

This is a Circle Writing Event #2 (The Plot Bunny CWE) entry. Many, many, many thanks to Misty for taking the lead on the CWEs and coming up with the *awesome* plot bunny idea! I chose the following plot bunny: "The events of the Secret of the Mansion from Bobby's POV—but it should be an older Bobby recalling what had happened that summer. Exactly how old is up to the author, just that he *not* be six talking about a see-crud. He could be thirteen himself wishing he had adventures like Trixie did at thirteen, an old man telling the story to his grandchildren (or maybe Trixie's), or an adult of any age." I hope I did the plot bunny justice and the submitter is happy with the story that resulted with the inspiration!

This story is dedicated to my mom and my "Moms". Pat (Amygirl) is my honorary Moms, and I love her to pieces, and she loves Bobby, and so I chose this plot bunny! I hope she likes what I've done with the little imp! It's also dedicated to my mom, who instead of reading stories to my niece and nephew at bedtime tells them stories of when their mom was a kid to keep her memory alive.

Oh! And some of the names used *might* just be an homage to a certain show that features another spunky, blonde, teenage detective! One of the nicknames is a definite homage to my nephew, whom we affectionately call Mr. C.

Finally, many, *many* thanks to the fantabulous Susan who edited this in about 9 seconds flat. The woman never ceases to amaze me! Have I mentioned what a true Bob-White she is?

Read, Read, READ! by Dana

"Read, read, *read!*"

The command was one that he heard often. As a matter of fact, he'd heard it so often that he was convinced that *someone* had decided to seek revenge and tell his children to torment him by saying it. On some nights, the phrase was enough to make him want to lose his mind. On other nights, after a hard day at work when nothing seemed to go right, he had to look heavenward and count to ten so as not to lose his temper. After all, he always read to them when they asked. There was no need to demand it!

But then, on some nights, it didn't bother him in the least. Instead, it set off waves of nostalgia for when *he'd* been the little imp demanding that his older sister read *Peter Rabbit* until her voice was hoarse. Or so she always said, but he didn't remember a time that Trixie had *ever* lost her voice.

He smiled down at his youngest child, Logan. China blue eyes the size of saucers stared at him expectantly, and a riot of blond curls reminded him of himself at that age.

Yes, it was a nostalgic night, for sure.

"Yes, Daddy," a voice came from the other bed, on the other side of the nightstand that separated them. "Read, please!"

Again, large blue eyes and riotous blond curls greeted him as he turned his gaze to Logan's sister, older by seventeen minutes. When his wife had delivered two blond-haired, blue-eyed fraternal twins, Trixie had laughed and told him that boy/girl twins ran in their family, referring to her status with their older brother Mart as the "almost twins."

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Bob also had not missed the devilish glint in his sister's eyes when he and Lily had announced to their families that they were having twins. Trixie didn't need to express herself vocally for him to know that she was thinking about just desserts. But if twins were twice the handful, they were also twice the pleasure.

The blond sat down on the edge of Veronica's bed. Logan immediately protested. "But you don't have a book, Daddy!" he observed, his voice full of six-year-old indignation.

Bob's nostalgia wouldn't let go. "How would you like me to tell you a story instead of reading a book tonight?"

Both of the twins nodded excitedly, their curls vigorously bouncing. "Yes, please!" Polite Veronica said.

"Yes, please!" Logan echoed, not to be outdone.

"Good," their father said. "How about I tell you the story of something that happened when I was six years old?"

"This is a really-truly story?" Logan asked, his eyes shining. "I love really-truly stories!"

Bob smiled at his son. "Yep, this happened when I was your age."

"Wow!" Veronica breathed. "This story must have happened *forever* ago."

"Not as long as you'd think," Bob said dryly. "This is the story of how I helped Aunt Trixie find Uncle Jim."

"*You* helped Aunt Trixie find Uncle Jim?" Veronica asked, a doubtful expression gracing her angelic features. "That's not how Aunt Trixie tells the story."

"Aunt Trixie just tells the short version," Bob assured her. "Now, do you want to hear this story or not?"

Both twins nodded and settled back into their pillows, awaiting the story that was to come.

"We found Uncle Jim the same day that your Aunt Honey moved into the Manor House. Trixie couldn't wait to go meet the new neighbors once she saw that there were horses being led up the driveway. And, because she loved showing off her favorite little brother, she naturally took me with her to the Manor House."

"That's not what Aunt Trixie says!" Veronica inserted. "She says that she was trying to earn money to buy a horse by babysitting you, and she *had* to bring you along."

"She was babysitting me, true, but she really did want to show me off," Bob explained. "Anyway, that was when we first met Aunt Honey. She had a little black puppy named Bud. I loved that puppy! And, because Trixie wasn't a very good babysitter, I got to stay and play with Bud and Miss Trask while she and Honey went off exploring on the horses."

“What’s ‘sploring?” Veronica asked.

“I know!” Logan cried with six-year-old pride. “It means going where you’re not s’posed to go. Uncle Mart told me so!”

Bob chuckled. “The kind of exploring your Aunt Trixie did often involved going places she wasn’t supposed to, but what you’re describing is called ‘trespassing.’ Exploring is when you go to a new place and look around and see what you can find.”

“So, Aunt Trixie went s’ploring and founded Uncle Jim!” Veronica finished with glee.

“Who’s telling this story? You or me, kiddo?” Bob asked good-naturedly. He rued the fact that the twins had inherited their aunt’s propensity for interrupting. They certainly didn’t get it from *him*! Being called “the most interrupting-est little boy in all of Westchester County” by his seemingly-always-reprimanding older sister was just the tiniest glimmer of a faint memory in his mind.

“You, Daddy,” Veronica said with an angelic smile that melted Bob’s heart.

“That’s right!” he said with a grin. “So, I played with Miss Trask and Bud while Trixie and Honey explored, and then I went home for lunch. But Grand-Moms told me that lunch wasn’t ready, so I wanted to explore, too. From down in the hollow of Crabapple Farm, I looked up at Ten Acres and saw the horses, so I knew that’s where your aunts had gone exploring.”

“I love ‘sploring Ten Acres!” Logan said.

Veronica nodded her agreement. “Uncle Jim has the bestest playground. It’s better than our school’s playground.”

Bob said, “Yes, Jim’s playground is nice, but when I was your age, Jim’s great-uncle lived there, and he didn’t take care of the place at all. The house, which is no longer there, was practically falling down, and all of the trees and bushes were overgrown. It didn’t look anything like it does now, with Uncle Jim taking care of it, and there certainly wasn’t a playground.”

He paused and smiled. “But do you know what people said *was* there?”

“What, Daddy?” the twins chorused.

“Everyone said that there was a lot of money hidden in the Frayne mansion.”

“A *treasure*?” Veronica breathed.

“Like a pirate’s treasure?” Logan asked. “Buried and everything?”

Bob smiled. “Something like that.”

“Did they ever find the treasure, Daddy?” Veronica asked.

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"I bet Aunt Trixie and Aunt Honey did!" Logan exclaimed. "They're the best 'tectives ever!"

Bob chuckled. "You'll have to listen to my story to find out if we found the treasure or not. Are you ready to *listen*?" He smiled inwardly as both twins nodded, knowing there were going to be at least 219,882,399 more interruptions before the story was finished.

"So, when I saw the horses up at Ten Acres, I headed up there, but once I got close, I realized that everything was so overgrown that I couldn't figure out how to actually get to the house. I knew Trixie was there, so I called for her and then waited under a tree for her to find me. She came running to my call, as I knew she would, and she was so excited to see me that she hugged me."

"That's not what Aunt Trixie says!" Veronica stated. "She says that you were screaming your head off and that there was a mad dog on the loose and even though she was mad at you for screaming your head off, she was so glad that the dog didn't hurt you that she hugged you instead of shaking you."

"Your aunt exaggerates," Bob said, wondering how Veronica was able to say that many words in a row without taking a breath, and then hurried on with the story. "Jim was with her, and that was the first time that I got to see him. I don't know why he didn't stick around to say hi, because I was really good at keeping secrets, and I would have kept the secret that he was staying at the mansion, but as soon as he saw I was safe, he headed back to the house."

"So that's when you founded Uncle Jim, Daddy?" Logan asked.

Bob nodded. "Yep, that's when I found him," he confirmed.

"But didn't Aunt Honey and Aunt Trixie find him first before you saw him? Doesn't that mean that they really founded him first?" Veronica asked.

Bob waved his hand. "Semantics," he said, forgetting his audience for a moment.

Veronica giggled. "Now you sound like Uncle Mart!"

"Antics!" Logan chimed. "Mommy says I have antics!"

Bob chuckled once again. "You certainly do 'have antics,' Mr. L!" he agreed, using everyone's favorite nickname for the boy. He then rushed to continue his narration before Veronica could inject any more of her logic into the story.

"So, after lunch I took a nap and when I woke up, Grand-Moms had left for a Garden Club meeting and had left Trixie in charge." He grinned ruefully. "If your Aunt Trixie ever tells you that snakes don't go around biting people, don't listen to her."

"Did a snake bite you, Daddy?" Veronica asked, the horrified look on her face making Bob realize that maybe it wasn't such a good idea to tell this part of the story, but he had already started, so he figured he had to push on.

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“It did, but I don’t want you to be afraid of snakes. I was mean to the snake, and so it did what it thought it had to do. I didn’t mean to be mean—I just wanted to catch it—but he thought that I was trying to hurt him. He couldn’t use his words, so to get me to leave him alone, he did the only thing that he could do. So, if you see a snake, just leave him alone and walk away, okay?”

The twins nodded. “When I see a snake, I run away!” Veronica stated emphatically.

“I thought they’d be fun to play with,” Logan said, “but not if they bite!”

“Where did he bite you at, Daddy?”

Bob laughed and lifted up his bare foot, wiggling his big toe back and forth with his fingers. “Right here on my big toe!”

The twins giggled madly at this. “That’s funny, Daddy!” Veronica proclaimed.

“Want to know what’s even funnier?” Bob asked his children.

“What, Daddy?” Logan asked.

“Your Aunt Trixie saved me from the snake and carried me inside Crabapple Farm, and then you know what she did?” He paused as the twins shook their heads, their blue eyes wide. “She sucked my toe!”

“Ewww!” Veronica exclaimed, making a face akin to the one that she made when she was served lima beans. Logan, predictably, laughed hysterically.

“Why would she do that, Daddy?” Veronica wanted to know, even as her brother continued to guffaw loudly from his bed.

“Because the snake was a copperhead, and he put some poison in my toe when he bit me, so Trixie had to suck the poison out until the doctor could get there and give me a shot to stop the poison. Nowadays, there are snake bite kits that have a little pump in them to suck any poison out, but they didn’t have them back then.”

“I *told* you it was the olden days!” Veronica said triumphantly. Her father snorted in spite of himself.

“So, if you were poisoned, did Aunt Trixie save your life?” Logan asked.

“She did,” Bob agreed. “Of course, if she had been watching me better, I never would have left the garden and gotten bit in the first place!” As soon as Bob said the words, he wished that he could take them back. Although that was true, Trixie had been truly repentant and felt horribly about his accident. She had apologized profusely and had even been extra patient with him in the days following the incident before he and Moms had left for the seashore.

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“But don’t tell your aunt I said that! She acted very quickly after I was bitten, and she felt very badly that she hadn’t noticed I had left the garden. It’ll be our secret, okay?”

Veronica nodded solemnly while Logan piped up, “I love see-cruds, Daddy! I’m *really* good at keeping them, just like you were!”

Bob reached over and ruffled Logan’s blond curls. “I know you are, Mr. L.”

“What happened next?” Veronica wanted to know.

“Well, your aunt wanted to explore the old summerhouse that used to sit on the Frayne property, so she borrowed my flashlight. It was all covered in vines and leaves, and you couldn’t even see it anymore. It was kind of like going into a cave. Trixie had her own flashlight that she got for her birthday and never let me play with it, but I was good at sharing, so I let her borrow my flashlight for Honey.”

Veronica looked at her father pointedly. “Dad-*dy*,” she began, enunciating each syllable. “Aunt Trixie says that you did something called ‘blackmail.’ That you wouldn’t share your flashlight unless you read to her all afternoon.”

“She said that, did she?” Bob asked, thinking he needed to have a talk with his sister.

“Yep! She also said that she had to read to you, otherwise you were going to tell Grand-Moms that she had been ‘sploring up at the mansion.”

Before Bob could think of an appropriate response—other than, “Huh”—he was saved by Logan asking, “Did Aunt Trixie find the treasure in the summerhouse cave, Daddy?”

Bob shook his head. “Nope, there was nothing but cobwebs in there.”

“Yucky,” Veronica interjected.

“So, where did Aunt Trixie find the treasure?” Logan persisted.

“Did I say that Aunt Trixie ever found the treasure?”

“No,” the young boy admitted, “but in a good story, the treasure’s *always* founded!”

“Is it now? Well, there *is* more to this story. Can I finish?”

Once again, the twins nodded angelically, their wide blue eyes filled with eagerness and innocence, and Bob found he didn’t even mind the constant interruptions.

“Well, since I was such a good kid, your Grand-Moms and Grandpa took me to the seashore to have my own adventures. I got to swim in the ocean and build sandcastles and have a lot of fun.”

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“But then you were nowhere near the treasure!” Logan exclaimed. “So, how do you know what happened?”

“Your aunts and Uncle Jim told me, natch,” Bob explained. “You see, Jim had a mean stepfather.”

“Kind of like in *Cinderella* but with boys?” Veronica asked.

“Like that, sweetie, yes. And Jim’s stepfather was just as mean to him as Cinderella’s stepmother was to her. He came looking for Jim at his uncle’s house, and he accidentally started a fire in the mansion. That’s why the original Frayne mansion isn’t there, and when Aunt Trixie and Uncle Jim went to live at Ten Acres, they had to build a new house.”

“A new house *and* a new school!” Logan piped up.

“For boys like Uncle Jim who losted their mommies and daddies,” Veronica added.

“That’s right. But back to the story,” Bob said, clearing his throat in a teasing manner. “Your Aunt Honey and Aunt Trixie ran up to the mansion when they saw it was on fire. With Uncle Jim, they tried to put the fire out before the firemen came. Trixie pulled a mattress out of the window so that it wouldn’t help feed the fire. And you know what?”

“What?” the twins chorused.

“The treasure was hidden in that mattress!”

“It was?” Veronica asked while Logan whooped, “I just *knew* Aunt Trixie must have founded it!”

Bob chuckled. “Well, your Uncle Jim was the one who ended up finding it in the mattress later, but Trixie saved it from the fire, for sure.”

“Was it a gazillion dollars, Daddy?”

Bob smiled indulgently at his son. “Not quite, sport. But enough for Jim to live off of until Aunt Honey’s parents could adopt him. And you know the pretty ring that Aunt Trixie wears? That was a better treasure than the money, and Aunt Trixie found that up at the mansion, too.”

“How was some silly old ring better than money?” Logan asked with a scoff.

“Because a pretty, sparkly diamond ring is better than stupid old money,” Veronica told him in no uncertain terms.

“Is not!” Logan shouted.

“Is too!” Veronica retorted, just as loudly.

“Guys! Enough!” Bob said, his voice turning stern for the first time that evening. He might be patient through their endless questions, but he did not tolerate arguing.

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The twins stuck their tongues out at each other, but neither of them said a word after that.

“The ring was a special treasure,” he explained, his voice losing its sharp edge, “because it belonged to Jim’s great-aunt. He didn’t have a lot of things to remind him of his family, just his christening mug—you know, the big silver cup that sits above the fireplace at Uncle Jim’s house—and a family Bible. and the ring. *That’s* why it was special.”

“*And* because it was a diamond,” Veronica insisted. “Diamonds *are* special.”

Oh boy! Her father thought. *Six years old and already thinking about diamonds!*

Out loud he said, as he ruffled her curls as he had done her brother’s earlier, “You like diamonds, do you? Then I’ll have to tell you about the time I found a diamond in the Bob-White clubhouse before it was the clubhouse.”

“You did? You found a *diamond*?” Veronica asked excitedly. “Really and truly?”

“Really and truly.”

“Tell us that story, Daddy!” Logan begged.

Bob shook his head, already pulling the covers up around Veronica. “No can do, Mr. L. It’s already way past your bedtime. You need to sleep,” he said as he stood to kiss his daughter on the forehead. “Good-night, my little Veronica harmonica.”

Veronica smiled at the nickname. “G’night, Daddy. Thank you for the story.”

“You’re welcome, sweetie.” Bob smiled at his daughter as he moved over to tuck in his son. He would have liked to have kissed his precious boy on the forehead, too, but Logan had declared a month before that he was a *boy* and too old for that sort of thing.

“Can’t you tell us the diamond story?” Logan implored, even as he settled into his bed for sleep after his father had swaddled the sheet and blanket around him.

“I can, but not tonight. If you’re good for Mommy tomorrow, I’ll tell you that story tomorrow night.”

“You tell the bestest stories, Daddy,” Logan said. “Maybe you should write down all of your really-truly stories and put them in a book like *Peter Rabbit*.”

Bob smiled. “Maybe I should. Good night, Mr. L.”

He got up and turned on the butterfly nightlight that was near Veronica’s bed and then the football nightlight near Logan’s. As he paused at the door to shut off the overhead light, he turned for another long look at his twins. Their eyes were already closed, and if they weren’t already in dreamland, he knew that they soon would be.

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Just then, his wife joined him, giving him a gentle hug from behind. "You were up here a long time. How many times did they make you read *Peter Rabbit* this time?" she asked in a soft voice.

Bob turned and smiled at Lily. "None." At her surprised look, he explained, "I told them the story of how Trixie, Honey, and I found Jim."

Lily laughed quietly as the two headed back down the hallway to the living room, where they usually settled in after the twins went to bed to watch a movie or a television show while they munched on popcorn and cuddled. "You mean when Trixie and Honey found Jim!"

Bob grinned. "I may have embellished a little."

"I bet!"

"Hey!" Bob said, feigning hurt. "Logan enjoyed the story so much that he said I should become an author."

Lily looked at him skeptically. "He said that?"

"Well, not in so many words. But he does want me to write down my 'really-truly' stories and put them into a book."

"Maybe you should," his wife returned, a mischievous twinkle in her violet eyes.

"I'll have you know, Lily Lynch-Belden, that I got high marks in English," he said haughtily as they settled themselves on the couch.

"Having a human dictionary for a brother certainly did come in handy," Lily remarked dryly.

"He's your brother-in-law, too. Twice even!"

"Yeah, it's too bad that there wasn't another Belden brother for Violet, or it could have been three times!"

"I don't know if Moms could have handled another child to give her gray hairs! Anyway, back to the writing. You don't think I could do it?"

Lily leaned in to kiss her husband. "Of course, I think you can do it. I was teasing, and you know it. Of course, the way you tell it, the secret of the Frayne mansion would be that you were involved all along but that fact has been kept hidden all these years!"

Bob grinned. "I was *so* involved. Trixie used *my* flashlight to explore the old summerhouse," he said with an air of dignity.

"Keep telling yourself that," Lily said, kissing him once again and then standing up. "You find something to watch, and I'll go pop the popcorn."

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Bob watched his wife head into the kitchen, thinking of all of the gifts in his life. One thing that was no secret was how much he loved his family. They were more precious than a diamond ring, no matter how special, or a “gazillion” dollars hidden in a mattress. With that thought in mind, he got up to help his wife make the popcorn.

Secret of the mansion, indeed.