

This is a Jixemitri CWP#2.1 contribution and occurs in the "future" of *Sapphire Days*, so there are spoilers ahead. The title comes from the Beach Boys song of the same name. Merry Jixmas!

Merry Christmas, Baby

by Dana

As Honey placed the last string of lights on the Christmas tree, she glanced out the large bay window and noticed that it had started to snow. She smiled as she walked to the window to enjoy watching the large, wet flakes as they fell gently to the ground. The large evergreens, oaks, and maples that surrounded her newly constructed home were already covered with a thin layer of white from a light snowfall two days previous, but Honey wanted a truly and spectacularly white Christmas. She wanted her first Christmas in her new home, her first Christmas back in Sleepyside, and her first Christmas as Honey Mangan to be as traditional as a Currier and Ives print. She was looking forward to cooking Dan a Christmas goose, something she had never attempted before but that Dan remembered fondly from Christmases he had spent with Mr. Maypenny.

As Honey stared out into the game preserve, sadness descended as she thought of the gnarled old man whom she and her friends had adored. Jeremiah Maypenny had passed away just over a year ago, and his loss was felt greatly among the Bob-Whites and their families. Honey knew how devastated Dan had been that the man who had opened his door to him when he needed it most, the man who had provided him a home and guidance, was gone. Dan particularly felt the loss on the day he had married Honey, ever aware that the old man had not been standing on the beach that day to witness the happiest moment of his life: the day his golden girl became his wife. It broke Honey's heart as well, not only because she, too, loved the old man, but because she knew how important Jeremiah Maypenny had been to her husband.

Honey was especially eager to honor Mr. Maypenny's memory this first Christmas with Dan because it was his generosity that allowed her and Dan to be ensconced in their little house in the game preserve that she and Dan loved so much. Mr. Maypenny had left the pie-shaped piece of land to Dan—with the stipulation that the young man build Honey a lovely house on it. He didn't want Dan to feel as though he had to preserve the spartan cabin in the woods in his memory; he wanted Dan and Honey to have a comfortable home.

Honey and Dan had discussed it and, in the end, they had been unable to tear down the cottage that had been in the Maypenny family for generations. So, the cabin still remained, and Dan and Honey had chosen to build their new home in another spot on the pie-shaped piece of land. As a wedding present, Matthew Wheeler had given the couple a few acres of game preserve land that connected Mr. Maypenny's land to Glen Road, providing them a place to put a long and winding gravel driveway to their new house. Dan and Honey had been touched and thrilled with her father's gift; it felt like their marriage was a true blending of their families and their pasts. Land that had once caused a rift between Dan's guardian and Honey's father was now merged together, providing the newlyweds with their first home. It truly felt as though they had come full circle.

Construction on the simple Colonial, a four bedroom, modest house with cedar siding that complimented the woods surrounding it, had been completed just after Halloween. The house had passed final inspection, and the couple was happily settled into their new home by Thanksgiving.

And now it's almost Christmas, Honey thought as she sighed happily, turning her attention back to the Christmas tree that she and Dan had chosen from the preserve just the evening before. *Our first Christmas, and it's going to be perfectly perfect.*

After meticulously arranging the red and green lights on the tree, she plugged them in and stepped back to see if they needed any adjustments. She half-listened to Newt Gingrich being interviewed by Bill O'Reilly on the Fox News Channel in the background as she did some minor tweaking to get the lights, well, perfectly perfect.

Merry Christmas, Baby

When Honey was happy with the placement of the lights, she picked up the package of Fig Newtons that Dan had left on the coffee table the previous evening and headed toward the kitchen where a pot of hunter's stew, Mr. Maypenny's recipe, natch, was bubbling quietly. Honey stirred it and then pulled a loaf of bread out of the oven, feeling very domestic. Dan was due home from his new job as Sleepyside's first detective any minute now, and Honey wanted to have dinner on the table for him. It wasn't often that Honey was home early enough to cook her husband dinner, so she wanted to take advantage of the unexpected bonus.

After college, Dan had joined the NYPD as he had always planned. He had even accepted a year-long internship in California for the opportunity to really excel at his profession. Although he had only been with the NYPD for a few years, when Sleepyside had decided to expand its police force to include a position for a plainclothes detective, Molinson, now the Chief of Police, had immediately thought of Dan. Despite the fact that he was years away from being eligible for Detective Third Grade on his own force, Dan had passed the Sleepyside detective test and, after several interviews, had been hired. It was a dream come true for the former juvenile delinquent to serve as a detective in his adopted hometown.

Meanwhile, Millennium Investigations, Trixie and Honey's detective agency in White Plains, was beginning to pick up steam. Initially many cases were of the domestic variety, but in the past few months the two detectives had seen an increase of legal and financial cases, and even some corporate cases. This had meant longer hours for Trixie and Honey, but both of them were very happy to be busy.

Dan was just as driven in pursuing the cases to which he was assigned, so he understood Honey's own drive and determination, just as Honey understood and appreciated his. Instead of driving the couple apart, their mutual devotion to their careers forged a stronger bond between the two and made the time they did find to be together all the more special.

Like the upcoming Christmas holiday. Yes, the two had not found the time to pick out their tree until December 22, and yes, here it was Christmas Eve-Eve and their tree was not decorated yet, but neither Dan nor Honey had to work the next two days, and they intended to make the best of it. Instead of risking being on call for the holiday, Dan had put in for two days of vacation; Trixie and Honey's agency was closed for the next two days.

Trixie had suggested they close the agency for the holidays because "the last thing we need," she had joked, "is to invite murder, mayhem, and mistletoe when you and Dan are trying to spend your first Christmas together!" Honey had laughingly agreed.

Trixie had decided to take care of some last minute surveillance the next day, but everything else on their desks could wait until December 26, so Honey was able to spend a rare two days off in a row with her husband.

Of course, there was going to be lot of family time instead of alone time during the next 48 hours, but Honey didn't care. Their first Christmas as a married couple was sure to be special, no matter what.

Christmas Eve was going to be spent at Manor House with Honey's family and Dan's uncle, who was now Matthew Wheeler's business partner. Honey's father had helped back Bill Regan in a stable venture three years ago. Regan's knowledge and love of horses, when combined with Matthew's business acumen, could yield nothing but success.

Honey giggled as she remembered her father joking that not only would they be celebrating Christmas Eve as a family, the Wheelers could also host their "new neighbors," the Mangans.

On Christmas morning, the Beldens were hosting a Christmas breakfast for the Bob-Whites at Crabapple Farm. Although Di and Mart's newborn twins, just three weeks old, were too young to truly appreciate Christmas, it had been important for Grandma and Grandpa Belden to spend Christmas morning with their first two grandchildren. Helen and Peter also wanted to include Jim, Honey, and Dan in the Christmas

Merry Christmas, Baby

morning festivities, declaring the event a “Bob-White Christmas Morning Extravaganza.” Honey and Dan, Godparents of little Charlotte Helen Belden, were thrilled to be included in the Christmas morning celebration. Mart and Di had chosen Trixie and Brian as Godparents for Charlotte’s younger (by six minutes) sister, Caroline Veronica.

Although Honey was looking forward to spending time with their families the next day and with the Bob-Whites and the Beldens on Christmas morning, what she was looking forward to the most was Christmas afternoon when it would just be her and Dan, cuddled in front of the fireplace celebrating Christmas just the two of them.

Softly singing “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas,” Honey finished setting the table for dinner, dreaming of a perfectly perfect Christmas.

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Dan awoke with the dawn on Christmas morning, his arms wrapped tightly around his honey-haired wife. This aspect of marriage was the one Dan found the most perplexing, and the most appealing. It amazed him that he knew that every morning for the rest of his life was going to be the same—he would wake up curled up next to Honey, who smelled of sweetness and springtime and everything good, and the amazing thing was that instead of worrying that the sameness of it all might get to him, he knew that this was *exactly* where he wanted to wake up every morning for the rest of his life. He would never be bored, never be tired; he would always be energized and fulfilled as long as he woke up with his beautiful wife in his arms.

This morning was no exception. Dan cuddled Honey closer to him and looked out at the greyness that was seeping in around the edge of the blinds in their bedroom. It was still obviously very early, and Dan was contemplating whether or not to wake up Honey to open presents before they were due at Crabapple Farm, when she stirred and turned to look at him with a smile.

Dan had been staring at that smile for over a decade, and it still took his breath away.

“Good morning,” Honey murmured.

“Merry Christmas,” Dan returned, giving her a soft kiss as he said it.

“Merry Christmas,” Honey said contentedly, snuggling closer to her husband. “Our first of many as the Mangans.”

“Absolutely,” Dan agreed. “Shall we stay cuddled up against the cold for a bit longer, or should we open presents?”

Honey looked at the clock. “I think we should snuggle for five more minutes and then get at those presents. We’re due at the Beldens’ in less than two hours.”

“A perfectly perfect plan,” Dan said with a grin.

“You can make fun of my expressions all you want, Mr. Mangan, I don’t care,” Honey said with a sniff, but the twinkle in her hazel eyes belied any anger.

“I would never think of making fun of you, Mrs. Mangan,” Dan returned, bringing his lips down on Honey’s before she could retort.

Honey eagerly kissed him back. Christmas morning in her husband’s arms. Did it get any better than this?

Dan finally pulled back from the passionate session and looked at the clock, feigning shock. “Oh, no! We just spent six minutes making out instead of five minutes snuggling. You okay with that?”

“I’ll live,” Honey said cheerfully, giving him another quick kiss before she climbed out of bed. Dan followed, pulling on the flannel pajamas that he never actually managed to wear to bed. It didn’t matter how cold it

Merry Christmas, Baby

was, he didn't like sleeping in the confines of pajamas, or even boxers. Honey was always there to keep him as warm as he could ever want.

Honey put her robe on over her flannel pajamas, pulled on her slipper socks, and headed downstairs to start some water for tea. As she passed the Christmas tree in the family room, she stopped to plug it in. The soft lights, combined with the first rays of the morning sun shining through the window, gave the family room a magical glow.

A magical Christmas glow, Honey thought to herself as she continued into the kitchen, busying herself with making tea and turning on the oven to prepare Dan's surprise.

She then went to the pantry and got out the loaf of sweet Irish soda bread, rich with spices and currants, that she had made the day before. Dan had mentioned that his mother had always had freshly baked sweet Irish soda bread and a glass of milk ready for him on Christmas morning, so Honey wanted to give him a little taste of the childhood he had been forced to give up much too soon. Hearing Dan's footfalls on the stairs, Honey hurriedly placed the loaf of bread into the oven to warm through and was reaching into the cupboard for a glass when Dan came up behind her and took her in his arms.

"Have I said merry Christmas to my favorite wife yet?" he murmured softly into her ear.

Honey laughed. "Your favorite wife? Who's my competition?"

Dan hugged his wife closer. "You know you have no competition. At least, you *should* know that."

Honey turned around and looked into Dan's eyes. "I do know that," she said softly. And then she laughingly added, "Do you want to know about *your* competition?"

Dan staggered backwards. "My competition? *My* competition? Who is he? Where is he?"

Honey dissolved into laughter. "As if," she said.

Just then Dan started sniffing the air. "I must be losing it, but that smells exactly like the soda bread my mom used to make on Christmas morning."

The tea pot started whistling just then, and Honey removed it from the burner and poured the hot water into the mug that already held a tea bag.

"Hallucinating smells now, Dan?" she asked with a smile as she poured.

"Maybe it's because this is the first Christmas that really reminds me of when I was a kid," Dan said.

"Or maybe it's because you have the best wife in the world," Honey said cheekily. "Check the oven."

Dan looked at her quizzically before opening the door of the oven. He quickly shut it and turned to Honey. "For me? You made sweet Irish soda bread for me?"

Honey put her arms around Dan's neck. "That should answer all of your questions about your competition."

Dan smiled and kissed Honey. "Thank you, sweetheart. You're the best."

"I know," Honey said airily, and then dissolved into giggles as her husband tickled her. "Let me go!" she finally cried. "Your bread's going to burn!"

Dan relented and soon the couple was ensconced in front of the Christmas tree, Honey with her mug of peppermint tea and Dan, grinning from ear to ear, with his soda bread and milk.

"You first," Dan said to Honey, motioning toward the presents.

"Any particular one?" Honey asked as she looked at the assortment of gaily decorated packages underneath the tree.

Merry Christmas, Baby

"Any one that strikes your fancy," Dan said between bites of soda bread.

Honey chose a large package wrapped in bright green and red paper and eagerly tore into it. It turned out to be a popcorn popper that she had mentioned wanting last summer.

"Thanks for remembering. This will be perfect in our new kitchen!" Honey said. "Your turn! Pick any one at all!"

Dan chose a package that sported snowmen decorating the paper. Like Honey, he did not stand on ceremony and quickly made short work of the wrapping.

Dan looked up in amazement at Honey. "This is perfect! Where did you find it?" he asked as he pulled his new law enforcement equipment bag out of the box.

"You can find just about anything on the Internet," Honey said with a mysterious smile. "I thought that Sleepyside's bright new detective needed an equipment bag commensurate with his skills. And his good looks," she added slyly.

"Thanks, sweetie," Dan said with a quick kiss for his wife.

The back and forth gift giving continued, revealing flannel pajamas, several Agatha Christie and other mystery novels, a monogrammed silver business card case, a cashmere scarf, and several CDs and DVDs for Honey. Dan's booty included binoculars, a pair of jeans, a Rangers hockey jersey, and several more CDs and DVDs, plus a TiVo box.

"TiVo?" Dan said when he opened that package.

"I don't know. I just thought with us working weird hours, maybe it would come in handy. I can return it if you don't like it."

"No, it's fine. We're just not TV watchers, so I wondered is all."

"Well, we do have a couple of favorite shows," Honey said. "This way we won't miss 'em when we're hot in pursuit of justice."

"Sounds good to me," Dan agreed and then reached underneath the chair that he sat in front of and pulled out another present. "I think you missed one of your presents, though," he said as he presented a silver-wrapped package to his wife.

Honey looked at the small box in surprise and then laughed. "You're always so sneaky, Mangan!"

"Right, like you're not sneaky, sending me out on errands yesterday so you could bake Irish soda bread behind my back!"

"Yeah, sneaky like that." Honey grinned, accepting the small package that Dan was still holding out to her.

She opened it and gasped. Nestled among black velvet was a pair of exquisite diamond and emerald earrings

"Dan! These are beautiful! And they'll go perfect with the new outfit I bought to wear today!"

Dan smiled at his wife. "I saw these and immediately thought of you. I wanted you to have them. I'm glad you like them."

"I love them!" Honey said, throwing her arms around her husband and kissing him passionately. "They're perfectly perfect!"

She pulled back from the hug, a mischievous glint in her eyes. "I think you missed a present, too," she said as she handed Dan a small package she had been concealing in the pocket of her robe.

Merry Christmas, Baby

“And you say *I’m sneaky*,” Dan said as he took the package from her, a curious look on his face. He hadn’t asked for, or even hinted at wanting, anything this small. He quickly removed the wrapping paper and opened the box, his face showing confusion at first and then astonishment.

“Honey,” he gasped, “where did you get this?”

“This” referred to a very old and worn Swiss Army Knife, circa 1942. Dan was very familiar with this particular knife, as it had been one of Mr. Maypenny’s most treasured possessions. Times were few and far between when Jeremiah Maypenny had been willing to discuss his time in Europe as a soldier fighting Hitler’s army, but he had told Dan that the knife had been a gift from a British Commando officer, grateful that Maypenny had saved his life.

When Mr. Maypenny had died and Dan could not find the knife among his effects, the young man had been deeply disappointed, thinking the item that his friend and mentor had held so dear was lost forever.

“Last summer when we went through and began boxing up things in the cabin, I found it wedged between the cabinet and the refrigerator. I was going to give it to you then, but I wanted to give you something really special on our first Christmas, and I couldn’t think of anything more special than this.”

Dan drew Honey into yet another hug. “I can think of one thing more special than this, but she’s already agreed to be my wife. Thank you so much. This means so much to me. And so did you baking sweet Irish soda bread, just like my mom did on Christmas morning. I love you, Honey.”

“I love you, too,” Honey said, happy that her perfectly perfect Christmas was unfolding beautifully. “Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas, baby.”

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Final notes: I snuck the title of a holiday-themed mystery book title into Trixie’s dialogue. *Murder, Mayhem and Mistletoe* is an anthology of holiday mystery stories by Terence Faherty, Aileen Schumacher, Wendi Lee, and Bill Crider.

Oh, and my newt is Newt Gingrich—included just for Misty! :) The new recipe is either the Christmas goose that Honey is making for Dan in honor of Christmases spent with Mr. Maypenny or the sweet Irish soda bread she made him in honor of Christmases spent with his mother—take your pick. The rest of the items should be pretty obvious.

Happy holidays!