

Again, many thanks to those who responded to my call for help in finding Mart canon scenes to write. This one is dedicated to Anna, Diana, Susan, and Trish, who love Mart's various reactions to Trixie's shenanigans in this book! And, of course, it's dedicated to the lovely Mary Carey. I didn't get this done as soon as I had hoped, so it's unedited by anyone except me. *gulp* I apologize right now, because I'm a lousy self-editor!

**Mart Belden in:
Old Lamps for New
by Dana**

I've got another confession to make. Again, if you promise not to judge if I tell you, I promise not to use big words.

You know, like how last time I was *completely* honest and admitted that getting away from Crabapple Farm and going to camp was boring, how I was jealous that Trixie had managed to scare up a lot of excitement while I was gone, and how I got myself into an unbelievably dangerous situation to prove I was more than Trixie's shorter haired "almost-twin" and worthy of Di's attentions?

It's all about *quid pro quo*, no?

Wait! You're holding *Latin* against me? It's the *basis* of our language. And those were short words! Four letters or less. Much better than four letter words of a different...

What? Okay, fine. I get it.

All right, in words of one syllable, I'll get on with it.

It all began when...

We Bob-Whites were all in a tizzy, meeting on the Manor House veranda and eating post-wedding grub after the "horror-cane," none of us thinking straight...except for Brian and Trixie.

Brian knew we had to get our wood order in as soon as possible to fix the clubhouse roof before bad weather set in, and he knew the only way to do that was to sacrifice the \$50 he'd saved for his jalopy. (Can you believe he was able to get a car for \$50? Me neither!)

Anyway, Trixie was thinking straight because she knew she had to find a way to save that car for Brian.

That conversation on the veranda that day? Not one of our best Bob-White discussions. Brian exploding that yes, Jim was rich, but he couldn't touch any money he didn't earn. Jim, not to be outdone, reminding Brian that *his* money had been saved for the express purpose of buying a jalopy—and nothing else. Honey throwing into the ring her argument, absolutely adorable in its beloved Honey-speak about borrowing money from Miss Trask because the clubhouse had "saved" her dad's prized blue spruce.

That's when Jim and Honey started throwing out ridiculous terms like "stepsister" and "very own full-blooded adopted sister." I have to tell you—Honey made more sense on that one. Stepsister? What was Jim thinking? She wasn't his stepsister! I agreed with Honey. She was definitely his full-blooded adopted sister.

Blood was thicker than water, right? And love was thicker than blood. And these two had it in spades.

Anyway, it was in the middle of all of this chaos and discord and rhyming that Trixie announced that she had a plan that made sense. In retrospect, I regret covering my face with both hands and announcing that she'd land us all in jail.

Once Trixie outlined her plan for us all to take Fleagle's job as gamekeeper, I moved toward optimistic. True, Jim and Brian pointed out that we couldn't ask for a week's worth of pay in advance, but Trix was on to something. Even after Brian was all Dr. Doom about his fifty bucks, I had a feeling that if we worked together as Bob-Whites, all would be well.

Jim and Brian may have been all doom and gloom, but it was seriously hard to miss Trixie perking up, her blue eyes shining and sandy curls bouncing, when she suddenly beckoned for Honey to follow her inside.

I confess that I *may* have followed them when I thought it was safe, and I *may* have heard some stuff.

But not enough. Which I regret forever, because I *totally* could have prevented a lot of misunderstandings from occurring *if Trixie and Honey had just let me in on the see-crud from the beginning!*

And I won't even go into my hyperventilation about actually thinking that Di *liked* Ben. If only I'd known she was helping my sister out of a scrape.

Anyway, I knew I should've followed the two of them off the veranda immediately, but with all of the Jim-and-Brian-honorability-glowiness surrounding us, I wasn't sure how to do so unobtrusively. Once I realized that Jim and Brian were in a deep conversation about bearing loads, joists, and collar beams, and didn't even seem to notice that the electricity had been turned back on inside the house, I figured that they wouldn't miss me, and I could sneak away to Honey's room, where I presumed my almost-twin had her collared. With the electricity back on, I needed to collect my wayward sister and get a start on all the chores that awaited us at Crabapple Farm, anyway.

As I approached Honey's room, I could hear Trixie talking through the flimsy door.

"Nobody can swoon properly unless she looks a little something like the 'Lily Maid of Astolat,' which I definitely don't."

Wow. Trix throwing out an Arthurian literary reference. And she complains I talk fancy!

Wondering why my sister was worried about the art of swooning, I knocked on Honey's bedroom door and poked my head inside.

"I've got news for you, Trix. The electricity is on, so household chores await you at home."

My sister's response was certainly not what I had expected.

"Chores?" she asked, buffing her stubby, slightly soiled fingernails against the ragged cuff of her sweater. "Surely you can't mean anything that might give me dishpan hands?"

I couldn't help it. I stared at her openmouthed. "What-at did you say?" I managed to gasp out.

“It isn’t that I don’t want to cooperate, you must understand. It’s just that Ben, well, he wouldn’t like it. Ben. Ah, Ben!”

If I had any hair to clutch, I would have clutched it. As it was, I simply clasped my hands above my head and demanded, “Ben who, lamebrain? If you are referring to Benjamin Franklin, I’ve got news for you. He died before you were born and so couldn’t care less if you have dishpan hands.”

Dishpan hands? *Dishpan hands?* Trixie had obviously finally lost it. Of course, she would do almost anything to get out of chores...but acting liked she’d gone all “frail and feminine” all of a sudden? That was a new one!

It was Honey who spoke next. “Trixie’s quite right, Mart,” she said firmly. “Ben wouldn’t like it. I mean, after all, when a girl starts wearing diamond rings, she’s just got to have pretty hands. What I mean is, it’s obvious, you know. Ben Riker and Trixie. It is obvious, isn’t it, Mart? I mean, he’s my very own full-blooded cousin, and she’s your very own full-blooded sister, so *we* should know, shouldn’t we?”

I didn’t know anything of the sort. I couldn’t begin to fathom what she was talking about. I let out a loud groan. “So far as I am concerned she’s a full-blooded, but very lazy, squaw. And if she doesn’t get down to the family tepee soon and cope with the dust and the dishes, I’ll brain her. Not,” I added as I departed, eager to get away from the insane asylum, “that she has a brain to be brained.”

I stalked off with heavy, angry footsteps.

Femmes! I would never understand them!

Especially when Trixie appeared at dinner that evening wearing a red-and-white dotted-swiss Nylon frock, white socks, and black patent leather slippers. I hadn’t even known she owned anything that girly! She had brushed and dampened her blonde curls so that they looked almost as neat as though they had been set by a beauty parlor expert. I admit that I had to give her props for that. She had also obviously helped herself to Moms’ hand lotion and toilet water, because she smelled decidedly un-Trixie-like.

Nobody said a word for a long minute. I did the only thing I could think to do. Clearly, Brian and Dad had the same idea, for we all, simultaneously, took large sips from our water tumblers.

It was our diplomatic father who broke the silence, sounding rather choked. We all stared as he reminded my sister that our Thanksgiving open house was more than a week away.

Trixie’s response was astounding.

“Oh, Dad.” Trixie waved her hands airily. “How can you be so ridic? This isn’t a party dress. It’s just a very simple little thing Moms found last summer in a bargain basement. But it is becoming, isn’t it? I mean, Ben liked it. Of course, it does need jewelry to set it off, don’t you agree? Just a simple little pin or a necklace or a ring would do it.”

I couldn’t help it. I uttered a sound identical with the yelp Reddy emitted whenever Bobby accidentally stepped on his tail. I drained my water glass, and needing to do *something* other than sit there and look at my loony sister, took it out to the kitchen to be refilled. I nearly collided with Moms and the large platter of fried chicken she carried, but I managed to escape into the kitchen before I heard her take on Trixie’s ridiculous getup!

I refilled my water glass, and as I headed back out to the dining room, I could hear Bobby saying, “You smell funny. Mostly, you smell all nice and sunshiny the way Reddy does after he’s gone swimming in the lake. Now you smell sort of—”

I came back through the swinging door then and said, “We know Bobby. None of us will ever forget the day that you got the flea powder can mixed up with Moms’ talcum powder. Reddy will never forget it either.” I couldn’t help being a smartass. If Trixie was going to be obnoxious, I was going to give it right back to her in spades. How else could I get her to realize what a first-class dope she was being? I stopped behind Trixie’s chair and sniffed elaborately. “Yes, Bobby, you’re quite right. She does smell very much the way Reddy did on that unfortunate occasion.”

There! I’d set the trap. She’d be back to the old Trixie in no time, as I knew my short-tempered sister couldn’t resist rising to my bait.

Except...she did.

After a pause, she quoted from *Romeo and Juliet*, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

Two literary references in one day? Really?

I groaned and said to Brian, “She’s gone in for *non sequiturs* in a big way, no?”

“Yes,” Brian said succinctly.

It was then that my sister went on about Ben being a “sophisticated boy” and actually insisting that Dad take the diamond ring Jim gave her out of the bank! Was she serious?

Moms actually backed up Trixie’s request, and Dad nodded in shell-shocked agreement. Brian threw an absolute fit then, and I didn’t blame him. He called Ben a goon—which he was. Bobby defended him, but Brian and I had a lot to say on the subject of Ben in response. That got Moms’ defending him, too! Apparently, the reason that he plays all of those stupid practical jokes is because he’s “just young for his age.”

It went on like that all week. Trixie dressed for dinner, each night increasing the amount of jewelry she wore—except on her hands. Which she declared felt naked. She also doodled “Trixie Belden loves Benjamin Riker” on every scrap of paper she could find. By Thursday night, the night that Dad gave into her insanity and promised to get her ring from the safety deposit box, Brian and I, worn out by the work we had to do on the clubhouse in the few hours of daylight we had, stopped making comments. Clearly, “ladylike Trixie” wasn’t a passing fad. My stubborn sister was bound and determined to get that ring.

I suspected it wasn’t because of some out-of-nowhere “yen for Ben,” but I couldn’t figure out exactly *why* it was so important she have that ring.

Even as Trixie was hugging Dad in her excitement, Brian and I started making dire predictions of how she would lose it: dropping it down the kitchen drain, losing it in the chicken-feed bin, or losing it swimming in the lake.

Even Bobby chimed in, beating on his plate with a spoon to attract attention. “You better not lose that ring, Trixie. It must be worth a zillion dollars.”

In the end, it was worth something *way* more than a zillion dollars, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

The next week was a blur of activity. Preparing for Thanksgiving, Ben's arrival, acting as gamekeepers, working on the clubhouse roof. Trixie was acting more suspicious than ever, but with everything that was going on, I didn't really have a chance to question her as much as I wanted to. And, I must admit that I got a little distracted when Trixie's yen for Ben became Di's yen for Ben! Since when did she want to sit around and listen to music? I'd have done that with her if I'd known that's what she wanted! Femmes! It was nice having Ben occupied while we were so busy, but did he have to be occupied with the fair Diana?

Harumph.

I finally got the chance to ask her some questions one evening when she and Honey were late in returning from patrolling the game preserve. Brian, Jim, and I were just about to do the honorable thing and search for them when they arrived back at the stables.

After some back-and-forth banter, I followed her into the tack room and confronted her. "Come on, Sis, 'fess up. You're in some sort of scrape, and you know it."

It was Honey who came quickly to my sister's rescue. "Oh my goodness!" she cried exasperatedly. "Can't you leave her alone? Don't you know that her heart is broken and all because Ben is so crazy about Di?"

Jim and Brian, apparently, bought this hare-brained story, and left the stable. But not me. I simply perched myself on the edge of the work table and began to whistle. I watched the two girls clean the tack but when no one said anything further, I took the plunge.

"Don't you girls try to give me any of that. You almost had me fooled for a while, Trix. But when you disappeared so mysteriously yesterday afternoon, instead of lurking around and waving your diamond ring in Ben's face, I knew for sure that you had simply been using him for an excuse." I lowered my voice to a whisper: "*Why did you ask Dad for the ring, and where is it now?*"

"None of your business," Trixie retorted.

"Did you pawn it?" I persisted. "Or lose it?"

It was Honey who replied, quite spiritedly, I might add. "Neither, Mart Belden, and it *is* none of your business. If you knew the real reason why Trixie asked her father for the ring, you'd die of shame."

So excited was I to have my suspicions confirmed that I completely ignored her remark about dying of shame.

"So?" I asked, brows raised. "The plot thickens. Mr. Lytell, among others, is very, very suspicious." I elucidated that he had seen Trixie exiting the woods after dark the day before, and I had explained to the suspicious storekeeper about our new gamekeeper jobs since Fleagle had quit, using that as a plausible explanation for Trixie's curious behavior.

"Oh, all right, Mart," Trixie suddenly exploded.

Ah ha! I thought. *I'm finally going to learn what's going on!*

But what Trixie admitted didn't explain a darn thing about the diamond ring. But what she did tell me—that the girls suspected a poacher of lurking in the game preserve—made all thoughts of that blasted diamond ring flee from my mind. We hatched a plan to deal with the poacher if the girls' found definitive evidence of one, and it was much later that I realized that I never did find out what was so important about Mrs. Frayne's old engagement ring.

Fortunately, it was Trixie herself who provided me with leverage to learn her see-crud. The squaw borrowed our little brother's wrist compass—and promptly “lost” it. And, of course, Murphy was in full action, because Bobby, after not having mentioned that compass for forever, suddenly decided that he needed it the very next day to hunt down some par-squirrel contraption that Ben had rigged up.

Listening my little brother's his howls of fury upon learning that the compass was lost inspired my devious plot to get the real story behind that ring from Trixie. I'd simply offer to pour oil on the troubled waters by lending my own wrist compass to the little imp for his “hunting” expedition. When I told Trixie that I'd lend him said compass, I told her I needed a favor in return. Not surprisingly, Trixie was immediately agreeable.

“I'll do anything,” Trixie said, “if you can keep Moms from looking at me as though she thought I were a thief.”

“Pooh,” I said airily, knowing that Moms was doing no such thing. “So far as our maternal parent is concern, you are already forgiven since you immediately confessed your crime. She may have a few well-chosen words to say to you on the subject later, but that will be that. Once Bobby is all sunny smiles again, the thing will soon be forgotten. Since I am the one who can produce those smiles, I will now dictate the terms. I will lend him my wrist compass on this condition: You tell me here and now why you asked Dad to get that diamond ring out of the bank. I am not a member of the feline family, but curiosity is slowly but surely killing me.”

“Oh, all right,” Trixie said crossly. “But you've got to promise to keep it a secret.”

Inside, I was feeling an enormous sense of triumph, eager to *finally* hear what scheme my hare-brained sister had cooked up. I couldn't imagine what it was. Outwardly, I made an elaborate gesture of crossing my heart.

Trixie began her tale at the very beginning, and as she was talking, my heart started swelling with pride and joy. I was so thrilled that Brian hadn't lost his jalopy—and impressed with Trixie's ability to come up with a mature and first-rate solution to the problem—that I couldn't help it. I just had to show my almost-twin how fantastic I thought she was in that moment. I threw my arms around her and hugged her so tightly that she started making gasping sounds, and I realized that she couldn't breathe.

I relaxed my grip a little, and because I had to temper my excitement a little—or it would have gone to Trixie's head, natch—I cried happily, “You super-stupendous lamebrain! How do you do it? You always give the impression that you're totally insane, and yet, in the end, you're the only one who makes sense.”

So happy was I that I danced around the kitchen with her until Trixie tapped me on the head with Moms' vegetable grater.

“Listen, muttonhead,” she said, gasping for breath, “it's not as simple as you seem to think. There is a poacher in the preserve. We can't collect our salary as gamekeepers on Saturday if we don't do something about him first.”

I immediately sobered and collapsed on the kitchen stool. “True,” I agreed. “But your cabin-in-the-clearing story is so fantastic I can’t believe a word of it. But first things must come first. Right now I shall go upstairs and pour oil on the trouble water’s of Bobby’s anguished sobs. While I am doing so, Moms will undoubtedly seize that opportunity to explain to you the meaning of the Shakespearean quotation: ‘Never a borrower nor a lender be.’ Then you must bathe and don suitable garments so that I can escort you up to the Manor House where a festive repast awaits us. En route, we can discuss the poacher problem and what to do about it.”

As I hurried out of the kitchen toward Bobby’s room, I was still absolutely floored by my sister. Her grades in school weren’t always the best, but she had the kind of smarts that would go far in the real world, after school was done. We menfolk might tease her and Honey about their “detectiving” ambitions, but I bet they *would* someday open the Belden-Wheeler detective agency, and Trixie would make a great private investigator. Don’t tell her I said that, though!

Trixie could be exasperating at times, but she was also thoughtful, generous, and fiercely loyal to those she loved. If I felt this grateful about her saving Brian’s jalopy, I couldn’t even imagine how Brian was going to feel when he found out! I couldn’t wait to see his face!

In the end, though, I didn’t get to see his face when he found out. I was off looking for Bobby, who had run away after thinking he “lost” Trixie’s diamond ring (which was, of course, a fake, as the real diamond was in Mr. Lytell’s safe at the store). It was Trixie who found him, and to soothe the boy’s tears, she had told him the story of the ring and Brian’s jalopy, throwing in Aladdin’s lamps from *Arabian Nights* just for good measure (she’s a lot more literary than I thought, my sister!). Old lamps for new, and all that jazz. Brian happened to overhear the tale, and from what I understand, he was so happy and appreciative that he was all choked up and could barely speak.

Brian may be quiet, but his emotions run deep. His reaction didn’t surprise me at all.

I’m pretty lucky to have a brother like Brian and a sister like Trix. Not to mention Moms and Dad and Bobby, and friends like Jim, Honey, and Di. This whole experience has made me appreciate what I have all the more.

What happened with the poacher? Well, that particular mystery off Glen Road is another story for another time.