. Not bad, she reflected as she added a gold necklace Jim had given her for her seventeenth birthday a few weeks ago. A dusting of powder to camouflage her freckles and a smattering of pink lipstick, and Trixie was done getting ready. She continued to dance around the room, singing to her teddy bear, when Brian entered her room without even bothering to knock.

“What’s up, big brother?” Trixie said teasingly as she tossed the teddy bear at him.

Brian caught the teddy bear and unsmilingly set it down next to the stuffed cat Bobby referred to as the Evil Orange Animal, given its leering grin, bright orange fur, and missing front leg.

“Honey and Dan are here,” Brian said curtly and was gone before Trixie could react.

“Sheesh!” she said out loud to her teddy bear and the EAO. “What’s gotten in to *him*?” Then she shrugged it off and ran down the stairs two at a time. No matter what Brian’s mood, Trixie knew tonight was going to be perfectly perfect.

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Diana laughed in exasperation. “Mother! Mart and I need to get to the Beldens’ so they can take pictures, too. I think two rolls is enough!”

Ed Lynch grinned at his wife and added his pleas to his daughter’s. “And I’d like to start my anniversary celebration with my wife.”

Veronica Lynch smiled indulgently. “Okay, okay,” she said good-naturedly, “it’s just that you look so beautiful, Diana, that I want to make sure I get lots of pictures of you.” Diana’s mother recalled a time when she couldn’t have afforded the luxury of taking two rolls worth of pictures of an event. She still deeply regretted that the only reason she had any pictures of Diana’s first day of kindergarten was due to Helen Belden’s generosity. The house and the servants and the cars that her husband’s new wealth afforded were all nice, but it was these once impossible little luxuries that Veronica treasured more than anything.

Diana was laughing at her mother’s words. “Mom, you have to say that—you’re my mother!”

Before Mrs. Lynch could protest, Mart spoke up. “But I’m not your mother and I can confirm that you look absolutely, breathtakingly, and astonishingly gorgeous.” He leaned in to kiss the black-haired beauty and Mrs. Lynch immediately started taking more pictures. Ed Lynch put his arm around his wife and whispered something in her ear that made her blush, but she did stop taking pictures long enough to hug her daughter and her daughter’s boyfriend and let them depart in the sleek black limousine.

Veronica and Ed put their arms around each other and headed back inside the house. Veronica looked up at her husband and smiled.

“Aren’t our daughter and her friends perfectly perfect?”

* * *

Brian stood at the top of the stairs and watched his parents take photos of all three of the happy couples, Trixie protesting because it wasn’t prom night for her, and Jim playfully putting his arm around her and saying that there was nothing wrong with lots of pictures of his sapphire girl for him to take back to college with him in the fall.

Brian rolled his eyes and wished he had taken his friend Mark’s offer of a sofa-bed that weekend. *At least I’d be in Virginia and not forced to watch this happiness-fest*, the young collegiate thought bitterly.

His eyes traveled to where Honey and Dan were standing off to the side, whispering happily to each other while Mrs. Belden took pictures of Mart and Di. The look of pure love in Honey’s large hazel eyes as she looked at Dan could not be missed.

Well, isn’t this perfectly perfect, Brian thought to himself as he resisted the urge to punch the nearest wall.

* * *

“I thought we’d never get out of there!” Dan said as he relaxed in the back of the limo on the way to the Sleepyside Country Club.

“Awww, poor Danny doesn’t like his picture taken,” Mart teased.

“It’s not that, exactly. It’s just that there were *so many!*”

The group laughed happily, not really minding all of the pictures the various parents had taken. Prom was ahead of them, and that was all that mattered. The night they had been thinking about for so long was finally here!

“I wonder how the prom decorating committee ended up decorating the club,” Honey idly asked.

“Splattered paint everywhere,” Mart stated with a dead-pan face.

“Maxi-pad torches,” Dan piped up.

Honey and Di stared at their fellow Bob-White in disbelief.

“Wha-at?” Honey finally asked.

Dan laughed. “Yeah, I hear the committee decided to do like a jungle theme complete with palm trees and torches. And I also hear that maxi-pads make great torches.”

“No kidding?” Diana asked. When Dan burst out laughing, she smacked him playfully. “You brat!”

“No, seriously, Debbie Horner, who I work in the cafeteria with and who is on the committee, said that it’s going to be out of this world. I guess the various fundraisers the senior class held over the last year brought in more money than anticipated, and they decided to spend the extra money on decorations and on upgrading the dinner menu.”

“Sounds great. Happen to know what’s on the menu?” Mart immediately asked.

“Nope, Debbie was pretty closed-mouthed. She just said we’d all have to wait and see.”

"Well, we don't have long to wait," Di stated as she looked out the tinted glass of the window. "We're here!"

A shiver of excitement ran down Honey's spine, and she and Di grabbed each other's hands and squealed in delight. Prom night was here!

The boys escorted their dates to the door of the Sleepyside Country Club and presented their tickets to the faculty members manning the entrance.

"Enjoy yourselves tonight, kids," Miss Golden smiled at them.

"We will, Miss Golden," Honey said.

The four swept through the doors of the club and found themselves in a fairy tale world. Dan leaned down and whispered into Honey's ear, "Welcome to Moonlit Enchantment." Honey's eyes widened as she realized Dan had known the whole time they were discussing the decorations what to expect. Dan read her look and smiled. "I knew the decorating theme, that's all." His dark eyes swept the room. "It's pretty fantastic isn't it?"

The two couples gazed at the transformed country club, delighting in the glamour that surrounded them. The overhead lights were dimmed, and the walls were covered with dark blue paper. A shimmering, glowing three-tiered chandelier in the center of the room and silver stars and twinkling lights on the walls gave the illusion of being outside on a moonlit night. The tables were covered with floor-length blue gossamer pape, and the table tops sparkled with silver confetti stars. At each place a keepsake champagne flute, embossed with "Sleepyside Senior Prom" and the date, was filled with iridescent shred. Along with the twinkling lights adorning the sides of each table and the strategically-placed light blue glitter candles, the iridescent flutes caused each table to appear absolutely glowing and magical. A Lucite crescent moon in the center of each table completed the effect.

"Wow!" Di said in an awed voice.

"That pretty much says it all, doesn't it?" Mart, normally so verbose, shared his girlfriend's awe.

"Shall we find a table?" Dan asked and placed his hand on Honey's back to guide her toward an empty table near the dance floor. "How's this?"

The other three nodded their agreement and sat down at the table. The happy couples made small talk as they watched the faces of their classmates as they arrived and saw the splendor they would be spending the evening in.

"Debbie and the committee did a fabulous job," Honey stated. "They should be so proud!"

"Let's hope the food committee also exerted a stupendous effort on the menu!" Predictably, Mart was thinking of his stomach.

"I heard corn dogs, Fritos, and ice cream sandwiches served in picnic baskets," Dan said slyly, as he winked at Honey.

Mart snorted and Di giggled. "The decorating is a far cry from the maxi-pad torches you promised us, Dan Mangan, so I'm sure the food will be, too!"

True to Di's prediction, it was. After the tables had filled and three other couples, including Ruthie Kettner and her boyfriend, joined the Bob-Whites at their table, the wait staff began serving dinner. The first course was a delicious chicken noodle soup that tasted homemade. After a tossed salad, the prom-goers had their choice of either prime rib or baked herb chicken with roasted red bliss potatoes and almond green beans. Dessert was a heavenly tiramisu. After the wonderful dinner even Mart proclaimed he was full and sent his compliments back to the chef.

Ruthie and her boyfriend excused themselves and declared they were going to take a walk to digest their meal before the dancing started. As they headed away, Mart leaned in toward Honey and Di.

"Isn't that the guy who wore his uncle's Hee-Haw overalls to the last dance?" he asked in a low voice.

Honey giggled. "It sure is. His uncle's name was Lum—I distinctly remember that!"

"I think Ruthie and what's-his-name had the right idea about taking a walk. Care to join me, Miss Wheeler?" Dan looked expectantly at his girlfriend.

Honey's eyes sparkled in the candlelight. "But of course, Mr. Mangan."

As the couple left the table, they grinned as they heard Mart call out. "Be good, you two, and don't do anything I wouldn't do!"

The sun was just beginning to set as the two strolled the grounds of the country club. The delicate smell of lilacs filled the air and Honey felt very content as she walked along the stone paths, her fingers intertwined with Dan's.

Dan broke the silence. "Have I told you how beautiful you are? Your dress is, well, incredible!"

Honey smiled shyly. "You've mentioned it a couple of times since you picked me up at Manor House, but I love hearing it!" She looked at her dark-haired boyfriend, gorgeously arrayed in a black tuxedo with an emerald green vest and tie that matched her dress perfectly. "Have I told you how dashing you look in a tux, Mr. Mangan?"

It was Dan's turn to smile. "I think I remember you saying something to that effect." He pulled her toward a nearby bench and they sat down together. "Happy prom night, Honey Wheeler," Dan said as he kissed her tenderly.

Honey sighed after the kiss was over. "I do love kissing you, Dan Mangan."

Dan smiled. "I love kissing you, Honey Wheeler. Remember our first kiss?"

"Yep," Honey said simply, her mind wandering to that luscious memory. "Remember the storm that night?"

"I do. I also remember how Trixie and Jim ran over shattered glass and had to change a tire in that storm, and I how I got to spend a cozy evening in an abandoned schoolhouse with the girl of my dreams."

Honey leaned forward and pressed her lips on Dan's and everything, including the prom, was forgotten for quite a while. Finally, Dan pulled away. "I did bring you to the prom, so I suppose we should actually attend said prom."

Honey smiled and stood, extending her hand to Dan, who took it. Just then, Honey caught a flash of light in the sky.

"Oh! A shooting star!" she cried.

Dan grinned. "I saw it, too, and made a wish."

"I suppose you're not going to tell me for fear it won't come true," Honey pretended to put. Dan kissed her full lips.

"Maybe one day I'll tell you. If it comes true."

Honey suddenly felt a shiver run through her, and she knew it wasn't the balmy spring evening. Honey suddenly knew, just *knew*, what Dan had wished for. And if she had been thinking fast enough when she saw the star, she would have wished for the same thing.

“Shall we head back to the ‘Moonlit Enchantment’ of the prom?” she asked, her voice light.

“We’re just trading one moonlit enchantment for another, but let’s go,” Dan agreed.

When the couple returned to the club, the prom was in full swing. Honey looked around until she spotted Mart and Di fervently dancing to an impossibly fast song. Honey turned to Dan, who was visibly nervous about joining the frenzy on the dance floor.

“Next slow song?” Honey said, taking pity on her boyfriend.

“Would that be okay?”

“Of course,” the honey-haired girl said as she led him back to their table. The couple didn’t have long to wait, as the deejay soon switched to a Celine Dion song. Dan and Honey joined the couples on the dance floor. As Dan took his girlfriend into his arms, he savored the feel of her lithe body leaning into his. He caught the faint scent of jasmine as he held her close and knew that the smell of lilac and jasmine would always bring him back to this one moment in time.

Dan Mangan, former gang member, was caught up in the romance of prom—he could hardly believe it. As he listened to Celine Dion sing “It’s All Coming Back to Me Now,” he thought about the stories his mom had told him of her senior prom. She and Tim Mangan had had a magical night, she always told Dan, recounting the romance of the evening to her son. The stories she told, once lost in his need to bury the pain of her death, flooded back into his mind. He could begin to imagine what it must have been like for his mother and father to be dancing together, swept up in the magic of their prom, totally in love.

He squeezed Honey tighter. “I love you, Honey,” he whispered.

Honey removed her head from where it had been resting on his shoulder and gave him a light kiss. “I love you, too, Dan.”

Dan at that moment knew, without a doubt, that the wish he had wished upon that fleeting, shooting star would come true. And that no matter what fate or time threw at Honey and him, as long as they were together, everything would be perfectly perfect.

Yes, Trixie dancing around was inspired by Elisabeth Shue dancing around singing in the beginning of *Adventures in Babysitting*, a movie I have never seen start to finish, but for some reason that beginning scene always stuck in my mind! And since Mary’s Trixie is Elisabeth Shue, why not? :)

Carryover items: a picnic basket (#1), a special occasion—the prom (#2), a snack food (#3), a shooting star (#4), a storm (#5), Lum’s Hee-Haw overalls (#6), three legged cat (#7), an anniversary (#SA1), freckles (SA#2). The Celine Dion song I chose was in homage to the first fanfic I ever read—Misty’s “The Song Remembers When.” Thanks to Susansuth and Leigh for being so encouraging about “the prom story.” ☺