

This is a Jixemetri CWP#12 submission. The title comes from the No Doubt/Talk Talk song of the same name. A gazillion thanks to Susan for her speedy edits!

It's My Life

by Dana

"I'm home, Moms," eighteen-year-old Trixie Belden shouted as she entered the sunny red and white kitchen of Crabapple Farm.

Helen Belden withdrew from the refrigerator, where she had been rearranging things in preparation for the celebration picnic the Beldens were hosting that night.

"I'm right here, Trixie," Mrs. Belden said with slight reproach.

Trixie looked abashed. "Sorry, Moms," she said in a quieter voice. "I didn't see you there."

"Obviously," Helen said dryly, but the twinkle in her blue eyes, so much like her daughter's, belied her irritation. "How was graduation practice?"

"Bo-oring," the exuberant teen said. She opened up her purse and pulled out a wrinkled envelope.

"This is for you from the school. It's about graduation and your tickets and stuff. If it's sunny and nice, it will be outside at the football field, and everyone can come. But if it's raining, it will be in the gym, and then I only have tickets for you and Dad."

"Well, it was sunny for Brian's graduation and for Mart's, so we'll just keep our fingers crossed that that pattern holds for yours."

"At this point, I don't care, as long as I graduate!" Trixie exclaimed.

Mrs. Belden grinned as she scooped up several markers that Bobby had left on the counter and moved them to a drawer that held pens, pencils, paper, scissors, and the like. In the meantime, Trixie moved to the refrigerator and poured herself a glass of milk.

As Trixie took a long swig of the delicious dairy product, Bobby came rushing into the kitchen, his shorts showing off his two skinned knees to advantage. Trixie rolled her eyes at Bobby's appearance, completely forgetting that, at ten, she herself had two skinned knees more often than not.

"Moms, have you seen my stories?" Bob asked.

"No, but I did put your markers away. What stories?"

"The teacher told us we had to write two stories, and she gave us time to write them in class. I wrote one about frogs and started the other about a turtle. My frog story was all about the legend of ol' Lisgard House and how Sarah turned all the children to frogs, and I finished it today in class. I was watching TV right now and had an idea to add to my turtle story, but now I can't find my story!"

"It's probably in your backpack, squirt," Trixie said helpfully.

Bobby glared at her. "I'm ten, not six anymore, so don't call me squirt!"

Trixie rolled her eyes while her mother said, "Bobby, watch your tone with your sister. And, Trixie, can't you help him find his stories while I finish up in here? Everyone will be here before you know it."

Trixie and Bobby both looked contrite. "Sorry, Moms," they both apologized meekly. Trixie followed Bobby out of the kitchen to look for the lost stories. Helen almost felt sorry for her only daughter when she heard Bobby, apparently trying to make amends, start in with one of his knock knock jokes.

"Who's there?" Trixie replied dutifully.

"Dewey."

"Dewey who?"

"Dewey have to listen to all of this knocking!" Bobby then broke into gales of laughter, and Mrs. Belden chuckled as she put a large pitcher of homemade lemonade in the refrigerator to chill for the picnic.

Peter Belden arrived home just after Trixie had finally located Bobby's stories shoved under the couch, of all places.

He gave Trixie a hasty thanks before rushing to greet his father.

"Dad! Moms said you could tell me what Viagra has to do with sex in a park!"

Trixie entered the kitchen just in time to hear Bobby's question, and her startled blue eyes flew to Helen Belden. Peter's eyes also sought out his wife, who suddenly became very busy with a large bowl of potato salad, seemingly oblivious to her son's question.

Mr. Belden finally found his voice. "She did, did she? Well, right now, I need to change and get the grill ready for our picnic tonight, so we'll talk about it later, okay?" He looked down at his youngest son.

"Sure, Dad," Bobby agreed amiably.

Trixie watched, amused, as her dad leaned over her mother's shoulder and said under his breath, "And we'll be having a little talk later, too, won't we?"

Helen turned and gave her husband an innocent smile. "Whatever you say, dear."

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The picnic was turning out to be a great success. The Bob-Whites and Peter, Helen, and Bobby had a grand time as they joked and teased their way through Moms' famous burgers, potato salad, and corn-on-the-cob, the Wheelers' cook's unbeatable fried chicken and fresh-baked rolls, and Di's delicious pasta salad. Dan had even surprised everybody with a mean guacamole.

Upon listening to the Bob-Whites groan about eating too much, Peter Belden suggested the teens go for a walk to help digest their food before they tackled dessert. Trixie was sure he wanted to get Helen alone and corner her about Bobby's sudden interest in Viagra.

The Bob-Whites agreed that the idea of a walk was a superb one and immediately paired off and headed in various directions. For once, Brian didn't feel like seventh wheel, because it was time for him to go pick up Lexi from the train station for her weekend visit. As Peter noticed his daughter going off in one direction with Jim, his second son heading off in the opposite direction with Di, and Honey and Dan heading off in yet a third direction, he wore a chagrined look, as if he hadn't expected the younger generation to take *separate* walks. Helen laughed aloud at the comical look on his face.

As Trixie and Jim headed in the direction of the clubhouse, they heard Bobby say, "Now you've got time to tell me about Viagra, right, Dad?"

A giggle escaped Trixie's lips, and Jim looked amused.

"Do I even want to know about Bobby's sudden interest in Viagra?"

"I don't know much about it myself," Trixie admitted. "When Dad got home, Bobby nearly attacked him at the door saying that *Moms* said that Dad would *love* to tell him about what Viagra had to do with sex in the park."

"Ten-year-olds grow up fast these days," Jim commented with a grin.

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"Yeah, next thing you know, he'll be wondering about clandestine meetings in the clubhouse," Trixie said with a sly grin.

"Speaking of, shall we have one of those ourselves, Miss Belden?"

"Why, I would absolutely love to, Mr. Frayne. Thank you so much for the lovely invitation."

Within a few minutes, the two were ensconced in the old gatehouse and kissing passionately.

"You know what the best part of you being home this summer is?" Trixie asked when they finally pulled apart.

"What's that?"

"This time, you're not going to leave me behind at the end of it."

Jim's smile reached his green eyes. "That *is* a very good thing," he agreed as he leaned forward to give Trixie's full lips yet another sweet kiss. "I'm so glad you're going to be on campus with me next year, Trix."

"Me, too. It's a lot less scary knowing that I'll have you there to show me the ropes. I mean, I may have chosen Michigan State whether you were there or not, since they have one of the best criminal justice programs in the country, and the thought of heading out there all by myself, well, that would be pretty intimidating."

"Trixie Belden? Intimidated?" Jim asked, his surprise only partly feigned.

Trixie allowed herself to smile at his good-natured sarcasm. "A little, yeah. I don't know how you did it three years ago."

"It's like you said. State's education program is one of the best in the country, and I really feel it's where I needed to be to make my dream of a school for orphaned boys come true. It was hard going so far away, especially since I was young for a freshman, but you do what you have to do. And you, Trixie, are a terrier when it comes to pursuing things, especially your dream of being a detective, so you would have been just fine."

"Thanks, Jim," Trixie said seriously, happy that the man she had always considered the most wonderful boy in the world thought so highly of her, as well. "You're right, as always. But it's still pretty serendipitous that we can both pursue our dreams at Michigan State together."

"That it is," Jim said, kissing Trixie again, "and I am not one to look a gift horse in the mouth." His handsome face acquired a sly look. "Speaking of gifts..." he said as he extricated himself from Trixie's arms and moved to the room where they stored their sporting gear, noting that his harmonica, which he hadn't seen in a year, was sitting there amidst the baseball mitts and tennis rackets.

"Jim Frayne!" Trixie said, laughing. "What have you done now?"

Jim returned with a brightly wrapped package. "It's not much, just a little something I decided you should have for graduation."

"You shouldn't have," Trixie said even as she tore into the package. She opened the box to reveal a beautiful silver frame, engraved along the bottom with "Bob-Whites of the Glen." The picture was of all seven of the club members from the previous summer after a particularly fun picnic at the Wheeler's lake. The seven of them looked relaxed and happy, a true band of brothers and sisters. Jim had thoughtfully had it enlarged to 5 x 7 and framed it.

"Jim," Trixie breathed. "This is wonderful. Thank you."

"I thought that you would like that for your dorm room next year. Maybe they won't seem so far away then."

"It's perfectly perfect," Trixie stated, kissing him soundly.

"I'm glad you like it. I was absolutely stumped about what to get you for graduation. Then, I was talking to Debbie one day, that girl I worked with last year, and she inadvertently gave me the idea."

"Well, thank Debbie for me, because I love it. I can't wait to meet Debbie next year. You've spoken so highly of her, that I already feel like I know her."

"Debbie's a great gal, all right," Jim agreed. "I know you two will get along famously next year. She loves mysteries, too."

"She sounds perfect!" Trixie joked.

"You'll like her a lot. She and a group of friends volunteer at a soup kitchen in downtown Lansing every year during Christmas break. Last year, they all dressed up as Christmas icons to entertain the little kids there. She dressed up as Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer. It was pretty funny."

Trixie's blue eyes sparkled. "I wish I didn't think I was going to be homesick for Sleepyside by Christmas. I'd stay in Lansing and volunteer, too."

"Well, the MSU dorms sponsor trick-or-treating for needy kids at Halloween. You can pass out candy to the kids from the comfort of your dorm room. Or you can go out in the neighborhoods and do trick or treat for UNICEF. A lot of State students do that. Last year, it snowed on Halloween. All of the snow-covered pumpkins were something to behold."

Trixie wrinkled her nose. "Snow? On Halloween? I don't even think it's snowed *here* on Halloween."

Jim shrugged. "It happens. Everyone just kind of deals with it. But you're made from hearty New York stock, so you'll be fine!"

Trixie snuggled up to her boyfriend. "Of course, I'll be fine" she said impishly. "I have you to keep me warm during those frigid Michigan nights!"

Jim kissed her soundly. "And I take my responsibility seriously. No girlfriend of mine is going to freeze on my watch."

"Speaking of watches," Trixie said reluctantly, "we've probably been gone long enough. My dad will be sending out a search party."

"Or your brother," Jim said with a rueful smile.

"Actually, he's on his way to the train station to pick up Lexi, so we may be off the hook for once!" Trixie laughed.

The two reluctantly left the privacy of the clubhouse and headed back toward Crabapple Farm. A shooting star twinkled overhead as they made their way down the path.

"Did you see that, Trix?" Jim asked.

"I did," she said with a smile. "Did you make a wish?"

"I did," Jim returned.

"I did, too." Trixie took Jim's hand in hers, and the two smiled warmly at each other, knowing exactly for what the other had wished. And, somehow, the bond of that shared, secret wish made it seem all the more certain that it would come true.

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The two strode back to the Beldens' yard, arriving just as Mart and Di appeared from the general direction of the crabapple orchard, and Honey and Dan materialized from the direction of the Wheelers' game preserve.

"We were just about to send a search party out for all of you," Mr. Belden said sternly, but nobody missed the twinkle in his eye. "Are you all ready for dessert?"

The group agreed that they were. After indulging themselves with Moms' apple pie, Di's cupcakes, and Mr. Maypenny's donuts, the group was absolutely decimated and decided to call it a night.

There was much laughter as the party broke up and promises were made to call each other the next day. Trixie gave Jim a hug and once again thanked him for her thoughtful graduation gift.

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The next few days were a blur of studying and finals, and, before Trixie knew it, she was dressed in her cap and gown, and Mart and Dan had dropped her and her two best friends off at Sleepyside High for the graduation ceremony. Could she, Trixie Belden, really be about to graduate high school?

As the three girls crossed the parking lot and headed inside the school, Trixie glanced out toward the football field where commencement would soon be commencing. A few students were decorating the goal posts with maroon and white crepe paper. Trixie smiled at the sight.

Trixie wondered what a group of junior boys, allegedly there to help the faculty with various graduation details, were really up to, when she heard one of them say, "I think we can take them."

The three girls wove their way through the crowd of gathered seniors. They watched with amusement as Miss Bennett, the botany teacher, chased down Jerry Vanderhoef and demand that he replace the candy cane that dangled from his cap instead of the traditional tassel. Jerry laughed good-naturedly and immediately pulled the tassel from his pocket.

Amy Morrissey was looking at Jamie Kenworthy skeptically, refusing to believe his announcement that he was wearing nothing under his maroon cap and gown except a bow tie. Mr. Stratton was weaving through the crowd of chattering teenagers, resplendent in their maroon and white graduation uniforms.

Trixie turned to Honey. "I can't believe we're celebrating graduation in New York City!"

Honey nodded excitedly. "Wasn't Miss Trask a dear to agree to chaperone? Especially what we put her through when you bought that ugly little idol."

Trixie grinned ruefully. "She always is a good sport."

"She'll get to spend tomorrow visiting her sister while we explore the city a bit, so I don't feel *too* guilty for dragging her!" Honey chuckled.

"We've all got exciting evenings planned, eh, Di?" Trixie said with a wicked grin for her dark-haired friend.

Di, staring off into space with a dreamy look, didn't respond. It was clear that she was miles away from Sleepyside Junior-Senior High School.

"Di?" Trixie said.

"Earth to Di!" Honey chimed in.

"Sorry," Di said with a guilty smile. "I was just thinking that I can't believe this day is here already!"

Trixie smile knowingly. "You didn't look that dreamy about graduation. You were thinking about my brother!"

"Guilty as charged," Di said, not looking guilty at all.

Just then, Mr. Stratton called for attention, and the crowd quieted. "It is time for you to line up in your rows to walk out to the football field. Please try to remember your position from rehearsal the other morning."

There was happy confusion as the members of Sleepyside's latest graduating class scurried about, trying to remember to which row they had been assigned and between whom they had been seated. Trixie had a very easy time of it, as she had been assigned to the very front row. She headed to the front of the crowd to find her place between Chuck Altemus' younger sister, Allison, and Mary Brendan.

Honey also had no difficulty finding her place, as she was in the back row between Jerry Vanderhoef and Bill Wright. Diana headed to the middle of the crowd, and eventually found her place between Ruthie Kettner and Jane Morgan.

Once the seniors had organized themselves, Mr. Stratton and Miss Bennett released them, row by row, to march out to the football field. Once the first row of students stepped onto the field at the back of the end zone, the student band began to play "Pomp and Circumstance."

At the first strains of the traditional song, Trixie felt a swelling of pride within her. The girl who had once almost wrecked an Arizona vacation because of her grades had made it through and was about to graduate from high school.

She took her seat in the first row of chairs set up on the football field and remained standing as the rows behind her filed in. She craned her neck, looking into the stands to find a glimpse of her parents or Jim, but even Jim's shock of red hair was lost in the blur of the crowd.

Finally, Mr. Stratton signaled for the seniors to take their chairs and commencement began. Trixie tried to concentrate on Mark Nixon's graduation speech, she really did, but it was just so...ordinary. It wasn't a bad speech, but it was so full of the same kinds of sentiments that she had first heard at Jim and Brian's graduation and then at Mart and Dan's graduation that she found herself instead listening to two of her fellow graduates seated behind her.

"Being the last of seven to graduate high school, I've practically got this speech memorized," a male voice said. Trixie could definitely sympathize with that sentiment, and she was only the third to graduate from her family.

"I know," another male voice responded. "I still remember the speech from my sister's graduation last year."

"It's too bad they can't spice it up," the first voice continued. "You know, talk about how a male kinkajou starts its mating ritual by nipping at the female's throat or something. That would get people's attention!"

Trixie suppressed a giggle and couldn't help but agree. That tidbit had certainly gotten *her* attention!

No more interesting nuggets of useless information were forthcoming from the pair of boys behind her, and Trixie tried not to yawn through the valedictorian speech and the distinguished alumnus speech. Her mind drifted to the finals she had just taken, from the excruciating trigonometry final first thing on Monday morning to the forensics final that she had actually thoroughly enjoyed that morning. When Sleepyside High had started offering forensics as a class, she had been flabbergasted, but overjoyed. She had found every minute of it fascinating, as had Honey. It was like a taste of what was to come in

college, when she could finally—*finally*—concentrate on the courses she wanted to and drop the ones that she didn't.

She sat up straighter when she finally heard, "In closing, remember the inspiring words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who said 'Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.' God bless and God speed."

Amid the applause of graduates and audience alike, the Sleepyside alumnus returned to his seat on the stage, and Mr. Stratton took his place at the podium. Trixie knew the time had come, and she felt fairly electrified with anticipation. Thank goodness, she was in the first row and wouldn't have to wait long!

She stood with her row, and, when she heard her name called, she beamed as she crossed the stage and accepted her diploma and a handshake with Mr. Stratton.

"Congratulations, Trixie," he said with a smile.

"Thanks, Mr. Stratton," she returned. On the way down the steps, she looked into the sea of faces and waved her diploma, a brilliant smile lighting up her face. She didn't know exactly where Jim and her family were, but she knew they had seen the excited gesture meant especially for them.

She cheered loudly and gave a Bob-White whistle as Di and Honey crossed the stage and accepted their diplomas. Finally, the Bob-White girls had joined the Bob-White guys as graduates—and adults. Trixie fairly trembled with excitement at the realization that, as trite as it sounded, today was the first day of the rest of her life. Her *adult* life.

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Jim and Trixie strolled hand-in-hand down Columbus Avenue on the Upper West Side, while Dan and Honey trailed at a discreet distance. Both couples had enjoyed a late dinner at Tavern on the Green, a wonderful graduation gift from Honey and Jim's parents, and were leisurely strolling past the Lincoln Center, its high arches aglow with a symphony of golden lights.

Jim and Trixie paused to take in the fountain, its flowing water accented with the rosy illumination of pink lights, as Dan and Honey caught up to them.

"Maybe they still have tickets available to see that dance troupe that's supposed to be wonderful," Honey said with a wicked grin, knowing exactly how that suggestion was going to be met by her companions.

"The Hickory Dickory Dancers?" Dan asked with a roll of his eyes.

Honey snorted. "The Holly Dixon Dance Company," she corrected and then assumed a cultured voice. "And I hear that the dance they do to Barry Manilow's 'Copacabana' is really quite astounding."

"As much as I love you, Honey," Trixie stated emphatically, "I am not going to see any Humpty Dumpty Dancers do the Copacabana!"

Honey grinned as she raised her hand to delicately tuck a strand of her golden hair behind her ear. "Well—" she started, but she never got a chance to finish her thought.

"Honey Wheeler!" Trixie shrieked, grabbing Honey's hand and examining it. "When did you get that ring?"

Honey and Dan shared a smile, which did not go unnoticed by Jim. His eyes flew to Honey's hand, and he was relieved to see an emerald instead of a diamond gracing Honey's left ring finger.

"It was a graduation present," Honey said.

"That's not surprising, considering how much your mom loves jewelry," Trixie said.

"It wasn't from my parents," Honey stated, savoring Trixie's reaction. The blonde's face registered confusion, and then her round blue eyes flew to Dan's face, which was plastered with a wide grin. Finally, her confusion turned to surprise as realization settled in.

"You?" she asked ineloquently.

Dan nodded and laughed. "Guilty as charged."

"Wow. That's some gift!"

"It sure is," Jim echoed in a neutral tone. Honey's eyes flew to her brother's face, but she could not tell whether or not he was upset about Dan's gift.

Trixie elbowed her boyfriend and grinned cheekily up at him. "Oh, stop playing big brother, and be happy for Honey and Dan. Did Brian jump all over *you* for the sapphire ring you gave me summer before last? Or the *engagement* ring you gave me when I was a mere thirteen-year-old child?"

Honey and Dan tried to suppress their grins at Trixie's brash statements and Jim's sudden flush. The redhead, realizing that he was thoroughly defeated, finally let out a laugh.

"Okay, okay, you win," he said as he kissed her forehead and then her nose. "What would I do without you to keep me honest, Shamus?"

Trixie smiled up at him, her cerulean eyes sparkling with happiness. "You'll never have to find out."

Dan and Honey grinned at each other as Jim and Trixie shared a kiss.

"Okay, you two, it's getting late, and Miss Trask will be worried. We still have a bit of a walk back to the penthouse," Honey reminded them.

The two couples resumed their stroll up Columbus Avenue, but not before passing Lincoln Center patrons dressed to the nines for their evening out. Honey loved looking at all of the beautiful and elegant gowns on the women, and even Trixie was slightly impressed.

One woman had decided upon a bright red, sequined dress, a feather boa, and a diamond tiara for her evening out.

"Look," Dan said under his breath, "it's Princess Supple Bling Bling—in person!"

The foursome chuckled over his joke as they left the lights of the Lincoln Center behind. Trixie looked around, savoring all of the bustle and excitement of New York City. She loved Sleepyside, but it was fun to experience all of the stimulation and exhilaration of a thrilling city like New York.

As she passed a street vendor, she stopped to look at his display of postcards.

"For Bobby," she explained at the questioning looks of her friends. "Since he always seems to be left out of our activities."

Dan nodded. "I do feel bad for him, but, then again, he *was* the one who mauled that poor waiter for the chocolate cake the one time we did bring him with us."

Trixie groaned, recalling the incident. "Leave it to Bobby to make a scene in the fanciest restaurant in all of Westchester County." She turned to Honey. "I warned your parents when they invited him to come along with us, but I really think they thought he was just a harmless little kid."

Honey laughed. "He *is* a harmless little kid, Trixie, and you know it. The mauling incident wasn't *that* bad, and Mother and Daddy were amused more than anything."

Trixie looked up from the postcard she was selecting and gave her friend a dark look. "Any time you can name an event, especially if it includes the word 'incident', it *is* that bad," she insisted.

Trixie proceeded to purchase a few postcards for Bobby, intending to send them the next day so that they had a New York City postmark, and the foursome was again on their way. As they strolled past the American Museum of Natural History, Honey gave a slight shudder.

"I will never forget the day that oily man scared us half to death when he trapped us in that museum trying to get that idol back," Honey said.

Trixie murmured her agreement, her mind involuntarily jumping to the memory of her trip to Jake's Hamburger Place.

Thank God for Dan, she thought as she turned to look at the dark-haired man whose knowledge of the seamy side of New York had probably saved her life that day. She was startled to realize that he was gazing at her, his dark eyes intense, and Trixie knew that he was remembering that awful trip to Jake's, as well. He smiled at her then, and she smiled back. Jim gave Trixie's hand a sharp squeeze, indicating that he recollected that day, too.

Honey, always aware of the undercurrents of any situation, started talking about visiting the New York Aquarium the following day while Miss Trask visited her invalid sister, and the moment had passed as quickly as it had arrived.

The four soon arrived at the Wheelers' apartment building, but not before helping a stranded motorist change his tire. Miss Trask was on the living room couch reading a book, but the Bob-Whites knew that she was discreetly waiting up for them.

"Did you have a good time tonight?" she asked with a warm smile for her charges.

"The best, Miss Trask!" Honey exclaimed. "Thank you so much for agreeing to chaperone us so that we could celebrate our graduation in style."

The grey-haired woman smiled indulgently. "It was no trouble, Honey. I'm glad that you had a good time. There are some snacks in the kitchen, if you're hungry. I just finished up a chapter, so I think I'll go to bed now. Good night."

"Good-night!" the others called as Miss Trask headed to her bedroom.

"Miss Trask is the best," Trixie said as she headed to the kitchen, where the manager of the Wheeler estate had left a cheese and cracker tray, an assortment of fresh fruit, and a bottle of sparkling grape juice.

Trixie and Honey carried the food and beverages to the living room, while Dan and Jim followed them, each carrying two of the Wheelers' Waterford crystal champagne glasses.

"Talk about style," Dan said as Jim popped the cork on the sparkling juice.

"No kidding," Trixie said before popping a piece of domestic Brie on a cracker into her mouth.

Jim poured each of them a glass of the juice and held up his own glass. "A toast," he said simply. "To friendship."

"To friendship," the group repeated as they sipped from their crystal glasses. The four friends stared at each the other, the sparkle of shared camaraderie alight in their eyes, and they all knew how lucky they were to have found each other—and the Bob-Whites who were not present, too. No matter how far apart they were or what journeys they embarked upon, they would always be Bob-Whites. And that bond would never, *could* never, be broken.

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"To the next adventure," Trixie said, raising her glass again. "The best is yet to come."

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Final notes: Ossining High School's colors are maroon and white. According to the 2005 Ossining High School online graduation picture album (no longer available), the men wear maroon caps and gowns, while the women's are white. I decided to use this for Sleepyside High's graduation ceremony. (2020 update: According to current OHS pictures at SmugMug, beginning in 2016, all students wear maroon.)

Ossining High School does offer forensics, which we all know Trixie and Honey would take in a heartbeat. Information can be found by visiting http://www.ossiningufsd.org/course_curriculum_guide.htm and clicking on "Science" to access the PDF of the course description.

According to the Cameo edition of *The Mystery of the Blinking Eye*, Honey's parents' penthouse is on the Upper West Side of New York City, so that is the area of NYC that I chose to have them eating dinner in and wandering around in.

The "Holly Dixon Dance Company" is the creation of Aaron Sorkin for the *Sports Night* episode entitled "Small Town." The character Casey makes fun of them by calling them the Hickory Dickory Dancers and the Humpty Dumpty Dancers. Somehow, they wandered into my story when I needed a dance troupe. Thanks, Aaron!

Carryovers were: #1 – mention or appearance of a secondary character (take your pick from the graduation crowd); #2 – a joke; #3 – dairy product; SA#1 – clandestine meeting at the clubhouse; #4 – shooting star; #5 – changing a tire; SA#2 – lost stories; #6 – Jim's harmonica; #7 – snow covered pumpkins; SA#3 – coworker named Debbie; #8 – something hidden in the gatehouse (Jim's present for Trixie); #9 – reindeer; #10 – markers; #11 – tassels; SA#4 – a literary quote not by Mart. Most of the CWP#12 items should be obvious, but just to clarify, the "item used for something other than it was intended" is Jerry Vanderhoef's candy cane tassel. Candy canes weren't meant to be tassels. Really.

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