

This is a Jixemetri Circle Challenge #13 - Meagan's 100 Point Challenge entry written for my Four Year Jixaversary; it is a sort of sequel to "Trixie Belden at the Mysterious Bribe" and contains a spoiler or two, but you don't need to read the other one to understand this one. In the original dustjacket 1951 version of *The Gatehouse Mystery*, Julie Campbell named the town "Sleepyside-on-Hudson," so I have used that name for the town. Also, you should know that I procrastinated and wrote it at the very, very last—*last*—minute, so it's self-edited. Read at your own risk—and if you don't want to, believe me, I understand! :) Thanks again to all my friends at Jix and to Cathy for making me feel at home. Y'all rock!

Trixie Belden and the Killifish Point Mystery

by Dana

"I'm telling you," Trixie Belden stated emphatically, each one of her sandy blonde curls bouncing along in time to Trixie's words, "there's something mysterious about that man!"

Mart, her older brother by eleven months, hooted. "What, pray tell, is so mysterious about this particular gentleman?"

Trixie's blue eyes flashed with annoyance despite the fact that she had come to expect Mart's teasing over the last fourteen years of her existence. "You can make fun of me all you want, Mart Belden, but there's something not right about him!"

"What specifically is bothering you, Trix?" Dan quickly interjected before the bickering between the two "almost-twins" could become a full-fledged argument.

"Well, we're in the middle of a July heat wave, and he's wearing long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, and a weird hat pushed down over his eyes. He's got to be dying of heatstroke—"

"Not everyone dies a thousand deaths at the drop of a hat like you, Trix," Mart interrupted. "As far as the 'weird hat' goes, it's called a bowler hat or a derby hat."

Trixie glared at her brother. "I *know* what it's called," she responded acidly. "Do you remember what Tom said about people who wear their hats over their eyes? He said that when you don't want someone to recognize you, you pull your hat down. It's what made him take a good look at Di's fake Uncle Monty, if you recall."

"Another reason to pull your hat down, especially on a day like today, is to keep the sun out of your eyes," Trixie's other brother, Brian, said practically.

"Why not wear sunglasses?" Trixie demanded.

"Maybe he didn't have any," Jim suggested.

"But he had a derby hat?" The incredulousness in Trixie's voice was unmistakable.

"Maybe he likes derby hats and not sunglasses," Di put in.

"You never know, Trix," tactful Honey pointed out.

Trixie sighed. If even Honey and Jim wouldn't listen, what was the point?

"Okay, you all win," she said. "I won't say anything more about that man." *Until I have proof that he's up to something*, she added silently.

The seven teenagers, known collectively as the Bob-Whites of the Glen, had decided to pack a picnic lunch and visit Killifish Point, located on the northern end of Sleepyside-on-Hudson, New York, where the group lived. There were several paths that led down to the

Hudson River, and the gang had thought the proximity to the river might be cooler than elsewhere. It also had the distinction of being the spot where Trixie had seen what appeared to be a shark in the Hudson. Trixie recalled that memorable day last fall when she had first seen that ominous gray fin.

On a sudden impulse, Trixie lingered behind for one last look at the river.

The normally placid Hudson had turned a sickly gray. Ripples sliced through areas of deceptive calm. Trixie stared at it for a long moment, awed by the thought of nature transforming a joy into a threat in such a short time. In a way, though, even a threatening Hudson was beautiful. The gusts of wind hitting her in the face and the rhythm of the waters pounding against the shore were oddly hypnotic.

Something in the scene before her struck Trixie as being out of place. Nearly everything was in various shades of gray—the sky, the cliffs, the water. Even the trees lining the river were showing their gray sides instead of their autumn-colored shades. The grayness was what made a black triangle, cutting slowly through the murky water, stand out.

Trixie squinted and used both hands to hold back her wildly blowing curls from her eyes. Standing as still as she could, she took a good long look and decided that her first impression had indeed been correct.

"Yipes!" she whispered. "It is a fin. What in the world is a shark doing in the Hudson River?"

The shark, however, had turned out to be a hoax, a signal that criminals were using during their illicit activities. Trixie's mind had been focused on this previous mystery when they had arrived at Killifish Point. With her mind already on mysterious things when she had seen the oddly dressed man glance furtively around and disappear on one of the trails leading up the bluff, her curious and suspicious mind had immediately caused her to jump to the conclusion that there was "something mysterious" afoot.

Despite the fact that Trixie had a one-track mind and thoughts of the suspicious-looking man simmered in the back of her consciousness all through the picnic, she was still able to enjoy the company of the other Bob-Whites and the feast that Mrs. Belden and the Wheeler cook had provided. The picnic was the usual feast of fried chicken, an array of side dishes, a fantastic dessert, and the accompanying teasing and joking that always occurred when the seven teenagers got together. After even Mart proclaimed himself "decimated from the delectable post meridiem repast," Trixie predictably implored her friends to explore. The bluff was full of nooks and crannies that, while they could not be called full-fledged caves, were still fun to investigate. Pat Bunker's old silver mine was also burrowed into one of the cliffs near Killifish Point.

Jim and Brian had brought their fishing poles and declined Trixie's invitation in favor of some leisurely fishing in the Hudson. Di decided that she wanted to relax at their picnic site and catch some rays. Not surprisingly, Mart elected to keep her company.

At Dan's snicker, Mart replied defensively, "If Hallie were here, you'd do the same thing."

Dan gave his friend an innocent smile and merely shrugged nonchalantly. He then decided, along with Honey, to join Trixie in some simple climbing and exploring of the landscape.

The trio set out along one of the paths that wound around the bluffs, sometimes angling downward toward the mighty Hudson, and other times bearing up toward the top of the bluffs. The slope was gentle along this portion of the river, and the path was easy to navigate. Further north, the bluffs would be much steeper and impassable. The trio had fun exploring the terrain, even leaving the paths to do some simple rock climbing a few feet up the bluffs. It was on the way back to the flat spot where the Bob-Whites had laid out their picnic that Trixie saw him.

A figure appeared at the top of one of the trails, apparently saw Mart and Di leisurely chatting on the red and white checked blanket below, and hurriedly turned and darted away.

Trixie, to the bewilderment of her friends, suddenly increased her pace and practically ran up the path after the man. Honey tried to call to her, but her friend ignored her. At the top of the path near the road, Trixie saw a beat-up and very dirty auto pulling out onto the road, its tires squawking. She tried to get a glimpse of the license plate number, but the plate was extremely dirty, and the car was moving away too fast.

Trixie sighed in frustration and started the descent down the path to return to her friends, knowing that she was going to have to explain her actions to Honey and Dan. She had gotten about a quarter of the way down the path when she met Honey and Dan on their way up, a mixture of concern and curiosity on their faces.

"Trix?" Honey asked. "Are you okay?"

Trixie nodded. "I am. I'm sorry I took off like that, but I saw a man come over the cliff, take one look at where Mart and Di were sitting, and then rush off. I decided to follow him. He was peeling away in an old clunker of a car by the time I made it to the top."

Dan glanced up toward the road and then back to Trixie. "Do you think it means something?"

Trixie shrugged. "I don't know. Between the weird guy in the hat and this guy being in such a hurry to get away, I don't know what to think." A sudden thought struck her. "Hey! Maybe the two of them are in cahoots and they found out that the legends that say there's a bunch of buried treasure around here are actually true and they're trying—"

Trixie stopped abruptly at the looks of amusement that her friends were giving her.

"Well, the last time we had a mystery that involved this very point it involved sunken treasure," she said defensively.

"I know, Trix," Honey said. "We didn't mean to make fun of you. It's just that there's no reason to believe that the two men have anything to do with each other, but you've got them in cahoots and looking for pirate treasure."

Trixie laughed good-naturedly. "When you put it like that, it does sound a little silly."

Dan gave her a mischievous smile. "A little?"

Trixie stuck her tongue out at him, and the three rejoined their friends at their picnic spot. Brian and Jim had finished fishing and were sitting with Mart and Di.

"We were just about to send out a search party for you all!" Di said.

"Yeah," Mart agreed. "We saw you hightailing it up the bluffs. What gives?"

"Nothing," Trixie said, busying herself with cleaning up the remnants of their picnic lunch. "I thought I saw something, but I didn't."

Mart looked at her skeptically and appeared as though he was about to say something, but Brian spoke up just then.

"Well, we should get going. Dad wanted to take Moms on a ride down by the river this afternoon and stop for tea, and we Beldens promised that we would watch Bobby."

At Brian's words, the Bob-Whites immediately started to pack away their belongings, and Trixie was glad that Mart didn't have a chance to interrogate her further. She may have been too hasty to jump to the conclusion that the two men she had seen were looking for buried pirate treasure, but she knew there was something more going on than met the eye. Somehow, in some way, those two men *were* connected to each other. She could feel it in her bones.

* * *

That evening after dinner, Trixie sat on the porch swing on the Wheeler veranda, reading a Lucy Radcliffe romance/mystery novel and absent-mindedly rubbing Patch's velvety ears. Honey was inside finishing some thank you letters she was writing as part of her duties as her mother's secretary, and Trixie had quickly realized that this was not a task with which she could help her friend. Not wanting to distract her, she had borrowed one of Honey's Lucy books and settled down with Jim's dog Patch to wait for her friend.

She had only been there for about fifteen minutes when Jim joined her on the swing.

"Waiting for Honey?" he asked.

Trixie nodded and put the book down. "We're going to go bike riding as soon as she's done with your mom's correspondence. Do you want to come?"

"I would love to, but I can't. Jupiter needs to be exercised, and I also promised Brian that I would help him with the tune-up of his jalopy. After we do the tune-up, we're going to exercise Jupe and Starlight."

Trixie smiled. "I remember when cars used to frustrate you not so long ago. I'm glad Brian's knowledge is rubbing off on you."

Jim grinned. "Yeah, he's a much better teacher than Dick the Dip ever was."

Trixie knew that Jim meant it as a joke, but she couldn't help but shiver despite the heat. What if Dick had done more than just hit Jim over the head when he had given him 'driving lessons' last summer? Jim must have seen Trixie's look, because he said, "Hey, stop worrying. Dick didn't hurt me, so don't even think what might have been."

Trixie felt warm all over as she realized that Jim knew her well enough to read her mind. When he reached out and tugged one of her sandy blonde curls, she couldn't help but smile. "You're right. Dick's behind bars where he belongs."

Just then, Honey joined them on the veranda. "I'm done!" she sing-songed as she approached her friend and her brother. "Are you going to go bike riding with us, Jim?"

Jim shook his head. "I can't," he said, standing. "But you two have fun—and no mysteries! I still haven't gotten over the shock of seeing Olyfant pull a gun on you two last week." Jim referred to an incident that had transpired the week previous when Trixie and Honey had set out to clear Sergeant Molinson of false charges.

Trixie and Honey's eyes met briefly at his statement but then they both turned to Jim with bright smiles on their faces.

"We'll definitely have fun," Trixie said. Jim looked unsure at their reaction but said nothing and headed down the path to Crabapple Farm.

"I thought for sure our cover was blown," Trixie exclaimed as soon as Jim was out of earshot. "I had to invite him along on our bike ride so he didn't get suspicious, but I was hoping against hope that he wouldn't take me up on it. Fortunately, he and Brian have a full evening planned."

"Are you sure we couldn't let Jim in on our plans, Trix?" Honey asked.

Trixie shook her head vigorously, her curls bouncing in emphasis. "No. He'd just make fun of me for thinking there's something suspicious about those two guys. He'd make up a million plausible explanations, and I don't want to hear all those explanations. I *know* there's something going on."

"Jim wouldn't make fun of you, Trixie," Honey chided gently. "He may offer a million plausible explanations, as you say, but he respects you too much to ever make fun of you."

Trixie said nothing, but Honey thought she looked very pleased.

The two girls grabbed their bikes and were soon on their way to Killifish Point. Trixie was sure that the man who had sped off earlier wanted to be alone on the bluffs, and she was also sure that he would return that evening to do whatever it was that he wanted to do before. Sure enough, when Trixie and Honey arrived at Killifish Point, the battered, dirty car she had seen earlier was parked there.

"That's the car I saw earlier!" she exclaimed even as she was noting the license plate number.

"Wow. You were right, Trix," Honey stated. "But maybe he just wants to be alone with his thoughts on the river or something. It doesn't necessarily mean he's up to no good."

"We'll soon find out," Trixie said with an almost grim determination.

The two girls hid their bikes in some underbrush on the other side of Killifish Road and started down the path.

"Trix," Honey whispered, "if he *is* up to something, what's he going to do when he sees us?"

"Well," Trixie returned, "this is a public place, and he has to know that sometimes people are going to be here. We're out here exploring the bluffs on public land. What *can* he do?"

Thus reassured, the two girls crept silently along the paths, trying not to disturb loose pebbles that would give away their presence. Intuition led Trixie to head toward the place where she had seen the man with the derby hat, and sure enough, when they were about twenty feet away from the spot where Trixie had seen the oddly dressed man, the driver of the battered car came into view. He had a ball cap pulled down low over his eyes, but Trixie could still see that he had longish brown hair peeking out from underneath the cap. He was rather tall and stocky and held a simple canvas bag in his left hand. Like the other man, he glanced furtively around as he started up the path. The scrub growing along the bluffs was not enough to hide behind, so Trixie and Honey were unable to conceal themselves before his eyes turned their way.

Trixie watched his face flush with anger when he saw them. His furious look frightened her for a moment, but she immediately decided to play innocent.

She waved to the man and called pleasantly, "Hello there! Nice evening for watching the Hudson, isn't it?"

The man grunted something and hurried up the path, disappearing in the same place that the other man had earlier that day.

The two girls continued to pick their way along the path and soon found themselves in the same spot that they had observed the man. They then followed the winding path the way from which they had seen him come. The path took them down and back up the bluff, one of the less straightforward of the many paths at Killifish Point. Trixie was almost ready to admit defeat when she saw something that caught her eye.

Tucked into one of the bluffs, about ten feet above them, was a small crevice that looked just the right size to hold the bag the man had been carrying. She left the path to climb up toward the crevice and soon reached the spot. Honey stayed below on the path and urged her friend to be careful.

Trixie peeked inside the crevice and at first glance saw nothing. Without a flashlight, she really couldn't see very far into the fissure in the rock. Realizing that there was only one way to explore the cavity without a flashlight, she gingerly put her hand inside, hoping that she didn't disturb a snake or a nest of spiders. To her relief, her hand touched upon what felt like a piece of paper, and she withdrew it. It was indeed a folded-up piece of paper, and she eagerly unfolded it. Her eyes grew wide as she read the contents of the note.

If you don't want your secret to get out, you will pay me \$50,000 in cash. I will contact you with the time and place. Leave this note with the money, or I tell all.

"Honey!" she shrieked. "Those men *were* connected! And I know how!" She turned to face her friend and saw, to her horror, that the stocky man with the scraggly hair was standing on the path below her with his arms around Honey, one hand over her mouth, the other holding a ominous looking blade.

"Well, then you know too much then, don't you, girlie?" he growled in a menacing voice. "Now get down here before I throw your friend in the Hudson."

Trixie had no choice but to obey.

The frightened girl slowly climbed down the rocks, her thoughts churning. Obviously, the blackmailer had wanted his victim to return the very note that she held so that it could not be used as evidence. He had obviously thought that the note would be in with the money. When it wasn't, he came back to look for it. But she and Honey had gotten there first.

Trixie was sick with fear. No one knew where she and Honey were. Her brain raced to come up with a plan, but all she could see was the terror in Honey's eyes and the swirling waters of the Hudson that reflected the rays of the setting sun.

She was now standing on the path next to Honey and the blackmailer.

The man stared at Trixie through narrowed eyes. "I know who you are. I've seen you in the newspaper; you're that snoop from Sleepyside High. You fancy yourself quite the little detective, don't you? Well, your snooping days are over, kid." He gestured with his knife toward the path. "Get going."

Trixie and Honey obeyed, walking along the path in the opposite way from which they had come. They were moving farther and farther north up the Hudson. Pretty soon, the bluffs would be impassable. Trixie wondered what the blackmailer's plans were.

"It must have been an impressive secret for \$50,000," Trixie said, hoping to get more details of the crime and to distract their captor.

"Shut up," he snarled.

Trixie instantly and wisely decided that talking would not be the right approach and did as she was told.

Just before the bluffs became too steep and impassable, the path they were on veered toward the river and widened. Soon, they were almost level with the river, and Trixie could see the mouth of a cave.

"In there," the man commanded in a gruff voice. Trixie and Honey entered the cave, and Trixie realized it was an old silver mine, much like the one that Pat Bunker used when he was fishing.

"You two little girls are going to stay here where you can't cause me any more trouble. Someone may find you and maybe they won't. Either way, I'll be long gone before there's anything you little ladies can do about it."

Trixie's worried blue eyes met Honey's frightened hazel ones. *We've been in far worse trouble*, Trixie silently sent a message to her friend, *and we've gotten out of that. We'll get out of this, too.*

Honey blinked a few times, and Trixie knew that Honey had understood her look.

Meanwhile, the blackmailer had removed his shirt, revealing a white t-shirt. He took this off and began tearing it in strips. "And now you two have cost me a perfectly good t-shirt. No matter. I can afford to buy a lot of t-shirts now." He chuckled, but there was no pleasure in the sound.

He ordered the two girls to sit with their backs to each other on either side of one of the wooden beams that had been placed there when the silver mine had been chiseled out of the side of the bluff. He then tied the two girls' arms behind them around the pole and gagged them for good measure.

"Wouldn't want someone to hear you, now would we?" he asked rhetorically. "Bye bye, girls! It's been fun!" He again chuckled mirthlessly as he disappeared.

Trixie was frustrated that she couldn't even talk to her friend, let alone call for help. She leaned her head back against the wood beam so that the gag was up against the wood and moved it up and down, trying to loosen the knot on the gag, or at least move it enough to where she could talk. Finally, after what seemed like hours, she was able to spit the gag from her mouth.

"Honey!" she exclaimed. "Try to get the gag off by rubbing it against the beam!"

While Honey did as Trixie said, Trixie began to think of a way to get them out of the cave. She felt around the sandy floor for a sharp rock but could not find one. Finally, she just decided to rub the t-shirt material along the beam and hope that the roughened wood would be able to do the trick.

She was concentrating so hard on trying to get her hands untied that Honey's voice startled her.

"Trix?"

"Honey! I'm trying to scrape the cotton against the wood, but I don't think it's doing so well. Can you feel around and see if you can find a sharp stone or something?"

There was silence as Honey felt along the ground for something sharp, but as her hands were tied so close to Trixie's, she didn't cover much more ground than Trixie already had in her search.

"I'm sorry, Trix," Honey said.

"That's okay. Just keep trying to rub the cotton against the beam. We'll be fine," Trixie said, despite her most recent disturbing thought. This cave was at river level. If the tide began to rise before they were able to get free, would they drown? Trixie pushed this thought from her mind and started to scrape the cotton tie along the beam with renewed energy.

Trixie had no idea how long she and Honey had been in the cave when her cotton restraint finally gave. With a shout of joy, she rubbed her wrists and then hurriedly freed Honey's hands.

The two celebrated their release—briefly—and then hurried to the cave entrance and back to the path from which they had come.

As they hurriedly tried to find their way back to their bikes, Honey commented, "I really wished he would have given himself away more when you tried to talk to him. I guess we'll never find him now."

"Oh yes we will," Trixie said with grim determination, each word enunciated to show her resolve.

"But, Trixie, how?" Honey wanted to know.

"I memorized his plates. I'm sure once we head to police headquarters that they can trace the plates and put out an APB and catch this guy," Trixie explained.

"I hope so," Honey said, exhaustion in her voice.

"Don't worry, Honey. We're almost there," Trixie encouraged her friend.

Within a few more minutes, they had found their bikes where they had hidden them in the underbrush. The pedaled as fast as they could in the dark until they arrived at the Sleepside Police Headquarters to find it in an uproar.

"Trixie Belden!" Sergeant Molinson boomed when he saw her. "Where in the dickens have you been?"

"Sergeant!" Trixie cried, happy to see a familiar face even as she wondered why he was at the station this late. "You have to get him! He's a blackmailer, and he kidnapped Honey and I!"

The gruff sergeant took one look at the girl who had saved his job and his reputation just the week before and knew time could not be wasted. "What happened?"

"A man, tall, stocky, with longish brown hair, blackmailed someone for \$50,000. The pick up point for the money was Killifish Point, and Honey and I accidentally got in the way. He drives a beat up Ford, dark blue." She then rattled off the license plate number.

Sergeant Molinson immediately ordered an APB based on Trixie's description. He then picked up the phone.

"Helen? They're safe. They're at the station," he said into the phone, and Trixie suddenly realized why Sergeant Molinson was at the station so late. She felt warmth spread through her to know that the Sergeant cared enough about herself and Honey to be on hand directly for their search.

"Now that we've got the APB out, will you come into my office and tell me the details?" the sergeant asked. Trixie and Honey were gratified that his normally gruff voice held concern and interest. It seemed that the relationship between stern police officer and schoolgirl shames had turned a corner.

Trixie and Honey had just finished relating all of the details from their picnic earlier that afternoon through their ordeal in the abandoned silver mine when Helen and Peter Belden and Matthew and Madeleine Wheeler came rushing in. After a happy reunion, the girls' bikes were loaded into their parents' respective vehicles, and the girls were taken home.

* * *

Two days later, the Bob-Whites assembled in their clubhouse. Sergeant Molinson had just called Trixie with some information, and she had called an emergency meeting of the club.

Eager to share her news, she called the meeting to order as soon as Dan, the last member of the club to arrive, came through the doorway.

"They caught the blackmailer in Chesapeake, Virginia," she announced happily. "His name is Arthur Hearn, and he had a record of some petty things, theft and stuff, but nothing major. Sergeant Molinson won't tell me who the blackmail victim was, or what he was being blackmailed for, because of some confidentiality rules, but he could let me know that Hearn had been caught so that we could have peace of mind, him having kidnapped us and all that." She stopped and took a breath.

"So that's it? You're safe?" Jim wanted to know.

"Yes, he's no threat to us anymore. He was caught with the money and the note, so we won't even have to testify. Sergeant Molinson agreed not to press kidnapping charges so that he never has to know that it was Honey and I that turned him in."

"How is he able to do that? How does he think he was captured?" Dan wanted to know.

"Well," Trixie began, "the man he was blackmailing had managed to get his license plate number the first time the man came to pick up the money—Hearn really wasn't a very smart criminal—and debated whether or not to go to the police with the information. He wasn't really sure if he wanted the publicity. But he did decide to go and went to the Sleeypside police and gave them the license plate number yesterday. So, as far as the police are concerned, they apprehended Hearn on the blackmailing victim's tip, and Trixie Belden and Honey Wheeler were never involved. Which makes it very nice for us," Trixie concluded.

"And Molinson gets another feather in his cap for a case you two solved," Di said.

Trixie shrugged. "That's okay," she said, and Honey echoed her. "We don't do it for credit. Just knowing that he's behind bars and that Sergeant Molinson has fixed it so that he never comes after me and Honey is enough for me."

"Me, too," Honey stated emphatically.

"Me, three," Jim said with a special smile for his favorite schoolgirl shames.

With that, Trixie closed the meeting and the Bob-Whites of the Glen enjoyed what turned out to be just another summer day...an unusual but welcome occurrence.

I chose the following items for Meagan's 100 Point Challenge: *5 points*—appearance of a pet mentioned in the books (Patch), mention of a relative from another state (Hallie), mention of a school (Sleepyside H.S.), a romance novel (I stretched and made Lucy Radcliffe a romance/mystery novel, because the excerpt Trixie reads in *Ghostly Galleon* just *sounds* like one!), extreme weather (heat wave), someone sitting on a porch swing; *10 points*—somebody jumping to an incorrect conclusion (Trixie, natch!), a flashback that incorporates a scene from the books (*Hudson River Mystery*); *25 points*—the two Bob-White who appear must not be related (I had them all; take your pick), two of the following mentioned in the same sentence (Jupiter and Brian's jalopy).

The flashback scene is quoted nearly verbatim from *Trixie Belden and the Hudson River Mystery*, is the copyright of Random House, and is used without permission.

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Thanks to the rockin' Susan for her Sleepyside Files so that I didn't have to re-read *Hudson River* to learn the salient points of Killifish Point!

I have now officially written three full stories this year and am a "Slayer of Writer's Block"—thanks to Dani's fantabulous challenge idea. Have I mentioned how much Dani rocks? Well, she does.