

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, Kate, and Susan, who love Mart coming to the rescue in *The Happy Valley Mystery*. There's also a couple shout outs to Mart scenes from *Gatehouse* and *Black Jacket* that Amygirl (Moms!) loves. Julia, Mary, and Susan deserve a huge thank you for their speedy edit, even though I'm the procrastinator. As always, it's dedicated to the lovely Mary Carey, whose Mart is an inspiration!

## **Mart Belden in: The Rescue by Dana**

All right, I've already confessed a few things you may not have known about me—how jealous of Trixie I was that she got better adventures while I was at camp, how proud of her I was for saving Brian's jalopy, that sort of thing. So, I might as well keep the streak going. This time is all about the time we Bob-Whites (well, all of us except Dan, who had to be tutored this vacation) visited Uncle Andrew's farm out in Iowa and how Trixie got herself in hot water. Or rising water, as the case may be...

We all wanted a nice relaxing vacation, for the most part, but before the plane to Des Moines had even taken off, Trixie was worried about Uncle Andrew's sheep. To be fair, Uncle Andrew and the Gormans, the couple who take care of his Iowa property while he travels, were worried about his sheep, too, as many more than normal were suddenly disappearing.

As soon as Uncle Andrew muttered the words "downright mysterious" to my sister, I knew that any hope of a purely relaxing week in the Midwest was out the window, even though he followed those words up with, "You young folks forget all about it and have a good time. Happy Valley is a place to have a good time."

To be honest, I was okay with a little excitement mixed in with my relaxation. That's just how I roll. I do recognize that I am a lot more like my almost-twin than I let on, but if I were ever to admit something like that, I'd never hear the end of it!

The trip did turn out to be a good mix of relaxation and excitement. On the relaxation side, there was playing with Tip and Tag, horseback riding, dancing the Charleston with Di to the Gormans' old records, fishing, a basketball game and dance at Rivervale High (although considering what happened there, maybe those particular activities should go in the excitement column), ice skating at the local rink, mothering an "orphaned" black lamb the mother ewe wouldn't accept, rabbit hunting, hanging out with new friends, and the like. And the food was top notch to boot, too! On the excitement side, there was rounding up lost sheep in a blizzard, helping the found sheep out of a gully in a blizzard, chasing after trucks driven by mysterious men with beards, and sneaking around the woods at night spying on the hired help (how was I to know he was just possum hunting?).

But the most excitement-filled event was one that was not welcome, not welcome at *all*. Who had known the danger that Jim, Trixie, and Honey would be in when they left on an otherwise *relaxing* afternoon to go validate our travel reservations?

Now, I knew that we could have easily have validated the reservation over the phone, but I also knew that Trixie and Honey needed an excuse to get away to explore, certain that there was something mysterious going on in Walnut Woods, a dense, wooded area near the farm, and that the sheep thieves were hiding out in there. When we had arrived in Iowa, Mr. Gorman had even warned us that the woods were a good place for us to stay out of because many a person has been lost there. At the same time, he had mentioned the other boundary of the woods, the

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Raccoon River. What we didn't know was that he also had provided us with a piece of information that had seemed trivial at the time but became crucial. He had noted that the river was a little high and liable to go a lot higher.

If we had only paid attention to that simple—but oh-so-critical—statement.

Unfortunately, the day the trio decided to explore Trixie's hunches also happened to coincide with a heavy, heavy downpour. Combined with the recent snow melt, the rains caused the river, its waters already threatening to overflow the banks, to flood. And do I mean *flood*. The force of the rushing water washed away the bridge over the river, and as Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote, there was "water, water everywhere."

After our fellow Bob-Whites left to go to the airport, the rest of us New Yorkers were having a grand time at the Ned Schultz' house, completely forgetting the time in all of the fun until Brian looked at the clock.

"Gleeps!" he exclaimed. "Trixie, Honey, and Jim should have been back by now!"

Mrs. Schulz looked at the clock and agreed, a worried look shadowing her features. "I hope they're okay."

Brian and I locked eyes.

"We could have confirmed our reservations over the telephone," Brian said, his dark eyes suddenly alive with understanding.

"Trixie and Honey wanted to explore Walnut Woods for clues to the sheep thieves," I stated, knowing it would have been easy for my younger sibling to finagle Jim to do her beckoning.

At that, Ned's mother gave a startled exclamation and rose. "With this rain, that's not safe! The river was already high, and it's sure to flood in this downpour!" She crossed the kitchen to the telephone and immediately called the Gormans.

Di's violet eyes filled with tears as she looked at me in horror. "They'll float away in that old jalopy of Ben's!" Ben, who also worked on my uncle's farm, had been kind enough to allow us the use of his jalopy, which was about as beat-up as Brian's.

I took Diana's hand in mine, trying to comfort her as well as myself. "They've been in worse scrapes than this. They're smart. They're going to be fine. Jim would never let anything happen to his sister or his...to Trixie," I finished.

I had eyes in my head. I knew Jim considered Trixie his "special girl" even if neither he nor my sister truly realized it. But for some reason I felt uncomfortable acknowledging this. Maybe it was because I felt the same way about Di, but I had never admitted that to her, either.

Mrs. Schulz came back to report that Mr. Gorman was going to launch a boat from Sand Hill, the highest point in the area, and go looking for them.

I immediately stood. "I'm going, too," I declared.

"Mart, no!" Brian and Di both exclaimed in one voice.

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I looked at them, determined. "I know Trixie's mind better than anyone's. I'll know where to look."

Brian and Di gave small nods, realizing the truth in my statement, and I hurried over to the farm to insist to Mr. Gorman that I accompany him. He was in such a rush to get out and look for the trio that he gave into my arguments pretty quickly, no doubt realizing I was not going to take no for an answer and that he'd be wasting precious time to try to change my mind.

I can be as persuasive as Trixie when I want to be.

Somehow, news had already spread of our predicament, and as we parked at Sand Hill I saw that a small crowd of people had gathered. I also saw how badly flooded everything below Sand Hill was. And that was where my sister and my friends were.

I gulped, hoping that they were okay. They had to be. They just *had* to!

A couple of the men helped Mr. Gorman and I lower the boat into the flooded waters at the bottom of Sand Hill. Armed with a flash lantern, Mr. Gorman's rifle, and a megaphone that one of the men shoved at me, we were off.

I explained to Mr. Gorman where Trixie had seen the lights in the woods, and he set off in that direction with grim determination.

The motor on the boat was loud, discouraging conversation, but I wasn't in a conversing mood anyway. As we sped along the flooded river, a million thoughts crowded through my head. Our first house party, when I had arrived up at the Manor House with a suitcase for us Beldens, very smartly and not at all cheesily shouting, "Gleeps, creeps, and weeps! Have you heard about the house party, Trix?"

Thinking of that suitcase and Trixie made me think of Honey, and a certain incidence with *her* suitcase. Right around the time that Dan had arrived in Sleepyside and turned Di's head, I had decided that I needed to up my game. Honey was spending the night one evening, so I decided to practice some chivalry on her. Apparently, Brian had the same idea. So, there the two of us were, Brian wearing his new cashmere sweater and I wearing my snazziest ski sweater, out front of Crabapple Farm vying to carry Honey's bag for her. I let Brian win since I was just practicing for Di, but I knew he was in it for real with Honey. Out of deference to my brother, I didn't let loose the Mart charm. I was saving it for Di, anyway.

Then, as we raced along in the darkness, other, darker thoughts crossed my mind, some I'd only found out about secondhand, but frightening nonetheless. Trixie, Honey, and Jim trying to put out the fire at Ten Acres that Jim's stepfather had started with his lousy cigarette. Trixie and Honey trapped in the loft of a barn by ruthless trailer thieves. Jim being knocked out by Dick the Dip. Trixie being held at gunpoint by Tilney Britten. Trixie, Jim, and Brian being lost overnight in a blizzard.

I reminded myself that they'd gotten themselves out of those scrapes.

*One of these days, though, odds are, they're not going to be able to*, an evil little voice whispered inside my head.

"Not this time," I murmured, willing that voice to shut up. "*Not today.*"

Mr. Gorman cut the engine just then, and I looked around toward where he was waving the flash lantern. He asked, "Is this near the place you think they went?"

"It's hard to tell with all of this water, but I think so," I replied.

"Why don't you grab the megaphone and call to them?" he suggested.

"Jim! Jim! Trixie! Trixie! Honey! Honey!" I called into the megaphone, happy that someone had thought to send us off with it.

I strained my ears, willing there to be a response.

Silence.

I tried again, ever hopeful. "Jim! Jim! Trixie! Trixie! Honey! Honey! Are you out there? Answer! Jim! Trixie! Honey! Trixie-e-e!"

That's when I heard it, and relief flooded over me...er, forgive me, washed over me. I never want to hear the word flood again!

Clear and shrill in the darkness came the most welcome sound, the sound of the Bob-White whistle. "Bob...Bob-White! Bob...Bob-White!"

I threw my arms in the air for joy, completely forgetting for a moment that I was in a small boat, and gave an answering whistle. "Bob...Bob-White! Bob...Bob-White!"

"What in tarnation is that?" Mr. Gorman asked.

"That's our call. That's them!" I said triumphantly.

With no further urging, Mr. Gorman started the motorboat back up. Its motor turned over, started up, and straight as an arrow, we came to the edge of the old red barn on which Trixie, Honey, and Jim had found refuge. I was thankful that they had been able to find high "ground" in all of this water.

Mr. Gorman raised his gun and shot into the air.

From the far edge of the water another gun answered.

"They know you're safe," Mr. Gorman said. "Thank God."

We helped the wet trio into the boat—along with a wriggling little newcomer, a puppy they'd saved from the rising waters. He was a cute little thing, whom I ended up naming Moses, me being the literary guy I am and all. During the ride back, Trixie, Honey, and Jim were mostly quiet, Trixie cuddling the little puppy close to her. I looked at my sister.

"Did you get what you needed?" I asked.

Trixie smiled triumphantly, despite the gravity of the situation. "I saw the thieves! They're stuck on high ground in their truck! I can tell the sheriff exactly where to find them—exactly—and they can't get out!"

I grinned back at her, thinking, *Gumshoe Trixie tracked down the sheep thieves after all. The team of Belden and Wheeler, private detectives, always gets their man!*

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I couldn't help but also think that the price of Trixie's triumph this time had almost been too high.

When we returned, grounding the boat at the foot of Sand Hill, the crowd had grown to about fifty people, including Brian and Diana, who joyously threw their arms around the trio. It wasn't long before we were back in the warmth and safety of Happy Valley Farm, with Mrs. Gorman fussing over those who had been lost.

Suffice to say, Trixie did lead the sheriff to the sheep thieves and provided the final clue that would serve as evidence to lock them up for a long time. It had looked a little dire there for a while, but Trixie had managed to pull through yet again, and thankfully, the Happy Valley mystery we had all stumbled into had a happy ending.

Thanks to my rescue, natch! ;)