

This is a Jixemetri Circle Writing Project #4 submission. Merry Jixmas!

The Most Wonderful Time of the Year

by Dana

Sixteen-year-old Trixie Belden stopped to admire her red-headed boyfriend as he was chopping wood. It was frosty out and a blanket of snow covered the ground, but Jim Frayne had shed his winter coat because of his exertions. He wore a thin flannel shirt and Trixie could see his muscles bulge as he hurled the axe into the logs. She stood, admiring his physique, until he looked up and saw her.

Jim's heart stopped for just a moment at the unexpected site of Trixie standing there. She made a handsome picture with her shiny blonde hair, sparkling blue eyes, and royal blue coat and hat. The frosty air had given her cheeks a rosy glow and Jim knew he had never seen anyone so beautiful.

Trixie grinned at him and made her way over as he set the axe down.

"Where are you headed, pretty girl?" he said and gave her a kiss on the cheek. "I'd hug you but I'm all sweaty."

"Honey and I were visiting. I'm heading home now to help Moms prepare for the Christmas Eve feast."

Jim pretended to pout. "You were going to leave Manor House without saying good-bye to your boyfriend?"

Trixie stuck her tongue out at him. "Apparently my boyfriend would rather chop wood than spend time with me. He deserves what he gets."

"Oh yeah, is that a fact?" Jim playfully growled as he grabbed Trixie and started gnawing on her ear. Trixie shrieked and tried to pull away but Jim had her firmly in his grasp. "I deserve what I get, do I? Well, I like what I've got." He stopped nibbling her ear and found her lips for a sweet kiss.

Trixie sighed contentedly. "I like what I've got, too."

The two continued to kiss a little more until Trixie reluctantly pulled away. "I really have to help Moms get ready for tonight. I'll see you in a little while."

"That you will," Jim promised as he kissed her on the tip of the nose. He watched Trixie scamper off down the path to her house in the hollow. Just before she dropped out of site down the hill she turned and waved at Jim.

Jim smiled and returned the wave before turning around and finishing the task of chopping wood for the Manor House fireplaces.

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"That was wonderful, Mrs. Belden. I couldn't eat another bite," Dan stated as he pushed his chair away from the table. The other Bob-Whites agreed and added their thanks to Helen Belden.

The Bob-Whites would be scattered on Christmas Day, so they decided to have a Bob-White Christmas Eve, complete with a Christmas feast and gift exchange. Moms had volunteered to host the gathering and had outdone herself on the feast. There was a huge Honey-baked ham, scalloped potatoes, green beans with cranberries and walnuts, Boston baked beans, a large salad of greens, and Jell-O molds with wonderful additions like mandarin oranges and colorful marshmallows. For dessert, Mrs. Belden had made spicy gingerbread cake, an assortment of Christmas cookies, and a wonderful, rich cheesecake that Peter Belden privately referred to as "sex on a plate." Helen always blushed when Peter requested that particular dessert in that particular manner. She had to admit, though, that whenever she made his sex on a plate for him, he always repaid her with the real thing.

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“Well, now that we are all stuffed, shall we head into the family room for some Christmas fun?” Brian asked.

A chorus of “Yes!” followed his question, but Trixie and Honey dissented. “I think we could repay Moms for this wonderful meal she slaved away on by helping her with the dishes.”

But before anyone could say anything, Helen protested. “No, no, this is your celebration. Please, go enjoy yourselves.”

Honey spoke up. “But Mrs. Belden, you’ve already done so much for us. We can’t let you do that.”

Helen smiled. “Nonsense. I love cooking for you all; it was nothing. I have Peter and Bobby to help me. Enjoy your party.”

Moms wouldn’t take no for an answer, so the Bob-Whites headed for the family room after thanking her profusely. Mart headed for the stereo and turned on the radio. The sound of “Love in an Elevator” by Aerosmith immediately filled the air. Mart grabbed Di and they started a spontaneous dance to the music. Brian quietly went over to the stereo and switched to an all-Christmas song station and laughed at the confusion on Mart’s face as Steven Tyler’s vocals gave way to “Silent Night.”

Laughing and joking, the tight-knit group settled in various places about the room. Mart took Mr. Belden’s big easy chair and pulled Di down on his lap. Honey ended up on the sofa between Brian and Dan, and Trixie and Jim lounged on the floor together.

“I hear you have a new student teacher at Sleepyside High,” Brian stated.

Di’s beautiful laugh rang out and she looked at Mart, whose face turned beet red. Everyone noticed his discomfort and immediately pounced.

“What’s up with you and the new teacher, Marty-boy?” Dan taunted in a friendly way.

“Nothing,” Mart said quickly with a look at Di.

The black-haired beauty was still laughing. “I’m sorry, Mart, but you don’t think that you’re going to get out of this do you? I have to tell them now!”

Mart looked as though he was about to say something and then changed his mind.

Trixie, ever the curious cat, looked at Di. “Well, spill it already! I’m dying to know what has my brother so flustered.”

“And speechless,” Jim added for good measure.

“Well, the new teacher is a beautiful Asian girl, just out of college. She has the most gorgeous black hair that she wears in a style very similar to mine,” Di started to explain. Honey’s grin said she thought she knew where this story was going. “The other day she was bending over the water fountain. Mart came along, saw her there, grabbed her and kissed her, thinking it was me!”

By this time the whole group was laughing uproariously and Mart’s face was a brilliant shade of red.

“Okay, okay, so I kissed a teacher by mistake. What of it?” He tried to play it off, but he knew there was no way he was going to live this down anytime soon. Reddy, sensing the merriment in the air, started jumping up and down and barking, as if laughing with the teenagers. Mart looked at him. “Et tu, Brutus? Man’s best friend, my eye!” He grumbled good-naturedly, bringing more laughter from his friends.

“How about we open the presents?” Honey finally said after the laughter began to die down.

Mart quickly agreed, eager to get the attention off of himself. The Bob-Whites had agreed to do a ‘Secret Santa’ this year and had drawn names. Honey volunteered to hand out the presents that the

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gang had placed under the tree earlier and moved to the floor next to the lovely evergreen, trimmed with ornaments full of special meaning. The first present she grabbed was a small one, brightly wrapped in red and green. Honey read the tag and a look of confusion settled over her lovely features. "This one says 'To Brian, from Devin.'" She looked questioningly at Brian.

"Devin's my, uh, housemate back at school. She gave me that before I left for Christmas break and said I had to wait until Christmas to open it," Brian explained, looking slightly uncomfortable.

A look of disappointment and sadness flashed over Honey's face, but was gone before anyone but Trixie had a chance to see it. Honey's smile was bright as she pulled a big package wrapped in Holiday Winnie-the-Pooh paper.

"This big one is for Dan from Trixie," she said passing the box over to Dan.

Next she pulled out a small box with iridescent wrapping. "This one is to Di from Mart. Funny how *that* worked out," she smiled as she handed the box to Di.

Honey laughed as she grabbed the next box and read the tag. "Okay, something funny is going on here," she exclaimed as she held up a box wrapped in Coca-Cola Polar Bear wrap. "That is too much of a coincidence that you two drew each other." She declared as she handed the box to Mart. "That thing is heavy, Di, what did you get him?"

Di smiled her lovely smile. "You'll all have to wait and see," she said mysteriously.

Honey grinned at her and pulled a bright green package adorned with a huge, crimson bow. "Yes, something is definitely afoot. Trixie, this is to you from Jim."

Trixie squealed and grabbed the package. "You pulled my name, sweetie?"

Jim nodded and kissed her as Honey continued to pull packages out from underneath the tree. "Jim, your gift from Brian."

Honey smiled as she looked at the clumsily wrapped gold package. She looked up at Dan. "Dan pulled my name," she stated as Dan smiled happily.

Honey slowly reached for the last package. She had been thrilled when she drew Brian's name and had thought long and hard for what to get him, but now she had her doubts. Was the gift from Devin a friendly roommate gift, or was there something more to it? She shrugged off the unwelcome thought and smiled brightly at Brian. "And I drew your name, Brian. I hope you like it."

Brian smiled back at Honey. "I'm sure I will," he said as he accepted the gift from her.

"Shall we open them one by one or all together?" Honey asked.

"One by one," Trixie decided. "Dan, you go first."

Dan looked at the big package on his lap. "Okay, Miss Shamus, here goes." Dan started to tear the wrapping off the gift and burst out laughing when he was able to see what it was. "Dave's Insanity Asylum Kit! How'd you know, Trix?"

Trixie shrugged with an evil smile. "I saw that at a gift store in Sleepyside and knew the only person insane enough to actually consume that stuff is you!"

"What is it?" Brian wanted to know.

"Insanity Hot Sauce is an insanely hot sauce made from habanero peppers. Dave makes a whole line of absolutely mouth-killing habanero based products. This kit has Insanity Hot Sauce, Hurtin' Habanero Hot Sauce, Insanity Snax Mix, Burnin' Hot Nuts, and Blazin' Chocolate Espresso Beans. These are great snack foods. Thanks, Trix!"

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“The box is even designed to look like an insane asylum,” Trixie added.

Mart snorted. “You would have to be insane to put any of that stuff in your mouth!”

“Coming from Mart, that means something,” Jim laughed.

Dan grinned. “He has a point. This sauce actually carries a warning on the label: ‘Use this product one drop at a time. Keep away from eyes, pets and children. Not for people with heart or respiratory problems.’”

“Are they serious?” Brian asked incredulously.

Dan started laughing. “Well, Tad Webster and I were at that burrito place in White Plains, and he put a little on his burrito. He loves the stuff and was okay with it. Only problem was, he went to the bathroom afterward and didn’t wash his hands beforehand. His, uh, privates burned for two straight days he said.”

A chorus of “No!” “You’re kidding?” and “Really?” was heard among the laughter that followed Dan’s story.

After the laughter subsided Trixie looked at Mart. “Okay, buddy, I am dying to find out what Di got you, so you’re next!”

Mart obliged and the look on his face was pure happiness when he saw what Di had given him. He looked up into Di’s violet eyes, pure adoration on his face.

“Sweets, this is so wonderful. Thank you!” he said and kissed her.

Trixie looked at the six thick books. “Wow!” She exclaimed. “Where’d you manage to find those, Di?”

“I found them all on eBay. It took me a while to get all six Cosmo McNaught books in the Deluxe edition, but I managed. The last one came in the mail just two days ago.”

“What a great gift, Di,” Trixie stated. “Now let’s see what Mart got you.”

Diana carefully unwrapped the small box and opened it.

“Oh, Mart,” she breathed when she saw the glittering amethyst and diamond necklace nestled in its velvet bed. “It’s beautiful. Thank you.” Mart happily accepted the kiss she gave him.

Mart put the necklace around her neck as everyone admired it.

“It’s perfect for you, Di,” Honey commented. She loved her friends dearly and wasn’t capable of jealousy, or so she thought, but watching Mart with Di and Jim with Trixie, she was starting to realize that she had no one. After Trixie and Jim had paired off, she had been waiting for Brian to come around and make a move, but so far it hadn’t happened. She had been planning on doing something about it herself while he was home for Christmas. The first step was going to be the sentimental gift she had gotten him, but now it looked as though a girl named Devin was intruding on her plan.

She looked up to see Dan staring at her, a thoughtful look on his handsome face. He smiled warmly at her and she found herself grinning back at him. Honey suddenly felt dizzy staring into Dan’s intense, dark eyes.

“Now let’s see what Brian got Jim,” Trixie was saying. Honey managed to tear her eyes away from Dan’s and look as Jim tore into his package.

What was that all about? Honey wondered, feeling discombobulated from the intense look she and Dan had just shared.

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"These are great, Brian. Thanks!" Jim said as he held up an acrylic duck call and special training whistle for Patch.

"Is that acrylic?" Trixie inquired. At Brian's nod, she commented, "Good stuff."

"And what do you know about duck calls, Beatrix?" Mart asked.

"I know that you can get them in a variety of materials like plastic, acrylic, and wood. And as far as synthetic duck calls go, acrylic is the best," Trixie stated. She hadn't been listening to Tom and Jim talk about duck hunting for years for nothing.

But Mart didn't want to let it go and decided to challenge his only sister. "And which wood is the best?"

Trixie snorted. "That's easy. Cocobolo."

Mart's eyebrows shot up. Trixie really *had* been paying attention all those times she tagged along behind Tom as a kid. He was also sure Jim had something to do with Trixie's education.

"What's cocobolo?" Di questioned.

Before Mart had a chance to launch into a polysyllabic, long-winded explanation, Trixie spoke up. "It's a particularly hard, exotic wood from Central America. It's orange to red and actually quite pretty."

Jim was silently laughing to himself at the way Trixie stood her ground with Mart. She no longer lost her temper but instead handled his teasing and challenges matter-of-factly. Trixie was definitely growing up. But then again, so was Mart, and he didn't try to annoy Trixie nearly as much as he used to.

Right now Mart gave his almost-twin a fond look. "I bow to your superior knowledge, Trix. Good job."

Jim leaned over and whispered in Trixie's ear. "It was a good job. I'm proud of you, Trix." The sandy-haired girl glowed from the praise. Aloud Jim said, "Okay, Trix, your turn."

rixie, with her usual enthusiasm, tore into her package with gusto. Her present from Jim was a gift basket from Bath and Body Works.

"Mmmm, Tangerine Spice. This smells yummy," Trixie said as she opened up one of the bottles and smelled it. She passed it to the other girls to smell. She turned to kiss her boyfriend. "Thanks, Jim."

"You're welcome, Trix," he leaned over to give Trixie another kiss and said softly, "It reminded me of you, all sunshiny and fresh and vibrant."

Everyone else was talking and laughing, but Honey was able to hear Jim's words. Even though the words were coming from her own brother, Honey almost melted.

That was so sweet. When am I going to find somebody who feels that way about me?

Mart looked at his brother. "Go ahead, Brian. Let's see what you got."

Honey held her breath as Brian slowly unwrapped the gift. Was it her imagination or did he seem reluctant to open it? Brian looked stunned as he opened up the box and saw what was inside. He raised his head and his startled eyes met Honey's hopeful ones. She smiled at him tentatively.

"I heard you say you needed a new watch," Honey said softly.

"I did, but...Honey, this is too much," Brian said as he stared at the gold watch.

Trixie saw the crushed look on Honey's face and then got up to look at the watch that Brian hadn't taken out of the box yet.

"Wow, it is a really nice watch, Brian. You did need a good watch." She looked at Honey. "I think it's beautiful, Honey."

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Brian's head shot up. "Oh, I'm not saying I don't like it. It's a great watch." Brian thought Honey looked like she was on the verge of tears. He quickly put the watch around his wrist and got up to give her a hug. "I love it, Honey. I guess I just never had such a nice watch before and it surprised me. It's fantastic."

Honey returned the hug and smiled. Seeing Brian's discomfort at such an expensive gift, she didn't want to add to it further by telling him she had also had it engraved. "To Brian, from Honey," followed by the word Christmas and the year. She briefly wondered if Devin had engraved *her* gift and then quickly banished the thought.

Brian released her and returned to his position on the couch. "Looks like you're the last one to go, Honey. Let's see what you got."

Honey admired the beautiful gold wrapping. "The wrapping is so pretty, Dan."

Dan shrugged. "You're the golden girl of the bunch, Honey."

Honey smiled at him and delicately removed the wrapping. She opened the cardboard box to find a velvet jeweler's box inside. Curious, she pulled the second box out and opened it. She gasped when she saw the gold locket with the intricate yet delicate design on the front.

"Oh, Dan, it's beautiful," she breathed. She showed the locket to everyone. They all chimed in with their praise of the locket's beauty.

"Open it," Dan urged.

Honey did as she was told and Dan smile was satisfied as he saw the wonder in her eyes as she saw the pictures inside the locket. On the left-hand side was her parents' wedding picture. On the right-hand side was a picture of her and Jim taken near the lake last summer.

"How did you manage this?" she gasped.

Dan smiled mysteriously. "I have my ways, Miss Wheeler. I know how important family is to you and I thought it would be nice to have your family in there."

"Dan managed to get a hold of my parents' wedding picture and had it sized to fit the locket," Honey explained to the others. She passed the locket around and smiled as everyone oohed and ahhed over it. Her eyes met Dan's and she smiled warmly. "Thank you, Dan. I love it." When the locket was returned to her she crossed the room and held it out to Dan. "Put it on me?" she requested.

"Sure," Dan said as he took the delicate chain and placed it on her graceful neck.

Brian looked on and despite what was happening at school, felt the rumblings of jealousy in the pit of his stomach. *Since when did Dan go around buying such thoughtful and sentimental gifts?* he wondered.

Dan looked at the golden locket hanging gracefully on the beautiful girl and spoke without really thinking. "It reminded me of you when I saw it. Golden and delicate, but intricate and solid at the same time."

Honey was speechless at what Dan had just said. She had just been wishing that someone would say something like that to her, but she never expected that it would be *Dan*. Dan suddenly realized that everyone else in the room was staring at him with interest.

"What? I can't tell one of my best friends that a beautiful piece of jewelry reminds me of her?"

Dan was saved from the sarcastic replies that were headed his way by two things happening simultaneously: the phone rang and Bobby entered the room carrying stockings.

"Hey guys, Moms thought we could hang up our stockings now that it's Christmas Eve."

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He passed out the stockings to Trixie, Mart, and Brian. Trixie lovingly hung the stocking over the fireplace that she had been hanging since she was three years old. "I love this stocking," she sighed.

While Mart and Brian hung their empty stockings near the fireplace, Bobby passed out new stockings to Honey, Di, Jim, and Dan filled with oranges, homemade popcorn balls, Christmas cookies, and other small, assorted trinkets.

"Your mom certainly didn't have to go all of this trouble for us!" Jim exclaimed as he pulled a new Swiss army knife out of his stocking. The Belden children, except for Bobby, were just as surprised by the appearance of the stockings as their friends were.

Just then Peter and Helen came in laughing.

"What's so funny, Moms?" Mart grinned at his parents.

Helen carried a tray of mugs filled with steaming hot chocolate. Trixie and Honey immediately sprang up to help her pass the mugs out.

"Your father just got a call from a singles group asking him if he was single and lonely this holiday season and would he like to join them for a singles Christmas get-together tomorrow," Helen said, a twinkle in her eye as she smiled at Peter.

"Needless to say, I will be spending tomorrow with my family," Peter laughed and then a strange item on the fireplace mantel caught his attention. "Bobby, is that your *gym sock* hanging from the fireplace mantel?"

Bobby grinned angelically and looked at his father. "Sure is. Everyone got a stocking but Reddy and my gym socks are my biggest ones, so I hung one up for him."

Mart rolled his eyes and Trixie snorted, but their father knew his youngest son well and said nothing further. He settled down in a family rocking chair that had been passed down the Belden family for generations, while Helen settled on the couch with Dan and Brian. Honey sat on the floor and leaned back on Dan's legs. Jim, Trixie, and Bobby sprawled on the floor near the tree. The group sipped from their mugs happily and looked at the beautifully decorated evergreen. The angel atop shone brightly down upon them.

Di sighed happily. "It's so wonderful to be together like this at the holidays."

Everyone agreed with her and silently counted their blessings. Peter looked at the group of teenagers and Bobby so relaxed in his house and felt a warmth inside that filled him with contentedness. After the mugs of hot chocolate had been emptied and everyone was growing sleepy, Dan stood up.

"Well, Uncle Bill and I are heading out to visit Joan early tomorrow morning, so I had better get going. Thanks for all of your wonderful hospitality, Mrs. Belden."

"You're quite welcome, Dan. I wrapped a ginger spice cake for you to share with Mr. Maypenny and Regan," Helen said as she stood up to see the guests out.

Dan gave her a big hug. "You're the best, Mrs. B!"

Mrs. Belden blushed as everyone added their compliments. It was easy to see where Trixie got her modesty from.

Jim looked at Trixie. "Want to go for a quick Christmas Eve walk?"

Trixie looked questioningly at her mother, who nodded. The sandy haired girl smiled up at Jim. "Sure," she said as she and Honey went to get their coats.

Dan took that opportunity to volunteer to walk Honey home.

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Brian spoke up then. "You don't have to. I can walk Honey home."

Dan looked at Brian. "Brian, that's stupid. I'm already going out and it's easy to drop Honey off at Manor House before I head over to Maypenny's."

Brian, knowing he had no good argument for that, nodded silently. Trixie and Honey returned then.

Dan smiled at Honey. "Your chariot awaits, madam. I'm going to walk you up to Manor House since Jim and Trix are going for a walk."

Honey smiled sweetly at Dan and curtsied. "Why thank you, kind sir."

Honey hugged everyone before departing with Dan. Diana followed suit before she and Mart headed out the door. A chorus of "Merry Christmas!" and "Thank you" sounded and then Trixie and Jim were the next out the door. Mrs. Belden smiled and shut the door. "We have a wonderful group of kids," she said as she hugged her husband.

"We sure do," he agreed as he wrapped his wife in his arms. "We sure do."

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Meanwhile, at the clubhouse, Jim was taking Trixie into his arms and eagerly kissing her. "I had so much fun tonight, but it's so hard to control myself around you," Jim murmured. "I love these clandestine meetings in the clubhouse."

Trixie merely nodded and continued to kiss him fervently. It was sweet torture for her, too, to sit there next to Jim for hours—the whole time wanting to be in his arms, to feel his lips on hers, to tangle her tongue with his, all the while being denied this simple pleasure.

Finally, Trixie drew away. "And now, my Christmas present to you," she said as drew out a small package from inside her coat.

Jim grinned wickedly. "Is it present time again?"

"You already gave me mine. This is for you," Trixie stated.

"If I already gave you a present, then what is this?" Jim tried to pull an innocent air as he also pulled a small, brightly wrapped package from his coat pocket.

"James Winthrop Frayne!" Trixie exclaimed. "You already got me something!"

"*That* was for the BWG gift exchange. *This* is for our own special gift exchange."

"But Jim," Trixie started, but Jim silenced her with a kiss.

"Open it," he said when he pulled away.

Trixie shook her head. "I've already opened something from you, you go first."

Jim smiled and indulged her. He hugged her tightly when his unwrapping efforts revealed a pocket watch he had seen in a store over the summer. He had commented to Trixie that his father had had one just like it. Trixie had been saving ever since to get it for him.

"It's perfectly perfect, Trix," he stated. "I love it. You remembered. And we weren't even together when we saw it."

Trixie grinned. "I know, but I knew right then I was going to get it for you. Then, when we started dating, I was thrilled. Do you know how hard it's been to keep this a secret all these months?"

Jim laughed. "For you? I can imagine! Now it's your turn."

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Trixie happily tore the wrapping off of the small box and gasped when she saw what was inside. "Jim, it matches my ring perfectly!" Jim took the box from her trembling hands and pulled the sapphire pendant out of the box and clasped it around her neck. "Looks like all of the Bob-White girls got necklaces this year," Jim commented.

Trixie nodded, her mind momentarily forgetting the beautiful sapphire and diamond pendant that perfectly matched her ring.

"Did you see the locket Dan got Honey? And hear his comment? I never realized it, but I think Dan's got a thing for Honey."

"Do you really, Trix?"

Trixie thought about it. "That gift was sentimental as hell and he went to a lot of trouble to get those pictures that were inside. You don't get a girl something like that if you're just friends."

Jim nodded. "Well, he was very eager to walk Honey home tonight when I said I was taking you for a walk. Brian tried to talk to him out of it, but Dan was pretty insistent."

"What was all that weirdness with Brian? Do you know anything about Devin? Did Brian tell you anything?"

Jim shook his head. "I just know that he lived with her last year and liked her enough to continue rooming with her this year. If there's anything romantic going on with her, he didn't tell me about it."

"He never mentioned her even once when he was home this summer," Trixie mused.

Jim kissed her. "Are we going to theorize about your brother's romantic life or are we going to make out?"

Trixie smiled what she hoped was a seductive smile. "I think I'd rather make out," she admitted and the couple proceeded to do just that for the next several minutes.

"Well, Miss Belden, I think we should probably be getting home," Jim reluctantly said.

Trixie sighed. "*Must* you be so sensible? Can't we run off to Tahiti or somewhere instead?"

Jim pictured her in a bikini on the beach of a tropical island. "Now that sounds like a plan. Then you wouldn't need all of these clothes," he said wickedly as he nibbled on her neck.

"Mr. Frayne!" Trixie pretended to be shocked. "Have your hormones made all of your honorableness fly out the window?"

"I just meant you could wear a bikini. My oh my, where your dirty mind drifts to, Miss Belden." The two laughed and kissed a bit longer, but eventually the two left the clubhouse to head home.

"Oh look! A shooting star," Trixie pointed up into the night sky, where thousands of twinkling stars blinked down at them.

"Did you make a wish?" Jim asked as he hugged Trixie from behind and stared at the sky with her.

She turned around and gently kissed him. "My wish already came true. I have you."

Jim's throat tightened. "I love you, Trix," he said, his voice taut with emotion.

"I love you, too, Jim," Trixie said and the two shared a sweet kiss. "Thank you so much for the necklace. It's beautiful."

"You're my sapphire girl, Trix. You know that."

Trixie smiled happily. "I know. Maybe I'll be able to see you tomorrow night?" She asked hopefully.

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"I don't think we'll be very late tomorrow. I'll call you when we get in," Jim promised. "Do you want me to walk you home?"

Trixie shook her head. "No, you're almost home. I'll be okay. I promise."

Jim kissed her on her forehead. "Give me one ring when you get home."

"I will," Trixie promised, as she started down the path to her house. "Merry Christmas, Jim."

"Merry Christmas," Jim said as he watched her head down the trail.

Trixie skipped merrily to her house, thinking of the most wonderful boy in the world. "I have the most wonderful boy in the world," she said aloud, "and this truly is the most wonderful time of the year!"

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Additional notes: Devin, whom I used as my borrowed character after Kyrie insisted I just *had* to even though I had better ideas, is Kyrie's creation. My carried over items were: mention/presence of a pet (#1), BWG banquet menu (#2), snack food (#3), clandestine meeting at the clubhouse (SA#1). And that story about Tad Webster? The names have been changed to protect the innocent but yes, it really did happen to someone I know! Once again, Merry Jixmas!