

This is another foray into what might have been happening behind the scenes of the original series. I used the 1954 cellophane edition of *The Mysterious Visitor* as my reference. Okay, who am I kidding—it was more than a reference, as I blatantly plagiarized from it! The original book starts on Friday, October 24 so I am releasing this on Friday, October 24 since the days happened to fall the same this year (although my story starts a few days earlier); thanks to Leigh for the inspiration to release it at the same the book occurs. Although this universe is supposed to be about the “first impressions” all of the Bob-Whites have of one another, Di insisted I open it up and explore her feelings and her back story, so there’s more of that than her first impressions of Honey and Jim. I hope you find it an enjoyable story anyway!

**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 October 20 was not actually a Monday in 1954 (but, for the record, it was in 1952). Chalk it up to that Tainted Timeline, and please willfully suspend your disbelief!

## Through Lavender Colored Glasses

by Dana

*Monday, October 20, 1954*

“Diana!” Virginia Lynch called to her teenage daughter. “It’s time to get up for school, dear.”

“I’m up!” Diana called to appease her mother, although her violet eyes remained firmly shut. School, something she had once enjoyed for the social interaction if nothing else, had become something the young girl positively dreaded, and Monday mornings were the worst. It was so hard to go back after the weekend ended.

School had once meant playing on the monkey bars with her best friend, Trixie, and following along after Mart on the schoolyard. Now it meant wearing dressy frocks and being ignored by her fellow schoolmates.

*I hate being rich!* Diana thought bitterly, her eyes slowly opening and adjusting to the light spilling in from the windows. *I used to have fun!* Diana lay in bed a few more minutes, reveling in self-pity.

“Diana!” her mother’s impatient voice carried into the teenager’s luxurious blue and gold bedroom.

Diana sighed resignedly and sat up. “I’m up, Mother! I’ll be right down.”

“Wonderful, dear. I laid out your pretty lavender frock that you love so much!”

Diana looked at the chaise lounge and did indeed see that at some point during the night or morning, her mother had laid out the pretty dress. She rolled her eyes. Her mother would never guess that Diana actually loathed the dress. She loved the color, of course, but its fanciness just served as a reminder of all she hated about her new life. Gone were the days of casual clothes and play dates with her friends.

As Diana dressed and brushed her hair she thought about the last time she had had a friend over to the house. It was Trixie and she could tell that her former friend had had an awful time. That awful Harrison had smothered them, and Trixie was clearly relieved when it was time to go home. Of course, a tour of the art gallery had been pretty boring for two twelve-year-old

girls. The whole affair had been a disaster, and Di had been too mortified to invite her friend back.

Of course, now Trixie had a new best friend and didn't need her. Perfectly perfect Honey Wheeler and her brother Jim Frayne had moved into the Manor House, and Di had been replaced. Di gathered up her schoolbooks and wandered into the dining-room where Harrison was serving breakfast, the whole time thinking of the grand times she was sure the Beldens were having with their new friends. Oh, how she longed for her old friends back!

And she couldn't even dislike Honey, as much as she wanted to. Every time she saw the golden-haired girl, Honey was always very nice to her and tried to be friendly. Much like Trixie had tried to include her way back on their very first day of kindergarten. Well, her dad's money had changed all that.

Diana finished her breakfast and stood patiently as her mother fussed over her dress. "You look so beautiful, dear."

Diana forced a smile. "Thanks, Mom. I'd better go so I don't miss the bus."

"Of course, honey," Virginia said, placing a kiss on her daughter's forehead. "I'll see you after school."

Diana nodded and left for school.

Throughout the day she would catch a glimpse of a red jacket and an intense longing filled her. Oh, to belong to a club like the B.W.G.'s—whatever *that* stood for! But it didn't matter. Diana just wanted to belong to a group that included her old best friend, her, well, Mart, and their brother Brian, the sweet new girl, and the handsome new redhead. They were often seen in the hallways or in the lunchroom, laughing and joking together, the best of friends.

Diana's haze of self-pity surrounded her throughout the school day until she returned home to find her mother speaking to a strange man. Curiosity finally broke through her sadness, and she joined the duo sitting in the parlor.

"Diana!" Virginia cried, catching sight of her daughter. "Oh, I have the most wonderful news!"

Diana smiled and looked curiously at the man. He was rather small and thin and had very small, beady brown eyes. "Hello, Diana," the man said. Diana shivered involuntarily. Something about this man bothered her.

"Hello," she said politely, looking at her mother, confusion apparent in her lovely violet eyes.

"Diana, dear, this is my long lost brother, Montague Wilson," Virginia placed her plump hand on the man's arm, her face absolutely beaming with happiness and pride.

Diana's jaw dropped and she stared at the two of them, unsure of what to say.

"Well, now, Miss, I can certainly understand how you feel," Montague Wilson said in a western drawl that to Diana's ears didn't sound quite right. "I've been wondering about your mother's whereabouts for years now, and I was finally able to track her down. I am very pleased to meet my dear sister and her family," he stated, a wide smile on his features. "Please, call me Uncle Monty."

Diana, mindful of her manners, finally found her voice. "How do you do, Uncle Monty? It's very nice to meet you."

Before she could say anything else, a deep, baritone voice spoke behind her. "What's going on here?" Jolly Mr. Lynch strode into the room, also quite curious. "I came home as soon as you called, Ginny."

Mrs. Lynch crossed the room and gave her husband a kiss. "Remember how I told you that my dearest dream was to find my long-lost brother? Well, he's found me!" Virginia looked as though she would burst from pure joy and happiness. Ed Lynch, inclined to be suspicious of such a claim, took one look at his wife's face and softened. He had never seen Virginia so happy, certainly not recently, and it warmed his heart. If this person was not who he said he was, there would be time to find it out later.

"Montague Wilson," the stranger said, reaching out a hand to his brother-in-law.

Ed shook the offered hand, finding it quite scrawny and clammy. "Edward Lynch. It's a pleasure to meet you. Shall we sit down?"

"That would be most gracious of you, sir," Monty stated, taking a seat on the blue and gold upholstered sofa.

Diana looked at her father who nodded at her to have a seat as well. She sat down in a nearby chair, eagerly awaiting the next moment in this unfolding drama.

"So, Montague," Ed started.

"Please, call me Monty, Mr. Lynch."

Ed nodded. "Fine, Monty, and you'll please call me Ed. So, Monty, how did you happen to track my wife down?"

"Well, my story begins over thirty years ago, when I was a strapping young lad, head full of the world and fortunes to be made. I was fourteen-years-old when my baby sister was born. I'll never forget that night! It was a stormy, March evening when my mother went into labor. My father panicked and was running around the house, desperately trying to get things together to take my mother to the hospital. A neighbor came over to stay with me while my parents were at the hospital. I remember that she was quite worried about my panicked father driving in the storm. But he and my mother arrived safely at the hospital and, after nine hours of labor, my baby sister, Virginia Allison, was born at 4:22 a.m. in Highland Hospital in Rochester, New York."

Monty smiled warmly at his sister. "I was so disappointed when I found out that you and mother were to stay in the hospital for three days. I wanted to see you immediately. When I finally gazed upon you for the first time, I couldn't believe how small you were."

Monty's face clouded over then. "It wasn't long after that, that I left New York for an apprenticeship out West. My parents were quite poor, and as I said, my youthful head was full of dreams of riches and fortunes. I was in Arizona when my parents died and by the time I received word of their deaths, my baby sister had already been taken into foster care. I didn't have the money to travel home to search for her right away. When I was finally able to make it back to New York, the welfare people wouldn't give me any information. I searched high and low for Virginia Wilson but I found no trace of her. I soon became frustrated in my search." Uncle Monty reached over and took the hand of his sister, whose round blue eyes were brimming with unshed tears. "It turns out she took the name of her foster parents. Oh, when I think of the wasted years..."

"So, how did you finally find her?" Ed asked, hoping to halt an emotional scene. Staring at the gaunt little man with the beady dark eyes, Edward was struck how little this man looked like his plump, beautiful wife, with large, expressive eyes as blue as blue delphiniums.

Monty regained his composure. "Well, it was through a stroke of luck that I became aware of my sister's whereabouts. I happened to be at a dude ranch where a rich gentleman from New York was staying. He was adamant about keeping up with the happenings in New York and had the New York papers specially delivered out in Arizona. I happened to see your

story last year and read about how Mrs. Lynch was orphaned as a child and hoped some day to be reunited with her missing brother. I decided right then and there to travel to New York and see if this Virginia Lynch was my sister Virginia. And, lo and behold, she is!" Monty looked quite triumphant as he looked at his sister and then back to his brother-in-law.

Diana, who had initially wondered if this man could really, possibly be her uncle, was swayed by his story. He knew all the right facts, her mother quite obviously believed him, and he look positively proud as he gazed at her mother.

Ed Lynch was still reserving judgment as he studied this small man before him. "So, what do you do Monty? Did you make the fortune you dreamed of?"

"Why, yes, Ed, I did. I don't like to brag but I must say, I made Arizona the great state it is today! I was one of the first people to settle..."

Diana tuned out at that point, thinking of how strange this situation was. All day long she had trudged around school, miserable, and now she came home to a long-lost uncle! Her thoughts wandered as her newfound Uncle drawled on monotonously with that western twang. Diana didn't know how much time had passed when she became aware that her father was addressing her.

"Diana, if you have homework, you should probably try to get it done before dinner."

Diana nodded. "I do, Daddy, thank you." She politely turned to her mother's brother. "It was very nice to meet you, Uncle Monty. I am so happy that you were finally able to find mother and join our family."

Monty beamed. "The pleasure is mine, Diana. I can't wait to get to know my niece better! Now, you run along and finish your homework, ya hear?"

Di excused herself and rushed to her room, eager to get out of the uncomfortable, frilly, lavender frock that her mother loved so much. She changed into a simple wool dress and sat at her large desk to begin her homework.

She was almost through with her assigned math problems when Harrison, the butler, knocked on her door. "Miss Diana, dinner is being served in the dining-room."

"Thanks, Harrison," Diana said. She finished the problem she was working on and hurried down to the formal room where the Lynches dined.

When Uncle Monty saw her, he looked at her in surprise. "Well, now, what happened to that beautiful lavender frock you were a-wearin' earlier?"

Diana looked down at the dress she had changed into. "This is just more comfortable, Uncle Monty."

"Well, now, a pretty girl like you must like dressing up!" Monty persisted.

"Sometimes, but I really like comfortable clothes," Di said as she sat down. She looked at Uncle Monty and thought she saw a fleeting look of calculation on his gaunt face. But the next moment he was smiling so heartily at her she thought she must have imagined it.

During dinner, Uncle Monty spoke of how sick he had been for the last few years, but Diana noticed that that fact didn't seem to affect his appetite. He ate with gusto, attacking each course as it was served, and eating seconds of nearly everything.

Diana was relieved when dinner was over and she could excuse herself to her room. Of course, she felt the same way every night, with or without Uncle Monty's presence. Dinner, with Harrison hovering around the table with his fancy tray, was no longer the fun, noisy, family event it had once been. Harrison didn't approve of children, so Diana's two young sets of twin siblings ate their meals in the nursery. The evening meal, far from being enjoyable, consisted of Virginia

Lynch visibly trying to put on a cheerful air as she pretended not to be intimidated by their stern butler. Ed Lynch constantly attempted to draw Diana out from the walls she was slowly but surely building around herself. Not only did she feel uncomfortable speaking around Harrison, but she also didn't want her parents to realize how unhappy she had become.

Diana felt guilty for the selfish and ungrateful thoughts she had been having about her family's newfound wealthy status. When they were a poor and struggling family, she had wished for all the money in the world. She wished that her dad didn't have to work so hard, keeping two jobs and going to school at night to try to provide for five children and a wife. She had hated seeing her mother go without so that she and her younger brothers and sisters could have the bare minimum. Now that her father didn't have to work as hard and her mother could indulge in the fine things she wanted for both her children and herself; Diana's wishes had come true. But, ironically, now she was downright miserable.

She hated that she hated her father's money, since it meant good things for her family. And that turned into guilt that she must not love her parents as much as she thought she did. And that added to the miserable loneliness she already felt. It was a vicious circle, one that Diana was unsure how to break. *If only I were as outgoing as Trixie*, Diana thought for the millionth time as she drifted off to sleep that night. *If only I were a B.W.G.*

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Diana, initially happy that her mother seemed happier and more relaxed than she had in a long time due to Uncle Monty's presence, had come to absolutely loathe her new relative. During the past few days he had absolutely ingratiated himself into their house and into her mother's life. Anything Monty suggested, Virginia would do.

Although some of his pronouncements were about the house—Diana had been shocked to learn that their house was slowly but surely being eaten by termites—a lot of his attention had been on Diana herself. After their initial conversation about Diana's preference for comfortable clothes, Monty had insisted that Diana, as a wealthy young "debutante," needed much more sophisticated and lovely clothes. Despite Diana's protests to the contrary, her mother had dragged her to White Plains after school one day to shop. Instead of the comfortable clothes she desired, Diana and her mother had come home with several party frocks she was expected to wear to school and downright ridiculous evening dresses she was expected to wear to parties.

*Not that I ever get invited to any*, Diana reflected glumly.

The worst was the fact that Halloween was coming up and Diana's mom wanted her daughter to throw a party at their house for her classmates. Uncle Monty had given his sister a long talk about what was expected socially of society matrons and their debutante daughters. Despite the fact that they did not have generations of wealthy status as some families did, Montague Wilson had convinced Virginia Lynch that their *nouveau riche* status still demanded the same social conventions as more established wealth.

As such, Diana's Halloween party, instead of being the simple affair she wanted, was to be an event of lavish extravagance. Monty's vision, and therefore Mrs. Lynch's, included caterers, orchestras, and fancy evening clothes. Diana could not convince either adult that this was completely inappropriate for teens her age and that everyone would have a perfectly awful time. Uncle Monty, in that sly way of his, had made her feel as though she didn't love her mother enough not to disappoint her, so it had gotten to the point where she didn't even feel as though she could voice her opinions. Party plans were made, but Diana couldn't bear to invite any of her classmates to this formal affair, so she didn't. She wasn't sure how her mother would react to that, but she just *couldn't*.

Diana was standing at the bus stop after school that Friday, wearing one of the new party frocks that her mother had insisted on purchasing for her, and thinking that she had had almost as much as she could bear, when suddenly Honey Wheeler crooked her arm through Di's and pulled her into the very group of people that Di longed to join.

"I was just thinking, Di," Honey said to the astonished girl, "that it would be wonderful if you could spend the weekend with me and Jim. Here comes the bus now, but there's plenty of time for you to go back into the school and telephone your mother. You won't need any clothes. We're just about the same size, and I have loads of jeans and all kinds of T-shirts and sweaters."

Diana stared at the sweet girl, a myriad of thoughts running through her astounded mind. *Why, she's as sweet as I thought she'd be*, was her first thought. What immediately followed was the thought that there was *no way* well-bred, rich, and totally put together Honey Wheeler could possibly own jeans! Before thinking, she blurted, "I don't believe it, Honey Wheeler. I don't believe you ever wear sloppy clothes. I'll bet you don't even own a pair of jeans."

Swiftly upon the heels of her outburst, Diana was berating herself. *What are you thinking? The sweetest, nicest girl in the school has just included you in her weekend plans and you, Diana Virginia Lynch, are arguing with her about her jeans? What a goose you are!*

Diana, mortified, was about to open her mouth to apologize, but Honey's good-natured laughter filled the air. "But I do," she stated. "We all live in sloppy clothes after school and on weekends. I didn't used to own any, but last summer when I met Trixie, Miss Trask got me some so we could dress alike and have fun all the time. Miss Trask is my governess, you know."

"Your governess?" Di shook her head, her bitterness about her newly rich status returning full force. "That's one thing I've been lucky enough to escape so far. How do you stand it?"

"Miss Trask isn't really a governess," Trixie Belden spoke up. "She runs the Wheeler place the way your butler does your place, Di. And she's a grand person. We all love her."

Diana, not believing for a minute that anyone who ran an estate the way Harrison did could be "grand," sniffed. "I can imagine! The way I love our butler. The stupid old thing!" And then, remembering the fiasco last spring with Trixie, she added, "I can't even ask a few friends home for cookies and milk after school without Harrison hovering around with silver trays and fancy lace doilies. I hate him."

Di was a little flustered after her tirade, but Honey's voice was so soothing as she spoke her next words that the violet-eyed beauty felt much better. "Well, never mind. I know how you feel. We used to have butlers, too, and they were an awful bore. But now they're gone and we have Miss Trask and Regan—"

"Who's Regan?" Diana interrupted, curiosity overwhelming her and making her momentarily forget her manners. As soon as she realized that she had interrupted—and practically admitted to eavesdropping—she immediately felt embarrassed. She could feel a flush rising to her face. "Oh, I know I'm being nosy, and I haven't meant to eavesdrop, but I can't help hearing you kids talk on the bus. You're always shouting back and forth to each other across the aisle and I've heard you mention Regan so many times."

"He's our groom," Honey said. "We have five horses, you see, but Regan does a lot more than just take care of them. He and Miss Trask run the whole place together. I mean, the other servants take orders from them. We couldn't get along without Regan. Could we, Jim?"

Di watched as the handsome redhead shook his head and spoke. "Make it snappy, Di. The bus will be leaving in a few minutes. Honey and I sure would like to have you spend the weekend with us. You've got just about time to telephone your mother."

Di hesitated, absolutely torn. She had been dreaming of the day that the B.W.G.s invited her to join them, and now she had that invitation. Honey and Jim seemed so nice. But, on the other hand, she was sure that if she spent time with them, Uncle Monty would find a way to interfere, and she would be embarrassed in front of her new friends. Finally deciding that it was too good of an invitation to pass up, without another word, Di raced to phone her mother.

"Mother!" Diana exclaimed excitedly after her mother got on the line. "Trixie Belden and Honey Wheeler have invited me to a house party at the Wheelers!" Diana mentioned Trixie knowing her mother would feel better if a girl she knew was going to be present. "Honey says that she has lots of clothes that fit, so I don't even need a thing! May I go, please?"

Diana's mother thought the plan was a lovely one, especially considering how unhappy her daughter had been recently. "I think it would be fine if you spent the weekend at the Wheelers, but don't they dress for dinner? Are you sure you don't need clothes?"

"I'm sure they wear skirts and such, nothing fancy, but I'm sure the new lavender party frock I'm wearing will be fine for dinner tonight, and Honey is bound to have a dress for me for tomorrow night."

"Well, if you're sure that she's got clothes for you—what's that?" Mrs. Lynch suddenly said to somebody else. Diana could guess who it was, and her deduction was confirmed when her mother returned to the line. "Your Uncle Monty brought up a good point. These are very socially prominent people, Di. You should have some of those lovely evening gowns I bought you. I am going to send our chauffeur over with a suitcase for you."

"No! You don't have to do that. I'd hate for you all to go to all that trouble." Truthfully, Diana wasn't thinking of the efforts involved in packing her a suitcase, instead, she was afraid of what sort of clothes that Uncle Monty would make her mother pack. She didn't want to be wearing evening gowns to dinner if the girls were wearing simple skirts.

"It's no trouble, Dear."

"Mother, please, no! I just want to borrow Honey's clothes. The Wheelers aren't that formal. Why, Honey told me they live in dungarees when they're not at school," Diana pleaded with her mother.

"Well, dungarees may be fine for the Beldens on their farm, but I just can't imagine Honey Wheeler in dungarees!" Virginia Lynch exclaimed. "What's that, Monty?" Diana heard a masculine voice exclaiming something, but she could not hear what. "Dear?" Virginia Lynch returned to their phone conversation. "Uncle Monty agrees with me. Dungarees are just not appropriate for a house party at the Wheeler estate. The chauffeur will be out later with the suitcase."

Diana felt tears of frustration welling up in her eyes. She knew she couldn't change her mother's mind, and, even if she could, she didn't have time. She was sure the bus was going to leave any second.

"Fine, Mother, good-bye!" she said breathlessly, hanging up the phone and running to catch the bus.

Although she was upset about the suitcase, as she ran to the waiting bus the realization that she was going to spend a fun weekend with some great kids brought a smile to her face.

"I can come," Di said breathlessly as she climbed into the bus to sit between Honey and Trixie.

“Oh, I’m so glad,” Honey cried. Diana could tell her new friend was sincere, and she felt the warmth of belonging growing deep inside her, banishing the loneliness she had been feeling. “You don’t even have to worry about a toothbrush,” Honey continued. “Miss Trask buys them by the dozen so we always have plenty of new ones on hand for guests.”

Di shook her head, the smile fading from her lips and the warmth she had felt just a moment ago receding at the thought of the suitcase that was being packed even as they spoke. “Mother is sending a suitcase out with our chauffeur. I begged and begged her not to, but—” She stopped, desperately trying to hold back the tears.

“Why, what difference does it make,” Trixie blurted, “whether she sends it or not?”

Diana did *not* want to discuss the complexities of her mother’s notion that rich people always wore formal clothes plus her own desire not to hurt her mother’s feelings on the school bus, surrounded by kids. “I can’t talk about it here on the bus,” Diana whispered tensely.

“Why not?” Trixie demanded.

Di turned her face away to stare out of the window, stubbornly pretending to be very interested in the scenery.

Di watched as Trixie twisted around on her seat to look out of the window. Some of the boys and girls in their class who walked to and from school were standing on the corner. One of them waved to Trixie and shouted:

“How about that English homework assignment? Tough, huh?”

“You said it,” Trixie yelled back. “It’s going to ruin the whole weekend.”

*No, that suitcase is going to ruin the whole weekend*, Di involuntarily thought. She continued to stare out the window.

Trixie nudged her with her elbow. “What’s the matter with you, Di?”

Di pretended she hadn’t heard.

“Talkative aren’t you?” Trixie asked Di sarcastically. She nudged Di again. “Are you deaf, Diana Lynch? Or has the cat got your tongue?”

Di had had enough. She whirled away from the window then. Her violet eyes were filled with tears and her lips were trembling. “I told you I didn’t want to talk about it here on the bus,” she whispered hoarsely. She thought of Trixie’s idyllic life at Crabapple Farm with no new riches to adjust to, no butlers ordering her around, and no long-lost uncles demanding that her mother dress her up in grown-up clothes. How could Trixie ever possibly understand what she was going through? “Anyway, Trixie Belden, *you* wouldn’t understand!”

The rest of the bus ride was uneventful, and Di was relieved to escape the loud voices and enter the quiet peace of the Manor House. *Honey’s family’s estate is beautiful*, Di reflected. As she walked up the sloped driveway, she couldn’t help but remember sledding down it with the Beldens when they were younger. The Manor House had been empty then and very tired-looking. But the Wheelers had done a wonderful job of bringing the tired landscape to life again and restoring the house to its original splendor. The whole effect was very tranquil.

Honey entered the house and immediately called out to Miss Trask. “Miss Trask! We have a houseguest for the weekend,” she called.

Diana felt shy as a trim, efficient-looking woman with crisp gray hair and sensible oxfords appeared.

“Why, that’s wonderful, Honey. You know we love to entertain your friends.” Miss Trask smiled warmly at Di, immediately putting the shy girl at ease. “How do you? I’m sure Honey’s told you I’m Miss Trask.”

Diana clasped the hand that the older woman offered. “Yes, she has. I’m Diana Lynch, and I’m very pleased to finally meet you.”

“It’s nice to meet you, too, dear. Now, you and Honey must get changed into comfortable clothes and join us for cookies and milk in the kitchen. Cook just made a fresh batch of oatmeal cookies.”

“Yummy yum!” Honey exclaimed, pulling Di after her as she fairly ran to her room. “We definitely want to hurry and change so we can have Cook’s cookies while they’re still warm!”

Honey opened her drawer and pulled out a pair of dungarees and a sweater for Di. “I have some sneakers that should fit you, too.”

“Thanks so much, Honey,” Di said shyly as she took the offered clothes and headed to the bathroom to change.

As she changed into the comfortable outfit, Di thought about how sweet Honey really was. She had immediately noticed the new girl on the first day of classes; Sleepyside was still small enough that everyone knew everyone else and most of the kids had been in kindergarten together. So, of course her curiosity was piqued when she had entered her homeroom and had seen the honey-haired girl sitting at a desk. Di had noticed over the past few weeks that Honey Wheeler always seemed to have a smile and a kind word for everyone. Now that she was getting to know her, she was starting to realize the extent of Honey’s generosity and kindheartedness.

When Diana was finished changing, she came out to see that Honey was already in a similar outfit waiting for her.

“Ready?” Honey smiled.

“Would you mind if I telephoned my mother?” Diana asked, almost timidly.

“Of course,” Honey said warmly. “There’s a phone in the study you can use. I’ll show you the way.”

A few minutes later, Diana was ensconced in the study, having promised she would join Honey in the kitchen for milk and cookies as soon as she was finished with her telephone call.

“Harrison?” Diana said when the prim and proper butler answered the phone. “May I please speak to my mother?”

“One moment, please, Miss Diana,” Harrison intoned before setting down the telephone and going to do Diana’s bidding.

A few minutes later, Di’s Uncle Monty came to the phone. “Well, howdy there, Miss Diana. What can I do for you-all?”

“Uncle Monty, I wanted to speak with my mother, please,” Diana said, unconsciously clenching her teeth as she dealt with her difficult relative.

“Now, that isn’t possible at the moment,” Uncle Monty drawled. “Your mother is busy packing up the suitcase for you. She needs to hurry and get it ready so that the chauffeur can drop it off on his way to pick your father up at the station. Is there a message that I can give her?”

“Yes, please tell her to stop packing that suitcase!” Diana said a little more vehemently than she intended.

"Well, now, I can't do that! She's so happy to be able to pack some of those fancy dresses she just bought you. You wouldn't want to disappoint her, now would you?" Monty said slyly.

Diana sighed. Her uncle seemed to know exactly what buttons to push. "No, I don't want to disappoint her, but I also don't want to put her to a lot of trouble to pack things I am not going to wear."

"Not going to wear?" Uncle Monty exploded. "Why, of course you'll wear those beautiful dresses! Now, you're a-dinin' at the Wheelers and from what your mother tells me, they're a thoroughbred lot. You simply must dress up for dinner. I want you to promise me that you'll wear the dresses your mother packs. It will mean so much to her."

Diana sighed. When he put it that way, she felt ungrateful. "Fine, I promise, Uncle Monty. Well, I guess I'll be going now."

"Wait just a moment, Diana. I thought I would come out to the Wheeler ranch tomorrow and take a looksee at their hosses. I figured as long as I'm in the area, I could impart some of my vast wisdom to the groom. I bet he's never been bonco-bustin' out West like your dear Uncle Monty!"

Di was absolutely horrified at this new development. "Oh, don't! Please don't!" she burst out. She could not see the sly smile that crossed Montague Wilson's face at her desperation.

"Nonsense, my dear, it's no trouble at all!" Uncle Monty said, pretending to misunderstand her reluctance to have him at the Wheeler estate.

"Oh, Uncle Monty, Regan is a very busy man. Not only is he the groom, but he also helps run the whole estate, so you musn't take up his time. Please don't come," Diana continued to plead.

"Nonsense!" Uncle Monty repeated. "Any groom worth his salt would jump at the chance to talk to an expert such as myself. I'm sure that no matter how busy he is, he'd like the opportunity to learn from a real master of hossflesh!"

"Oh, please don't. Please don't," a distraught Diana again pleaded.

"I'll see you tomorrow morning, my dear Diana," Monty said, as though Diana had not spoken. "And don't forget your promise to wear those pretty frocks you're mama is nice enough to pack for you. Don't disappoint her!" With that, Uncle Monty disconnected the phone call.

Di stood there in the Wheeler study feeling impotence and rage course through her. "Oh, I hate him. I hate him!"

The lovely girl slowly regained her composure and found her way into the kitchen to meet Honey. Although Cook's oatmeal cookies, fresh from the oven, were out of this world, Diana did not enjoy them as she should have. Honey was very sweet and kept up a very one-sided conversation as they ate their cookies and milk. Di hated to be rude, and she appreciated Honey's kindness, but her mind was on that blasted suitcase and her Uncle Monty's proposed visit.

Soon, Honey looked at her watch. "Gleeps! Here I am, chattering away, and it's time to meet the Beldens and Jim down at the stables."

Honey led the way down to the stables, Diana lagging slightly behind, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Lynch chauffeur coming up the drive. She really wanted to be there when her suitcase arrived. The trip to the stables was short, however, and the two girls arrived without Diana seeing her family's sleek, black limousine.

They entered the stable to see a very handsome redhead finishing up putting the bridle on a strawberry roan. *Why, he's very cute!* Diana immediately thought.

"Regan, this is one of my schoolmates, Diana Lynch. Diana, this is our groom, Regan," Honey, ever polite, introduced them.

Diana immediately offered her hand to the handsome groom, a shy smile alighting her face. "How do you do?" she said.

"I'm do fine, thanks," Regan said in his masculine voice. "It's a pleasure to meet a friend of Honey's. Have you ridden before?"

Di quickly shook her head while glancing at the large beast Regan had just finished with. "No, I haven't." *And I'm not sure I want to learn*, she added to herself as she looked up at the large animal next to her.

Just then, Honey and Trixie's brothers entered the stable. Jim and Brian offered her hearty hellos, while Mart simply smiled at her. Diana smiled at all of them, appreciating Jim's warmth and willingness to include her just because his sister had invited her over. She also couldn't help but remember the day on the playground, so long ago, that she had met Mart Belden. She had thought he was so smart! Her gaze lingered on Mart, and then she looked away, slightly embarrassed.

"Where's that wacky sister of yours?" Regan was asking Brian. "Isn't she going to ride?"

Mart answered for his brother. "My female sibling is scouring the locale on the family homestead in which the familial automobiles are housed. She should be ambulating along shortly."

Diana stared open-mouthed at Mart. She'd always known he was smart, but he really impressed her now. Brian caught her look and smiled. "Mart suffers from a debilitating condition called dictionary-itis. Don't pay any attention to him. We don't!"

Mart pretended to be offended by this remark, but before the teasing could get out of hand, Regan spoke up. "Well, gang, we have six teenagers and five horses. What's the plan?"

Jim immediately spoke up. "Actually, I'm beat from working on the clubhouse. Brian can ride Jupe and Di can have my spot."

Diana looked at the husky redhead and knew there was no way he was "beat" from working on the clubhouse. The lovely brunette was touched that he would say he was in order that she didn't feel bad. She was quickly coming to realize just how wonderful the new boy and girl really were.

"Please, Jim," Honey said. "I'd really rather stay home. Miss Trask may have some things she would like me to do before dinner "

Just then Trixie appeared and appeared to have heard the last part of the conversation. "I don't feel much like riding," she cried impulsively. "I'm half dead from cleaning out the garage. You ride Susie, Di."

Diana was overwhelmed at how these kids, who she knew absolutely loved to ride, were making excuses *not* to ride, just so that *she* could! Right then Di felt like a million dollars. But she also didn't know how to ride, and she certainly didn't want to be the cause of anyone having to give up his or her ride. She shook her head. "I don't know how to ride. All of you please go. I don't mind being left behind. Besides, I want to be here when my suitcase comes, so— "

As she hesitated, flushing, Honey said quickly, "I don't want to ride either. Lady doesn't need any exercise. Mother rode her this morning."

"Dad rode Jupe before breakfast, too," Jim added.

Regan, who had gone inside the tack room when the argument started, came out just then and decided to end things once and for all. "Well," he said, "the other horses do need exercise. So you Beldens had better get going before it gets so dark even the horses won't be able to see."

After the Beldens quickly left on their mounts, Regan turned to Di. "Would you like a lesson on Lady?"

Diana hesitated, torn between getting a riding lesson from this handsome groom and wanting to be at the house when her suitcase came. Honey spoke up. "Oh, please do, Di. We'll definitely do more riding this weekend, and it would be great if Regan had taught you the basics."

Di, not wanting to appear ungracious and really wanting the lesson, agreed. Honey gave her a wide smile. "Great! I'm going to go up to the house and see if Miss Trask needs anything. Enjoy your lesson!" With a reassuring wave, Honey left the stables.

"Regan, while you're giving Di her lesson, I'll go ahead and take care of Jupe," Jim volunteered.

Regan called his thanks and led Lady and Di into the corral.

As the lesson wore on, the young girl instinctively knew that the young groom, despite his sometimes stern manner, was a really caring man. Before she knew it, she was telling him all about her family's new wealth, her problem adjusting to it, and her new uncle, who seemed to love to interfere in everything. Regan offered her a sympathetic ear and reassured her that she would eventually come to adjust. "Honey, who grew up rich, had a little trouble adjusting, too," he told her. "Not to being rich, since that's all she's ever known, but trying to be a normal kid despite the wealth. Since she's moved out here to the country and become friends with Trixie, she's made great strides. I'm sure that your friends will help you, as they've helped Honey."

Diana glowed. *Her friends.* Di desperately wanted to call the B.W.G.s her friends and Regan seemed to think it was possible. She finished out her lesson on a high note.

"Go ahead up to the house," Regan told her. "I'll groom Lady and clean her tack. You have fun—and remember what I said!"

"I will, Regan, thanks!" Di smiled her lovely smile at him and headed up to the house.

She entered the guest bedroom that Honey had designated as hers and immediately let out an exasperated sigh upon seeing the hated suitcase sitting on the bed. With grim determination, she marched over to the bed and opened up the offending item. She looked at the two dresses that her mother had packed for her to wear to dinner on Friday and Saturday nights: both long frocks with full, floor-length skirts. She started to shove them back into the suitcase and go borrow a simple dress from Honey, but she remembered her promise to her Uncle Monty.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, trying to summon the courage to put on a dress she knew would be far too formal. She hated to think of the looks on her newfound friends' faces when she appeared to dinner wearing one of these, but she knew she had to do it. She had made a promise.

Diana took a long shower, trying to rid herself of the horse smell. After she dressed in a strapless gown with a long full skirt and hung her clothes, she couldn't find Honey so she wandered down to the veranda. As she was passing by a window she heard her name.

"Diana's suitcase arrived while Regan was giving her a riding lesson on Lady in the corral. Celia was busy, so I took it upstairs to the guest room across the hall from Honey's room, and unpacked it." Diana surmised that this was Miss Trask speaking. Her heart sank

when she heard the following words: "I'm afraid Mrs. Lynch must have got the impression that we were giving a party, for she had packed two frocks with long skirts. They're both lovely, but frankly, Trixie, I felt they were too sophisticated for a girl of thirteen. How long have you known Diana Lynch?" Di's cheeks flamed as her worst nightmare unfolded in the study: her clothes were being ridiculed as inappropriate, and Miss Trask was discussing her with someone else.

"Since kindergarten," she heard Trixie say. Diana knew it was wrong, but she waited to see what Trixie would say about her. "We were very good friends until the last year or so."

"Judging from those frocks, I'm not sure I want Diana to become a close friend of Honey's." Diana gasped out loud and tears sprang unbidden to her eyes as she listened to this indictment of her. "You see, Mrs. Wheeler doesn't want Honey to grow up too fast. We want her to be a tomboy, like you, Trixie, for as long as possible."

Diana heard Trixie's chuckle and that infuriated her for some reason. How could Trixie laugh when Miss Trask was tearing her apart? True, they had grown apart over the last year, but they had been good friends since kindergarten. Surely Trixie would *defend* her!

"I'm glad somebody likes me the way I am. It seems to me that my own family has done nothing all day but lecture me on how sloppy I look."

"Everybody likes you the way you are," Miss Trask said. *Of course they do!* Di thought bitterly. *Everybody has always liked Trixie, and no one likes me!* She listened as Miss Trask continued. "You know how grateful we all are for what you've done for Honey. She was a nervous, sickly child when you two met last summer. She owes Jim to you, too. Why, you're like one big happy family. I certainly don't want that to change at all."

"But why should it change?" Trixie asked.

"A newcomer to your group could make a difference. But perhaps I'm wrong about Diana. It's unfair to judge her when I've only really had a glimpse of her."

Diana could take it no more. The one thing she wanted more than anything in the world—to be a member of the B.W.G.s—and Miss Trask was trying to take that away! Without thinking, she threw open the doors leading into the study and burst into the room.

She ignored Trixie's gasp of surprise and stared at Miss Trask, her violet eyes black with anger. "I heard every word you said. Don't you worry, Miss Trask. I'm not going to stay in this house another minute. I'll call a cab right now and leave at once."

Miss Trask was at her side in a second. "Diana, dear, I'm so sorry. I didn't know you were on the veranda. It was very wrong of me to discuss you with Trixie, but you see, she has known you for a long time, since kindergarten, really, and we—"

Di could not believe this woman had the nerve to apologize to her after suggesting that she wasn't worth being friends with. "Don't apologize," she said, her voice taut with suppressed tears. "Everyone likes Trixie, and nobody likes me. I might have known this would happen." Determined not to cry in front of Honey's governess and Trixie, she raced out of the room and up the stairs, finally reaching the guest bedroom. She slammed the door and felt childishly better. For a moment, anyway.

As she realized that her hopes of becoming a B.W.G. were evaporating, Diana flung herself on the bed and cried bitterly. She was vaguely aware of the door opening and the movement of the mattress as someone sat down beside her. She didn't care who it was, she was determined to ignore them. When a soft hand stroked her hair, just like her mother used to do when she was a child, Diana began to feel calmer. Eventually she rolled over and saw the concerned face of Miss Trask.

"I'm so sorry I upset you, Dear. It was very, very wrong of me to discuss you with Trixie," Miss Trask began and then sighed. "I'm afraid I've become somewhat overprotective of Honey, so much so that it blinded me to your now obvious predicament. Honey was so like you—wanting to be a normal child but wanting to please her mother. And now I see that's what is happening with you. Of course you don't want to parade around in evening gowns, but you *do* want to please your mother. I should have seen that." The governess gave Diana a warm smile. "I hope you'll forgive me."

Diana, beautiful even with red-rimmed eyes and tear-stained cheeks, nodded. "I do. I'm sorry, Miss Trask, I've just been so mixed up lately!"

Miss Trask opened her arms and Diana sat up, receiving a reassuring hug from the older woman. "I know. Being a teenager is a confusing time as it is, and you've had tremendous change to deal with. But with Trixie and Honey as friends, I just know that things are going to get better for you. You'll get used to your father's wealth, I promise."

Diana gave Miss Trask a watery smile. "That's what Regan said." Diana sat up straight next to her newfound champion. "It's just that..." Diana hesitated.

"It's just that what?"

Diana looked at the governess. Miss Trask looked at her and the young girl saw that there was no condemnation on her face, only concern and caring. Before she knew it, Diana found herself pouring out her story to Honey's former math teacher. "And now she wants me to have a party!" Diana wailed. "A fancy Halloween party with caterers and Harrison hanging around and I couldn't! I just couldn't!"

"You didn't invite any of your friends?" Miss Trask asked.

Di shook her head. "No, I don't want to invite all of my classmates to a party that no one will have fun at. It will be awful!"

"There must be a way to convince your mother, without hurting her feelings, that a simpler party is much better," Miss Trask mused, almost to herself.

"Mrs. Wheeler is my mother's very own ideal," Diana said. "And I thought..." The young girl allowed her sentence to trail off, not daring to say aloud what she had been thinking.

"You thought that if Honey's mother spoke to your mother, then she could convince her?" Miss Trask deduced.

Diana nodded, afraid to even dare hope that Miss Trask and Mrs. Wheeler would do that for her.

"Well, that's easily arranged. Mrs. Wheeler is very happy with the changes in Honey since we moved to Sleepyside, and she'll certainly agree that a simple, teenage party is much better than an elaborate one. I'll speak to her. Perhaps she can invite your parents to a party she is having next week, and when she phones them, she can broach the subject of your party."

"Oh, that would be wonderful, Miss Trask!" Diana exclaimed, throwing her arms around the surprised, but pleased, governess.

"Don't you fret, Diana, we'll get this taken care of. Now, surely there is a simple dress in the suitcase that your chauffeur brought?" Miss Trask asked the lovely teenager.

"Well, my mother was horrified that I might wear dungarees tomorrow, so she packed school dresses for me to wear tomorrow," Diana said, crossing the room and opening the closet where she had hung her clothes. She selected a simple lavender wool dress and quickly changed into it in the adjoining changing room.

She re-entered the guest room and smiled at Miss Trask. "Thanks for everything, Miss Trask. I think I'm ready for dinner."

The two entered the hall and immediately saw Trixie and Honey. Di felt very gratified that the dress she was wearing was very similar to the wool dresses that Honey and Trixie were wearing. Trixie's blue wool dress set off the vivacious blonde's bright blue eyes, while the green dress Honey was wearing showcased her golden aura. Di actually felt like she belonged for a change.

"How nice you look," Honey said, slipping her hand through Di's arm.

The boys came out of Jim's room then, and they all trooped down to the dining-room. Di was silent through most of the meal, listening to the laughter and jokes of the other teens. She wanted to participate, but she felt shy, especially around the boys. Being around the five close-knit friends all at once was a little overwhelming. Di was relieved when, during dessert, Jim stated that he and the Belden boys were going to the movies.

Diana half-listened to the friendly bickering that followed, until Honey said something that made her snap to attention.

"...It's Halloween next Friday. Don't you think we ought to have a party here, Miss Trask?"

Miss Trask shook her head. "I'm sorry, dear. Have you forgotten? Your mother is going to have a party that night." The governess looked at Di with kindly eyes, silently urging her to speak up.

Before Di could say anything, Trixie spoke. "I know. Moms and Dad are invited. So let's have the party at our house. It'll still be Indian summer, so it'll be warm enough so we can roast franks on our outdoor grill. So—"

"So, so, so-so," Mart interrupted. "How you love that word, Sis, when it isn't spelled s-e-w."

Diana could take it no longer—she couldn't believe that her revised Halloween party plans were going to evaporate before Miss Trask even had a chance to talk to Mrs. Wheeler about them. She couldn't let that happen! "Don't," she cried suddenly. "Please don't."

"What?" Trixie asked in amazement.

"Don't give a party at your house." Di could feel her cheeks flaming and felt the tears gathering in her violet eyes. "You just can't give a party at your house. Mother would never forgive me."

"But I don't understand," Trixie said. "We planned to invite you, Di, if that's what you mean."

"That isn't what I mean." Di's voice was high-pitched, even to her own ears. She knew she wasn't saying things the right way, but once again, Trixie could never hope to understand what she was going through. "*You* don't understand, Trixie Belden, because your house isn't all cluttered up with servants. When you give a party, you and your brothers do the planning and you do all the cooking, too."

"Natch," Mart said easily. "Who else?"

Diana looked wordlessly at Mart. She knew she was overreacting. She knew she was being a baby. But they just didn't *understand*. She had tried to explain, and it wasn't getting through; the words weren't coming out right. At a complete loss for what else to do, Di jumped up and ran out of the dining-room.

For the second time that evening, the dark-haired beauty was lying face down on the bed, shaking with sobs and weeping into the pillows. She was still that way when Trixie and Honey entered the room a few moments later.

"Please don't cry," Trixie begged her. "Mart didn't mean anything. What *is* wrong, Di?"

Miss Trask came quietly into the room and sat on the foot of the bed. In a soothing voice she said, "Sit up, Di, and tell the girls what you told me before dinner. Everything is going to be all right."

Di tearfully told Trixie and Honey about her mother's desire that Di throw an elaborate Halloween party. She ended with, "Oh, Honey, you've got to help me."

"But how?" Honey's eyes were filled with sympathy, and Di once again felt lucky to be friends with this sweet and empathetic girl.

"Your mother is my mother's very own ideal. If your mother would tell her that it would be much better to let me give the kind of party the Beldens give, why then she would."

Miss Trask told the girls about the plan to have Mrs. Wheeler explain to Di's mother the advantages of a simple affair when she phoned to invite Mrs. Lynch to the Wheeler party.

Di nodded as Miss Trask spoke. "Do you think your mother would do that, Honey? I mean, explain that most of the kids will come in homemade costumes and won't like it if Harrison is hanging around in that prim way of his."

"Of course," Honey cried enthusiastically. Diana sighed in relief and, for the first time in a long time, felt like things would be okay. "Harrison can be given the night off so you can run things the way you like, Di. Mother's very good about explaining things like that. She knows how I feel about butlers. We haven't had one since Miss Trask came to live with us. And I'm glad."

"And Regan," Miss Trask said. "Regan takes the place of a butler in this household, except that he doesn't buttle."

"I wish we had a Regan at our place," Di said enviously as she thought of the patient, handsome redhead who had been so understanding with her earlier as she poured out her troubles. "When he was giving me a riding lesson, I sort of poured my heart out to him and he was so sympathetic." That reminded her of one of the things she had talked to Regan about: her uncle. Suddenly, she covered her pretty face with her hands. "Oh, I forgot. *Uncle Monty!* He'll ruin everything."

"Uncle Monty?" Trixie repeated. "I didn't know you had an uncle, Di."

"I didn't," Di sobbed. "He suddenly turned up on Monday night. He's mother's long lost brother who left home to make his fortune when she was just a baby. She has never heard from him until now."

"How exciting," Honey cried. "What on earth makes you think he'll ruin everything, Di?"

Di stared dismally up at the ceiling. "Maybe he won't. Let's not talk about him. Let's start making plans for Halloween. Maybe Uncle Monty will have gone back to Arizona by then."

"If he hasn't," Miss Trask put in, "Mrs. Wheeler will certainly invite your mother's brother to the grown-up party here that evening."

Diana was absolutely horrified at the thought. She didn't know why, but she was determined to keep her newfound relative far away from the Wheelers. "Oh, no!" Di's voice was so high-pitched it was almost a scream. "Please, Miss Trask, don't let Mrs. Wheeler invite him out here."

Di was relieved when Honey tactfully changed the subject and the talk veered to the exciting plans for the party. Miss Trask left the girls alone to plot, and Di managed to forget about her uncle.

Di had just returned from the bathroom when she noticed Honey and Trixie grinning at her.

“What? Do I have something on my face?” Diana asked, ready to run back into the bathroom to check her face.

“Not at all, you look perfectly ravishing as always,” Honey assured her. “It’s just that, well,” the honey-haired girl exchanged a glance with her curly-haired friend, who was grinning like a Cheshire cat, “we would all love for you to join our club. If you’ll have us, that is.”

Diana was sure she must have misheard her friend. Could the moment she dreamed of really be here? She was going to get to wear a red jacket and pal around with these five wonderful people? Even after all of her outbursts that weekend? “I’m sorry?” she said before she could stop herself.

“You don’t have to join us, Di,” Trixie said hastily.

“No!” Di cried. “It’s not that. I’d *love* to join your club, I’ve dreamt of nothing else since the semester started, I’m just surprised you want me is all!” Diana could feel her violet eyes filling with tears, but this time they were tears of happiness.

“Of course we want you, Di!” Both Trixie and Honey exclaimed and leapt off of the bed, pulling Di into a happy group hug.

“Oh, this is wonderful!” Di cried. The three girls giggled and laughed, happy that their circle of friends was widening.

Diana felt happiness spread over her and vowed to stop looking at the world as if it were out to get her. From now on, she’d see everything through lavender colored glasses, and the world would be rosy indeed!

More notes: Yes, apparently in 1954 “dining-room” was a hyphenated term, so I went with it. Also, in re-reading *The Mysterious Visitor* with a critical eye, nowhere did they actually invite Di to join the B.W.G.s—it was just sort of taken for granted. I know Di has a lot of special “intuitive” talents, but I don’t think true clairvoyance is one of them, so I went ahead and had Trixie and Honey ask her to join. :)