

Happy Second Anniversary, Jix! This is the start of my new universe, *First Impressions*, which will chronicle the thoughts and feelings of each of the BWGs as they meet one another for the first time. Most will be heavily based on the published Trixie Belden series but to tell the story of when Trixie and Mart first meet Diana, we need to go back to kindergarten. I tried to capture the emotions of five and six-year-olds as best I could.

I wanted this uni to be set around the time the Trixie books were actually published. Since *Trixie Belden and the Secret of the Mansion* was written in 1948 but *Trixie Belden and the Black Jacket Mystery* was not written until 1961, I took the “average” of when things occurred, so most of this uni will be set from 1954 to 1955. This means that Trixie and Diana started kindergarten in 1946. I know nothing of what kindergarten was like in 1946, so bear with me! *g* Also, as far as learning to read, I realize most kids now-a-days learn waaaaay earlier than what I portrayed in this story but I figured a) it was realistic for the time period of the story, b) Bobby didn't seem to learn to read at an early age, and c) I needed it this way for my plot, lol! Enjoy!

The Playground by Dana

Wednesday, September 18, 1946

Helen

Standing under one of her mother's prized crabapple trees, five-year-old Trixie Belden smiled her best smile for the camera—even though her mother had attired her in a frock and not her usual comfortable play clothes. Moms had wisely chosen a simple, blue cotton dress for her daughter's first day of kindergarten, knowing she never would have gotten it on her tomboy if it were frilly and pink. Helen Belden smiled as she snapped a photograph of her youngest child on this most monumental of days—the first day of kindergarten was so exciting! She had been emotional when her eldest, Brian, had started school and now it was her baby's turn to leave the nest, even if only for a few hours each day.

And this was such a significant year for the Belden children. Moms worried about her little hens. Brian, not quite eight, was skipping the third grade and beginning the fourth grade today. What if the other kids didn't accept him? Having an October birthday, Brian was already younger than most of the kids in his class. Now he would be the youngest by far. What if she and Peter eventually regretted the decision to send him ahead a grade?

Helen and her husband had agonized over the decision, but had finally asked their bright young son how he felt about the matter. Dark-haired Brian had responded in his usual matter-of-fact way. "Moms, Dad, I just get so *bored* in school. And the fourth graders get to do neat science projects. I'd love to do neat science projects." And so it had been decided, but Helen still couldn't help but worry.

Mart, her middle child, entered the first grade today. It was his first year attending school for the whole day. Mart had always been ravenous when he de-boarded the bus from his half-day of kindergarten last year. What if he got too hungry in the afternoons and couldn't concentrate on what he was supposed to be learning in class? Would he make it all day? Helen just hoped she had packed him a big enough lunch.

And now Trixie was heading off to school, too. Trixie was so outgoing and friendly that Moms wasn't worried about her enthusiastic daughter making friends. No, Helen worried about something else entirely: Trixie was so curious and so headstrong that Moms wondered how the *teacher* would fare this year!

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"Moms?" a small voice broke her reverie.

"Yes, Trixie?" Moms bent down so that she was at eye level with her daughter.

"Are you sure no one will call me Beatrix?" the five-year-old stared at her mother with wide, brilliant blue eyes.

Helen smiled. "I told the school your name was Trixie, just like I promised I would."

The tiny kindergartener threw her arms around her mother's neck. "Thanks, Moms! You're the best!"

Just then Brian and Mart came out of the little farmhouse, lunch boxes in hand. "Moms? Is it our turn for pictures yet?" solemn little Brian asked.

"It surely is, Brian. You boys come stand next to your sister," Moms beckoned her two oldest children.

Mart snickered as he followed his older brother to the crabapple tree where their younger sister stood. "You look funny in a dress, Beatrix!" he teased.

Trixie's well-known temper flared. Her face screwed up in anger, and she gave her brother, who looked so much like her with his blonde curls and bright blue eyes, a hard shove. "Oh yeah, smarty-Marty-pants!"

"Trixie! Mart!" Helen said sharply. Both children looked at their mother with guilty expressions. "Mart, your sister looks wonderful in her new dress. And you know she likes to be called Trixie. I think you owe your sister an apology, Martin."

Mart looked sheepish and stared at the ground. "Sorry, Trixie."

"Trixie, even if your brother said something that wasn't very nice, two wrongs don't make a right. And we don't push or punch or hit to solve our problems. Please apologize to your brother."

Trixie looked at her brother. "Sorry, Mart."

Their mother smiled and raised her camera as the three scooted together and smiled for their picture. There were no more incidents, and the school bus arrived shortly after to take Helen's three children to Sleepyside Elementary.

It was as she turned to enter the white frame house that Helen realized something. In her anxiety and excitement, she had forgotten one crucial thing: she had three-and-a-half hours of peace before Trixie's bus returned the child to the little farmhouse in the hollow.

Helen couldn't help but smile.

Trixie

As Trixie boarded the bus, her bright blue eyes twinkled in anticipation. The five-year-old loved adventures, and she knew that school was going to be one big adventure! Moms had told her so. She would make new friends and learn new things. It had been so boring this last year with Mart gone in the mornings and nobody else around to play with. She wished that funny old Mr. Frayne next door had some grandkids to come visit, but no such luck.

Helping Moms with the garden and dusting and stuff was fun sometimes, but Trixie wanted to explore. And she knew that school was a way to explore new things—her daddy had told her so. School had made Brian smart; so smart that he was skipping a whole year of classes!

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Then Trixie thought about her other brother, Mart. It didn't seem to be making him so smart. It just seemed to make him hungrier. Trixie shrugged off thoughts of Mart as she sat down in an empty seat. Brian and Mart also each chose their own seats. Brian had told her that since there weren't many kids who lived so far from the village, there was always lots of room on the bus. The bus picked up a few older kids, but Trixie and Mart were definitely the youngest on the bus. Trixie started to wonder if she would be the only one in her new kindergarten class!

The next thing she knew, the bus was pulling up in front of the elementary school and suddenly Trixie had a tingly feeling inside. It was in her tummy, but it was different from the time Moms didn't smell the milk before she poured it on Trixie's cereal and Trixie was awfully sick. It wasn't a bad feeling, more like butterflies flying around in there. Trixie took a deep breath and followed her brothers off the bus. Brian took her hand and started to take her toward the kindergarten room, but she snatched her hand away.

"Brian, what are you doing?" Trixie demanded in her little girl's voice.

Brian sighed. "I'm taking you to your class like I promised Moms I would."

"Fine, but you don't need to hold my hand." Trixie smiled proudly and puffed her chest out. "I'm a big girl now. Moms and Daddy said so!"

Brian smiled indulgently at his baby sister. "Okay, I won't hold your hand, but let's hurry. I don't want to be late on the first day of the fourth grade."

Trixie waved good-bye to Mart and walked next to her oldest brother. Soon Brian had dropped her safely off at her classroom with a solemn, "Good luck, you'll be fine, Trixie."

Trixie looked around the classroom, her eyes wide with excitement. Free at last! Before she decided just where to go, her sharp eyes surveyed the classroom. A brown-haired boy with thick glasses was sitting in the story corner looking at books along with a girl whose long blonde hair was fastened in a ponytail. Sitting at a table drawing with crayons were two boys and two girls. And standing in a corner, crying softly to herself was a pretty little girl with the shiniest, blackest hair Trixie had ever seen. Trixie felt sad for the little girl, crying on such a special day, and she immediately approached her.

"Hi! I'm Trixie!" Trixie said to the girl.

The girl stared at her, and Trixie noticed that her eyes were purple. A light shade of purple, but purple none-the-less. Trixie had just seen *Courage of Lassie* with her mom at the Cameo last month, and this girl standing in front of her reminded her of the girl in the movie. What was her name? Elizabeth Taylor, that was it.

The girl was still staring at Trixie and hadn't said a word, but Trixie didn't care, she just went right on talking.

"Have you seen *Courage of Lassie*?" Trixie wondered.

The girl with the purple eyes shook her head no. "We don't go see many movies," she said.

"My mom says that the 60 cents it would cost for us to go to the movies can be better spent on something else. I really wanted to see Lassie, too."

"That's too bad, it was a good movie. You look a lot like the girl in it. What's your name?"

"My name's Diana."

"Why were you crying, Diana?" Trixie asked in her usual straightforward manner.

Diana looked down. "I'm a little scared," she whispered.

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Trixie looked at her incredulously. Scared? Why would anyone be scared of something as great as school? "Why?"

Diana looked around. "My mommy and daddy aren't here, and I'm all alone."

"But you're not alone. Look at all the kids." Trixie herself looked around and felt excited. This year was going to be so fun! Now she just had to convince Diana.

Diana's pretty eyes shyly took in the other kids. She hesitated. "They scare me, too."

"Do I scare you?" Trixie asked.

Diana shook her head. "No, I think you're nice."

"I bet the other kids are, too. Let's go play with them." The tiny girl with the head full of blonde curls pulled on the sleeve of her new friend's lavender dress. The pretty girl with the shiny black hair and the scared look in her violet eyes followed her reluctantly.

Trixie marched up to two girls playing house in the housekeeping corner, Di in tow. "Hi, I'm Trixie, and this is Diana," she announced.

The two girls smiled back. "I'm Jane," the girl with brown pigtails said.

"And I'm Patty," said the girl with the long, brown braid. "Do you want to play house with us?"

Diana looked happy at the prospect, but Trixie wrinkled her nose. "Maybe later. I think I might want to color right now, thank you." Trixie didn't really want to color, but her mother had taught her not to be rude, and she certainly didn't want to play *house*. Jane and Patty seemed nice, but Trixie wanted to meet more kids. And she felt very sorry that Diana was scared, and she wanted to try to help her to not be scared.

Just then a slender woman called everybody together. "Welcome to kindergarten, children! Shall we gather around the rug and meet each other?"

Trixie immediately started to head over to the rug in the corner, but when she turned to check that Diana was with her, she noticed that the pretty girl had hung back. Trixie returned to her. "What's the matter?"

Diana's violet eyes were wide. "Can I sit next to you, Trixie?"

Trixie smiled and put her arm around her friend. "Of course! I think you're the neatest person here," she said truthfully.

The other girl looked at her in surprise. "You do?"

Trixie nodded. "I do. C'mon, we'll sit together on the rug."

The two girls sat down and listened as their new teacher, Miss Pursell, told them of all of the wonderful things they would do and learn over the next school year. She also explained that now that the children were in kindergarten, they were big boys and girls and, as such, were expected to act like it. She explained the classroom rules, which included things like sharing, what to do if someone upset you, and things like that. Trixie listened in rapt attention. Her temper was well-known in her family, but the little girl vowed that she would follow all of the rules and not hit or push any of her classmates if they upset her. Sharing was never a problem with Trixie; she was always very generous.

Finally, Miss Pursell, looked around the classroom and announced that the class had a very special member that would be with them for the year. "We will have a bunny rabbit named Thumper in our classroom for the whole year," she announced. The class clapped and cheered at this announcement. "Bunnies are fun to have around, but they also need a lot of work. They

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must have food and water, and they must not be played with too roughly. Sometimes we can take Thumper out of his cage, but sometimes it will be time for us to learn and Thumper must stay in his cage. No one is to take him out of his cage except for me. Do you all understand?" She smiled as each of the school children gathered around her nodded solemnly.

"Now, I will need a special helper who will help me take care of Thumper. We will rotate this job so that everyone has a turn. Each person's turn will last almost a month." Trixie watched as Miss Pursell's sharp eyes took in the group that sat in front of her. Trixie's heart quickened when the teacher's eyes lingered on her. She couldn't know that the teacher was thinking that this girl, with the tousled blonde curls and sparkling blue eyes, exuded a *joie de vivre* that the teacher had rarely seen in all her years of teaching. She nodded at Trixie. "What's your name?"

"Trixie Belden," Trixie immediately offered.

"You look like you would do a great job helping me with Thumper for the first few weeks. Would you like that?" The teacher laughed happily as Trixie's curls bounced on her frantically nodding head.

"I would love that, Miss Pursell," Trixie said excitedly, glowing from the praise of this wonderful new teacher. She loved kindergarten already! She had the neatest girl in the whole class as her best friend, she had the best teacher in the whole school, and now she got to be the very first bunny helper. Trixie knew this was going to be the best year ever!

Diana

Diana Lynch looked around her family's small apartment as though she was never again going to see it. She knew her mommy and daddy had told her that going to school was going to be a wonderful thing, but she seriously doubted it. She liked staying home with her mommy and listening to serials on their old, battered radio. Why would she want to go to school with a bunch of other kids who probably wouldn't like her anyway? There were lots of kids who lived in her apartment building on Main Street, and they never wanted to play with her. Daddy said it was because they were older than her and that the children in her new kindergarten class would all be her age, but Diana was still scared.

One good thing had come out of starting school. Diana had gotten her first brand-new, store-bought dress for the occasion. She had gone shopping with Mummy and chosen a pretty dress that was the lightest shade of purple she had ever seen. She loved having a brand-new dress that was not from a second-hand store or made by her hard-working mom. She loved the dress so much and it was so pretty that she thought maybe light purple was going to be her new favorite color. She loved putting on the dress and twirling around and around, letting the skirt fly out around her.

"Are you ready for school, Diana?" her mother asked. Virginia Lynch looked at her beautiful daughter in her pretty new dress, and tears sprang to her eyes. She wished she could take a picture of her baby, but the ancient camera that had been Edward Lynch's father's had finally broken, and they did not have the money to repair it right now. Mrs. Lynch tried to control the swelling disappointment by reminding herself that there would be school pictures later in the year, and Di could wear her lavender dress then.

Diana reluctantly nodded. She wasn't ready at all but she didn't want to disappoint her mom. Virginia noticed the reticence in her daughter's nod and tried to reassure her. "Di, honey, you're going to love school," she said, bending down to hug her precious child. "I promise."

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"But what if no one likes me?" Diana asked in a very small voice, tears welling in her violet eyes.

"Sweetheart, everyone will love you!" Virginia stated matter-of-factly. "What's not to love? You're a very pretty girl."

Diana tried to put on a brave smile. "I'm ready, Mummy. We can go now."

The five-year-old clung tightly to her mother's hand during the short walk to school. She gulped as they entered her new classroom. Not only were there other kids already in the room, but now her mom was going to leave her. Her eyes were bright with unshed tears, but she wanted to be brave for her mommy. She didn't cry when her mother gave her a hug and a few words of encouragement and with one last wave, disappeared out the door.

Diana looked around at the kids coloring or playing with each other and immediately retreated to a corner, where she felt safe. She stood there crying silently until, suddenly, she noticed a girl with blonde curls approaching her.

Diana wanted to run away, but she was rooted to the spot and just stared at the girl as she marched straight up to her.

"Hi, I'm Trixie," the blonde girl said.

Diana just stared at her. This girl was very brave. How could she just march up to someone she didn't know and announce her name like that? Diana wondered if maybe, just *maybe*, this brave girl *might* want to be friends with her.

"Have you seen *Courage of Lassie*?"

Diana had wanted to see *Courage of Lassie* ever since it started playing at the Cameo the month before. She had begged her parents to take her, but her mother had told her no. She shook her head no and stated, "We don't go see many movies. Mummy says that the 60 cents it would cost for us to go to the movies can be better spent on something else. I really wanted to see Lassie, too."

"That's too bad, it was a good movie. You look a lot like the girl in it. What's your name?"

"My name's Diana."

"Why were you crying, Diana?" Trixie asked.

Diana looked down, ashamed of admitting the truth to this brave girl. She was afraid Trixie would laugh at her if she told her. "I'm a little scared," she whispered.

"Why?" the other little girl persisted.

Diana looked around. "My mommy and daddy aren't here, and I'm all alone."

"But you're not alone. Look at all the kids."

Diana's pretty eyes shyly took in the other kids. She hesitated but then decided to tell Trixie the truth. After all, she hadn't laughed at her the last time. "They scare me, too."

"Do I scare you?" the brave girl wanted to know.

Diana shook her head. For some reason this girl did not scare her at all—she made her feel much better. "No, I think you're nice."

"I bet the other kids are, too. Let's go play with them," the blonde girl said. Diana didn't really want to, but her new friend was pulling on the sleeve of her dress so she went with her. Diana was amazed at the way this girl with the blonde curls could just march up to kids she didn't know

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and start talking. Diana wished she herself was like that! Maybe Trixie would be her very best friend and teach her how to talk to people she didn't know.

Diana was happy to meet Jane and Patty and realized that Trixie might be right. They were very nice to her. Di was a little disappointed that Trixie didn't want to play house. Diana thought it would be fun to play house with brand new toys instead of the used hand-me-down toys she usually played with. Di's mommy cleaned houses and when the kids no longer wanted their toys, their parents gave them to Di's mommy to give to her pretty daughter.

When the teacher called the class together, Diana got nervous again. Suddenly everyone was heading to the same place, and she felt shy all over again. Trixie didn't notice that she was scared and started to scamper away. Diana started to think that maybe the blonde girl didn't like her after all.

But that couldn't have been further from the truth. Diana was grateful when Trixie turned around and came back to ask her what was wrong.

"Can I sit with you, Trixie?" Diana asked in a small voice.

She was relieved when the other girl smiled and put her arm around her. "Of course, I think you're the neatest person here."

Di couldn't believe what she had just heard. "You do?"

Trixie nodded. "I do. C'mon, we'll sit together on the rug."

The two girls sat down next to each other and Diana swelled with pride when her new best friend was chosen to be the very first bunny helper. Di was sure she was friends with the best girl in the whole school.

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The two had lots of fun playing together at recess, and all of Di's fears were quickly fading. Mummy and Daddy were right—school was fun, and she now had people her age to play with.

One of the best parts came when she met Trixie's brother Mart while he was playing a game with his friends on the playground. She watched as a fight almost broke out between Trixie and one of Mart's friends, but Mart stepped in and stopped the outburst before it could escalate.

"Quiet, Lester! Do you want a teacher to come over here?" Mart asked.

Diana's eyes widened as Lester immediately quieted down. *He must be very important for people to listen to him that way*, Diana thought. She already thought he was wonderful because he was Trixie's brother and he looked so much like her new friend, but now she also felt respect growing inside her. She didn't know exactly what she was feeling, she only knew that she *really* liked this boy.

Then he talked about all he was doing in his first grade class, and Diana knew that he must be very smart. Her daddy was very smart, and she loved her daddy very much. If Mart was also smart, then she knew he was someone special, just like her daddy.

Diana wanted Mart to know that her daddy was smart, too. Maybe if she told him about her father, then Mart would like her. She spoke up before she lost her courage. "My daddy just went back to school to become smart and rich." The words had their desired effect because both Trixie and Mart seemed to think this information was neat, so she offered more details.

All too soon the recess bell rang. Diana started to follow Trixie, but then turned toward Mart. She really liked him, but she didn't know what to say so she just smiled before she ran after Trixie.

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Diana was suddenly excited for the new school year. With a brave friend like Trixie and a smart boy like Mart, she was sure to have good times at school!

Mart

Mart loved to learn. Kindergarten had opened up a whole new world for him. While he liked playtime and playing with his friends, what he loved most of all was when the teacher read them books. Not the kind of bedtime stories that Moms read, but the stories *about* things. He loved learning about bugs, and animals, and snakes, and trains, and airplanes, and the sky.

He was sure that first grade was going to be even better. There were going to be actual lessons all day long instead of just story time and activity time. He would have his own desk and his own books. He was going to learn to read! Moms had been teaching him a little, but he was finally going to be able to read his own books every night before bed, just like Brian did. For a little boy who loved words, this was heaven.

But, ironically, the highlight of his first day of first grade did not come inside the classroom. Sure he loved being issued his very first reading primer, but something far better happened during recess.

Mart had been playing jacks with his friends Lester Mundy and Ty Scott when Lester had started laughing. "Is that your sister over there, Mart?"

Mart looked up to see Trixie jumping rope with a black-haired girl. "Yeah," he said, shrugging and already turning back to the game. He didn't see what the big deal was about his sister.

"She looks just like you, Mart." Ty laughed and started chanting. "Mart looks like a girl! Mart looks like a girl!"

Mart gave him a dirty look, but Lester was also laughing and joined in the chant. "Marty's got curls like a girl's!" Ty added cruelly.

Mart self-consciously ran his hands through his curls and knew the first thing he would do when he got home, even before he ate his afternoon snack, would be to ask Moms to give him a haircut. No more baby curls for him! He vowed that he would always keep his hair as short as possible from that day on.

"Here comes your sister!" Ty gleefully announced.

Mart quickly looked over in the direction where the two girls had been jumping rope, and sure enough, they were heading over to where the three boys had their jacks game.

"Hi, Mart!" Trixie called brightly.

"Hi, Trixie," Mart said grudgingly. His eyes avoided her and settled on her friend.

Golly! was his first thought. Trixie's new friend was the prettiest girl he had ever seen. *Prettier even than the girl in the Lassie movie!*

Mart had left the Cameo a few weeks before in the throes of his first crush on the actress he had seen onscreen. Moms had told him that the actress' name was Elizabeth Taylor. And now he had a miniature Elizabeth Taylor standing before him with the shiniest, blackest hair falling gently down her back and eyes like he had never seen before. He and his sister had boring blue eyes, but this girl's eyes were purple. Mart thought they were neat.

"This is my best friend, Diana," Trixie was saying.

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"H-hi," Mart managed to stutter a response. He was so absorbed with this new girl that he didn't notice his two friends grinning next to him.

"Hi," Diana said shyly.

"What are you doing?" Trixie asked brightly.

"We're playing jacks, kindergarten baby!" Lester replied.

Mart groaned as Trixie's well-known temper kicked in. "I am *not* a baby!" she yelled as she gave Lester a swift kick in the shin.

Lester howled in pain, but Mart quickly shushed him. "Quiet, Lester! Do you want a teacher to come over here?" As soon as he was done admonishing Lester, Mart turned his eyes back to Diana. He liked the way she looked at him, like he was really smart or something.

"But she kicked me!" Lester was whining to Mart.

"You did call her a name," Mart reasoned, trying to sound smart and grown up. All of a sudden, he wanted to impress this girl as much as he usually tried to impress his friends.

Trixie stuck her tongue out at Lester and turned to Mart. "What's first grade like?"

"It's fun. We got our reader primers this morning and we're going to start learning how to read them after recess. And I learned how to write my full name this morning," Mart boasted.

"Wow!" Diana breathed. "You must be smart!"

Mart's pride swelled at her comment, and he stood taller. "Well, I like to read."

"My mummy says that people who can use words real good are smart and can do anything they want when they're all growed-up," Diana volunteered.

"Really?" Mart looked interested. "I guess I'll have to learn a lot of big words then."

"You'll never be as smart as Brian," Trixie scoffed.

"I will too!" Mart yelled. He was going to go on, but Diana interrupted.

"My daddy just went back to school to become smart and rich."

Trixie looked intrigued. "Really? Your daddy goes to school just like us?"

Diana solemnly nodded. "He works and goes to school. He's tired a lot, and we don't always have a lot to eat, but Mummy says that when Daddy finishes school he'll get a really good job and we'll have lots to eat and I can go to the movies and live in a big, big house instead of an apartment."

"Neat!" Trixie said.

"Our dad works in the bank," Mart said. "We have a farm with chickens and everything!"

Just then the recess bell rang. Trixie ran to where the kindergarten class was gathering, beckoning Diana to follow. Mart felt happy inside when pretty Diana smiled shyly at him before following his sister.

As he picked up the jacks and followed Lester and Ty into his classroom, Mart thought about Trixie's friend. He didn't understand it, but he knew he wanted her to like him. It was just as important that Diana liked him as it was that Ty and Lester liked him. She liked smart boys and words. Mart decided that he would pay close attention in class and learn as many words as he could.

Mart smiled dreamily as he thought of the pretty girl with the purple eyes.

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Virginia

Virginia Lynch approached the school with some trepidation. Her daughter was a beautiful, sweet girl, but she was very shy. She hoped that Diana had made friends that morning. It would break her heart if her lovely daughter was upset when she came to pick her up. As she stood outside the red brick building, she noticed another mother waiting to pick up her child. She knew her by sight—after all, Sleepyside was a small village—but she had never spoken to her. Virginia had seen the blonde, curly-haired woman shopping in the market with a very serious looking dark boy and two twins who looked just like her.

Mrs. Lynch approached the blonde woman. "Hi, I'm Virginia Lynch."

The blonde smiled warmly. "I'm Helen Belden."

"Are you here to pick up your twins from kindergarten?" Virginia wanted to know.

Helen laughed merrily. "I'm here to pick up my daughter, Trixie, from kindergarten. Her brother Mart is actually eleven months older and in the first grade."

Virginia blushed at her mistake. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have assumed."

But Mrs. Belden didn't seem to mind her blunder. "It happens all the time. I call them my 'almost-twins.' Trixie actually rides the bus, but I got to missing her and decided to pick her up myself. Are you waiting for a kindergartener? The pretty little girl I often see you with in the market?"

Mrs. Lynch nodded. "That's my Diana. She was a little shy about coming to kindergarten, but I'm hoping that she'll make some friends."

"Trixie's not shy at all, and I'm anxious to learn just what she's been up to all morning!" Helen smiled ruefully and leaned in conspiratorially, saying in a low voice, "I'm trying not to imagine of some of the predicaments my youngest may have gotten herself into today, which is another reason I wanted to be on hand when she was released. Virginia smiled warmly at the confession.

At that moment, the bell rang, and soon a teacher appeared through the door leading a flock of kindergarteners. When Trixie and Diana saw their mothers, they leapt into their arms with shouts of "Mommy!"

Virginia was pleased to see her daughter more animated than she had ever seen her. Diana quickly announced, "Mummy, I would like you to meet my best friend." Diana turned and pointed to Trixie. "Mummy, this is my best friend Trixie. Trixie, this is my mommy."

Trixie grinned. "Hello, Mrs. Diana's Mom. Di, this is Moms. Moms, this is my best friend Diana."

Diana curtsied like she had been taught and said, "How do you do?" Diana's family may not have had money, but Virginia wanted her child to grow up with impeccable manners.

Mrs. Belden smiled fondly at the black-haired little girl and curtsied back. "I do fine, thank you very much. It's nice to meet you, Diana."

Trixie tugged on the hem of her mother's skirt. "Moms, can you take a picture of Di and me with Daddy's camera?"

"Of course, dear." Helen lifted the camera she had brought and snapped several photos of the little girls, one so vivacious in a simple blue dress, the other so lovely in lavender.

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Helen turned to Virginia. "If you've forgotten your camera, I can make sure that you get a few of these."

"Actually, we haven't a camera right now. It...it's being repaired, and it isn't ready to be picked up yet," Virginia fibbed, feeling self-conscious.

"Oh! Then I must take a few shots of Diana so you have a keepsake," Helen said.

Virginia started to protest. "Oh, no I couldn't. Film developing is so expensive."

But Helen insisted. "My husband's brother is an amateur photographer, and he develops all of our film for us. If it weren't for him, we wouldn't be able to take nearly so many pictures." Helen looked deeply into Mrs. Lynch's eyes, and she understood why she didn't have a camera. She also understood how sad this mother must be not to have a picture of her daughter on the very first day of kindergarten. "Please, it's no trouble at all, really."

Virginia looked into Mrs. Belden's kind blue eyes and could not refuse the woman's generosity. "That would be wonderful," she simply said.

Helen smiled and had Diana pose for a few pictures.

The two mothers and daughters then said their good-byes, Mrs. Belden inviting Mrs. Lynch over for coffee when the pictures were developed.

Virginia walked home, listening to her daughter's animated chatter of what had happened the first day of school. She learned that not only was Trixie very brave, but that Trixie's brother was also very smart. Virginia herself thought of Helen Belden's kindness and how wonderful it was that she would have a picture of Diana on her first day of kindergarten after all.

She had tears of happiness in her eyes as she realized that Diana had made a wonderful friend. And so had she.