

This story, actually this whole universe, is dedicated to Cathy and all of the wonderful people who have made Jixemitri a reality. *Sapphire Days*, of which "Saturday in the Park" is the first story, is a universe that celebrates the romance of our beloved sleuth and her husky red-head. Not coincidentally, it's also a Jixemitri CWP#1 Submission. Standard disclaimers apply: not only am I not making any money off of this fanfic, but now my Trixie obsession is costing me \$9.95 a month in Web hosting fees! © The title is from the old Chicago song, also used shamelessly without permission.

Saturday in the Park

by Dana

"*Saturday, in the park, I think it was the fourth of July,*" sixteen-year-old Trixie Belden sang carelessly with the song on the radio as she finished dressing. She took one last look in the mirror and decided that she looked pretty okay.

For me, anyway, she thought ruefully. She had tamed her shoulder-length sandy curls, and the tight blue scoop neck T-shirt she wore with her cut-off white denim shorts showed off her summer tan very nicely.

In anticipation of the day ahead, she absolutely ran down the stairs of the white frame farmhouse she called home. It was a sunny Saturday afternoon in August, and she and her two best friends, Honey Wheeler and Jim Frayne, had decided to head to nearby Croton-on-Hudson to spend a lazy day in the park.

She bounded into the kitchen that her mother was just finishing cleaning. "Moms, I finished the dusting and fed the chickens. Can I go meet Honey and Jim now?"

Helen Belden smiled at her feisty blonde daughter's exuberance. "Of course, Trixie. I know you three have been planning this outing for a while. Hard to believe it's the last weekend before Jim and Brian head back to school!"

Trixie agreed that the summer had just flown by. Her older brother Brian would be heading back to Columbia, while Honey's adopted brother Jim would be heading back to Michigan State. Trixie hadn't known quite what to do with herself when Brian and Jim had left last year for their freshman year at their respective schools, but she had managed to get through the school year unscathed. The separation had just made this summer all the more special.

"Gleeps, Moms!" Trixie exclaimed. "Do you realize that Mart has only one more year before he leaves, too?"

Mrs. Belden finished drying the pan she was holding and gave her daughter a wry look. "Well, since he sent his application for early admission into Cornell just last week, yes, I can believe it. Thank you for reminding me that I have yet another child ready to head off to college!" She tried to sound stern, but Trixie saw the twinkle in her mom's blue eyes.

"Sorry to remind you that another one of your chicks is getting ready to leave the nest, Moms," Trixie said as she leaned over to give her mother a quick kiss on the cheek.

Helen smiled. "It's okay, Trixie. I have some great 'chicks.'"

Trixie looked at her watch. "Gleeps, Moms! I promised Honey and Jim I would meet them at the clubhouse five minutes ago!"

Helen quickly turned and picked up a picnic basket that had been sitting on the counter. "Gleeps, Trixie!" Her mother imitated the vivacious teen. "Don't forget this! I know Miss Trask will pack enough for an army, but I thought I could contribute to your special day."

Trix grabbed the heavy basket and hugged her mother. “Thanks, Moms. You’re the best!” And with that the exuberant teen was gone, the screen door slamming behind her, causing her mother to wonder why not one of her children could learn to close it quietly.

As the young detective crossed the yard, she saw her nine-year-old brother Bobby practicing on his new pogo stick. Ever since he had gotten the gift for his ninth birthday, he was rarely seen without it. Reddy, the Beldens’ lovable but completely un-trainable Irish Setter, was at turns starring quizzically at his young master and then trying to jump up and down with Bobby. Trixie chuckled to herself and wished she had a video camera.

The sixteen-year-old hurried up the path to the old gatehouse on Honey’s family’s estate. When Trixie, her older brothers, and their friends had formed their club, the Bob-Whites of the Glen, three years before, the members had painstakingly restored the run-down building and turned it into their clubhouse. When Trixie arrived at the cozy little building, Honey and Jim were already sitting at the table Mart had restored.

Trixie’s heart skipped a beat as she looked at Jim. She had had feelings for the muscular red-head ever since she had met him the summer she turned thirteen. He had been a scared, fifteen-year-old runaway back then, but looking at the self-assured eighteen-year-old now, one would never guess at his troubled past. For whatever reason, Trixie’s feelings for Jim had become much stronger over this summer. Maybe it was the separation of the previous year, maybe it was the twinge of jealousy she felt when she realized that Jim had dated a few girls during his freshman year at MSU, or maybe it was because Trixie saw romance blossoming among her other friends and yearned to express her own feelings for Jim. *Or maybe, Trixie reflected, it’s because he is such a hottie, and I want to jump his bones every time I see him.*

“Hey there, you two,” she said brightly as she realized she was staring at the muscles the tight T-shirt Jim was wearing did nothing to hide. *Yummy*, she thought involuntarily.

“Hey, Trix, we were just about to send out a search party for you,” Jim teased as he took the picnic basket from her.

“Did your mom forget that Miss Trask was going to send along a picnic basket for us?” Honey asked as she gestured to a similar basket sitting on the table.

“Nope, she said she just wanted to add something special to our day. I don’t even know what it is,” Trixie confessed.

“Well, grab it, and let’s go,” Jim said, gathering up his keys and carrying one of the picnic baskets to the door.

Honey grabbed the other basket and soon the trio was sitting in Jim’s jeep, laughing and singing along to songs on the radio. With the top down, the sun shining, and the wind blowing through her curls, Trixie swore that she had never been happier. She was in the front seat, sitting next to the boy of her dreams, and she wasn’t going to let the fact that he didn’t seem to know it spoil her day. As much as she wanted Jim to notice her romantically, and send more than fond looks in her direction, she was never the type to force the issue—it certainly wasn’t worth jeopardizing their friendship over. No, Trixie could be content to just enjoy special days like this one.

Just then Jim looked over at Trixie and smiled. “You look happy.”

Trixie smiled back at him. “Never happier.”

Jim laughed at that. “Is that because you know you’re getting rid of me this week?”

Trixie started to protest, but then she caught the mischievous twinkle in his green eyes. “Yep, Mr. Frayne, that must be it! Why would I want you around to swim in the lake with, ride horses with, explore the game preserve with –”

“Eat burgers at Wimpy’s with, solve mysteries with,” Honey chimed in. “Yes, it’s *such* a chore to have you around, big brother!”

While Trixie and Honey laughed, Jim pretended to be offended. “I can see I’m going to have to transfer to Westchester Community College so you won’t forget me.”

“Forget you?” Trixie snorted. “No one could possibly forget you!”

“I’ll take that as a complement, Miss Belden,” Jim said as he turned his jeep into the gravel lot at the entrance to the park and found a parking spot.

Trixie smiled at him the way she had seen Di smiling at her brother Mart. “You should.”

Jim smiled back at her and, for the thousandth time, Trix thought how handsome he was.

Jim himself was looking at Trixie’s wind-blown blonde curls, sparkling blue eyes, and radiant glow and thinking, for the thousandth time, what a beautiful girl Trixie was and how lucky he was to have her in his life. Blue eyes locked with green, and both felt something electrical and magic pass between them.

Honey saw the extended gaze her brother and best friend were engaged in and was thrilled to see it. Everyone knew Trixie and Jim would end up together eventually. *Everyone, that is, except Jim and Trixie*, Honey reflected. As much as she hated to do it, the honey-haired girl cleared her throat.

“Are we ready?” She said with a sly grin. Trixie and Jim seemed to both suddenly remember where they were.

“Umm, yeah,” Jim mumbled as Trixie blushed and reached for her door handle. Honey watched the two of them trying to recover from the intense look and chuckled inside. *This day at the park might be more interesting than I thought!*

As the trio grabbed the baskets and backpacks from the back of the Jeep, the self-consciousness of the prior few minutes was forgotten. The three happily walked down the path that lead from the parking lot, through a small, forested area, and finally down to the open picnic grounds. The beautiful day and the knowledge that summer would soon be over had brought people to the park in droves. Families sat on picnic blankets, laughing and chatting, a group of college age kids grilled, and another group had started a game of Frisbee. Trixie laughed out loud at a young boy about Bobby’s age trying very hard to make his yellow lab fetch a ball, but the dog was much more interested in the hamburger that the boy’s dad was preparing to grill. Couples strolled hand-in-hand or sat under trees and lounged. Trixie felt alive as she took in all of the activity surrounding her.

“What about that spot over there?” Jim asked, pointing to a spot closer to the edge of the trees that started up again at the opposite end of the clearing. “We don’t need to grill anything, so we don’t have to stay so close to the picnic area.”

“Sounds good to me,” Honey spoke up as she headed in the direction Jim indicated. Trixie agreed and followed with Jim at her side.

While Honey spread out the blanket and Jim opened the basket that Miss Trask had provided, Trixie decided to investigate what Moms had sent in her basket. When she opened it up, she found a long envelope resting on top of the food.

“Gleeps! It’s a letter from Moms,” Trixie exclaimed in surprise.

Jim's eyes twinkled. "Well, if it's a letter from Moms, it must be important indeed!"

Honey looked at her adopted brother. "Where is all of this 'indeed' stuff coming from? Are you reading Dickens again?" Before Jim could respond, Trixie started to read the letter out loud.

"Dear Gang,

I remember what it was like when I was young—the days were always too short when spending time with your friends. And summers seemed even shorter! Miss Trask and I knew that a mere lunchtime picnic would not be enough, so I decided to send you off with dinner as well! You will find burger patties packed in ice, as well as all the fixings, and a potato salad. You kids have fun on your last Saturday before the grind of school starts for Jim. I don't want to see hide nor hair of you until this evening! Just be home before 10 p.m. Have fun!

*Love,
Moms."*

Trixie was speechless at the gesture. Honey, however, was not. "Wow! Your mom is awesome! I can't believe we can just stay here all day and well into the evening."

Jim nodded enthusiastically. "This is great! It'll be so much easier to head back to school if I feel I had just one whole, uninterrupted day of laziness!"

Trixie could barely contain herself. "It makes it easier knowing that you're going away now that I have all of this extra time with you! We really are the luckiest people on earth having the friends and family that we do!"

Honey and Jim agreed. The three then relaxed and enjoyed the fried chicken, homemade rolls, carrot sticks, and other goodies that the Wheeler cook had packed for lunch. Honey opened the cookies and inhaled deeply. "Mmm, Cook's famous fresh-baked oatmeal and chocolate chip cookies."

Jim grabbed at the cookies playfully. "Mmmm. Cookies, me Cookie Monster and me need cookies. *Cookies! Now!*" He said in his best impersonation of Cookie Monster and popped a huge cookie in his mouth. Honey and Trixie shook with laughter. Just then Jane Morgan wandered up and looked at the three of them as if they were crazy.

"Jim, are you okay?" She asked, trying to contain a grin.

When Jim realized that Jane had seen him stuff a whole cookie in his mouth while pretending to be a Sesame Street character, he got flustered and tried to talk. He soon realized that talking with a large cookie in your mouth isn't the easiest thing in the world and, in addition to spraying cookie bits everywhere, started to choke. Once they saw it wasn't serious, the girls, including Jane, laughed even harder.

Tears were rolling down Trixie's cheeks and Honey's sides hurt. "Have you been taking lessons from Mart?" Honey managed to gasp between peels of laughter.

Jim tried hard to regain control and had almost succeeded when Jane said, "Well, my work here is done," and disappeared as quickly as she had appeared.

Soon Jim was able to speak again and Trixie and Honey had stopped laughing. "That was priceless, Jim," Honey told her older brother.

Jim grinned sheepishly. "Glad to be of entertainment service to you fair maidens."

After consuming massive quantities of cookies without further incident, Trixie started to get restless. "Well, what next?" Trixie demanded, always eager to be doing something.

"Do you guys want to go for a walk in the woods?" Jim asked. "We could follow those paths to the bluffs and get an extraordinary view of the Hudson."

Trixie eagerly accepted but Honey declined. "You two go ahead. I think I want to stay here and read the book I brought and maybe nap."

"Are you sure, Honey?"

"Sure am, besides, someone needs to stay and watch our stuff."

Trixie looked at Jim. "Okay, let's go."

Honey could not hide a sly smile as she watched the duo head toward one of the trails. *A beautiful day, birds singing, the sun shining, a quiet, romantic wooded path...maybe those two will finally take a hint!* With that thought, Honey settled herself on the blanket and closed her eyes, enjoying the sunshine on her face.

* * *

Jim was at that moment realizing how happy he was that he and Trixie had embarked on this walk alone. Trixie was sixteen now, no longer the impetuous thirteen-year-old girl next door. Jim knew he had developed feelings for the spunky sleuth the second she had stood up to him when he was standing in the middle of his great-uncle's house with a shotgun. Trixie had not backed down; instead, she had turned it around and accused *him* of trespassing. Since that day he had never once seen Trixie back down from a challenge.

That was just one of the things he loved about Trixie. Little did she know how much he had thought about her last year while he was at Michigan State. The occasional dates he went on were more to relieve social boredom than anything else, and the girls paled in comparison to Trixie Belden. Trixie was bright, sparkling colors: fiery reds, sapphire blues, emerald greens, and bright, sunshiny yellows. Other girls he met were muted and pale, pastels and tans; perfectly nice, but boring in comparison. He knew there would never be another Trixie.

He wanted to make her his girlfriend before he had left for Michigan State, but two things held him back. When he left she was only fifteen, about to be a high school sophomore, and so full of youthful innocence that he knew the time was not yet right. Jim also didn't feel it was fair to tie her down. She was in high school, she should go out and have fun and not worry about some guy hundreds of miles away. Before he left he had resolved not to date Trixie, or even hint at his feelings, until she graduated from high school. But looking at her now, a year older, Jim wasn't sure he could wait. More importantly, he was no longer sure he wanted to.

Jim was following Trixie along the wooded path, but he caught up with her and grabbed her hand. It felt perfectly natural and he loved the feel of her soft skin in his hand. Trixie looked up at him and he saw surprise mingled with happiness and something else...contentedness? He hoped so.

The two walked in silence for a while, enjoying the peacefulness of the forest trail. The path began to widen, and Trixie and Jim found themselves in a small clearing near the bluffs of the Hudson. The state had had the foresight to put a fence several feet before the bluff's edge so that no unfortunate accidents could occur. Trixie knew the dangers of getting too close to the edge of the bluffs all too well. Jim's cousin Juliana had fallen over one near their home in Sleepyside two summers before, after someone had maliciously removed the warning signs. Honey's father had immediately erected fences to prevent any further accidents. Now, Trixie

and Jim approached this fence and looked down at the sparkling, blue waters of the Hudson below.

Trixie broke the silence. "I love days like this, don't you?"

"It's perfectly perfect, to quote you and my sister," Jim agreed.

As she stood next to Jim in this wonderfully romantic location, Trixie had so many emotions welling up inside her that she wasn't sure she could hold them in any longer. She knew Jim regarded her as a kid sister and she didn't want to ruin their friendship, but sometimes she wondered how long she could keep these feelings bottled up inside. Watching her other best friend, Diana, with her brother Mart on a daily basis was only increasing the longing she felt for Jim. Trixie decided to at least speak some of what she was feeling.

"I wish you hadn't picked a school so far from home," Trixie said, making sure she used a light-hearted tone so Jim would not pick up on the depth of her feelings, or worse yet, take her words as criticism.

Jim looked at the beautiful girl standing beside him. "Sometimes I do, too."

"But you like it at MSU, right?"

"Of course, it's a great school. They have a great teaching program and the people I've met have been awesome. I did want to choose a school from a different part of the country to get some different perspectives, but I do get homesick for New York," Jim said. *And a certain curly-haired Schoolgirl Shamus*, he added silently.

"It was weird last year without you and Brian," Trixie commented. She felt like that was the understatement of the year, but she didn't know exactly how to express her feelings; that was Honey or Di's department.

"It was weird without the rest of the BWG's, too," Jim admitted. "I would have a bad day and want to hang out with you guys to help me forget, and then I would realize that that was kind of impossible. Or I'd ace a test and want to celebrate with you all, and I couldn't."

Trixie nodded. "The same thing would happen to me. I'd get stuck on a math problem and realize I couldn't just knock on Brian's door or call you up and hound you to meet me at the clubhouse to solve the wonders of geometry."

Jim grinned. "You and geometry!" He said in an exasperated tone, but his eyes smiled.

Trixie chuckled. "I know. There are some mysteries I will *never* solve!"

The two laughed together and Jim decided to take the bull by the horns. "Out of all the things I missed when I left, Trix, I missed you the most."

Trixie's heart stopped as she tried to digest what she had just heard. "Really, Jim? I missed you, too. So much."

They stared at each other and Trixie began to wonder if maybe, just maybe, Jim felt the same way about her that that she felt about him.

Jim wondered how he could possibly wait to kiss this girl standing in front of him for two more years. And then he realized—he couldn't.

Jim took a step forward and ran a hand through Trixie's curls. "You are so beautiful, Trix," he said before he leaned forward to kiss her.

"I said don't run ahead of me!"

Startled, Trixie and Jim jumped away from each other and looked toward the trees behind them.

“Awww, Mom, it’s okay,” a young voice replied. Within seconds, two ten-year-old boys emerged from the path, followed by a harried-looking middle aged woman.

Trixie and Jim smiled at each other and by mutual agreement, took each other’s hand and took the path back to the main part of the park where Honey was napping. Anything they might want to say or do certainly wasn’t appropriate for a ten-year-old audience. Or any audience for that matter.

When they had gotten a fair amount of the way into the woods, Trixie tried to talk to Jim about what had almost happened between them, but he smiled and put a finger to her lips. “There’s plenty of time for that when we can truly be alone. How about meeting me at the clubhouse tomorrow at noon?”

Trixie wondered how she could possibly wait until then, but she nodded her agreement. After that, the two strolled contentedly, happily enjoying each other, and soon they were awakening Honey.

“Hey, there, sleepyhead!” Trixie teased as she tugged on Honey’s hair.

Honey looked confused for a second and then realized where she was. “I had that dream again,” she mumbled sleepily.

“The one where you’re stuck in that yellow room?” Trixie questioned.

Honey nodded and sat up. “Except ‘yellow’ doesn’t begin to describe it—it’s blindingly bright.”

“Then what happens?” Jim prompted.

“I try to get out because the yellow is hurting my eyes, but there is no door and no window and I don’t know how to get out. Then, all of a sudden, the Easter Bunny appears out of nowhere and starts throwing chocolate eggs at me.”

Jim tried to control his smile as he asked, “What happens next?”

“I start yelling at him that I don’t want the chocolate eggs, I would rather have jelly beans. Then I wake up.” Honey finished matter-of-factly.

“How many times have you had this dream?”

“This is the third time this summer.”

“Interesting,” Jim commented.

“Well, Dr. Freud, have any ideas?” Trixie wanted to know.

“Just one.”

“What?” Trixie asked eagerly.

“My sister is a lunatic!” Jim and Trixie burst out laughing while Honey looked around for something to throw at him.

“Very funny. You guys wanna play Frisbee? I brought one,” Honey said, trying to get their minds off her bizarre dream. The last thing she needed was Jim trying to analyze her using knowledge gleaned from his freshman psychology class.

“Sure!”

The three started a game of Frisbee that attracted several of the college crowd and before they knew it, the sun was starting to get low in the sky and they realized they were starving. They said good-bye to their new-found friends and headed over to the picnic basket that held dinner.

Half-an-hour later, Trixie was biting into one of Moms' specialty burgers. "Mmmm."

Honey savored a bite. "I don't know how your mom does it, Trixie, but her burgers are always works of art!"

After the three had demolished the dinner that Mrs. Belden had so thoughtfully sent, they laid down on the blanket and stared at the dusk sky, full of pinks and purples. Most of the crowd of earlier had gone home and there were only a few other people left in the park.

"What a great day this has been," Honey sighed.

And you don't know the half of it, Trixie thought. Jim thinks I'm beautiful. Jim wants to kiss me!

Jim surreptitiously reached for Trixie's hand and squeezed it. "It was at that."

"I love having the park almost to ourselves," Trixie murmured.

"Yeah, since we are practically alone, let's sing Christmas carols at the top of our lungs!"

Both Trixie and Jim turned to look at Honey. "Are you okay, Honey?"

Honey giggled. "There's something about laying on a blanket with two of your best friends in the middle of August and shouting Christmas songs."

"Yeah, there *is* something about it. It's called insanity," Trixie stated with a grin. "But I'm game"

So the three started singing songs appropriate for snowy December and realized Honey was right—it was very liberating.

"You know what I've always wanted to do?" Jim asked after they had dissolved into laughter after a particularly boisterous rendition of "Deck the Halls."

"What's that, Jim?"

"I've always wanted to sit on top of a branch and pretend to be a bird."

"Wha-at?" Honey and Trixie chimed.

"Yeah, I'm going to go sit on top of the swing set over there and pretend to be a bird!" Before the girls could say another word, Jim was up and crossing the park toward the large wooden swing set. It was dark out by this time, and they realized they were the only ones left in the park.

"We must have scared everyone else away!" Trixie chortled as she and Honey got up to follow Jim. By the time they reached him, he was perched on top of the swing set cawing like a crow.

"Caw!"

Once again, Trixie and Honey were laughing so hard that tears were rolling down their cheeks. "Jim! Come down from there before you fall down!"

After several more caws, Jim came down and the three gathered up their things to head home. However, they were still in a very light-hearted, silly mood, and as they started to leave the park, they sang a very lopsided rendition of "Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard."

Suddenly, Trixie and Jim noticed a very large, white rock over by the edge of the trees. They looked at each other and grinned, the same thought entering their minds.

"Go!" Jim yelled. Trixie and Jim dropped the things they had been carrying and raced over, prepared to jump on the rock. Honey looked over dubiously, not remembering a rock there when they had entered the park.

She looked on as Jim and Trixie started to jump on the rock and suddenly stopped. "Oh my goodness, I'm soooo sorry," Honey heard her brother say.

"Yeah, um, we thought you were a rock," Trixie said in a mortified voice.

Honey shook her head and giggled as she realized what had happened, glad she had not participated in the "ambush." Jim and Trixie were both blushing furiously as, without a word, they picked up the belongings they had dropped.

"Are you talking to rocks now, brother dear," she asked sweetly as they headed out of the park.

"Umm, no, it wasn't a rock," Jim muttered.

"It wasn't?" Honey feigned surprise. "Well, then, what was it?"

"A blanket," Trixie stated simply.

By this time the trio was at the Jeep and starting to throw their various parcels into the back.

"Tsk, tsk, did you guys just disturb two people under a blanket?" Honey asked with a mischievous gleam in her eye.

Trixie and Jim looked at each other and suddenly their embarrassment at having almost jumped on two people (who quite clearly did not want to be disturbed) fled, and they started laughing with Honey.

"This will make quite a story, won't it?" Jim finally asked. "The time I jumped on two people having sex in the park!"

Trixie and Honey laughed as they adjusted their seatbelts and settled into their seats.

Trixie didn't know what her friends were thinking during the ride home, but she herself was daydreaming about tomorrow. *Tomorrow*, she thought. *A word that holds so much promise.*

When Jim turned the Jeep into the lane at Crabapple Farm, Trixie felt a pang of disappointment that her perfectly perfect summer day was over.

She said good-bye reluctantly to her friends and started to climb out of the Jeep, but Jim grabbed her arm. "I'll see you tomorrow, Trixie?" His green eyes looked deep into her blue ones, and she knew what he was asking.

"Tomorrow, Jim." She smiled happily and carried the picnic basket up to the white frame farmhouse she called home.

Tomorrow.