

Witty disclaimer: Umm, I guess I really don't have one except that I promise I have not made a penny off of this story. Don't you lawyers have anything better to do than to peruse Trixie fanfic? This is a Jixemtri Circle Writing Project #2. I carried over a "very important letter" from CWP#1.

Au Revoir a Jamais

by Dana

Trixie awoke to a dim ray of sunshine trying to sneak through the edges of her pulled window shade. She stretched sleepily and listened to the birds singing in the crabapple tree just outside her window.

Have they always sung this sweetly? Trixie wondered sleepily. Or am I just noticing them this morning because I am wonderfully, deliciously happy?

The sixteen-year-old lay in bed a few more moments contemplating her state of mind. She allowed her thoughts to drift to the day before at the park with Jim. In her memory, she was staring up at the handsome redhead, dimly aware of the azure sky above and the sparkling waters of the Hudson below. Jim's handsome face and warm green eyes were all that Trixie was fully conscious of. Being so near to Jim made her pulse race and caused those clichéd butterflies to dance in her stomach. Trixie loved standing so close, breathing in the masculine scent that she associated with Jim and only Jim.

Yesterday, he had seemed to read her thoughts, to realize that she wanted him to kiss her, to finally understand the depth of the feelings she had for him. He had taken her face in his large hands. He had told her she was beautiful. He had almost kissed her. Almost.

Trixie sighed and cursed the little kids that had stopped her dream from coming true. *Hopefully they didn't stop it*, Trixie thought, as she climbed out of bed. *Maybe it's just a little interruption. After all, Jim did tell me to meet him at the clubhouse so that we could talk.*

Trixie pulled on her favorite pair of denim cut-offs and a sunny yellow T-shirt and headed downstairs where she could already hear the rest of her family gathered. As she entered the sunny kitchen of Crabapple Farm, the smells of her mother's Sunday breakfast made her realize how hungry she was.

"Good morning everyone!" Trixie called out cheerfully as she grabbed some dishes to set the table with.

"Good morning, Trixie," her father said as he glanced up from the Sunday edition of the *Sleepyside Sun*.

"How was your day with Honey and Jim?"

Trixie's smile widened. "Wonderful!"

Mart saw her smile and started to open his mouth to comment but Trixie stopped him cold. "Not one word about how I got out of doing the dishes last night, Mart. I happen to have it on good authority that you were out with Di last night and that it was Bobby who helped Moms with the dishes."

Trixie's pre-emptive strike had the desired effect and Mart simply shrugged. "You got me on that one, Trix."

Trixie sat down at the table and helped herself to some toast, thinking how Mart's romance with Di had apparently given him some sort of confidence boost. He no longer felt the need to tease her mercilessly, and he had largely given up his habit of using the most outlandish words to convey his thoughts. Trixie thought it was a refreshing change, having waited years for this triumph.

Breakfast was a noisy affair. All of the Beldens realized that this would be the last Sunday breakfast they all shared for quite a while, and this seemed to make the four Belden children a little more boisterous than normal.

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Bobby picked up a strawberry from his plate and looked at it. "How do you tell the difference between an elephant and a strawberry?"

Mart and Trixie looked at each other, knowing this was a set-up of some kind, and waited for Brian to rise to the bait. He could always be counted on for that, and this time was no different.

"I don't know, Bobby. How *do* you tell the difference?" he asked with a smile.

"Well, if you can't tell, then I certainly wouldn't send you out to pick strawberries!" Bobby said with a look of smugness as he popped the strawberry into his mouth. Brian laughed obligingly while Trixie and Mart groaned.

Trixie looked at Mart. "I don't know why you're groaning. *You're* the one who gave him that book of elephant jokes!"

Mart grinned. "Touché, little sister, touché!"

After breakfast, Trixie did her chores as fast as possible and then jumped into the shower before she went to meet Jim. After she had quickly run a brush through her sandy curls and dressed, she glanced at the clock.

"Oh, whoa," she groaned. "A whole hour before I'm supposed to meet Jim! What am I going to do?" Resignedly, Trixie crossed over to her bookshelves and absently selected one of her favorite Lucy Radcliffe adventures.

"This should occupy my brain for the next hour," Trixie mumbled to herself as she flopped down on her bed and opened the book. But barely 10 pages in, Lucy was kissing a man she was spying on to get him to trust her. Trixie's mind once again strayed to the kiss she almost got from Jim yesterday, and she knew reading was hopeless.

The teen got up off the bed and started to return the book to its shelf, when she heard Bobby's voice.

"Oh baby, baby, how was I supposed to know that somethin' wasn't right here!" Trixie rolled her eyes as she realized Bobby was once again listening to his favorite singer, Britney Spears, on his Discman. "Oh baby, baby, I shouldn't have let you go and now you're out of sight! Yeah! Show me, how you want it to be! Tell me baby, cuz I need to know now what we've got!"

Trixie braced herself for Bobby's rendition of the chorus. "My loneliness is killin' me! And I, I must confess, I still believe, still believe! When I'm not with you I lose my mind! Give me a sign! Hit me baby one more time!"

Trixie rolled her eyes. Why did Bobby have to listen to that same CD over and over and insist upon singing it at the top of his lungs? It seemed like he had outgrown a whole host of annoying personality traits only to grow into a whole new, but just annoying, set of traits. Trixie shook her head and decided that she would not be able to wait out the remaining half-hour at Crabapple Farm and decided to head down to the clubhouse now.

She slipped on her battered moccasins and ran down the stairs. "Going to the clubhouse, Moms!" she called and soon she was running along the path to the old gatehouse.

Looking through the window when she arrived, she saw that Jim was already there, sitting at the table and leafing through the Bob-White scrapbooks that Honey and Di meticulously maintained for their club. Trixie took a deep breath and entered the cozy little clubhouse.

"Hi, Jim!" She said brightly and plopped herself down on the bench across from the handsome redhead.

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Jim looked up and smiled at the exuberant girl sitting in front of him. *Pure sunshine*, he thought. “Hi Trix.”

Trixie moved a bouquet of dead flowers so she could see the scrapbook more clearly. “I guess we can throw these flowers out,” she remarked. “They’ve been here a while.”

Jim nodded, suddenly feeling shy around the girl he could no longer hide his feelings from. He had lain in bed for hours last night, thinking of the perfect thing to say to Trixie today, but now that the moment was here, all rational thoughts flew from his brain.

Trixie was suddenly feeling awkward, too. She looked around the clubhouse, taking in the flooring that Dan had won at the ice carnival they had staged a few winters ago to aid earthquake victims in Mexico, the Monk’s cloth curtains that Honey had made with the very first money she had ever earned, and the shelves full of sporting equipment. Trixie smiled as she saw her old hula-hoop was still standing among the ice skates and pup tents.

Jim followed her gaze and smiled as he realized she must have been looking at the hula-hoop from her childhood days.

“You outgrew that before I ever even met you,” he commented.

Trixie smiled ruefully. “I know, but when Daddy made us clean out the garage for Fire Prevention Week a few years ago, I just couldn’t part with it.”

Jim looked, really looked, at the girl sitting in front of him. He had always loved her sandy curls, pert nose, and blue eyes that sparkled more brilliantly than the most brilliant sapphire. But today he wasn’t just noticing these things. Today he was noticing how full and inviting her lips looked, how her curves filled out her T-shirt beautifully, and how shapely her legs had become. At some point in the last three years, Trixie Belden had grown up.

Trixie cleared her throat. “So, umm, what did you want to talk about?”

Jim looked into her clear blue eyes and suddenly he wasn’t sure this was a good idea. What if she didn’t feel the same way about him? What if he was just another brother to her? What if he wrecked their friendship because he couldn’t hide his feelings anymore? Jim took a deep breath and pushed aside the feelings of doubt. It was now or never.

“Trixie, I thought about you a lot last year at State,” Jim started. “You know I went on a few dates, but what you don’t know is why.”

Trixie looked at him curiously. *Is he going to start talking about how great college girls are compared to a high school girl? Why does he think I would want to hear that?*

“I guess most colleges have a pretty socially active student body, but, well, MSU seems to have a more active one than most. At least it seems that way when I compare notes with Brian or friends at other universities. I went out with my friends a lot, but then halfway through the year, all of a sudden it seemed like everyone was paired off. Everyone but me. Not that I cared—I went there for an education. But, of course, people wanted to pair me off. They hooked me up with friends of friends and sometimes I’d even ask a girl out just because it seemed like it might be fun. At least more fun than sitting in my dorm room by myself while all of my friends had dates with their girlfriends.”

Jim paused and Trixie saw something glimmering in his green eyes that she couldn’t quite place.

“Well, Trix, here’s the hard part.”

“Why is it so hard, Jim? It’s me you’re talking to. Trixie. One of your best friends.”

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Jim realized by the expression on her face that Trixie was hurt that he didn't seem to trust her enough to confide in her.

"No! Trix! It's not like that at all! I trust you and I want to tell you, but it's because you're my...well, Trix, it's you more than Brian or anyone who is my best friend. I'm afraid of changing that by what I have to say."

Trixie held her breath. "Go on," she managed.

Jim closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he opened them he was disconcerted at the raw hope he saw reflected in the depths of Trixie's blue eyes. It gave him the courage to go on.

"I wasn't interested in anybody else because I already had a plan in mind."

"A plan?" Trixie was clearly confused.

Jim smiled ruefully. "Yeah, a plan that seems pretty weak when I think about it."

"What was it?"

"Well, I knew I had all these feelings about this one special girl. Feelings I had kept locked inside since the first moment I laid eyes on her in my uncle's run-down mansion."

Trixie's heart skipped a beat as she realized whom he must be talking about.

"I knew, at least I hoped, that someday she would be mine, and so all of the girls I met at school were inconsequential. Not one of them compared to the girl who had already stolen my heart. But that girl was hundreds of miles away and young and carefree and maybe she didn't want to be tied down to some guy who was far away. Maybe she didn't feel the same way about me. So I decided to keep my mouth shut about my feelings and wait 'til she had graduated from high school. Then I could reveal my feelings toward her," Jim's green eyes met and held Trixie's blue ones and the world seemed to stand still. Jim took Trixie's hands in his.

"But yesterday I realized that I could never wait that long. I realized that two years is too long to wait to kiss this special girl, and hold her in my arms, and run my fingers through her silky hair, and to make her mine. I can't wait, Trix, so I'm asking you now—will you be my special girl?"

For half-a-second, Trixie was too stunned to speak. But only for half-a-second. As if she was jet propelled, Trixie was up and around the table and throwing her arms around him.

"Jim! I've wanted this for so long. How could you think for a second I didn't feel the same way about you?" Trixie was hugging him, her hands feeling the cords of muscles that ran down his strong back.

"Is this a yes, you'll be my special girl?" Jim laughed.

"Yes!" Trixie laughed with him. "Yes!"

Trixie thought she would faint from sheer happiness and pleasure as she felt Jim's lips on hers, softly at first, but then building in pressure. Trixie had never been kissed before and she was thoroughly enjoying the experience now. She loved the feel of Jim's hands running through her hair, the feeling of his muscles under her fingertips. She parted her lips and allowed Jim's tongue to explore the sweetness of her mouth. The two finally pulled apart, breathless.

"Can I tell you a secret?" Jim whispered.

Trixie nodded, her smile reaching her eyes.

"I've always wanted to kiss you in the clubhouse. I'm so happy that this is the site of our first kiss."

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“And on today of all days!” Trixie sighed.

Jim thought about it for a moment, his brow furrowed as he tried to figure out the significance of the date. It wasn't Mrs. Belden's birthday; that was still a few days away. Suddenly, he remembered.

“And today of all days,” he agreed as he kissed her once again. “It certainly does seem fitting that our first kiss is on the anniversary of the day the BWG's were formed.”

Trixie smiled and nodded and the two sat for quite a while, kissing and talking and just generally enjoying each other's presence. Trixie looked down at her hand entwined with Jim's and wondered if there was a more beautiful sight in the world. Jim reveled in the feeling of just being near Trixie, wondering if anything in the world came close to what he was feeling at that moment. He could not be more exhilarated or alive or happy than if he had just climbed Mount Everest and was staring at the world from its summit. He was sure the petite blonde sitting next to him, with her sparkling eyes and happy smile, was more beautiful than any view from a mountain. Both of them kissed and cuddled, knowing that their relationship had turned a corner and feeling alive with all of the new possibilities that turning that corner presented.

Trixie and Jim were sharing a particularly ardent kiss when they became aware of voices heading up the path.

“Are you sure you heard Trix say she was coming to the clubhouse?” Brian's voice could be heard.

“Mine auditory apparatus did not deceive me, oh elder sibling.” Those words could only have been uttered by Mart.

“Then why doesn't Honey know where she is?” Brian was asking as he opened the clubhouse door. His eyes took in Jim placing the scrapbook on its shelf and Trixie throwing a bouquet of dead flowers in the trash can.

“What are you two up to?” He asked.

“Cleaning,” his sister and his friend replied in unison.

“Well, Moms said we had time for a short swim before she needs help with the party preparations.”

The Beldens were throwing an end of summer barbecue for Jim and Brian. All of the Bob-Whites and their families would be in attendance. Mr. Maypenny had been persuaded to “rustle up” a big batch of his hunter's stew and Mrs. Vanderpoel was bringing her famous Dutch windmill cookies.

Trixie nodded. “We'll meet you at the boathouse as soon as we're done here.”

Brian raised his eyebrows and looked at the spotless interior of the clubhouse but didn't say a word as he turned to leave.

Mart, however, looked right at Trixie. “So ‘cleaning’ is what you're calling it these days, eh?”

Trixie pretended to look confused but her trademark blush gave her away. “I don't know what you're talking about,” she tried to sound lofty, but she was not fooling either of her older brothers.

Mart took it in stride, was even amused, but there was no mistaking the “we-are-going-to-have-words-later-and-if-you-hurt-my-sister-I'll-hunt-you-down” look that Brian shot Jim.

“We'll see you in a few minutes at the boathouse,” Brian said rather shortly. With that, Brian and Mart were gone leaving Trixie bristling.

“How dare he tell us how long we have to get to the boathouse!” Trixie fumed.

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“Trix—” Jim tried to placate her, but her temper was off and running.

“Jim, did you hear how he emphasized that? ‘We’ll see you in a *few minutes*,’” Trixie mimicked her older brother. “Well, I’m about ready to take an *hour!*”

Jim looked at his girlfriend, amused. “Trix, he’s just being an older brother. Relax.”

Trixie was trying hard to act grumpy over her brother’s words, but it was becoming increasingly difficult with Jim kissing her neck. She giggled.

“I thought I might find a way to make you forget Brian,” he whispered in her ear.

“Brian who?” She said dreamily as she put her arms around him and started kissing him once again.

“It’s about time!”

Startled, Jim and Trixie broke apart and looked toward the door where Honey stood looking at them, a huge smile on her face.

“Honey, I...we...” Trixie stammered.

Honey waved her hand airily. “No need to explain. I know what you were doing and I couldn’t be happier! Ready for a swim?”

Trixie and Jim smiled and nodded. As they followed Honey out of the clubhouse, Jim took Trixie’s hand and winked at her. The three laughed and joked all the way to the boathouse, where they found Dan, Di, and Trixie’s brothers engaged in a friendly water fight.

“Hurry up and get changed, slowpokes!” Di yelled at the arriving trio.

“Yeah! Where the heck have you three been?” Dan called.

The questioned remained unanswered as the three hurried over to the boathouse, with a modesty stall for changing clothes, and changed into their swimsuits.

After an hour of swimming, water fights, and several races, from which Honey always emerged victorious, the group of friends realized that it was time to help prepare for the feast that lay ahead of them. The group waved good-bye to each other and headed their separate ways, the Beldens following the familiar path to the white farmhouse in the hollow. The walk was accompanied by an awkward silence. Brian did not want to have this talk with his sister and Trixie was still angry at Brian’s reaction at the clubhouse. She contrasted her brother’s reaction to her best friend’s and wondered why he couldn’t be happy for them like Honey was. She wondered if Brian’s apparent lack of romantic sentiments was the reason that he and Honey had never gotten together. Or maybe, like she and Jim, he and Honey were both afraid of their growing emotions and what it might do to their friendship. Trixie had no more time to reflect on this because they were approaching the farmhouse and Reddy was bounding across the lawn in welcome. It was no surprise that the exuberant Bobby was close at his heels.

“Hi, guys! Ready to help with the barbecue?” he greeted his older siblings.

All three older Beldens smiled at their youngest brother and agreed that they couldn’t wait to help. This was the second year that they had had this end-of-summer barbecue and it was quickly becoming a treasured tradition.

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Two hours later, Trixie looked at the two picnic tables with satisfaction. They were filled with fried chicken, baked beans, ear-after-ear of home-grown corn-on-the-cob, Moms’ famous burgers, potato

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salad, and Crabapple Farm's own raspberry pie. Miss Trask had arrived a few minutes earlier and was busily arranging the Wheelers' contribution to the affair: fruit salad, fresh baked rolls, and Cook's to-die-for chocolate cake. Trixie made sure there was enough room left over for Mr. Maypenny's hunter's stew and Mrs. Vanderpoel's Dutch windmill cookies.

"Hey, Trix!" Pretty Diana Lynch was hurrying up the lane carrying a cheese, fruit, and cracker tray. Terry and Larry, her younger twin brothers, followed carrying Tupperware full of fresh cut veggies. The youngest Lynch twins, Rachel and Cassie, brought containers full of vegetable dip. Mr. and Mrs. Lynch brought up the rear of the procession.

Trixie ran to greet her friends. "Wow! This is going to be some party!"

Di laughed and agreed when she saw the food-laden picnic tables. "This is such fun but I wish that it didn't mean that Jim and Brian are leaving and that we have to start back up soon at High."

Trixie agreed whole-heartedly as she grabbed the veggies from the twins, who immediately set off somewhere with Bobby. Diana placed her cheese tray on the table and headed into the kitchen with Trixie and her younger sisters, who were looking at everything with wide eyes, to help fix the veggie tray.

When Trixie re-emerged carrying the tray, she saw, to her delight, that the Wheelers had arrived. Her eyes immediately sought out Jim. She spied him talking to Mrs. Vanderpoel, who was happily arranging her fat cookies among the rest of the feast. As if sensing Trixie's gaze, the handsome redhead looked up just then and winked at Trix. Her clear blue eyes sparkled back at him.

The Bob-Whites enjoyed the company of their friends and family. Peter Belden was ensconced at the grill, contentedly turning out Belden burgers for the "ravenous masses" as he dubbed his hungry teenagers and their friends. Matt Wheeler and Ed Lynch carelessly discussed horses, happy to forget about their multi-million dollar businesses for the time being. Helen Belden, Madeline Wheeler, and Veronica Lynch chatted about flowers and gardens, while Jeremiah Maypenny and Geertruijda Vanderpoel discussed "the good ole' days" of Sleepyside. Jim, Trixie, and Honey eagerly listened to tales of the Sleepyside of four decades ago. Jim was especially enthusiastic about hearing stories of his great-aunt and -uncle, from whom he had inherited Ten Acres.

When the older Lynch twins and Bobby decided to "splore" the apple orchard, the younger Lynch twins tagged along, obviously in the throes of their first crushes. To the six-year-old girls, nine-year-old Bobby Belden was a hero among heroes. Diana giggled over this as she played horseshoes with Mart, Brian, and Dan. All of the teenagers, acutely aware of Miss Trask and Mr. Lytell sitting very close to each other and discussing who-knew-what, tried to keep their curiosity hidden. If Miss Trask noticed all of the covert glances and surreptitious looks she was getting, she did not let on. She didn't even seem to notice the loud burst of laughter from the horseshoe pit after Dan's comment about Mr. Lytell and Viagra.

As the sun was starting to set, and the younger generation returned from the crabapple grove, Jim asked Trix if she would like to go for a walk. Trixie eagerly agreed and the two set off, oblivious to the stern look of her older brother. The couple climbed the path leading to Ten Acres and ducked through the ivy covered doorway to the abandoned summerhouse where tragedy had occurred so many years before. Jim was careful not to have a repeat of that tragic night and reached for the flashlight he kept inside the door, shining the light around and looking for copperheads.

One summer night, when Mart was just a baby and Trixie hadn't been born yet, Jim's great-aunt and -uncle had sat in the summerhouse, enjoying the peaceful evening breeze off the Hudson. That was when disaster struck, and Mrs. Frayne was bitten by a deadly copperhead. A much panicked Mr. Frayne

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had placed his beloved wife in their ancient car and took a short-cut into town. Unfortunately, his car broke down on that lonely backroad and Mrs. Frayne died before ever making it to the hospital. Grief-stricken, Jim's namesake had shut out every memory he had of his wife. He boarded up the upstairs rooms and left her clothing hanging as though she would be back to wear them. The summerhouse, being a painful reminder of what he had lost, was allowed to become overgrown with foliage so that it was not even visible anymore, unless you knew where to look. Mr. Frayne had become a mean-tempered recluse, and had died before his great-nephew could find him.

But the summerhouse held happy memories for Trixie and Jim. This was the safe-haven Trixie had accidentally stumbled upon when Jim was a run-away, allowing him to hide from his awful step-father. This was where Jim was safely hidden when the mansion had caught fire and burned to the ground. This is where Trixie had found Jim's great-aunt's engagement ring that Jim had left for her. And this is where Trixie and Honey had first come up with the idea for the trailer trip that had eventually led them to Jim.

And now it was where Jim pulled Trixie to him and kissed her gently on the lips. "It's been torture sitting so close to you and not being able to do that," he murmured softly.

In answer, Trixie kissed him back, ardently.

"I must agree with you there, Mr. Frayne," she replied when the passionate kiss had ended.

"Do you have any plans for tomorrow evening, Miss Belden?" Jim asked.

"Why, I believe my social calendar is quite vacant tomorrow evening. Just what did you have in mind, Mr. Frayne?"

"Perhaps a movie at the Cameo and maybe dinner afterward at Wimpy's? It's not very upscale, but it is very 'us' and those are special places to us. But if you want our first official date to be fancier, we can eat at the restaurant at the Glen Road Inn or someplace like that."

Trixie sighed contentedly and wrapped her arms around Jim's neck. "I can't think of a better first date than a movie and Wimpy's. What time will you be picking me up?"

After setting a time, Jim and Trixie lingered over several more kisses and then reluctantly decided to head back to the barbecue.

"All I need is Brian coming up here hunting for you!" Jim laughed as he took Trixie's hand and led her out of the summerhouse.

When they returned to the party, they saw that Mr. Belden had built a fire in the outdoor firepit and everyone was happily roasting marshmallows for s'mores. They quietly joined the crowd and Honey smiled and gave Trixie's hand a squeeze while Di looked on knowingly, a twinkle in her violet eyes. Like anyone who has just found romance, she wanted all of her friends to share in her joy.

It was only a matter of time before the campfire songs started and the group enjoyed the singing immensely. It reminded Trixie of the Bob-White trip to Idaho two summers before.

Eventually, the singing died down, and the ghost stories started. Mr. Maypenny told eerie stories of the haunts of the Catskill Mountains, followed by Bobby's gleeful rendition of the witch that haunted Martin's Marsh, turning bad little boys and girls into frogs. Trixie enjoyed the story, but she knew that the witch that once haunted the old Lisgard House was only concerned with the protection of her earthly home. Mrs. Vanderpoel told of the Dutch ghosts that had haunted her parents' homeland, the Netherlands.

It was quite late when the party started to break up. The youngest twins had long since nodded off and the even the older twins were showing signs of fatigue. Mr. Lytell gave Marge Trask a fond look and

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gave a gruff thank you to Mrs. Belden, before mounting Belle and heading for home. Mr. Maypenny and Dan said their thank yous and good-byes and headed toward the preserve, escorting Mrs. Vanderpoel back to her yellow-brick home before heading on to their cottage. Miss Trask was trying to tidy up the last remaining evidence of the earlier feast, but the Bob-Whites shooed her away and made quick work of the leftovers. The Lynches headed to their mini-van, while the Wheeler contingency waved good-bye and climbed into their sedan.

The Beldens stood on their front porch, waving to their guests before retiring, one by one, to bed. After Trixie made sure that Bobby had brushed his teeth before going to bed, she changed into her pajamas and climbed into bed. She smiled when she thought of the previous night when she could not wait for “tomorrow.” “Tomorrow” had been every bit as wonderful as she had dreamed it would be and now she had even more to look forward to. Her first date with Jim Frayne. Trixie was so excited she wasn’t sure how she was going to fall asleep, but with pleasant thoughts of her redhead floating through her mind, she finally managed to drift into a slumber filled with even more pleasant dreams of Jim.

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“Trixie!” Moms’ voice called up the stairs. “Jim’s here!”

Trixie hurriedly checked her reflection one last time in the mirror, grabbed her make-up mirror and threw it in her purse, and then headed down the stairs. She didn’t want to keep Jim waiting. Ever since she had announced that she was going out with Jim tonight, her entire family, with the exception of Moms and Mart, had started acting goofy and she did not want Jim to have to deal with the pod-Beldens.

When she arrived downstairs, she was grateful that her mother was talking to Jim in a friendly way. Her eyes quickly perused the room and saw that her father was pretending to read the newspaper, but his eyes were focused on Jim. Brian had a book open in front of him, but he was blatantly glaring at his sister’s visitor. Bobby sat on the floor gazing up at Jim as if he had never seen him before. Mart, thankfully, was nowhere to be seen.

“Okay, I’m ready!” Trixie said cheerfully and kissed her mother on the cheek before hurrying Jim out the door. “I’ll see you at 11!” She called and shut the door before anyone had a chance to protest.

Jim was looking down at the little hurricane by his side as they headed out to his jeep. “What was that all about?”

Trixie climbed into the passenger seat of the jeep and fastened the seatbelt. “I have been dealing with pod-Beldens ever since I announced I was going out with you tonight. Brian is growling, Bobby is being even weirder than normal, and Daddy is acting like he doesn’t know *what* to do. I think Moms had a talk with him, so he was on his best behavior, but I swear!” Trixie smiled up at Jim, ready to forget her family’s behavior and enjoy their date.

Jim laughed at his girlfriend’s description of her family as “pod-people” but even as he was laughing he didn’t miss how great Trixie looked. Her snug blue top and tight khaki pants showed off her blossoming figure to advantage and her blonde hair shone atop glowing skin. “You look great, Trix,” he said.

Trixie absolutely glowed at the compliment. “Thanks, Jim. You look pretty darn good yourself!” Jim’s khaki Dockers and green polo shirt *did* look absolutely yummy on him.

The Cameo was showing an action flick on its one screen and Jim and Trixie happily settled into their seats, arms laden with popcorn (with the “tons of butter” Trixie had demanded), candy, and sodas. Trixie moved her feet to get more comfortable and realized that she had stepped on a wad of chewed up gum. Trixie sighed. They just didn’t keep the Cameo as clean as they used to.

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Just as the lights began to dim, Jim leaned over and kissed Trixie. "I haven't had a chance to do that yet."

"Well, shame on you!" Trixie teased him, as they settled in to watch the movie, their hands entwined.

The couple enjoyed the action on the screen, Jim occasionally leaning over to whisper sweet words in Trixie's ear, sending shivers down her spine. Trixie loved the feeling of having Jim so close to her, smelling his masculine scent. The pressure of his hand on hers was definitely heaven, she decided.

After the movie was over, the couple strolled down Main Street, saying hello to Hoppy, the weathervane that sat atop the Town Hall. When they got to the converted train car that housed Wimpy's, Jim opened the door for Trixie and the two slid into their favorite booth. Mike the counterman was working.

"The usual?" he asked them.

"Yes, please," the two replied in unison and then smiled shyly at each other.

Trixie looked at Jim while they were waiting for their milkshakes and burgers. "I wish you could have had your realization at the beginning of the summer. It hurts to think of you leaving for college tomorrow."

Jim's green eyes clouded over at the thought of having to leave for college the next day. How could he leave Trixie now?

Trixie saw the sadness that came into his eyes and she regretted her words. "Hey, Jim, cheer up! I didn't mean to make you sad. It'll be hard, but I know you are definitely worth it."

Jim grinned. "You are most definitely worth it too, Trixie Belden. We'll talk on the phone every night and I'll fly home every weekend and..."

Trixie laughed out loud. "Jim, don't you think maybe you should study at some point? And if you fly home every weekend, you're going to end up spending all of your inheritance before you have a chance to open your school!"

Jim joined in her laughter. "I know, Trix, but I want to see you as much as possible."

"You will, Jim. You'll be home for Thanksgiving and Christmas and spring break for sure, plus any other random weekends you can make it home. We survived last year, so we can survive this year."

Mike set down their milkshakes just then and Jim took a sip of his while staring thoughtfully at the beautiful blonde sitting in front of him.

"Why, Trix, you sound so sensible! When did that happen?" he teased.

"Me? Sensible?" Trixie feigned surprise, then grew serious. "I don't know. I guess with you and Brian being gone last year, I grew up a little."

Jim could definitely agree with that.

"Anyway, maybe Moms and Daddy will let me visit you one weekend," Trixie stated.

Jim's eyebrows raised about an inch. "You don't honestly think that do you?"

Trixie shrugged. "Maybe." Then her lips slowly spread into a wicked grin. "After all, everybody knows just how *honorable* you are."

Jim feigned innocence. "I don't understand why everybody in the free world uses that word to describe me! You might as well call me boring!"

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Trixie laughed. "You are the last person on this earth that I would call boring. Now, Brian might deserve that moniker, but definitely not you!"

"I hope that's a good thing," Jim shot an amused look at his girlfriend.

"Of course it is!" Trixie replied as their Wimpy burgers and fries arrived. The two were silent as they dug into their food, but eventually Trixie decided to ask Jim something that had been on her mind.

"Are you sure I'm what you want, Jim?" she asked hesitantly, staring with wide blue eyes at him as she awaited his answer.

Jim's first reaction was incredulity that she could even ask that question! "Of course, Trix! You're all I have *ever* wanted. If you are worried that I am going to get up to State and forget all about you, well, you can stop worrying! Trixie, you've had my heart since I was 15 years old. Nothing is ever going to change that.

"I'm more worried that you are going to go back to school and all the guys are going to be begging you for a date and *you* are going to forget about *me*!"

Trixie almost choked on her French fry. "You can't be serious!"

"Of course I'm serious!" Jim exclaimed. "You don't see yourself as others see you, Trix. You are full of spirit and adventure and life. When you get excited about something, which is often, your eyes sparkle and you just positively glow. You are one very beautiful woman, Trixie Belden, on the inside *and* on the outside."

Trixie felt the tell-tale blush creeping into her cheeks at Jim's words, but she was secretly pleased to hear them. She knew that no one could ever compete with Jim and now she felt reassured that Jim truly did want to be with only her. With all of this going for them, no mere physical separation would tear them apart.

"Jim, I want you to know that no one—*no one*—will ever compare to you. Please don't worry when you leave tomorrow. I want you to know that I won't be thinking of anyone but you."

Jim smiled at her and his emerald eyes locked with her sapphire ones. They both knew at that moment that they could face whatever life dealt them and come through with flying colors because they would always have each other.

"C'mon," Jim said, his voice filled with emotion, "let's go take a walk."

He threw money down for the meal and the two wandered through the quiet streets of the village, hand in hand, reminiscing about good times past and planning future good times. After some time, Trixie suddenly realized that it was almost 11 and that she had to be home.

"I hate to end our evening, Jim, but I did promise Moms," the petite blonde said with regret in her voice.

Jim nodded. "The last thing I want to do is return you late from our first date. That wouldn't be the *honorable* thing to do, would it?" His green eyes sparkled mischievously.

Trixie smiled up at her boyfriend. "And James Winthrop Frayne the Second is nothing if he isn't honorable."

Trixie cuddled up next to Jim in the Jeep, and the pair engaged in pleasant small talk during the brief ride to Crabapple Farm. Jim pulled Trixie into a tight embrace in her driveway. "You know you're my special girl, don't you, Trix?"

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“I do, Jim,” Trixie barely had time to respond before Jim’s lips were crushing hers, and they enjoyed what was probably their most passionate kiss yet. Trixie finally pulled away, breathless, and stared at Jim.

“You know you’re the only one for me, right, Jim?”

“I do, Trix.”

The couple shared another kiss and then in response to the porch light being turned on, Trixie finally reluctantly climbed from the Jeep.

“I’ll be up at Manor House tomorrow to see you off. What time?” Trixie asked in a voice that sounded as if she might cry any moment.

“About noon. Mom was really worried about me driving 12 hours. I told her it was no big deal but she insisted I break it up into two days. So I’ll get into Cleveland at around 8 tomorrow night. If I get up early, I can be to campus by about 10 am Wednesday.”

“Okay, see you at noon tomorrow!” Trixie tried to sound cheerful and hurried into her house.

Later, after she had talked to her mom and dad for a little bit and changed into her pajamas, she lay in bed for the third night in a row thinking about tomorrow. Jim was leaving tomorrow and it was going to be so much harder than it had been last year. She knew she had sounded sensible at Wimpy’s, but inside, her heart was breaking over having to say good-bye to him. How was she going to do it? How was she going to get through tomorrow?

~*~*~*~*~

Trixie arrived at the Manor House at 11:30 the next morning and headed straight to Honey’s room after Celia let her in the front door.

“Hey, Trix!” Honey greeted her friend warmly and then saw that Trixie’s eyes were red-rimmed. She quickly ushered her guest into her room and shut the door. “Trix? Are you okay?”

“How am I supposed to say good-bye?” Trixie wailed and threw herself on Honey’s bed.

“Don’t think of it as good-bye, think of it as ‘see you.’ You will be seeing Jim very soon you know.” Honey spoke softly as she sat on the edge of her bed next to Trixie.

“Yeah, at Thanksgiving,” Trixie said glumly.

Honey shook her head. “I don’t think so. I think Jim will probably be home at least one weekend before then.”

“Really?” Trixie brightened.

“Really! Now let’s get a cold washcloth on those eyes—you don’t want Jim to have anything but happy memories before he gets on the road today. I know this is going to be tough on him, too.” Honey said as she hurried into her private bath to wet a washcloth that she gave to Trixie.

“How do you know?” Trixie wondered as she placed the cloth to her eyes.

“Because Jim was up all night. I heard him go down to the kitchen two different times. Something woke me up at four this morning and when I went out in the hall to listen I saw that Jim’s light was still on. I heard the rustling of papers, so I know he was up.”

“Where is he now?”

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“He said he had a quick errand to run in the village, but I think I heard him get back right before you knocked on my door. I actually thought it might be him.”

Just then there was a knock at the door. “Honey? Is that Trixie I hear with you?”

Trixie hurriedly hid the washcloth while Honey inspected her friend’s eyes. Nodding that they passed inspection, Honey called to Jim, “Yeah, Jim, c’mon in.”

Jim stepped inside and Trixie’s heart skipped a beat, as it always did when she saw him. “Hi, Jim, I’m a little early.”

Jim smiled, crossing the room and giving her a hug. “That’s okay, I was hoping you would be.”

Honey looked at them both and suddenly remembered that Miss Trask needed to see her. She left her room quickly with a warm smile for them both.

Trixie and Jim smiled at each other. “It’s no wonder that girl’s tact is legendary.” Jim joked. Trixie smiled and kissed him. The two sat kissing for quite some time when Jim finally pulled away. “This is so hard, Trix.”

Trixie just nodded, unable to speak with the lump that had just formed in her throat.

“I have something here for you, but you have to promise not to open it until you are alone after I leave, okay?”

Trixie looked down and noticed for the first time that Jim held a small wrapped gift and an envelope in his hand. “Oh Jim! I didn’t get you anything!”

Jim kissed Trixie’s eyelids shut, trying to erase the guilt he saw in her eyes. “Trix, I didn’t expect you to. I saw this a few days ago, and I immediately thought of you. But you’re not to open it until after I leave, you hear? Open the package first and then read the letter, okay?”

Trixie nodded and promised she would do just that. Honey returned just then.

“The gang and Mother and Daddy are downstairs, Jim,” she said gently and then disappeared again.

Trixie and Jim looked at each other and wordlessly leaned forward for another lengthy kiss. They held each other tightly and Trixie tried desperately to keep her tears from escaping.

“*Au revoir a jamais*, Trixie. It means never say good-bye. And we’re not saying good-bye right now. We’re just saying ‘see you.’”

Trixie nodded and smiled, remembering that Honey had said the same thing. “Well, Mr. Frayne, it’s showtime,” she said with a sniffle and wiped her eyes. “You be safe and study and be good and...” Trixie paused and looked at the handsome redhead. “And don’t forget about me, please.”

Jim held her tight in response. “Trixie, I could *never* forget about you. This is going to be okay. I’m already planning on coming home in about a month, okay?”

Trixie nodded happily. “I can handle a month.”

“I know you can. We’d better get going,” Jim said as he took her hand, gave her one last kiss, and led her downstairs to where their friends and family were waiting.

There was a general confusion as all seven Bob-Whites and Jim’s parents and Miss Trask, Tom, Celia, and Regan all gathered around Jim’s Jeep. Mrs. Wheeler was tearfully giving Jim instructions, which Jim patiently accepted. His dad shook his hand and wished him a safe trip and a good school year. The other boys shook his hand and the girls hugged him. When Brian shook his hand, Jim was sorry he

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hadn't had time to talk to him before his trip, but the look on Brian's face told him it was okay. "Be good, man."

"I will, Brian." Jim looked toward Trixie. "You're closer than I am. Take care of her."

"You bet."

And in a flurry of last minute good-byes and waving, Jim backed his Jeep down the lane and was off to start his sophomore year at Michigan State University.

The group dispersed and Honey and Di gave Trix hugs and asked if she wanted some company. But Jim's gift had done the one thing he had hoped it would: Trixie's curiosity was on fire, and she just wanted to go somewhere and open the mysterious little package. Jim had counted on her curiosity to lessen her sadness at his departure; he knew her well.

Trixie thanked her friends for their concern but said she just wanted to be alone for a bit and headed to the clubhouse. She wanted to be in the clubhouse, where she and Jim had shared their first kiss, when she read this treasured letter from Jim.

She sat down at the table and unwrapped the small box, wondering just what it could be. She gasped when she opened it and saw a gold band with a marquise-shaped sapphire and two tiny diamonds mounted on either side.

How can I accept something like this? she thought. Despite her doubts, she immediately placed it on her finger and eagerly tore open the letter.

Dear Schoolgirl Shamus,

Is this your first sapphire? I hope so. I didn't give you this in person for three reasons. I knew that if I were to give it to you in person, that you would argue that it was too extravagant, and you wouldn't accept it. I can just picture you looking up at me with those beautiful sapphire eyes and saying, "But, Jim, how can I accept something like this?"

Trixie laughed out loud when she realized how well Jim knew her. That had indeed been her first thought. She looked at the ring lovingly and then continued to read.

The second reason is that I knew if you had something to wonder about, that you wouldn't miss me so much and be so sad after I left. I hope I achieved that goal.

"You did, Jim Frayne, you did," Trixie whispered, understanding more and more each moment just how well this man knew her and how well suited they were for each other.

And, well, the third reason is kind of silly. As I lay in bed tossing and turning a short while ago, I realized that I felt almost the same way that I did when I ran away after Ten Acres burned. And, well, I left you a note and a ring then too!

Trixie was laughing through her tears at Jim's sentiment.

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As soon as I saw this, I knew it had to be yours, Trix. Sapphires always remind me of you. Whenever I see a sapphire I think of your eyes, your energy, and your vibrant beauty. I hope that whenever you feel lonely or feel like I am too far away, look down at that ring and know that I am thinking of you, that I am right next to you in spirit, and that someday we will be together always.

Until then, take care of yourself, and trust in the fact that I am coming home to you.

*Always,
Jim*

Trixie sat in the clubhouse with tears streaming down her face, filled with the love she felt for this one boy. *The most wonderful boy in the whole world.*

“Au revoir a jamais,” she whispered. “Always, Jim. Always.”

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