

I have most definitely plagiarized to create this story and I used the 1954 Dustjacket version of *Trixie Belden and the Gatehouse Mystery* to do so. I mean no disrespect, as I have the highest regard for Julie Campbell and for Random House Books who heard our plea of "Republish Trixie!" and acted on it! The year of release of the version I used is perfect, as I have set this universe in 1954—1955. Thanks to Susansuth for the edit! (NEVER would I get passive-aggressive on you about your edits!!! *g*) And thanks for announcing this for me! As this is in celebration of my Second Jixaversary, I really need—no, want—to stop for a moment and thank the wonderful Cathy for so many things: creating my second home, encouraging me no matter what, being such a fabulous friend, and well, just for being Cathy! I loves ya! Thank you so much for allowing me to be a part of this amazing Bob-White community.

A note about the dates. I decided to set my universe in 1954–1955. If you follow the days/dates given in the original books, however, *The Gatehouse Mystery* occurs in 1950, *Mysterious Visitor* in 1952, and *The Black Jacket Mystery* in 1954 (or 1960; considering it was written published in 1961, that makes sense). So, because the books are inconsistent anyway, I decided to keep the original days/dates (minus the year) stated in the book and keep the year in which I wanted to set this universe. This means that August 21 was not actually a Monday in 1954 (but, for the record, it was in 1950). Chalk it up to that Tainted Timeline, and please willfully suspend your disbelief!

Home from Camp

by Dana

Monday, August 21, 1954

Mart Belden lay in his camp cot and sighed. As much fun as he had had this summer as a junior counselor at a boy's camp, he was ready for it to be over. He remembered how he had felt at the beginning of the summer, chomping at the bit to get away from the farm, even if only for a few weeks. It wasn't that he didn't love the farm—he did. And he loved his parents and even his crazy little sister and brother. But he also liked adventure and excitement, and he had thought that camp would provide it.

But all he had done all summer was chase after little boys his brother's age and try—unsuccessfully—to keep them out of the poison ivy. "Leaflets three" just didn't seem to get through to these little demons as they had gotten through to Bobby.

He picked up his sister's letter and reread it for the fifth time.

Honey and I went off searching for him last month in the Wheelers' gorgeous trailer with Honey's governess, Miss Trask, who is a perfect marvelous person, as nice as Regan, in spite of being a governess. And after we found Jim, Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler adopted him, so now Honey has a brother.

Mart sighed again. He thought *he* was off to find adventure and it turned out that his little sister had discovered much more adventure than he had. He remembered how bitterly jealous she had been when he had gotten the junior counselor job and she was too young for a job as a camp waitress. Oh, how he had lorded it over her! But then she had turned out to have the summer of a lifetime. And he? He had learned how to expertly apply calamine lotion to little boys' itchy sores.

The blond-haired, blue-eyed fourteen-year-old was relieved that the little sprites were leaving tomorrow and his boss happened to be driving through Sleepyside tomorrow night. He wasn't supposed to leave for another three days, but with the young kids leaving tomorrow, there really wasn't much left for him to do.

Mart closed his eyes and felt his body relax. Tomorrow he would be at home at Crabapple Farm, in his own comfortable bed with Moms' yummy cooking, where he could keep an eye on his little sister and meet this Honey and Jim that she had written about.

Tomorrow, was his last waking thought before he drifted into a deep, dreamless slumber.

* * *

Brian knew that his younger brother was sleeping by the snores that were coming from his bunk. He carefully sat up and picked up the letter from his little sister that Mart had dropped on the wooden floor of the cabin.

...and a simply darling daughter named Honey, who is my best friend...He's just about the most wonderful boy in the world—almost a year younger than you, Brian—he had his fifteenth birthday in July—but he'll be in your grade at High, because he did two years in one and won a scholarship to college, too. But he isn't a bookworm at all. He's simply super at sports and woodcraft.

When he left for camp, he had a barely thirteen-year-old tomboy of a sister who could think of nothing but horses. Now, she had a best friend and was writing to him about a boy that she clearly admired. How had his baby sister grown up so much in two short months? And since when was she old enough to be going on trailer trips across upstate New York looking for a boy?

Brian was definitely looking forward to returning to Sleepyside the following day. He had absolutely loved his summer tending to the little campers. He wanted to be a doctor someday, and tending to their scrapes and bruises and poison ivy had been good experience. But, considering what was going on with his little sister, it was definitely time to get home.

* * *

"Moms! Moms, we're home!" Mart yelled as he entered through the bright red front door of the little white frame house that the Beldens called home.

"Mart? Brian?" Helen Belden called as she took off her apron and hurried out of the kitchen to meet her boys in the front hall. She broke into a grin as she saw her two eldest born for the first time in two months. "Mart! Brian!" She ran and pulled each of them into a hug.

Mart's fair skin turned a definite shade of pink as his mother smothered him with attention. Brian took his mother's affection in stride.

"Well, you're home early. Is anything wrong?"

"Oh no!" Mart exclaimed. "The small fry went home today, so we bummed a ride home. We missed your cooking!"

"Boy, did we ever!" Brian exclaimed. "We just thought maybe we should get back here to see what Trix was up to," he said lightly, but his mother detected a slight bit of tension underneath his light-heartedness.

"Where *is* Trix?" Mart asked as he headed toward the sunny yellow kitchen, where he knew there was sure to be some of Moms' delicious fresh-baked cookies in the cookie jar.

"She's spending the night at Honey and Jim's," his mother answered. "Your dad is putting Bobby to bed."

Brian's brown eyes narrowed at this statement, but he quickly caught himself. If Moms and Dad liked Honey and Jim, then he was sure to, as well. So what if his tomboy sister seemed so enamored of this boy...

"Mart!" His mother said in an exasperated tone. "I think the three cookies in your hand are enough—you don't need to be grabbing more!"

"Sorry, Moms," Mart said through a mouthful of chocolate chips. "It's just that camp food could not possibly compare to the splendid cuisine that percolates under your guidance in the kitchen."

Helen Belden stared at her second child while Brian snorted. "Don't mind him, Moms. The only reading material he could get his hands on this summer was an old dictionary. He spent his time memorizing it."

"I had to do something to erase the painful memories of all the poison ivy I treated this summer," Mart retorted.

Helen smiled. "Well, boning up on a dictionary isn't the worst thing Mart could have been doing in his spare time. Although, I can't imagine there was much spare time with all those youngsters running around."

"Tell me about it!" Mart said dramatically, as he slumped into a chair at the nearby kitchen table.

Helen hid a smile as she went about cleaning up the dinner dishes. She almost couldn't stop herself from laughing out loud when she heard her oldest son give an inelegant snort.

"Mart Belden, you know you had a great summer at camp. Don't even pretend otherwise! How many times did I hear you in the morning saying 'Thank goodness I don't have to get up and feed those chickens!'"

Mart looked sheepish. "You're right. Camp was really swell and I am glad I had the opportunity to go." He snuck another cookie from the cookie jar while his mom put away dishes. "Although, it looks like all the excitement happened here. A new family moving in, a runaway, a small fortune in the mansion, Mr. Frayne dying, the mansion burning down, trailer trips, stolen trailers..." His voice trailed off. "Who says Sleepyside is a sleepy little village?"

Brian took this opportunity to ask his mother more about the two kids Trixie was pal-ing around with. "So, tell me about Honey and Jim, Moms." Once again, he tried to sound casual, but his mother noted the underlying concern in his voice. She found herself secretly grinning again. Brian was always so responsible and always looking out for his younger siblings.

"Honey moved in not too long after you boys left for camp. She's a very sweet girl, very polite and nice. She was a bit too shy and a bit too thin when she moved in, but she's been enjoying the country life and is coming out of her shell quite beautifully. Jim is an awfully nice young boy. He's very smart and also very knowledgeable about nature. He's very good to Bobby, too. So is Honey. Bobby just adores them both. I think you kids are in for some grand times together. It's always been a shame that you were the only ones on Glen Road your age. Now you'll have schoolmates to pal around with after school."

"Swell!" Mart said as he devoured another cookie.

"That's great!" Brian echoed. Moms was awfully smart and she really seemed to like Honey and Jim. That fact definitely put his mind at ease.

Just then, dark-haired Peter Belden appeared in the doorway of the kitchen. "My prodigal sons have returned! I thought I heard voices down here." He shook his sons' hands as

he continued, addressing his wife. "That is, I thought I heard voices over your youngest son's cries of 'Read, read, *read!*' It seems that I don't read *Peter Rabbit* quite as well as Trixie."

Helen laughed. "Oh, so he's my son, is he now? Well, all I can say, as much as Trixie complains about looking after Bobby, she really is better at it than she thinks."

"Say, that reminds me! Did Trixie really save him from a copperhead bite? Tell me the story!" Mart demanded.

Helen and Peter's faces sobered as they remembered the harrowing ordeal of earlier that summer.

"Yes, your sister really is growing up. She remembered her first aid and kept her head beautifully in a crisis." There was no small amount of pride in Peter Belden's voice as he described his only daughter.

The group sat around catching each other up on the events of their summers apart, until Moms noticed both of her boys trying to stifle yawns.

"You both must be exhausted. It's time for bed. Trixie will be home tomorrow morning to do her chores and she can catch you all up on her summer. I imagine she'll be bringing either Honey or Jim or both, so you can meet them right away."

Mart and Brian mumbled tired good-nights and climbed the stairs to their bedrooms.

* * *

The next morning, Mart and Brian were waiting for Trixie to appear to feed the chickens. They made small talk as they waited on the back terrace for their sister. They didn't have long to wait before they saw the familiar blonde curls...and an unfamiliar shock of red hair.

"Well, look," Mart said. "That must be Jim. He must really like Trixie a lot to get up early and come help her feed our chickens!"

Brian nodded, but said nothing. Just what was this boy doing escorting his sister so early in the morning?

Just then Trixie saw them and they immediately jumped over the low stone wall to meet her as she raced toward them. She hugged them both enthusiastically and Brian thought that maybe nothing had changed after all.

Then, the next thing he knew, she was dragging him toward the chicken coop to meet the tall, red-haired boy standing patiently, waiting to be introduced. Brian swallowed his concerns and immediately offered his hand. "Gee, it's great news that you live up in the Manor House. Trixie wrote us about you and Honey." *Did she ever!* he thought to himself.

"Scribbled is the word, Jim," Mart said with a grin. He thought of the letter that had made him so envious and decided to keep up a light-hearted banter. "It took us hours to decipher her message, but when we did, we decided we were missing too much fun at home. So here we are." He didn't add that he had expected to have an adventurous summer and was instead disappointed that his baby sister had experienced all of the excitement.

"But your jobs," Trixie said. "I thought camp didn't end until tomorrow."

"It doesn't," Brian said, tearing his eyes away from sizing up the other boy to look at his sister. "But the nursery group left yesterday afternoon. With the small fry gone, there wasn't anything for us to do but pack up the things they left behind." He sighed. "Our little charges were all about Bobby's age, so you can imagine the junk they collected."

Brian watched the boy's smile. He had a good smile and the dark-haired boy decided that he liked him. He almost wanted to dislike him, just for hanging around his little sister, but he knew that wouldn't be fair.

"By the time we finished cleaning the cabins, we decided that we'd never be junior counselors again." Mart stated emphatically as he began to size up Jim. He instinctively liked the husky boy. "Our boss took pity on us; and, since he had to drive through Sleepyside on his way home, he dropped us off here last night."

"Boy, am I ever glad to see you," Jim said enthusiastically. Brian and Mart raised their eyebrows at this eager greeting from someone they had just met. "Maybe you can talk your wacky sister into turning the diamond she and Honey found over to the police."

Diamond? Brian thought incredulously. *Did I just hear Jim say diamond? Maybe he's not all there after all!*

Mart, already slightly envious of the trailer trip, was not about to believe this! "Wacky, yes," he jeered, "but the finder of diamonds, no. When her imagination gets going, a piece of coal becomes a priceless ruby overnight."

Brian forgot all of the protectiveness he had been feeling about Trixie as he spoke up. "Truer words were never spoken," Brian agreed. "When you've known Trixie as long as we have, Jim, you'll stop listening to her tall tales."

"I'm beginning to catch on," Jim said, grinning. "Last night she heard a mysterious prowler, whom nobody else heard, and she suspects our new chauffeur and gardener."

Mart was suddenly happy to have another boy around to take his side. "A man or a mouse, it makes no diff to Trixie. They're all crooks if they so much as poke their noses out of their lairs after dark."

"Is that so?" Trixie demanded. "Mice don't live in lairs, smarty. We did so find a valuable diamond. Wait until you see it."

Brian looked up toward Manor House and his heart jumped to his throat as he saw a pretty, honey-haired girl flying down the path. *Why she's beautiful!* was his first thought.

Mart turned his head toward the path as he heard a girl's voice yell, "Trixie! Jim!" The honey-haired girl flying down the path was anything but meek and shy, as he had been led to believe. He groaned inwardly, thinking that now he had not one, but two femmes to deal with! His happiness over another male friend living so close was suddenly deflated. It didn't even matter to him how cute she was. Of course, Diana Lynch had caught his eye when he was the tender age of six, and he had been spoiled for all other women ever since.

The newcomer skidded to a stop when she noticed them and said, much more shyly than her earlier exclamation, "Oh, your brothers came home from camp sooner than they expected."

Brian stared, transfixed, at this golden girl standing before him. Sure, the girls at Sleepyside Junior-Senior High were cute, but not like this girl. He quickly looked down at his clothes and sighed inwardly. He was wearing his camp bathing suit. How impressive was that?

"That's right," Trixie said. "The one on my left with the funny-looking crew cut is Mart. The other odd-looking creature is Brian." *Thanks, Trixie!* a voice in Brian's head screamed. He was trying to impress this girl—not be called an odd-looking creature! Trixie went on. "I hate them both at the moment. They don't believe we found a real diamond, Honey."

Honey shook hands with the boys, smiling. Brian decided that she had the sweetest smile. And did she feel something special like he did when they shook hands? "But it is a real diamond," Honey said. Brian was suddenly absolutely convinced. "You can see for yourselves. I brought it with me." She reached into the pocket of her shorts and brought out the stone. The facets glittered in the early morning sunlight as she handed it to Brian, who eagerly accepted the stone from her.

Mart couldn't believe his eyes, but apparently, Trixie had managed to stumble on yet *another* adventure. But at least he was going to be in on this one! "Holy cow," he gasped. "I asked for bread and she gave me cake. Where on earth did you find it?"

Honey got very serious at this point and that made Brian feel concerned, for some odd reason. "That's not so important, now, as where we're going to hide it. I don't dare keep it in my jewelry box any longer."

"Why not?" Trixie asked. "What's happened?"

"Nothing's happened," Honey said, and Brian sighed in relief. "Not yet. But when I woke up this morning, I remembered what you'd said yesterday that gave me goose pimples. You said that Nailor might be one of the gang that stole the diamond. Why, Trixie, if he is, he could have sneaked into my room last night when we were asleep and taken it. The jewel box I mean. If he knew the diamond was in it, it wouldn't take him long to find the secret compartment."

Brian appreciated the fact that Honey seemed to have more common sense than his scatter-brained sister. She appeared to think before she acted, something that Trixie was not known for around the Belden household.

"What a minute, puh-leeze," Mart interrupted. "You're moving too fast for me. Let's start with where you found the diamond and then decide with where we're going to hide it." This was great! He'd only been back from camp just overnight and he was already involved in one of his sister's adventures! Maybe this summer wasn't going to be a total wash after all.

"Oh," Trixie cried excitedly, "then you don't think we ought to turn it over to the police?"

"Not me," Mart said, arching his sandy eyebrows. "If there's a mystery lying around loose waiting to be solved, I want a crack at it before the experts take over." If his wacky thirteen-year-old sister could solve the mystery of the missing runaway *and* the mystery behind the trailer thefts, then he, Mart Belden, could certainly solve the mystery of the diamond.

"How about you, Brian?" Trixie asked her older brother.

Brian was pleased that she would ask his advice and immediately regretted the teasing he had given her earlier. He wasn't sure he agreed with Mart, and thought that maybe turning the diamond over to the police was a good idea. But when he stole a glance at Honey, she was looking at him with eager eyes and he decided to play things by ear. "We-ell," he said thoughtfully. "When I know more about it, I might feel the way Mart does. We were going to have a swim before breakfast, but I guess that can wait." He stretched out in the long grass by the chicken coop, secretly hoping that Honey sat down next to him. "Let's hear it, Trixie. And don't exaggerate any more than you have to."

Trixie perched on a big rock, and the others sprawled on the grass around it. Brian was thrilled when Honey sat down next to him. Both Brian and Mart listened intently and without interruption while Trixie told the story of how she and Honey had found the diamond in the gatehouse, how she suspected one of the two new employees, and ended with the late night visitor she was sure she had seen the night before.

"Oh, Trixie," Honey gasped. "Then Nailor did try to sneak into my room last night?"

Brian wasn't happy to hear this. Both Trixie and Honey could have been hurt if this guy was a ruthless diamond thief!

"Nailor or Dick," Trixie said. "I frankly suspect Dick. Bobby told him what windows were yours."

"Are you sure you heard someone last night?" Jim asked. "Are you sure you weren't dreaming?"

"I'm positive," Trixie said. She said so matter-of-factly that neither Brian nor Mart doubted her. "When a door handle is turned it makes a special sort of grating sound. And when I dashed out into the hall I saw enough to be sure that someone had just disappeared around the corner where the back stairs are."

"What *did* you see?" Mart asked.

"I don't know how to explain it," Trixie admitted. "But there was something there, and half a second later, it wasn't. It might have been part of a man's jacket or bathrobe. But it was something, all right."

The group continued to talk and plan about how they were going to catch the thief. Brian hadn't realized it, but suddenly, as they discussed Jim and Honey swapping rooms to set a trap, he realized that he no longer wanted to call the police. Truth be told, he was slightly jealous that Jim was going to be in on the kill. He wanted to be the one Honey called "hero."

Mart, too, was feeling slightly envious of Jim's position. What Mart wouldn't do to be there to catch the thief! Coming home early had been such a great idea. After two months of small fry, he was ready for some *real* adventure!

Both Brian and Mart had decided that the Wheelers moving into the Manor House was a good thing. They were both thinking ahead to the grand times that the five of them could have during the school year. Brian had to admit to himself that the boy Trixie was obviously so crazy about really did seem like a good sport. And Honey, well, Honey was so sweet and pretty, what was not to like?

Presently, Trixie was suggesting a swim in the lake. Brian felt heat creeping to his cheeks as he thought of his new honey-haired neighbor in a swimsuit. He was disappointed when the girls decided to swim in their denim shorts and halters. When Honey donned a cap to cover her shoulder-length bob, Brian thought she looked decidedly cute.

The five entered the water, splashing and laughing. Both Belden boys were impressed with Honey's swimming ability. Trixie and Mart soon tired of swimming and swam over to the boathouse to dry off, while Brian stayed with Honey and Jim in the raft.

"Say, Honey, you swim like a dream. Where'd you learn?" Brian asked.

Honey blushed at her new friend's praise and Brian decided that she was even prettier when she blushed. It was sweet. "At camps and boarding schools."

"Boarding schools, huh? What are they like?" The dark-haired Belden was genuinely interested in hearing about what kind of life Honey had led before moving to Sleepyside.

The young girl made a face. "They weren't very nice at all. I missed my parents a lot. They were nothing like the school Jim here is going to open up."

Brian looked at the redhead with interest. "You want to open a school?"

It was hard to miss the spark that lit Jim's green eyes with excitement when he spoke of his school. "Well, it's going to be for underprivileged boys and I am going to teach them all sorts of things, not just regular classroom lessons. They'll learn woodworking and horseback riding, stuff like that. I'm hoping to give these boys a chance they might not have otherwise."

Brian was mightily impressed. He wondered why he had ever been suspicious of Jim's motives. Trixie was right—he really was an honorable and upstanding kind of boy. "That sounds great!"

He was about to ask more questions about the school when he heard Trixie's voice carrying across the lake. "Brian! Come back and meet Miss Trask. We're invited for breakfast."

Brian looked at his new neighbors and shrugged. "Trixie calls, we must away!" He was very gratified when Honey laughed.

Soon the group was gathered around the rustic table on the sunny porch of the boathouse.

Mart was in heaven. After two months of waiting on little boys, he was having food served to him. And delicious food at that! "This is the life," he said, buttering his fifth pancake. "At camp we were so busy seeing that our small fry didn't drown in the maple syrup, we didn't have time to eat ourselves."

"You look starved," Trixie said with a sniff. "You've both grown inches and gained tons."

"You haven't done so badly yourself," Brian said with a laugh. He turned to Jim, eager to talk about his plans for a school. "Say, I think the boys' outdoor school you were telling me about is a great idea. Can I sign up now for the job of resident doctor?"

Jim nodded, grinning. "How about you, Mart? You like small fry. Will you be the kindergarten teacher at my school for underprivileged boys?"

Mart couldn't believe his ears. Like small fry? Him? Bah! "Thank you, no," he said with an elaborate bow. "One summer with that age group was enough for me. Next year I'm going to work on a farm. I plan to go to agricultural college when I get out of high school, you know."

"Swell," Jim said, and Mart felt something akin to relief, though he wasn't sure why. But then, it was important to him that Jim and Honey like him. "Part of my curriculum at my school will be farming. You can be in charge of that department."

"That, I accept," Mart said, and then felt the familiar devilishness rise within him. He just couldn't pass up an opportunity to tease his sister. "What about the girls? Trixie loves housework. She'll be a big help. What she misses with a dust cloth would clog a vacuum hose."

"Is that so?" Trixie demanded. *Uh oh!* Brian thought. *Here she goes!* Trixie continued, "I'll have you know that Honey and I did all the cooking on our trailer trip, and kept the *Swan* tidy, too."

"Well, sort of tidy," Honey said with a giggle that was music to Brian's ears. "Anyway, we're going to be detectives, Trixie and I."

Brian couldn't help it. He didn't want to laugh at his new friend, but he couldn't help it. Mart had no qualms whatsoever about bursting into a hearty laugh. "That does it," Brian said, thinking of all the dilemmas that Trixie had gotten herself into over the summer. "No matter

what we do next summer, Mart, we'll have to take Trixie with us. Without us around, she goes completely off her rocker."

Mart smiled to himself as he watched Trixie toss her short, blonde curls. "You and Jim are just too, too funny." Brian discovered he was relieved to hear that Jim didn't take his sister too seriously. "Wait and see. We'll find out who dropped the diamond in the cottage long before you do."

Mart scoffed at that. He wanted to solve the mystery so badly! And he was determined to, also.

"How do you know it was dropped?" Brian asked.

"Oh, for Pete's sake," Trixie gasped, and Brian actually felt a little dim-witted for a moment as she went on. "You don't think that somebody deliberately buried it in the floor, do you? I got over the silly idea of looking for buried treasure in the cottage ages ago."

Brian and Mart listened intently as Honey told them about the heelprints and the tire treadmarks they had found. They were inclined more to listen to her than to their little sister. Brian couldn't help but notice that she seemed to have a good head on her shoulders, and that she was much calmer than Trixie. "Trixie is really very smart about clues," she finished seriously.

Brian was convinced and feeling contrite that he had made fun of them. "Let's all go have a look at those clues," Brian said, his words an olive branch. "But we'd better first change into shirts and dungarees on account of poison ivy."

"Once I go home, I'm stuck for hours," Trixie said mournfully. "There are about a thousand chores waiting for me. But Honey will show you what we found."

Brian was sorry that his sister wouldn't be able to join them, but he was pleased at the thought of spending more time getting to know Honey—and Jim, too.

Mart's thoughts were brewing in an entirely different direction altogether. He was already thinking of how smart *he* would be when they were looking for clues. *Diamond thieves in Sleepyside—imagine!* he thought to himself.

As they headed toward Crabapple Farm, both boys' thoughts were churning, reflecting on all that had happened in the few short hours they had been awake. Brian decided that Jim really was as great as Trixie had described in her letter. He thought the two of them would be great friends. And Honey was so sweet. Not only was she sure to help calm Trixie down, but, hopefully, some of her femininity would rub off on his tomboy sister. Brian smiled to himself as he thought of Honey's lovely golden locks and appealing smile.

Mart was thinking of all the grand times they would have in the coming months ahead. Adventure had seemed to follow Trixie, Jim, and Honey all summer long, and now he would get to be a part of it. He couldn't wait to see what adventure lay ahead with this diamond business.

Yes, both boys were thinking how great it was to be home from camp.