

A note about "Dana's World": This story is set in a very bright future where all terrorists have been neutralized and no longer operate. As such, people can once again meet their loved ones at the gate at the airport! :) Title is from the Foo Fighter's song of the same name. Thanks muchly to Susansuth for her edit of part one. She fixes my comma issues like nobody's business!

## ***Walking After You*** *by Dana*

### ***Part One: I Give You My Love***

Dan Mangan sat back in his seat, his heart pounding and adrenaline flowing through his veins. He tried to relax, but he couldn't. How could he? He was on a plane that would take him back to Honey. Back to the woman he had loved for so long.

He closed his eyes and remembered the first time he saw her. She had been sitting on the bus with her best friend when he climbed aboard behind her family's gamekeeper. Her warm hazel eyes had been curious, but friendly, as they lit on the "new kid." Those hazel eyes and that beautiful honey hair were the first good things he remembered about Sleepyside. There were a lot of good memories in Sleepyside, but they all flowed from that one indelible memory. The memory of the day he had found his golden girl.

Everything is about to change, Mangan, he thought to himself. You're ready, but is she?

After accepting a once-in-a-lifetime internship, the twenty-four-year-old had spent the last year in California. He and Honey had both agreed that this opportunity was not to be passed up. They also agreed that the opportunities that were opening up for Honey in New York could not be given up either. After many long talks, they both knew that each had to pursue their dreams. But they also knew that their love was strong enough to withstand the separation.

The year had been bittersweet for Dan. He loved the internship, loved learning from his superiors, working with his colleagues, and the work that both physically and mentally challenged him. But he also missed his girlfriend back in New York. He had only seen her three times in the last year. His internship had kept him busy, and Honey and Trixie's fledgling detective agency required a lot of nurturing to get it off the ground. Their times together were few and far between, but they had made the most of them. A long weekend in the California wine country, a Vermont ski weekend, and a heavenly weeklong Caribbean cruise. The islands had been stunning, and Honey and he had fallen in love with the laid-back beauty of St. Thomas in particular.

Dan had known for a long time that Honey was the woman that he was going to spend the rest of his life with, but something about being with her in the carefree world of the Caribbean, surrounded by startlingly white sand beaches, lush green mountains, and mesmerizing turquoise waters made Dan realize that the second, the very *second*, that they could be together again on a permanent basis, he would propose to her.

Which meant the second he got off of this plane. He was returning to New York permanently and he wanted Honey at his side.

The two had never really discussed marriage, *per se*. It was more of something they took for granted. One day, when they were ready, they both knew they would become husband and wife. Dan knew he was ready. He instinctively knew that Honey was ready, too, but now that it was time to actually ask her, he was anxious. He felt like that boy of so long ago, climbing on to a strange bus surrounded by strange people.

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Dan took a deep breath as he went over his plan. He had actually had to involve a lot of people in this plan of his! He knew it was rather extravagant, maybe even a little over-the-top, but he hoped it was romantic, and that Honey would realize that all of the effort he put into it wasn't to show off, but to show her what she meant to him.

He had had dozens of roses delivered to him at the jet-bridge of the plane when he left Detroit, where his layover had been. With the help of the flight attendants, he had circulated a picture of Honey during the flight. The passengers would, if everything went as planned, each take a rose as they left the airplane and present it to Honey, saying, "Dan will be right with you."

Dan took a deep breath and exhaled shakily as the flight attendants announced that their arrival at JFK was imminent. As the plane lost altitude, the butterflies in Dan's stomach turned into bats. He could feel the blood draining from his face and quickly gripped the arms of his seat. He took a deep, cleansing breath to steady himself and tried to boost his confidence by thinking positive thoughts.

"Mr. Mangan?" Dan looked up to see a petite flight attendant looking at him. "Mr. Mangan, this is the most romantic thing anyone on the flight crew has ever seen. She's going to love it!" With a reassuring smile, the flight attendant went to prepare for arrival, leaving Dan feeling buoyant.

As the plane taxied to the gate, the young man went over in his mind what he was going to say to Honey when he proposed. During one very long evening a few weeks before, he had written draft after draft of what he wanted to say to his girlfriend at this very important moment. He had then practiced and practiced until he was confident that his presentation was near perfect.

As the passengers filed off the plane, each taking a rose as requested, Dan received a lot of attention. Everyone was excited to be a part of such a romantic event. Women told him that if his girlfriend didn't marry him, they would! The men complained good-naturedly that he was making things tough for them. Little girls smiled shyly at him, while boisterous young boys high-fived him.

Soon, the line of passengers dwindled and Dan knew the time was almost near. He withdrew a small black box from his pocket and snapped it open. Nestled in the black velvet was a one-carat princess-cut diamond set in platinum and flanked on each side by an elegant baguette diamond. *A princess for my princess*, Dan thought as he picked up the dozen calla lilies he had arranged to carry. With one last deep breath, he headed down the jetway.

His heart raced and he swore he could hear the pounding of ocean surf reverberating through his head, but when Dan stepped into the airport and saw his golden girl waiting for him, her arms full of flowers, and a happy, but quizzical, expression on her lovely features, time stopped. The buzz in his head quieted and an overwhelming peace descended upon him. *This was right.*

He approached his girlfriend and realized that every word of his carefully prepared speech had fled from his mind. But he knew that didn't matter. He also saw that his fellow passengers were still gathered around, with their friends and family, waiting to witness this moment. That didn't matter, either.

The only thing in the world that mattered was that the beautiful honey-haired woman he had loved for so long agreed to spend the rest of her life with him.

Honey had stood at the gate waiting for Dan to appear, excitement building inside her as she watched his plane taxi toward the gate. She had not seen Dan for months, and knowing that he was returning to New York permanently, had given her immeasurable anticipation. She had hardly been able to concentrate on anything for almost a week, her thoughts frequently straying to Dan and his homecoming. As the door opened and passengers started to disembark, she had become flabbergasted when they had started handing her roses and telling her that Dan would be right with her.

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Now, as her armful of flowers grew, a new type of excitement exploded deep within her belly.

One of the things Honey loved most about her boyfriend was his simplicity. Dan was not a showy person, preferring to express himself in simple but meaningful ways. If he had gone to all of this trouble to set this up, Daniel Timothy Mangan had something pretty spectacular planned. Honey could only imagine, and dare hope, what it could be.

Then Dan himself appeared. Honey's heart leapt as she took in his handsomely chiseled features, his black hair flopping sexily onto his forehead, and his rugged, toned body, which his t-shirt and khaki pants could not hide. Her smile widened as she saw that he was carrying calla lilies, her favorite flower.

Dan strode purposefully to Honey and gently placed the lilies in her arms with the roses she already held. Without a word, he bent down on one knee.

Tears immediately sprang to Honey's eyes as the full realization of what was happening crashed down upon her.

"Honey," Dan began, his deep, baritone voice raw with emotion, "I feel as though my life began the day I met you. From the very beginning, you looked past the black leather jacket and that stupid leather cap and saw *me*. You taught me how to live again after I lost my parents, you showed me how to love, and you made me see that there are angels on this earth. I've lived without you for the last year, and I never want to do that again. Madeleine Grace Wheeler, will you please do me the honor of spending the rest of your life by my side?"

Dan's dark eyes were full of his love for the honey-haired woman who stood before him, and his features were etched with the profound hope he felt at that moment, breathlessly waiting for her answer.

Deep, full happiness blossomed inside Honey, staring at the man she had known for a long time that she would spend her life with. The moment was now here. "The rest of our lives" was about to begin. With the knowledge that she had never done anything more right in her entire life, Honey cried a joyful, "Yes!"

As the gathered crowd clapped and cheered their approval, Dan sprang to his feet and gathered Honey into his arms. She laughed happily as she threw her arms around him and they shared a passionate kiss.

Dan suddenly pulled away from the embrace. "Your ring!" he exclaimed, causing a ripple of laughter to flow through their gathered audience.

He opened the box that he had managed to forget about in his nervousness and presented it to his fiancée.

"It's beautiful," Honey breathed as Dan took the diamond and placed it on her finger. "It's perfectly perfect!" She leaned forward to give Dan another kiss, as the crowd began to disperse. There were many smiles as the passengers went about the mundane routine of baggage claim and finding their transportation. They were happy to have been invited to share in a special moment, and the joyful memory of the handsome black-haired man and his golden girl would linger for quite awhile.

"Well, it's about time, you two!" a flippant voice called.

Honey turned in surprise and saw her best friend approaching. "Trixie! What are you doing here?"

"I wouldn't miss two of my best friends getting engaged to each other for the world!" the petite blonde exclaimed, a happy smile relaxing her features. Her blue eyes sparkled as she gave her best friend a hug. "Congratulations, sweetie, you deserve this!"

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“You didn’t think I’d miss this, either, did you, Sis?” Jim Frayne appeared out of nowhere, a broad smile on his handsome face.

“Jim!” Honey shrieked as she let go of Trixie to give her brother a hug.

Over his shoulder, the newly engaged woman saw the rest of her high school friends approaching. She whirled around and faced her fiancé, her twinkling hazel eyes belying the accusing look she gave him.

“You planned this!”

Dan grinned unabashedly. “That’s my fiancée, a master of the obvious!”

Honey pretended to swat him, but she soon found herself engulfed in a group Bob-Whites of the Glen hug. For Honey, at that moment, everything was perfectly perfect.

After the group broke up, Diana could be heard exclaiming over the ring, as Mart clasped his best friend’s hand. “It’s all over now!” he joked.

“Martin Belden!” Diana scolded. “You stop that!”

Brian shook Dan’s hand next, drawing him away from the happy group gathered around Honey.

“Congratulations. You’re a lucky man, and I wish you two the best.”

Dan stared into the chocolate eyes of the man who had once been his rival for Honey’s affections and instantly knew that Brian was sincere. “Thanks. I know I’m lucky,” he said, his voice hoarse with emotion. The Bob-Whites had been through a lot, but all these years later, they were as strong as ever.

The two, sharing a new understanding, returned to the tight little group and joined in their celebration.

“Hey! How about you guys let me get out of this airport and we go celebrate?” Dan exclaimed, looking at the six people he loved most on this earth.

Trixie looked at him with an expression that clearly said she thought he had lost his mind. “Umm, Dan? You’ve been gone a year, you’ve just gotten engaged, and you haven’t seen your betrothed in months. Don’t you want to be alone with her?”

Dan gave Trixie a wicked grin. “Oh, we’ll celebrate plenty by ourselves later, but you all made this trip to the airport, and I’d like to celebrate.” He turned to Honey. “What do you say?”

Honey smiled happily at her fiancé. “I’d absolutely love it if we could all be together to celebrate. This is the first time in forever all the Bob-Whites have been in the same place, and I’d like to take advantage of that.”

“Well, the lady hath spoken,” Mart said, clapping his hands together. “Let’s go.”

The Bob-Whites, arm in arm and riding a wave of togetherness, headed toward baggage claim.

Dan and Honey, hands clasped and hearts joined, felt a strong sense of love and commitment enveloping them as they looked ahead to a very bright future.

### ***Part Two: Forever True***

Honey Wheeler opened her eyes and basked in the warm Caribbean sunshine that flowed into her hotel room and bathed her in its rays. She smiled slowly, deliciously, as she looked at the bright blue sky through the glass doors. She, Madeleine Grace Wheeler, was in paradise—St. Thomas to be exact—and today was the day she was to marry.

Like all little girls, Honey had dreamed of the glorious day when she would marry her very own prince charming. Even as a shy child, she had happily snuck into her mother’s closets and raided her extensive

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wardrobe for items suitable to be married in, even if only for pretend. A long white silk tunic blouse made the perfect wedding dress on her tiny frame, while a filmy white chiffon scarf served as the perfect veil for her five-year-old fantasies. A convenient white stain sheet, snatched off the elegant bed and clumsily tied around her waist served as a cathedral train that even Princess Di would fall envy to. The white roses, seized from the glittering cut crystal Tiffany vase that decorated Madeleine Wheeler's vanity, became the blushing pretend bride's bouquet, and a fantasy wedding was born.

But today, a magnificent day in paradise, was no fantasy. Today, Madeleine Grace Wheeler, Honey to her friends, was going to marry Daniel Timothy Mangan, her very own prince charming.

As she lay beneath the cool, crisp sheets, reveling in the feel of the morning sunshine warming her face and the cheerful sound of the exotic birds singing outside her balcony, Honey slowly adjusted to the realization that, after so much waiting and anticipating, her wedding day was finally here.

The young women laughed gleefully as she realized that life was very seriously imitating art right now. Well, maybe not art, but a 60s girl group song, anyway.

*Spring is here, the sky is blue  
Birds all sing, like they do  
Today's the day we'll say "I do"  
And we'll never be lonely anymore*

Honey stretched and began to count her blessings. The last ten years had not been perfect by any means; there had been occasional rifts between her high school friends at various times, romances had soured, and, in some cases, been rekindled, and there had been long separations. But, for the most part, she and her friends had come through the events of the last decade unscathed. For that, Honey was eternally grateful.

And now, the morning of her wedding had dawned in the most perfectly perfect way. Honey was so happy that she almost felt guilty. The honey-haired bride-to-be quickly banished that fleeting thought and concentrated on her special day.

The twenty-three-year-old had pulled a robe around her nightgown and was standing on the balcony sipping tea from the in-room coffee service, when a knock sounded on the door. She hurried across the room and threw open the door, finding her two closest friends standing in the hallway.

"Honey Wheeler!" Pretty Diana Belden scolded her friend, a merry twinkle alight in her violet eyes. "You can't just throw open the door like that." She scurried past a startled Honey and into the room, Trixie following right behind her, and continued her tirade. "What if it was your groom? You *know* it's bad luck for him to see you before the wedding!"

Honey shut the door and rolled her hazel eyes, but the gesture was softened by the sweet smile that accompanied it. "I saw Dan and your husband drinking last night at the tiki bar, remember? There's no way he's up this early!"

Trixie and Diana laughed. "Very true!" Di conceded good-naturedly. "Weren't Mart and Dan funny last night?" Di asked, a reminiscent smile playing on her lips.

Honey and Trixie giggled at the memory. "My almost twin giving Dan marriage advice was a scream," Trixie agreed, her blue eyes bright with mirth.

"When Dan looked at Mart and said 'I love you, man' I nearly lost it," Honey laughed.

"Clichés are clichés for a reason," Trixie stated seriously. "Mart and Dan have been best friends for forever. They've both grown up and stayed close. They're both on the verge of new things, realizing

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they've crossed over into adulthood." Trixie's sapphire eyes sparkled. "And the most important ingredient: they'd had a few beers. It really was only a matter of time before one of them looked at the other, realized the magnitude of the situation, and blurted out those infamous words." Trixie grinned. "My money was on Mart to say it first. Dan caving cost me ten bucks!"

Diana and Honey stared at their friend in incredulity. "You bet on this?"

"Oh, yeah. Jim and I sat back and watched the whole thing brewing. Jim put money on Dan and won."

The three girls laughed uproariously, sitting around Honey's bed and giggling, just as they had when they were teenagers.

After the laughter had subsided, Trixie dramatically threw herself back onto the pile of pillows in her usual exuberant manner. "So, what's the timeline this morning?" she asked practically. "It's almost seven now and the wedding's at ten. What's first?"

"Breakfast," Diana said firmly. "Honey, you need to eat, no matter how early the wedding is. But don't worry, being the fabulous matron-of-honor that I am, I've already ordered you room service. It should be here soon."

"You also need your groom to be on time, despite his indulgences and emotional outbursts of last night, so—being the stellar maid of honor that I am—I've already arranged for a personal wake up visit for Dan."

Honey's hazel eyes glistened. "You two are the best." The happy twinkle in her eyes turned to a mischievous gleam. "I love you, man!"

The three friends once again dissolved into hysterical giggles. Their merriment was interrupted by another knock on the door. Diana sprang to answer it before the bride could reveal herself, even if it was probably only room service.

Instead of the hotel attendant that Di was expecting, Madeleine Wheeler stood framed in the doorway. "I thought I heard laughter coming from this room!" she smiled and entered the room. She strode purposefully, but ever gracefully, over to her lovely daughter and gently gathered her into her arms.

"Oh, Honey, I'm so happy for you today."

The younger Madeleine smiled at her mother. "I'm pretty darn happy, too, Mother," Honey said with an impish grin. Then her smile turned softer and she added, "I'm so happy with Dan, and I'm happy that you're here to share it."

"There isn't any where I'd rather be, darling," the beautiful Madeleine Wheeler said, her melodic voice choked with emotion.

"Mother, I know how much you always wanted me to have a big, traditional church wedding. I hope you're okay with my choice."

"Oh, sweetheart," Madeleine murmured. "I just want you to be happy. I think this wedding is going to be the most beautiful wedding on earth, and it's all the more special because you and Dan planned it. That makes it perfectly perfect," she said, using Honey's notoriously favorite phrase. "I just always thought you wanted a big wedding since you loved to play dress-up bride."

Honey gasped in surprise and stared at her mother. "You *knew* about that?"

Madeleine's musical laugh rang out. "Of course. I absolutely detested that white silk tunic blouse after I had owned it for about five minutes—I never could understand what possessed me to buy that thing!—

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but I knew how much you loved to play in it and imagine it as a wedding dress, so I never could bring myself to discard it.”

Honey was overwhelmed with emotion, any remaining fears about her mother “not loving her because she wasn’t a boy” as a cruel maid of her family had once said, completely evaporated in that precious moment. Trixie was surreptitiously dabbing at her eyes, and Diana didn’t even bother to hide the tears that flowed down her cheeks as mother embraced daughter, a stunning picture of golden loveliness.

The special moment was interrupted by yet another knock on the door. “Grand Central Station!” Trixie called out at Diana once again sprang up. “Breakfast!” she cried as she saw the silver cart filled with wonderful looking pastries and fruits. She hurriedly tipped the waiter and pushed the cart farther into Honey’s room.

Madeleine excused herself, saying that she and Matthew also had breakfast on the way. She smiled once again at the daughter she had once not even really known and gave a prayer of thanks that Matthew had decided to move them all to Sleepyside all those years ago. How far the two of them had come. “I just wanted to say good morning on this most special day. Now, you three go back to your giggling and gabbing. That is the right term, isn’t it?” She smiled merrily and left the room.

“Your mom is great,” Trixie said off-handedly as she spread thick cream cheese on a bagel.

“Absolutely,” Di agreed before she stuffed a juicy pineapple piece in her mouth.

“She really is,” Honey said, awe still apparent in her voice. “I had no idea she knew that I used to sneak into her closet when I was little and dress up like a bride.”

“It just proves what I’ve been saying since we were thirteen years old. She always loved you, she just wasn’t sure how to show it.”

“You’re right, Trix,” Honey said as she threw her friend a warm glance. “You usually are.”

“I know!” Trixie crowed in mock smugness.

Once again, the girls dissolved into mirth. After the food tray had been decimated, the bride and her two attendants decided on a plan of action for the morning.

It was in trying to plan the morning events that the three realized that there really wasn’t much to do. The Emerald Beach Resort where they were staying was the wedding site. As a matter of fact, the white sand beach beneath Honey’s balcony was where she would stand in a few hours’ time and become Honey Mangan. The wedding coordinator was providing the flowers, the wedding cake, and the champagne. Honey and Dan had gone to the U.S. Territorial Court in Charlotte Amalie, the capitol of St. Thomas and the Virgin Islands, yesterday and been sworn in and completed the necessary paperwork for today’s ceremony.

Never a showy or a flashy type of person to begin with, Honey wanted today to be about the love that she and Dan shared, not about showy head-pieces or elaborate hair styles, so she was wearing her honey-colored hair in it’s usual no fuss style: long and loose and flowing.

In the spirit of a simple celebration of love, the bride had chosen a dress that was the epitome of simplicity. There were no buttons or zippers to be found on it at all. During the year that she had been engaged, Honey had searched and searched to find the perfect dress for her wedding day. One that would be elegant and beautiful, but would also be simple and austere enough for a beach wedding. And she had finally found it.

Her dress was three pieces, and actually rather reminiscent of her childhood dress-up activities. One piece was a gorgeous white silk sarong. She would wear it wrapped around her petite waist, an Italian

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silk sarong in ombre shades of turquoise and Caribbean blue underneath. The sarongs would be secured at her waist with a heart-shaped pearl bead encrusted coconut sarong tie.

Her top was an extra-long opaque white silk scarf wrapped around her bust, crossed in back, then brought back up underneath her arms, and tied behind her neck. The effect was almost that of a halter-top, but much more elegant.

Honey loved her unique dress. It was beautiful, it was tropical, and the colors spoke of both bridal conventions and the Caribbean Sea, which she would be mere steps away from as she said her vows. Trixie and Di had exclaimed over it when she had first modelled it for them, and that had solidified her feelings that *this* was what she was meant to wear on her wedding day.

Her two attendants were also absolutely thrilled with their outfits for the ceremony. Trixie and Di's outfits were similar to Honey's, except Trixie's was a sapphire blue that looked vibrant on the young blonde, and Di's was a gorgeous shade of her signature lavender. Both women looked absolutely stunning in their bridesmaids' sarong outfits.

"Well, since there's really no fussing to do with your hair, and any make-up you put on is going to slide right off in the tropical heat, and it takes you all of five minutes to get into your dress, well, there really is nothing to do!" Trixie finally concluded.

"How about a dip in the pool?" Honey suggested.

"Absolutely not, Honey Wheeler!" Diana screeched. "And risk Dan seeing you before the wedding? No way, no how." Di was emphatic in her declaration and her vigorous shake of the head emphasized that fact.

Trixie grinned at her sister-in-law. "Well, Mrs. Belden, exactly how do you feel about that subject?"

Diana grinned good-naturedly at Trixie's teasing. "Just doing my job as matron-of-honor."

"Well, we've wasted enough time talking that there's really only an hour left before I planned on being ready, a half-an-hour before the ceremony time. So, how about we all just start getting ready, and we can meet back in here and you can inspect me before show time. How's that?"

Di looked at Honey, a suspicious gleam in her eye. "You're not planning on sneaking out to the pool, are you?"

Honey laughed. "When did you get to be so suspicious, Diana Belden? That's Trixie's and my job—not yours!"

Diana shrugged. "Maybe since becoming a Belden it's just kind of crept into my veins or something!"

After her two best friends left, Honey headed to the shower to prepare herself for the ceremony that lay ahead.

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At precisely ten o'clock in the morning, Atlantic Standard Time, family and friends gathered on the white sands of Emerald Beach, St. Thomas to witness the joining together of Honey and Dan in holy matrimony.

Madeleine Wheeler stood next to Helen and Peter Belden, tears glistening in her large hazel eyes, so like the bride's. She couldn't believe how fast her little girl had grown up. It seemed like only yesterday that she was standing in the hallway outside of her room, sneaking a peek through the cracked door to watch her tiny daughter dress in white and pretend to march down an imaginary aisle, completely caught up in the world of her fantasy wedding. Where had the time gone?

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Next to her, Helen's blue eyes glittered brightly as she watched the girl she had always considered a second daughter standing on the white sands, the bright turquoise blue of the Caribbean Sea providing a gorgeous backdrop, waiting to take her turn down the conch shell aisle. Helen sighed happily and slipped her arm through Peter's.

Next to his father stood Bobby, now known as Bob. At sixteen, he wasn't nearly as moved by the romance of the scene as those around him were, but he had always had a fondness for both Honey and Dan and he was happy to see that two of his favorite people had found such happiness in each other.

Jim stood on the other side of Bob, his red hair gleaming in the tropical sunlight. His eyes were drawn to two people: Trixie, looking stunning in the blue ensemble Honey had chosen for her, being escorted up the aisle by one of the groom's best men, Bill Regan; and his sister, looking so radiantly happy and beautiful as she gracefully held her father's arm and watched the proceedings in front of her. The redhead couldn't help but reflect about what a wonderful thing it was that had lead him to Sleepyside all those years ago.

Next to Jim, Brian, darkly handsome, stood next to a blonde-haired beauty with tears glistening in her eyes. She had never been close to Honey, never really getting the opportunity to know her over the years as they lived across the country from each other, but Lexi always cried at weddings. Besides, from what the stunning blonde could tell, the bride was as sweet as her nickname and deserved the happiness she had so obviously found in Dan. All of the jealousy and pain was certainly laid to rest and in the past, and Lexi was grateful for that. She looked up at Brian, who looked down at her and smiled, the smile reaching his warm chocolate eyes. In that moment, Lexi was as happy for herself and Brian as she was for Honey and Dan.

Next to Lexi stood Ed and Veronica Lynch, looking on as their daughter strode across the beach on the arm of their son-in-law. Honey was a perfectly lovely and beautiful bride, but to Ed Lynch, no one was more beautiful than Diana at that moment. He put his arm around his wife's plump shoulders and reflected how wonderful weddings were and how amazing life had been for them. He could have moved the family to New York after he had reached his wealthy status, but he was extremely pleased that the Lynch clan had stayed in Sleepyside.

Next to the Lynches, Miss Trask stood proudly as she watched her lovely young charge start up the aisle on her father's arm. She had seen Honey grow from a shy, introverted teen to the confident and mature woman before her. Margery was eternally grateful that she had been persuaded to resign from Briar Hall and accept the governess position in the Wheeler household. What a fantastic group of kids she had met along the way. That they were an extraordinary group of friends was evidenced by the fact that after a decade of separate experiences with some heartaches thrown in, they were all gathered here together today to celebrate a truly wonderful event. Miss Trask dabbed her eyes with a cotton handkerchief.

Matthew Wheeler, looking casually relaxed but still authoritative in his khaki pants and golf shirt, felt the gentle pressure of his beloved daughter's hand on his arm and looked down. His little girl, the light and joy of his life, was about to become another man's wife. Matt, as happy as he was that Honey had found a wonderful man, felt a pang as he fully realized that she was truly Dan's now. The proud father consoled himself with the thought that, no matter what, Honey would always be daddy's little girl.

As they approached the spot where Dan was standing, his love for Honey written all over his face, Honey's face, already glowing, took on an absolute radiance that was breathtaking. Matt's heart nearly burst to see his daughter so happy, about to share her life with a man who completed her and adored her. He looked at Mart and Regan, standing to one side of Dan, and Trixie and Di, standing on the other side of the officiant, and thanked his lucky stars for deciding to move to Sleepyside all those years ago.

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Honey and her father now stood before Dan. Matt turned to look at the bride, a tender look alighting his strong features. "Your mother and I love you, Honey, and we think you and Dan are the perfect match." He turned to his son-in-law. "Take care of her."

Dan promised he would and Matt gently placed a kiss on Honey's forehead. He then took Honey's hand, placed it in Dan's, and with wet eyes went to take his place next to his wife.

Dan felt the familiar yet surprising jolt that he always felt when he touched his wife-to-be. "You look beautiful," he said, his heart in his throat. He still could barely comprehend that this magnificent woman wanted to spend the rest of her life by his side. He had come so far from his days on the street, and he counted his blessings that he had somehow found his way to Sleepyside and into the arms of this remarkable woman.

Honey, almost unable to speak in her state of bliss, gulped air and stared at the dark-haired, sexy man standing before her. Could this strong and proud man really want her for all of time? He did, and Honey absolutely reveled in that fact. Thank goodness fate had led them both to a sleepy little village on the banks of the Hudson River. "Thank you, you look pretty handsome yourself," she grinned.

The two held each other's hands tightly and turned to face the beaming officiant. The woman who was to marry them thought that she had never seen a more lovely couple than the one standing before her. She began the ceremony.

"Let us take a moment to mediate on the sacrament of marriage, open our hearts to our Creator to enter this ceremony, and give thanks for the beauty that surrounds us." Everyone bowed their heads and gave prayers of thanks.

"Dan and Madeleine, we are about to experience a miracle. This miracle is the joining of two lives in peace, which becomes the inspiration that forms a family.

"All of your moments together have led up to this exchange of vows and have prepared you as you promise to be each other's lifetime partner. This is a most special gift that you are about to share, which has been carefully nurtured and polished to give to one another. This gift cannot be bought in a store or found under a tree. This is the gift of love that can only be shared in marriage. May its radiance never diminish, as the sea around us will never diminish.

"We are joyfully gathered today to witness and to celebrate the joining of two lives in marriage. Let us rejoice with each other in the making of this important covenant. The essence of this covenant is the taking of each other in entirety, as an everlasting lover, friend, and companion. It is, therefore, a decision that has not been entered into lightly, but rather undertaken with great consideration and respect for one another.

"We have come together in the hope that the love which has brought you both to this union may go out beyond itself into the lives of others. Thus, we ask that your promises and hopes be realized. We ask that you both be granted the patience to listen, the capacity to understand, the compassion to give comfort, and the joy to laugh and just to be together. Most importantly, let your marriage make a home where neither person is a stranger, and, remember, it is just as important to *be* the right partner as it is to choose the right partner.

"Let your marriage offer illumination and growth. Bask in the joy of shared discoveries. Let your union be strong enough to endure the darkness of all things. May silence and despair never separate you; may you always return to each other."

The officiant then instructed them to face each other and repeat their vows.

## Walking After You

"I, Madeleine Grace, will share my life openly with you, Daniel Timothy," Honey repeated after the cleric. "I will walk hand in hand with you. I will grow with you, not away from you, in each of our discoveries. I will support your strengths with love and honesty and protect you, as we go forth together into this world as two yet one." Tears flowed down Honey's cheeks as she repeated her vows and looked into Dan's dark eyes, but, despite the emotion filling her voice, she spoke her words clearly.

Dan's eyes were wet as he took his turn repeating the words that he would spend a lifetime living up to. "I, Daniel Timothy, will share my life openly with you, Madeleine Grace. I will walk hand in hand with you. I will grow with you, not away from you, in each of our discoveries. I will support your strengths with love and honesty and protect you, as we go forth together into this world as two yet one."

Honey and Dan beamed at each other as their minister asked Trixie and Mart for the rings that Honey and Dan would exchange. Holding the rings, the woman said, "Let these rings which you are about to exchange serve to remind us that a circle is a symbol of the sun, the earth, and the universe; of wholeness, peace, and unity. Your rings are circles that have no beginning and no ending. They are tokens of this growing relationship you have come here today to celebrate and confirm, emblems of eternity which can never be tarnished, and which are without end, to show how imperishable is the faith that you have now mutually pledged before witnesses and to God."

She handed the plain gold band to Honey and the diamond and platinum band that perfectly compliment Honey's engagement ring to Dan. "As a symbol of your faithfulness, place the rings on each other's finger and repeat after me, 'I accept you, Dan, as my partner, as my friend, and as my husband, through all of the experiences life holds for us, in abiding faith and love.'"

Honey, voice trembling, repeated the words as she slipped the gold band onto the third finger of Dan's left hand.

"Now, Dan, please repeat after me. 'I accept you, Honey, as my partner, as my friend, and as my wife, through all of the experiences life holds for us, in abiding faith and love.'"

As he slid the ring on Honey's finger and repeated the words, Dan felt an overwhelming sensation cascade upon him, and he felt complete and whole at that very moment.

As Honey and Dan smiled at each other, and their friends and family dissolved to tears of happiness, the minister continued with the blessing. "Be together in harmony and let the winds of the heavens dance between you. Empower each other and allow your relationship to evolve to its highest purpose. Nourish each other's possibilities and lift up each other's spirits. Care for one another, share your love openly and let it be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Sing and dance together and be joyful. Share your lives with each other and unite your love with our Creator. May your union last through all of your moments together, so that in the triumphs and the trials that lie ahead, you will feel just as you do now—happy to be in love and married to one another. Go then, in peace, and live more and more in the present, which is beautiful and stretches away beyond the limits of the past and towards the horizons of the future.

"Having witnessed the vows you have just made to each other, surrounded by your love, and by the sand, the sun and the sea of the Virgin Islands, by the loving grace of our Highest Power and by the authority vested in me, upheld by the laws of the United States Virgin Islands, I now pronounce you husband and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Mangan."

A happy cheer rose up and surrounded the newly wedded couple as they embraced each other and shared a loving and tender kiss.

## Walking After You

“Are you ready for happily ever after, Mrs. Mangan?” Dan asked, love brightening his intense, dark eyes.

“I am, Mr. Mangan,” Honey happily replied, her hazel eyes bright with the possibilities of the future, as she leaned forward and gave her very own prince charming yet another sweet kiss.

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Author’s notes: Why, yes, I *did* Mary Sue my recent St. Thomas wedding! If you want to see the dress Honey wore and the beach where she and Dan got married, feel free to visit my online wedding album at [schoolgirlshamus.net/PhotoAlbum/wedding/index.htm](http://schoolgirlshamus.net/PhotoAlbum/wedding/index.htm). If you’re in the market for a destination wedding, I *highly* recommend it! Email me about it if you’d like!

I also cannot take credit for the idea of how Dan proposed to Honey. I’m really hopeless with that kind of stuff, so I “borrowed” the idea from Rick Rodriguez, who proposed this way and had it published in *The RoMANtics Guide to Popping the Question*, by Michael Webb.

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