

The debut of this story marks the official debut of a Susan/Dana joint universe called *Supernatural Reality*. We thought four stories constituted a universe. :) This is our annual Halloween story for the Jix 2006 Halloween Spook-a-thon Challenge. The title translates to "The True Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Many thanks to Susi who corrected my original German version of the title!

Die wahre Legende von Sleepy Hollow

by Susan and Dana

"Mischa really has *never* celebrated Halloween?" Trixie asked in surprise, lounging sideways in her favorite comfy chair in the family room at Crabapple Farm.

Honey shook her head. "Nope. She told me that she was really excited to learn all about it, though. She really wants to immerse herself in American culture."

"We should take her trick-or-treating for UNICEF," Di put in. "Think of all of the fun we could have dressing up!"

Honey's hazel eyes glowed at the thought. "We could also throw a Halloween party!" she cried enthusiastically. "And the only way to gain entrance is to trick-or-treat for UNICEF first. It's been ages since we threw a Halloween party, and since your last one was such a resounding success, Di, people will be sure to come in droves. Think of all of the fun we could have *and* the good we could do at the same time!"

Di's face lit up at the suggestion. She excitedly agreed and pronounced it "perfectly perfect!" The two girls turned to Trixie, sure that she would be onboard with the idea. But Trixie's single-track mind had not even seemed to register the suggestion.

"How could she never have celebrated Halloween?" she pondered, her brow furrowed. "I thought people all over the world celebrated it."

Mart entered the warm and cozy room just in time to hear Trixie's question, the rest of the BWG males following right behind him.

"*Au contraire*, mademoiselle," he began. "I shall be happy to regale you with a brief history of the holiday of All-hallow-even, now known as Halloween. However, my palate is a bit parched from the menial task I, as a part of the male contingency of our bevy, undertook so that Moms would not have formerly green—but now mostly brown—flattened, lateral structures that once functioned as the principal organs of photosynthesis and transpiration all over her tract of land. If I recall, dear sibling, that when it was discovered there were only four rakes available for said undertaking, you squaws promised to have hot, spiced apple cider and Moms' warm apple crisp and pumpkin pie waiting for us he-men."

Trixie glared at her brother. No matter how much time passed since Mart had swallowed his dictionary at camp one summer, she would never stop being annoyed at his verbosity. "It just so happens, smarty-pants, that I don't think you could give a brief explanation about *anything*. The apple crisp and pumpkin pies are in the oven and should be just about warmed through. Apparently swallowing that dictionary affected your sense of smell as well, or you would be aware of the aroma of spiced apple cider wafting through the air from the kitchen. It's been simmering nicely while we squaws awaited the reappearance of you *he-men*."

Mart opened his mouth to retort, but Brian immediately spoke up. "Thanks, Trix. We really appreciate you guys getting it ready for us." He looked at his fellow leaf-rakers. "Shall we?"

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"You're not keeping *me* away from Mrs. B's apple crisp," Dan declared and led the charge from the family room into the sunny kitchen. The scent of apples, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves permeated the air even more strongly in there. Everyone inhaled deeply and appreciatively.

Friendly bantering filled the kitchen as the seven friends commenced preparing their snack. The homemade vegetable soup and fresh-from-the-oven bread that the group had eaten before they had begun their yard work was a distant memory. Although the October Saturday afternoon had been sunny and clear, the wind had been brisk. Even as the Bob-Whites expended a lot of energy and exertion getting the garden, lawn, trees, and shrubs of Crabapple Farm ready for winter, the wind had chilled them, and the group had looked forward to their warm treats.

They settled around the kitchen table, and after the sound of contented murmurs and sighs as hot liquid passed over cold lips and scrumptious baked goods hit grateful taste buds quieted down, the conversation returned to Halloween. Honey explained that the young Russian woman who was staying with the Hoyts while she studied in America for a year had never celebrated Halloween.

"I kinda agree with Trix," Dan spoke up. "I guess I'm not too up on my holidays, but doesn't everyone celebrate Halloween?"

Before Mart could launch into a polysyllabic and lengthy explanation, Jim jumped in. "Mostly it's just the U.S., Canada, as well as Scotland and Ireland. Although, it is becoming more and more common in Europe these days. In some parts of Ireland and Scotland, instead of trick-or-treating, they make a sort of bonfire outside of town and then light torches and carry them to town, lighting fires in the hearths. It's kind of a ceremonial rekindling."

"That's neat!" Trixie exclaimed, imagining the Bob-Whites walking through the quiet village of Sleepyside carrying torches door-to-door in the dead of night on All Hallows' Eve, a full Hunter's Moon glowing eerily above. A delightful chill went up her spine at the thought.

"Halloween began in Ireland, and those traditions remain from when the Celts practiced Samhain. But when Christianity started to spread, pagan traditions and religious celebrations mingled, and Samhain, which was celebrated at the same time of the year as the religious All Hallows' Day, became known as All Hallow Even. And that eventually got shortened to Halloween," Mart explained. "Actually, Halloween wasn't a big deal in America, either, until all of the Irish immigrants landed around the time of the Irish Potato Famine."

"So where do the masks come in?" Diana asked as she took a bite of pumpkin pie.

"And the trick-or-treating?" Honey wanted to know.

"There's some confusion about the specific origins of masks and trick-or-treating," Brian put in, pushing his empty plate away from him, having just demolished large pieces of pumpkin pie and apple crisp. "Some say the practice of dressing up came from trying to scare the spirits away who were supposed to come to steal the souls of the living during this time of the year. But ready-made masks and costumes as we know them today didn't come about until the 1950s."

Jim grinned. "American pop culture at its finest."

"Trick-or-treating," Brian continued, "may have developed from the Scottish and Irish tradition of 'guising,' where kids would dress up and entertain adults for little gifts. Or, it could have come from the tradition of begging, or souling, on All Soul's Day, which is November 2nd."

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"This is really interesting," Honey said, her hazel eyes staring admiringly at Brian. "I never really much thought about Halloween except as a time to carve pumpkins and bob for apples. I never thought of where the traditions came from."

"We definitely have to trick-or-treat for UNICEF and then have a party," Trixie stated. "Especially since Mischa has never experienced the fun of Halloween. We'll have to go all out and do lots of different stuff, like maybe a pumpkin carving station and stuff like that. We can't let Mischa go back to Russia never having bobbed for apples!"

The rest of the Bob-Whites laughed at Trixie's enthusiasm. Honey and Di filled the boys in on Honey's idea to have a party that encouraged people to participate in the Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF Program before coming to the party. The boys enthusiastically agreed, and party preparations were underway when Mr. and Mrs. Belden returned home from their country drive with Bobby to view the autumn leaves.

"The yard looks wonderful," Mrs. Belden commented as soon as she entered the kitchen to find the complete assembly of Bob-Whites around her kitchen table, excitedly jotting notes in a notebook. "I can't thank you enough for all of your hard work."

"It was nothing, Moms," Trixie said. "We were glad to help."

"Nothing!" Mart exclaimed. "Says you, oh-squaw-who-raked-no-leaves!"

Brian interjected. "Well, I *did* rake leaves, and it really was nothing, Moms." The rest of the gang, including Mart, echoed his sentiments.

"Well, it's something to me and Mr. Belden. So, thank you," Helen said graciously.

"You already thanked us, Mrs. B.," Dan said with an impish grin. "There's nothing like Crabapple Farm baked goods to say thank you!"

Helen smiled. "Well, I'm glad. So, just what are you cooking up now?" she asked, indicating the notebook filled with Honey's elegant penmanship.

"Di and Honey had the most super-glamorous-perfect idea, Moms!" Trixie exclaimed, excited once again at the prospect of a Halloween party. "Since Mischa has never celebrated Halloween, Di thought we should take her trick-or-treating for UNICEF, that way we could show her good some good ol' American Halloween culture."

"Without feeling silly that we're a little old to be trick-or-treating," Mart put in.

"And then Honey thought we should also have a Halloween party, since it's been ages since we've had one, and if people want to come—which they will—they have to trick-or-treat for UNICEF first, too!"

"What a lovely idea," Mrs. Belden said. "Where were you thinking of having the party?"

"We thought maybe at the Lynch house, the Manor House, or here," Trixie replied with a cheeky grin. "With the distinct possibility of a haunted forest in the preserve."

Helen laughed. "Well, I may be able to help you narrow that down. Were you thinking of having it the Saturday before Halloween?"

"That was kind of the consensus," Honey said.

"We ran into Di's mother while we ran some errands in town on our way back, and you must all be on the same wavelength, because she also just decided that she would like to have a party, a dinner party anyway, that night. So, I think I can safely say that the Lynch mansion is probably not an option."

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The gang thanked Mrs. Belden for the information and immediately launched into a debate about the merits of holding the party at Manor House versus Crabapple Farm. In the end, the Manor House won. Once this was decided, a debate for a theme was launched. Once again, Helen intervened.

"What about looking upstairs in the attic?" she asked as she prepared meat loaf for that evening's dinner. "There might be inspiration up there."

Seven pairs of eyes stared at each other, and in one motion, seven pairs of feet were running for the stairs to the attic.

Brian pushed open the small door at the top of the steep stairs that led from the back of the house up toward the attic. He leaned over and flicked on the switch that lit the one lone bulb secured on the rafter above them and then stepped into the room.

"I don't think I've ever been up here," Jim mused as he followed Brian, bending his tall frame as he entered the $\frac{3}{4}$ -sized door.

"I guess we've never had any reason to bring you guys up here," Trixie replied as she entered the room, straightening as she looked around with interest. "It's mainly old family stuff. Nothing very exciting."

"What do you mean 'nothing very exciting'?" demanded Honey. "Isn't this the very same attic that you found the old Army canteen of your grandfather's that started us on that mystery to Virginia?"

Trixie grinned at her. "True. Although, it wasn't my grandfather's. Something like my great-great-grandfather's."

"Whatever!" Honey waved her hand dismissively. "All I was trying to say is that you never know what you might find in an old attic."

"Indeed," Jim said with a wink at Honey. "Mysterious music boxes and codes, for instance."

"Yes!" Honey nodded in agreement. "See?"

"Well, I found the old canteen in that crawl space over there." Trixie gestured toward a small, dark area of the room. "Bobby keeps his old toys in there now." She grinned at Honey. "We searched through there pretty thoroughly after he and I broke through the boarded up part." She ran a finger up and down her nose as she looked around the room. "Anyone getting any ideas from this stuff?"

Di peered into an old chest that stood up against one wall. "Well, there are a couple of bonnets in here," she said, pulling them out and waving them before she looked more critically at them. "But they look like they're for children." She gingerly put the bonnet on her head, but the bonnet was too small to cover more than the top of her head. She giggled. "Nope. These won't work."

Dan checked out an old Victorian umbrella stand which had one lone, rather fragile looking umbrella in it. "One of you girls could be Mary Poppins," he teased, brandishing the umbrella like a sword. "Spoonful of sugar and jolly holiday and all that."

Trixie wrinkled her nose at him. "Not Mary Poppins. We need something more...oh, I don't know...spectacular than that!"

"Well, you know that one guy from Di's biology class will show up as a ghost...again," Mart said dryly as he pulled a trunk out from under one of the eaves and opened it. "We could show up as ourselves and be more original than he is." He peered into the trunk and exclaimed in a pleased voice, "Well, now here we go!" Mart held up an old-fashioned Mardi Gras Harlequin mask with bright, plumed feathers. "Who's going to wear this one?"

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"Oh!" Di cried out, dropping the two bonnets back into the chest drawer and hurrying over to Mart to grab the festive mask. "This is gorgeous!" She held the mask up to her face. "Can you see me in one of those Harlequin outfits?"

Jim grinned at her. "I think you'd look perfect, Di." He ambled over to where Mart was pulling out various old-fashioned clothes. "Is this a trunk of costumes?"

"Well, I think they're mainly old clothes," Mart said, holding up a stiff, starched shirt against his chest. "But, yeah, for our purposes, they're costumes."

Brian, meanwhile, motioned to Dan. "Come help me move this trunk out. It's too heavy for me to move by myself."

Dan put the umbrella back into its stand and walked over to where Brian was. The two young men lugged on the trunk to pull it out from its hiding place.

"Geez!" Dan said as he flopped to the floor. "What've you got in here anyway? My muscles are already tired from all the raking we did earlier. It feels like that trunk is full of rocks or books or something."

Brian flipped open the lid to reveal a tightly packed inside full of papers and books. He grinned at Dan. "I guess you were right." He sat down on the floor next to the trunk, glancing at the titles. "*The ABC of Strawberry Culture for Farmers, Village People and Small Growers: A Book for Beginners*," he read.

"The Village People?" Dan asked, a twinkle in his dark eyes. "Now that sounds like a riveting book."

Brian snorted as he continued looking through the old books. "They're all like that. Crop rotation, farming, gardening. Sounds like this trunk will get left to you someday, Mart."

"I'm sure I'll be thrilled to spend the rest of my life wading through ancient books about the crop rotation of The Village People's strawberry fields," Mart said dryly.

"More trivia to add to your already saturated brain," Brian retorted.

Honey, meanwhile, had finished going through the chest that Di had abandoned, finding very little of worth for their quest. The discovery of two very large, very black spiders and their sticky spider webs in the empty bottom drawer had Honey slamming the drawer and turning back to the others with a slightly pale tint to her face. "So, uh...what else do we need to look through? Anyone find anything interesting?"

"We've got a couple of old dresses and a Victorian suit of some sort over here," Jim said, holding up an old jacket gingerly. "But I think they might fall apart if someone actually put them on. They're not in really good shape."

"This trunk is completely full of books," Brian added. "Nothing wearable."

Dan sighed and rubbed his muscles as he gave a baleful look at the old trunk in front of him. "I suppose we need to push this back where it came from, huh?"

"If you're not up to it," Brian said with a spreading grin, "I suppose I'm man enough to push it back where I found it."

Dan gave him a mock scowl. "Are you calling my masculinity into question?"

Trixie looked over at the two young men from where she sat, looking through Bobby's old toys in the crawl space, and rolled her eyes at them. "Boys," she muttered.

Dan and Brian continued to joke and tease each other as they pushed the trunk back under the eaves. Jim, meanwhile, left Mart and Di to repack the trunk and walked over to the window seat under the dormer in front of which Trixie now sat.

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Trixie had pulled out one of the drawers underneath the window seat and was going through it. Jim sat down next to her. "Can I help?" he asked.

"Sure," she said with a nod. She gestured toward the other drawer. "Look through and see what's there. It looks like it's mainly old blankets and bedding stored here, but you never know what we might find."

Jim and Trixie began to search through the drawers, pulling out yellowed sheets, a couple of plaid tartan blankets and what had once been a very brightly colored Halloween throw, covered in black cats, bats, ghosts and witches on broomsticks. "This certainly fits the season," Jim said with a laugh.

"Hmm...yeah, but it isn't a costume," Trixie replied. "I think we're going to be sorry out of luck on that score. Di's mask is the only neat thing we've found that isn't falling apart." She rummaged through her drawer a little more, pulling out a couple of small pillows with faded needlepoint designs on them and then looked into the now empty drawer with a sigh. "Nothing else exciting in here." She glanced over to Jim's drawer. "What about you?"

"Other than the Halloween thing?" he asked. At her nod, Jim listed off, "Five sheet sets that used to be white but now are a dingy yellow, a partially finished needlepoint sampler..." He held up the faded fabric with its tangle of thread behind it before he picked up the last item in the drawer. "And a dried out fountain pen, circa 1800-something."

Trixie suddenly noticed a piece of paper at the bottom of the drawer. She grinned at him. "That's not all! Look there! It's probably a receipt for said fountain pen. Maybe we'll have the date at the top." She grabbed the piece of paper and read, "Tuesday, 29th October, 1811."

"1811?" Jim asked, looking at the paper curiously. "That can't be right. That paper looks new." He ran a finger down the back of the sheet of paper. "And look at this! This is weird. It's not even wrinkled from being under all those blankets for God knows how long." He peered over her shoulder to read what was on the paper. "What does it say? It's not really a receipt for that pen, is it?"

"No," Trixie said with a shake of her head. "But it's not easy to read. It's in that old-fashioned handwriting that's really slanted and crimped together." She squinted at the paper and began reading. 'Midnight cometh like a dark warrior...'

"What have you got there?" Honey inquired with a smile. Her smile widened as she looked at the sheets. "Well, if Dave needs another sheet for his ghost costume this year, he can always borrow one from you, Trixie."

"He could be the tobacco smoking ghost." Brian chuckled as he looked at the yellowed sheets.

"Look at this." Trixie waved the paper excitedly. "It's some sort of old-fashioned note someone wrote."

"That can't be very old," Brian disagreed. "The paper isn't faded." He gestured toward the sheets. "If it really was an old note, even from twenty years ago, it would be turning the color of those sheets."

"But the writing is that funny, slanted kind from the old days," Trixie insisted.

"Maybe someone was practicing writing in the old-fashioned way?" Dan suggested as he walked over and peered down at the paper. "'Midnight cometh like a dark warrior and robs the sensible. Fear binds the courageous and mires the strong man.' Geez. Nice dreary sentiment, huh?"

"What's everyone looking at?" Di demanded as she and Mart finished putting away the clothes in the trunk and returned to the others.

"Some sort of old letter or poem or something," Brian explained. "Trixie found it in one of the drawers over here."

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Trixie looked up, finally, her mind on the grim images on the paper. "It's got that weird, Thomas Jefferson-ish writing on it, but the paper is all crisp and sharp like I just tore it off a pad of paper."

"Well, it probably is just someone's attempt to write a bad poem in an old-fashioned script," Mart said matter-of-factly. He took the piece of paper out of Trixie's hand. "We're supposed to be finding costumes, remember?" Mart glanced down at the paper and shrugged. "Let's just get rid of this and see if we can find something else, okay?" With that, he crumpled up the piece of paper and tossed it over his shoulder.

"Hey!" Trixie complained. "I wasn't finished with that!"

All of the sudden, Di squealed. "Look!"

Six heads swiveled around at Di's screech. The paper that Mart had just crushed had floated to the ground as crisp and new as when Trixie had taken it out of the drawer. Not one wrinkle marred its smooth surface.

No one moved or breathed for several long moments, and then seven pairs of eyes stared at each other.

"Well, I guess we know how it stayed so crisp and white all these years," Honey said nervously.

"Yes, because it's magic paper!" Trixie cried excitedly as she bent down to scoop up the mysterious document. Her statement was met with a series of groans and guffaws from the male contingent of the Bob-Whites.

"More like a *trick* paper!" Mart said.

"And who put it here, Mart?" Trixie demanded. "As far as I know, no one's been in the attic for ages. Moms and Dad obviously wouldn't have put a trick piece of paper here!"

"You're forgetting our youngest sibling, the king mischief-maker himself," Mart pointed out.

"And where would Bobby get something like this?" Trixie asked, waving the paper in the air. She shivered as a frosty breeze ripped through the attic in response to her movement. It was clear that everyone in the room had felt the breeze, which died down when Trixie lowered the paper. "See?" Her voice held triumph. "That kind of a breeze from a regular piece of paper is not normal."

"So, it's part of the trick," Brian said. "And in response to your question about where Bobby may have gotten it, what about from Ben? He loves playing tricks. Remember the par-squirrel? And he was here not too long ago."

Trixie shook her head. "He was here three *months* ago. And who knows when he'll be in Sleepyside next? Ben likes to be around when his jokes are sprung, and he would have known he wouldn't be when this was found. And if it was a joke, why would someone have hidden it in the attic? There would be a good chance it wouldn't be found for ages. As a matter of fact, if Moms hadn't suggested we search up here, it would still be sitting there buried under those old sheets."

Dan looked at Mart and Brian soberly. "She does have some very good points."

"Don't tell me you're buying into this?" Mart asked incredulously.

"I'm not saying that—yet—but there may be more to this than meets the eye," Dan said. "You know that we've run into some pretty creepy and unexplainable stuff in the past."

"There was the Lizzie Borden séance," Jim pointed out. Trixie looked at him gratefully and felt her cheeks grow warm when he smiled at her in response.

"Which was rigged by that fake paranormal guy," Brian said, rolling his eyes.

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"What about what happened in Chicago? How do you explain that?" Honey asked. "That was some pretty freaky stuff."

"Just because I can't personally explain it, doesn't mean there isn't a logical, scientific, non-ghostly, non-paranormal, non-insane reason," Brian insisted stubbornly.

"There was the incident at my dad's cemetery," Jim said quietly.

"Some practical joker hid the rotor on us is all," Brian said.

Trixie noticed that Jim looked as if he had been about to say something further but decided against it. Jim had been...different after the trip to visit his childhood home and father's grave outside of Rochester. Trixie knew it could simply have been because he finally had a bit of closure over the events of his childhood, but that didn't quite explain the change—the deep sense of peace that he seemed to have after that trip. Since that night, she had felt that something had happened in the cemetery, something that Jim wanted to keep private, but it was only a hunch. She had nothing concrete on which to base her assumption.

Suddenly, realizing that everyone was staring at her, she started to say something, but Mart beat her to it. "I see those wheels turning, Trix. Just remember, we're supposed to be planning a Halloween party, *not* solving a mystery...or whatever it is you *think* you dug up with that piece of paper."

"Even you have to admit that it's mysterious, Mart," she said.

He shrugged. "I still think it was Bobby."

"What was Bobby?" The youngest Belden, arriving just in time to hear Mart's comment, wanted to know.

"Trixie found a trick piece of paper in one of the drawers over there," Brian said, gesturing toward the drawer as he spoke. "We were trying to figure out how it got there. Did Ben Riker give you a paper to hide on us the last time he was here?"

Bobby shook his head slowly, his blond curls moving with the effort. "No, but that reminds me of something..."

"What? Reminds you of what?" Trixie asked, moving toward her little brother, her voice reflecting a mixture of excitement and curiosity. "You know something!" She thrust the paper toward Bobby. "This piece of paper, which appears brand new and pristine but has writing that looks very old, uncrumpled itself in front of all of us! If you know something, you have to tell us!"

"It's a story Brom told me an' Terry and Larry. You know how Dad has always told us that that Washington Irving supposedly stayed here at Crabapple Farm?" The Beldens nodded and Bobby continued. "Well, Brom says it's true. One of his ancestors—I forget how many great-grandfathers back—struck up a friendship with him when he stayed here. Brom says that even back then, Washington Irving liked to spin yarns and tell tales, even though that was way before he wrote 'Rip Van Winkle' or 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.' But..."

At this, Bobby paused and looked at each of the Bob-Whites. It wasn't often that he had the group's undivided attention, and he was savoring it. Especially because he knew how they, or at least Trixie, would react when they heard the full story.

"While he was staying here, something happened. Something that inspired him to write about a headless horseman, streaking through the night."

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In spite of herself, Honey shivered. The Bob-Whites listened attentively, eager to hear the rest of the tale.

“Washington Irving found something when he stayed at Crabapple Farm, something that first intrigued him and then grew to terrify him. He told Brom’s ancestor about a paper that brought him inspiration. A paper that seemed indestructible, no matter what. At first, Irving loved the sensation of sitting down with a fresh sheet of paper and pen, the words seeming to come out of nowhere, his hand barely able to keep up with the stories that flowed through the pen. He said it was as though someone else was telling the stories, and he was there more like an observer. A...conduit...was the word I think Brom used.

“And the tales the pen told were dark and grim. About fear and darkness and midnight and evil, stuff like that. But no matter how much he wrote, when he woke up the next morning, the paper was blank. The words were gone. But he would still feel compelled to sit down and write, even knowing that the stories would disappear. The ghostly presence would not leave him alone. It became stronger and stronger, until the dark images began to fill his head even when he was not in the presence of the strange paper and its companion pen.”

Trixie shivered at the transformation that had come over her little brother. It was hard to believe that a boy of his age could tell a story this well, but it was obvious that he had hung onto Brom’s every word and was reciting the story from memory, complete with the creepy pauses that Brom, a master storyteller, was sure to use. If only Bobby’s teachers, who were forever sending notes home about his lack of attention span and inability to remember key facts, could see him now!

“He tried to ignore it,” Bobby was saying. “He was staying up here in the attic, which I guess was the guest room back then, and he would try to hide the paper and pen, but they would always find its way back to his bedside table.”

“Why didn’t he just rip it up and throw it away?” Brian asked.

Bobby stared at him. “He did. It always pieced itself back together. And after that, the frightening images inside his head were stronger than ever. He learned the hard way not to tear it up.”

Brian scoffed at the notion. “Brom sure does tell some whoppers.”

“How can you say that? We have the proof right here!” Trixie declared, thrusting the paper toward him. “We found it in the very place that Washington Irving himself hid it.” She looked down in awe at the paper. “Can you believe Washington Irving actually touched this paper? That’s so cool!”

“That paper isn’t more than a couple years old, let alone more than a century. Washington Irving never touched it,” Brian insisted.

“I don’t know why you’re being so stubborn about this, Brian,” Trixie continued to argue. “You *saw* this paper defy the laws of physics! And it’s not like this would be the first ghost to haunt Sleepyside. What about Sarah Sligo?”

“Lewis Gregory was behind that and you know it,” Brian retorted. “He confessed.”

“But I saw...” Trixie began, but Brian interrupted.

“You *imagined*,” he insisted.

“Can I finish my story now?” Bobby glared at his sister and oldest brother.

“There’s more?” Dan asked.

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Bobby nodded his head. "Irving went for a walk one night, trying to get away from the images in his head, the images the paper put there. It was at the stroke of midnight that he saw something that terrified him."

"What?" Trixie breathed. "What did he see?"

Bobby shrugged. "Nobody knows. It terrified him so much that he couldn't talk about it. He told Brom's relative that he needed to get away from the Valley, it scared him so much. So, he left Crabapple Farm and went back to Manhattan. Not long after that he went to Europe, where he published 'Rip Van Winkle' and 'Sleepy Hollow.' Brom says that legend has it that he wrote 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' to exorcise the demons that had haunted him from the time that he left this area."

"How do you know that?" Jim wondered.

"Because when he returned from Europe and finally settled here at Sunnyside, he told that to Brom's relative. He said that writing the Sleepy Hollow story had done the trick, too," Bobby finished.

Trixie's blue eyes shone with excitement. She had just stumbled onto a mystery, here in the attic in Crabapple Farm! "This must be the paper! I wonder if the pen is around here, too," she mused as she darted over to the drawer where she had found the paper. She knelt to peer in the drawer. At first glance, it appeared as empty as Jim and she had thought it had been when they'd first gone through it. But as she leaned into the drawer to inspect it more closely, she saw a glint of gold near the back of the drawer. Trixie reached her arm all the way to the back of the drawer and triumphantly pulled out an ornate fountain pen. It appeared as new, but its style was from the days of old.

She turned and held it up to the assembled Bob-Whites. "See!" she crowed. "There's something to Bobby's story! I know it!"

"I'm not sure this proves anything," he said thoughtfully, examining the old-fashioned pen for a moment before he handed it back to Trixie. "But it sure is intriguing that it just happened to be here."

"Unless Bobby planted it, just waiting to tell us this tale," Brian said, giving his brother a sharp look. "Did you, Bobby?"

The younger boy shook his head. "I didn't, Brian. Honest." No one in the room doubted Bobby, the earnestness on his face was so compelling.

"I wonder what Irving saw," Trixie said. "I bet we could find out!"

"How, Trixie?" Honey wanted to know.

"Well, maybe the paper can tell us," Trixie explained.

Di shivered. "Trixie, didn't you hear Bobby's story? That ghostly paper haunted Washington Irving. He had to go all the way to Europe to get away from it. Why would you want to put yourself through that?"

"Dark and grim images don't sound fun to me, either, Trix," Dan agreed.

The excitement on Trixie's face dimmed a bit as she realized what they said was true. "You're probably right, but it would be so fun to solve this mystery. Imagine if we *could* figure out what Irving saw. It would almost be like finding a lost piece of history."

"Irving is one of the most noted American authors ever. It would be kind of neat," Mart had to agree.

"Count me out!" Di declared, with another elaborate shudder. "No dark and grim images for me, thank you very much!"

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"Kids!" Helen Belden's voice floated up the stairs. "It's almost time for dinner, and I could use some help getting things ready."

"We'll be right down, Moms!" Brian called.

No one spoke any more of the mysterious pen and paper that Trixie had found as they hastily straightened the attic and clamored down the stairs, the delectable aroma of vegetable soup and baked bread driving thoughts of the paper out of their heads.

It wasn't until much later, alone in her room, that Trixie took out the mysterious objects and studied them. Now, more than ever, she was convinced that the spidery writing was truly old. She wondered who had written it, what gave the paper its mystical properties, how it had found its way to Crabapple Farm, and what it had caused Irving to see. She was sure that whatever he had seen had inspired him to write "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and she was dying to know what that was.

Finally, she stopped her musings and put the pen and the paper down on her desk. She slid into bed and soon fell into a restless slumber, filled with visions of dark, shapeless forms that exuded evil, devils slinking through the labyrinth of the preserve, and deformed creatures sneaking through the orchards of Crabapple Farm.

Meanwhile, at the very stroke of midnight, the pen, of its own accord, etched more spidery writing onto the paper.

Evil walks upon the earth, cloaked in darkness. The righteous and the wicked shall be judged, the day of reckoning comes.

The day was half over before Trixie felt as if she'd woken up. The night of restless, disturbing dreams had weighed heavily on her. It hadn't helped at all to see that the paper had new eerie sentences about evil, darkness and death.

She entered the kitchen, hoping that, perhaps, the sight of the sunny room would dispel the weird sense of gloom that had hung around her like a cloak all day. She grabbed a few roasted pumpkin seeds from a bowl on the counter and munched them, looking around her at the cooling racks and the buckets of apples that her mother was intending to peel for more apple sauce and pies. Normally, the sight of fresh apple and pumpkin pies made her think of the crisp, cool air of fall. But instead, today, her mind strayed to the lanky schoolteacher, Ichabod Crane, who had tried to outrun the Headless Horseman and failed.

Her stray glance happened to look out the window toward the backyard. The trees were black against the storm-darkened sky, and the woods beyond had a sense of foreboding about them that sent a shiver down her spine.

"Oh, great. Tons of ominous, dark trees. Good thing I'm planning a ride in the preserve this afternoon," she muttered to herself.

Jim and Honey had suggested the late afternoon ride the day before, but as usual, Dan had his chores to do around the small cabin in the woods he shared with Mr. Maypenny. Di had family plans that day, and both Brian and Mart had tests the next day at school and needed to study. Trixie had dutifully checked her own homework, but the little bit of reading for her history class and the few math problems she had were easily disposed of in a quick homework session after lunch, so she had called Honey and agreed to go riding with them.

Trixie walked slowly down the stairs to the back door, took her BWG jacket off the hook and slipped it on over her shoulders before she headed outside.

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The wind had picked up since the Indian Summerish weather of the day before, and she could feel its chill whipping through her blonde curls. Everything seemed to be darker and grimmer than it had on the cozy day of fun she'd had with her friends the day before.

The disturbing thoughts propelled her forward until she was almost running toward the Manor House. She slowed down, trying to catch her breath as she headed for the stables to find Jim and Honey saddling Jupiter, Lady and Susie.

"Hey, Trix!" Jim greeted her with a smile.

"Hi, Jim! Hi, Honey!" Trixie noted the edges of weariness around his emerald eyes. "Tired?"

Jim laughed a little as he tightened the cinch around Lady's belly. "I think your strange paper mystery is rubbing off on me." He gave Lady an affectionate pat before he turned back to Trixie. "I had a lot of really bad dreams last night."

"Death and destruction and evil hounds of hell and all that kind of stuff," Honey said, her hazel eyes wide as she looked at her friend. "Jim and I both had them. I don't know, Trixie. You ought to get rid of that paper. I don't like this."

"Mart and Brian didn't say anything about the paper or any bad dreams," Trixie insisted. "They were in good moods when I left."

"What about you, Trix?" Jim asked quietly.

Trixie bit her lip and avoided Jim's gaze as she fiddled with Susie's saddle.

"See?" Honey demanded. "I told you, Jim. I knew she'd have the bad dreams too."

Trixie shook her head stubbornly. "I don't see any rhyme or reason to it, Honey. Probably we're just have more...I don't know...active imaginations or something. Brian and Mart are so thick-skulled that it would take a miracle for them to come up with something imaginative in their dreams."

Jim chuckled as Honey protested, "Trixie!"

Trixie sighed as she grabbed Susie's reins to lead her outside. "Ignore me. I'm really crabby today. All those dreams kept waking me up. And then it didn't help any that the paper had new writing on it this morning."

Jim and Honey, who had both taken the reins for their respective horses to lead them out of the stables, stopped and stared at her. "New writing?" Jim demanded.

"Trixie!" wailed Honey. "You have to throw that paper away. Burn it or something!"

"Burn it?" Trixie demanded. "You heard what Bobby said happened when Washington Irving tried to tear it up. The nightmares were a zillion times as bad as they had been before!" She shook her head.

"Burning it probably would have me having Freddy Krueger nightmares or something. No, thank you."

"What did the paper say?" Honey asked as the three friends walked their horses out into the corral and through the fence gate before they mounted them. "Something horrible, I'm sure. Death, murder, destruction, sacrificing chickens..."

Jim and Trixie both burst out laughing. "Sacrificing chickens?" Jim asked, raising his eyebrow at his sister.

"I don't know if I want to hear about your nightmares from last night, Honey," Trixie said, shaking her head. "It sounds like yours were way worse than mine were."

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Honey glared at them both. "Don't think we've heard the last of this paper, you two." She brushed aside several strands of golden hair as she looked at her friend in dismay. "Oh, Trixie. Why are we always in the middle of these Halloween escapades?"

"Maybe they – whoever they are – know that we'll solve the mysteries. Or try to anyway." Trixie lightly kicked Susie's flanks and followed Jim into the preserve. "We solved the problem for that gangster moll in Chicago. Although, we didn't help much with the Lizzie Borden mystery. I still wish we could figure out whether Lizzie Borden actually murdered her parents or not. And I'm really curious what that whole weird thing was with the Victorian versions of us."

"Well, I don't think solving that mystery will help Lizzie Borden now," Honey pointed out. "She's been dead for a century at least. And if she didn't do it, the real murderer's dead now, too. And they'll get their punishment in the end anyway."

"I know that," Trixie sighed. "But I still wish we'd been able to solve it." She gave Honey a rueful look. "You know me and mysteries."

"Yes, we do," Jim said with an affectionate look over his shoulder at his girlfriend. "I'm still grateful you like to solve them. Otherwise, who knows where I'd be today?"

Trixie blushed at Jim's praise and before she could answer him, Honey hastened to say, "You know I love solving mysteries, too, Trixie. I just don't like the idea of being haunted for the rest of my life by some mysterious spirit writing on paper. Didn't Washington Irving have to write something to finally get rid of that spirit?" She added, "It isn't like any of us are storytellers like he was. My English grade..." she trailed off meaningfully.

"Mart likes to write," Jim disagreed. "And that column Mr. Zimmerman gave him to replace the Miss Lonelyheart one would be a perfect place for him to write a spooky Halloween tale. If he ever needs to, that is."

"Well, hopefully, we won't have the problem Washington Irving did," Trixie said with a determinedly cheerful smile. "After all, he already *wrote* the story, so what more could there be to tell?"

"Don't *say* that," wailed Honey. "Who *knows* what he left out of the story?"

Trixie couldn't help but be affected by Honey's warnings and concerns about the mysterious paper. She had to admit to herself that seeing that the pen had written more words as she slept had completely crept her out. Her room had been freezing that morning, even though the hallway had been perfectly warm, and now, with the wind picking up and the horses neighing nervously, she felt like even Mother Nature was being commanded by the devilish pen.

The righteous and the wicked shall be judged, she thought uneasily to herself. *I wonder which we are.*

The screech of an owl startled her out of her thoughts. Honey let out a little yelp, and Jim laughed, but there was a tinge of nervousness in his laugh that Trixie could hear. The rustling of the wind through the trees and the dark, menacing canopy those same trees created overhead had Trixie anxiously tightening her grip on the reins.

Not one of the three friends spoke a word as the horses clopped through the forest. Even the tread of the horses' hooves against the fallen leaves sounded sinister.

Trixie took a deep breath, focusing on the back of Jim's head as he led them deeper into the forest. *Jim's with us. There's nothing to be afraid of. Nothing at all.*

Suddenly, the trees in front of them seemed to tilt back and forth in a strong sway. Jim pulled up on the reins of his horse and looked back at the girls, a startled look on his face.

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Trixie's eyes were riveted on the scene in front of her. The trees swayed until it looked as if they were shimmering. Shimmering like a silver, see-through curtain. Beyond the curtain, the river wound through the Catskills, sparkling in the overhead full moon's light.

However, Trixie still could feel the late afternoon sunshine on her shoulders. Yet, her eyes stubbornly insisted that the moon's hoary light filtered through the trees in front of her. The hackles on the back of her neck stood up, and she tightened her hands on the reins, her heart pounding wildly.

"Jim," Honey's voice was barely a whisper behind her. "We're not near the river, are we?"

Jim shook his head once, his freckles stark in his pale face.

A man, dressed in a tattered uniform, ran up to the edge of the river, looking around him in abject terror, trying to find a place to escape to. Behind him a couple of tall, red-coated soldiers advanced, their swords drawn. "Bitte, bitte, nicht!" he begged, dropping to his knees.

The two soldiers did not say a word as they walked in perfect time together, their stride long and sure. The shadows hid their faces, rendering them even more threatening.

"Ich bitte euch, habt Erbarmen. Erbarmen!" the man pleaded hoarsely.

Trixie held her breath, frozen in horrified awe as she helplessly watched the soldiers march forward. As one, they swung their swords, and the kneeling man let out a strangled cry that was cut off as his head was neatly sliced from his body.

Honey screamed, and the horses shied, neighing in their panic. The two soldiers turned as if they'd heard the noise, their heads swiveling to look through the sway of the silken-like curtain at the three Bob-Whites.

Terror spiked through Trixie as the two men slowly advanced toward them. And suddenly, she realized exactly what it was that had frightened Irving so many years ago.

Instead of the evil faces she was expecting to see, all she saw was empty air.

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Inside the familiar comfort of the Bob-White clubhouse, the three terrified friends sat and tried to absorb what had just happened to them.

"This isn't happening. This is not happening," Honey murmured over and over again, sitting on one of the benches and rocking back and forth, her stricken face pale from fright.

"We *couldn't* have imagined it," Trixie wondered out loud. "Could we?" As she often did in times of crisis or confusion, she looked toward Jim, as if he had all the answers.

Jim looked back at her, his green eyes looking huge and every freckle on his face standing out. "I don't see how we all could have just imagined the same thing," he began. "But at the same time I don't see how it *couldn't* be our imagination. That scene...it just...it can't..."

Trixie nodded, wrapping her arms around herself for both warmth and comfort. "It was a pretty gruesome scene. I'd hate to think it was real, but..."

Honey looked up then, staring into Trixie's eyes. "But the horses." It was a short statement of fact that may not have made sense to someone who had not been with them, but Trixie and Jim knew exactly what she meant.

Not only had the horses shied in fright, but as the headless figures approached, the animals had turned and shot back down the trail, their hooves flying as they tried to gain distance between themselves and

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the horrifying scene. It was only because of Jim and Honey's skilled hands that they had been able to eventually slow Jupiter and Lady. Fortunately, Susie had calmed down after Jupe and Lady were under control.

As if by unspoken agreement, the three had led their horses to the clubhouse, not ready to face the cheerful reality of Manor House or its stables, where Regan, Miss Trask, or some other resident would surely see something was terribly wrong with the trio.

"The horses," Jim and Trixie agreed in unison.

"Can animals experience a group hallucination?" Trixie asked.

Jim thought for a moment and then shook his head as he replied, "I doubt it."

Trixie closed her eyes and drew in a deep breath. As she slowly let it out, she opened her eyes again. "Then that means it was real."

"But *how* real?" Honey wanted to know. "Real as in, not a dream? Or real as in, we saw history reenacting itself?"

Trixie looked at Honey, her blue eyes sober. "I think you hit the nail on the head, Honey. I think we just saw what really happened to that Hessian soldier who was supposed to be the Headless Horseman."

Honey's hazel eyes filled with tears. "But why? Why us?"

Trixie thought for a moment. "Like you said, that paper called to us. For whatever reason, we were the ones sensitive to its power. Washington Irving must have been sensitive to it, too."

For a few moments, no one spoke, each trying to process the terrifying event and what it might mean.

"Well," Trixie finally spoke, breaking the silence, "we're not going to figure this out sitting here, and Moms and Dad will start to wonder about me if I'm gone much longer. I'd better be heading back."

It was a solemn trip back to the stables, where Regan was waiting for the horses. Jim and Honey promised the redhead that they would be back to groom the horses and clean the tack as soon as they had walked Trixie home. Regan, in turn, took one look at their faces and told them that he would take care of it for them.

"I don't know what happened in the preserve," he said, "but whatever it was, it looks serious. Are you kids all right?"

The group nodded their heads, but not one made even a pretense of smiling. Regan frowned.

"I won't badger you now," he promised. "But if whatever it is is serious, promise me that you'll talk to an adult before it gets out of hand, okay?"

The three nodded, and Trixie added, "It's not criminal, Regan. Promise. We just got kind of spooked in the woods. That's all."

Regan narrowed his eyes. "Spooked doesn't begin to describe how you three look right now. As much as I want to chalk it up to overactive imaginations and Halloween being around the corner, I know what kind of trouble you kids can get yourselves into. Just take care of yourselves, okay?"

The three nodded again and gratefully escaped down the path to Crabapple Farm. As soon as they entered the cheery, yellow glow of the light surrounding the white frame farmhouse, Trixie turned to her friends.

"I'm okay from here," she said. "You guys be safe heading back, 'kay?"

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"We will," they assured her.

"I'll tell Mart and Brian that we're going to have an emergency meeting of the Bob-Whites tomorrow after school. I'll call Dan, too. Will you call Di?"

Honey nodded. "Will do. See you at school tomorrow, Trix." She gave her friend a troubled look and a quick, impulsive hug. "Try to sleep okay."

"You, too. Both of you," Trixie said with a half-hearted smile.

Jim reached out toward his girlfriend and tugged his favorite curl. "We'll be fine, Shamus. And so will you."

As Trixie ran up the steps and into the cheerful farmhouse, she felt much better. With Jim on her side, she *would* be fine. As she entered the kitchen, she was grateful that her mother was distracted with helping Bobby make caramel apples. Trixie was able to head up to her room without anyone noticing how shaky she still was.

Once in her room, she pulled the mysterious paper out of her desk drawer and stared at it. Fortunately, no new couplets had appeared on the paper, but the ones that were there mocked her. She had an urgent feeling somewhere in the back of her mind that she was supposed to figure something out. To *do* something. But what?

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"Are you serious, Trix?" Mart broke the stunned silence that had followed Trixie's recounting of the fantastic events in the preserve the night before.

"Do I *look* like I'm joking?" Trixie asked.

"And you say the horses saw it, too?" Dan asked.

Trixie, Honey, and Jim all nodded. "It's the only thing that explains their reactions," Trixie stated.

"I wouldn't say it's the *only* thing," Brian disagreed. "You said Honey screamed. That could have set the horses off. Or your fear. Even if it was irrational, the horses could have sensed it and..."

"Irrational?" Trixie screeched. "The only thing that's irrational is your stubborn insistence that things are normal, even with the towering pile of evidence to the contrary that you yourself have witnessed!"

"I saw it, too, Brian," Jim said quietly. "Maybe what we saw was irrational, but if you had seen what we had, you would agree that our fear was anything but."

Brian obviously did not want to argue with his friend, but his face plainly said that he was sure he never would have seen the frightening vision to begin with.

Mart broke the awkward silence. "I wonder why it was red-coated soldiers that killed him? After all, it was the British who hired the Hessians to fight on their side during the American Revolution."

"A pretty fair amount deserted, so maybe he was a deserter. Or maybe what he was trying to explain was that he wasn't deserting, but the soldiers wouldn't listen. If they thought he was deserting, that could go a long way in explaining violent way in which they killed him," Jim commented.

"In any case, I'm sure we saw what Washington Irving saw," Trixie declared. "And now we just have to prove it."

"Prove it?" Di asked. "How?"

"Research," Trixie replied simply.

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"Well, then you've come to the right place, my dear Beatrix," Mart said, trying to diffuse some of the tension in the clubhouse. "What would you like to know about Washington Irving? Perhaps the fact that, under the pen name Dietrich Knickerbocker, Irving wrote a history of New York that poked fun at the early Dutch settlers in Manhattan. The term 'Knickerbocker' then came to mean anyone living in New York, and it's how the New York Knickerbockers, now known as the Knicks, got their name."

Trixie just glared at her brother, not sure if he was making fun of her.

"No?" Mart asked, unperturbed at her icy glare. "Well then, did you know that Irving is responsible for popularizing the name 'Gotham' for New York City?"

Trixie continued to stare, even as the other Bob-Whites were breaking into grins.

"No? Well then, how about..."

"Okay, okay, I get it," Trixie conceded. "You know a lot about Washington Irving. And for your information, yes, I know all that stuff, too. You know as well as I do, Mart, that you can't grow up in this area and *not* know a lot about Irving. But I'm talking about something deeper than that kind of biographical stuff. Like, learning what motivated him to write 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.' Bobby said that it was because he needed to 'exorcise his demons,' but what if it was more than that? What if the soldier somehow...I don't know...enchanted that paper, and Irving wrote the story *for* the soldier?"

"Why would he do that?" Dan questioned.

"I don't know. That's why I want to do some research."

"But then, if he wrote the story for the soldier, why is the soldier calling out to *us*?" Honey asked. "I mean, that's a pretty famous story, both here and in Europe. Why wasn't he satisfied with that?"

"That, my dear Honey, is the mystery!" Trixie said loftily. "Who's in?"

A chorus of five voices answered her, all proclaiming that they were "in." Only Brian sat there staring dubiously at the rest of the Bob-Whites.

"I don't know what you think this is going to accomplish," he said with a resigned shake of his head.

But despite all of his protests, Brian was with the rest of the gang the following Saturday when they visited Sunnyside, Washington Irving's last residence, less than ten miles from Sleepyside. Although Trixie had been to Sunnyside on many school field trips, she never quite got over the awe of experiencing the romantic setting. The gently curved paths led to the unique cottage that Irving had designed himself, and the sweeping views of the Hudson were breathtaking. It was hard to believe that the peacefully bucolic grounds could have been invented by the same man who had brought the Headless Horseman to life for several generations of readers.

Trixie's thoughts turned from the charming scene in front of her to the dreams that had plagued her every night during the last week, and she shivered. Honey looked at her sympathetically. She and Jim, too, had not had a restful night's sleep since before Trixie and Jim had found the mysterious paper in the Beldens' attic. The dreams were becoming more and more vivid and frightening, and the trio was ready to do almost anything to stop the horrible visions that haunted them.

Their guide, dressed in a 19th-century hoop skirt, appeared then and led the tour group through Sunnyside, explaining the history of the grounds and the cottage while Trixie's keen eyes darted everywhere, looking for a clue to their mystery. Nothing caught her eye in the gardens filled with 19th century herbs and flowers, the "Little Mediterranean" pond, the broad pasture, or the kitchen yard, but she didn't really expect to find clues in these places. It was inside Sunnyside that she hoped to find the answers she sought.

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Once inside, Trixie soon realized that she was not going to find what she was hoping for. The house, still authentically decorated with many of Irving's original furnishings, was a lovely example of 19th century living. But among the artifacts, even in Irving's writer's study, there were no papers, nothing that Trixie could study that reflected Irving's innermost thoughts. After the tour was over, she approached the guide and asked if there was a library or a place to study journals or other notes that Washington Irving might have written.

"Not here at Sunnyside," the perky brunette replied. "This site focuses more on his views of art, nature, and history as expressed through his architectural and landscape designs than on his literary achievements. The museum bookstore has a lot of his short stories and histories, but I don't remember any personal essays or anything like that. The Manuscripts and Archives Section of the New York Public Library has a collection called 'The Washington Irving Papers,' which includes a lot of his correspondence, notebooks, and journals—that sort of thing. It's available on microfilm at the library."

Trixie smiled at the guide. "Thank you very much for your help."

The Bob-Whites headed toward the bookstore, and Dan caught up with Trixie. "I know that you're disappointed that there's nothing concrete here, Trix, but please don't think this was a wasted trip. You've all been here before, but I haven't. And...well...I'm really glad I got to come."

Trixie smiled up at Dan. "Thanks, Dan. I *am* disappointed, but you've just made me feel a lot better."

Dan winked at her and then hurried to catch up to Mart and Di. Jim found his way to Trixie's side and asked, "You okay?"

"Yeah," the blonde smiled up at her boyfriend. "Dan made me realize that there's more to life than mysteries and that I was pretty lucky growing up."

Jim smiled. "That's my girl. And remember, a trip to the New York Public Library isn't such a hard thing to accomplish."

"I know," Trixie said dejectedly. "But it's too late to go today, they're closed tomorrow, and there's no way we could get there after school, so it will be another week before we can do any research. Oh, well. Hopefully, there'll be something in bookstore after all."

The Bob-Whites entered the bookstore, which was piping in hauntingly spooky music, probably in the spirit of the upcoming holiday as Sunnyside's famous and spooky "Legend Weekend" was just around the corner.

The group fanned out, exploring the various books for sale, but the guide had been right. There were many different editions of "Rip Van Winkle," "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, and the biography of George Washington that Irving had lovingly written about his idol. There were dozens of biographies about the famous American author, but Trixie knew that none of them contained the true story behind the inspiration of the Headless Horseman, or she would have learned of it long ago. She poked among all of the references, trying to find a published diary or a journal, thinking that maybe she would find an obscure reference that had been overlooked for all of these years. Unfortunately, there was nothing, and it was a dejected group that left Sunnyside. Even Brian was sympathetic to Trixie's disappointment.

Everyone climbed into the Bob-White station wagon, and the group was soon on their way back to Sleepyside. While Mart and Di flirted in the back seat, Honey described an upcoming English project to Brian and Dan, and Jim concentrated on driving, Trixie allowed her mind to drift. The rolling scenery of the Hudson River Valley escaped her notice as she stared unseeingly out the window, the wheels in her brain whirring. Suddenly, the elusive answer came to her.

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"Brom!" she shouted, startling Jim and bringing all of the conversations in the car to a halt.

Jim instinctively hit the brake pedal. "Where? Should we give him a ride?"

Trixie looked sheepish. "He's not here. I'm sorry I startled everyone," she apologized. "I just meant that maybe he could help us out. Maybe he has a journal or something, handed down from his ancestors."

"But the tour guide said that all of his journals were on microfilm down at the New York Public Library," Brian pointed out.

"Well, maybe this one never made it into the collection," Trixie said stubbornly.

"That's a good idea, Trix," Mart agreed. "Let's go to Brom's!"

"That might not be the best idea," Dan admonished. "Brom's pretty shy. He'd be pretty overwhelmed if all of us showed up at his doorstep."

"You're right," Trixie conceded. "Who should go?"

Di surprised everyone by answering promptly and matter-of-factly. "Bobby, of course." When everyone looked at her, she hastily explained, "Terry and Larry have told me enough about Brom to know that he relates best to kids their age. Bobby already knows we found the paper, so he'd be the perfect one to go."

"Di, you're a genius!" Trixie cried. "Let's go get Bobby and go right away!"

It wasn't long before the Bob-Whites were sitting in the car, watching Bobby disappear through the woods back to where Brom's little cottage was nestled. The minutes ticked by, and the battle that Trixie was waging with her impatience was becoming harder and harder to win until finally, Bobby's freckled face appeared again. He had a huge smile on his face and was waving a small, leather-bound book.

He scrambled into the car with a triumphant whoop. "You were right, Trix! Brom has an old journal of Washington Irving's!"

"And he let you have it?" Brian asked wonderingly.

"Not for keeps," Bobby said. "But Brom trusts me. He knows I won't do anything to hurt it."

Trixie reverently took the precious book from her younger brother. "This belongs in a museum," she breathed.

Bobby nodded. "Brom knows that, but when Irving gave it to his great-great-whatever-grandfather, he made him promise that the journal would never be made public." Bobby grinned proudly. "Brom doesn't consider me public."

Trixie smiled affectionately at the boy she used to consider a pest. "Of course not. You're one of his best friends." She looked down at the journal, brittle with age, and said, "We can't break Brom's trust. Let's read this right here and now, and then let Bobby take it back inside. I'd just die if something happened to it!"

The rest of the club agreed, and they eagerly peered over Trixie's shoulder as she carefully turned the delicate pages, quickly skimming for anything that might be significant. Finally, she found a passage that had potential.

"It is curious, indeed, this new find of mine. The writing flows in the most fascinating of ways," the spidery handwriting read.

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A few pages later, the journal offered, "My writing must not be to its satisfaction, for when I awaken, all of my labors are erased, and I must start the story anew."

As Trixie turned the pages, Irving's curiosity turned more disturbed. "What does it want from me?" The handwriting, still elegant, was not as evenly written as on previous pages. Instead, it had an agitated quality to it. "I have written the story that I thought it wanted. But it is never enough. The visions plague me in my sleep. The nightmares will not stop."

The next page contained only two sentences. Trixie read them out loud.

"I have seen the depths of hell. No man should have to endure that."

Honey gave an empathetic shiver. "I know what he means."

"Do you?" Trixie asked. "Does he mean that the soldier should not have had to endure what he did? Or does he mean that he should not have had to endure the vision?"

"Both," Honey said. "Both are awful."

After that, the journal contained mundane descriptions of everyday life until Trixie came to a passage that described Irving's quest to track down German and Dutch folk tales. By this time, he was living in England and traveling to the European Continent to conduct his research. And then there was a passage that sparked Trixie's interest.

"It is done. I have written it. Perhaps not like he wanted, but in my own way. I could not bear to write the horrors I saw. The test will be when I return to the valley. Will the thoughts plague me as they once did? If they do not, I will have my answer," she read aloud.

"What do you think he means by 'his answer'?" Jim asked.

"If he wrote the story right, I guess," Trixie responded. "If the soldier was happy with what Irving wrote about him."

"The soldier or the paper?" Di asked. "He keeps going back and forth as if it's the same thing. Sometimes he says 'it,' and sometimes he says 'he.'"

"Maybe the paper and the soldier are one and the same," Trixie offered. "If you notice, before he had the horrible vision in the preserve, he always says 'it.' After that, he says 'he.' It's like he's connected the paper with the soldier."

"How can the paper and the soldier be the same thing?" Brian scoffed.

"I don't know," Trixie said thoughtfully. "That soldier died a violent and horrible death near here. And he didn't have to. He was alone; he was defeated. I don't know German, but it was obvious that he was begging them to spare his life. He didn't want to die, and he certainly wasn't a threat to them. But they killed him with no mercy. If any event could cause the creation of a restless spirit, I would think that'd be it."

Honey nodded. "Maybe all he wants is for someone to tell his story. Maybe finding a way to haunt the paper and the pen was his way of finding some peace. Of getting someone to listen to him, unlike the soldiers."

"If it's the Hessian reaching out through the paper—and I am not saying that it is—then how do you explain that the writing is in English when his native language *wasn't* English?" Brian asked.

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"Well, look where begging for his life in German got him!" Trixie pointed out. "Not that I think it would have made a difference if he was speaking English to those horrible soldiers who chopped off his head, but maybe in reaching out this time, he knew it had to be in English. I mean, the paper *is* in America."

"But why is he back now?" Mart asked. "If Irving wrote the story, why isn't he able to find peace?"

Silence reigned until Trixie suddenly had another epiphany. "Because Irving wrote a *story*!" she exclaimed.

"We *know* that," Brian said in exasperation.

Trixie shook her head vigorously, her curls bouncing in emphasis. "No! I mean, Irving wrote a *fictional* story. No one believes it's true. And he didn't even really touch on the history of the Hessian soldier. The story is more about Ichabod Crane and Brom Bones and their rivalry over Katrina Van Tassel than about the Headless Horseman. It became one of the best-known stories ever, which may have brought some relief to the Hessian, but it doesn't tell *his* story."

"So," Honey said, "he wants someone to tell *his* story. The right way. The way it happened."

"Yep, and I know just the person to tell it," Trixie said, staring at Mart.

~~**~**

After yet another sleepless night, Trixie was nearly desperate for a solution. Mart had set to work on the article that morning, flipping through his copy of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and his notes about what Trixie, Jim and Honey had seen in the woods. A couple of hours went by, and Mart still had not resurfaced from his room. Trixie began badgering him, poking her head around the door to ask him how he was progressing. He finally kicked her out of his room permanently, instructing Brian to keep her away, after she had come in for the fourth time and demanded to know if he were done with the article yet.

"I don't understand what's taking him so long," Trixie cried, flouncing down on her bed. She glared at Brian. "You have no idea how awful it's been. The nightmares are horrendous. I don't even want to bother and go to sleep."

"I'm sorry," he said sympathetically, "but Mart isn't going to finish faster with you hanging over him like that. It's enough pressure on him just to have to write the article in the first place. And he still has to get Mr. Zimmerman to approve it for the paper."

"I *know*," she groaned and put her head in her hands. "What if he doesn't? I'll never sleep again!"

Brian gave her a skeptical look. "Trixie..."

"Go ahead and scoff, Mr. 'I Must Have Everything Scientifically Explained in Order to Believe It's True', but I'm not the only one sporting circles under my eyes the size of saucers because of terrible nightmares!"

At that moment, Mart poked his head around Trixie's door and gave his siblings a weary smile. "I think I'm done."

Trixie bounced off the bed and rushed over to the door. "Let me read it! Can I read it?"

Mart hesitated and then handed her the paper. Brian walked over behind Trixie to read over her shoulder.

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The True Legend of Sleepy Hollow
by Mart Belden

The average New Yorker is well familiar with the old tale of Ichabod Crane and his famous nemesis, the Headless Horseman, who terrorized the skinny schoolteacher into oblivion. Was this a figment of Washington Irving's imagination? Or was there something more to the famous story?

Most people would scoff at the idea of ghosts wandering the earth, unable to pass to the other side. Sympathetic vibrations, psychic readings and fortunes told are considered hoaxes and frauds at worst and wishful, fanciful feelings at best.

But then there is that time of year.

The time of year when the leaves turn color, the wind turns colder, and the darkening shadows of evening take over more and more of the day.

It's at this time of year that even the most skeptical of unbelievers takes a nervous, second glance at the old, abandoned house on the edge of their street or holds their breath while walking past the community cemetery.

The time of year when ghost stories are told and believed.

There are many theories as to where Irving got the inspiration for his famous story. An old German folk tale recorded by Karl Musäus is one of the most commonly reported.

But was there a real "headless horseman"?

Let's go back in time. Two centuries or more. To when New York was not a state of skyscrapers, large estates, and myriads of towns, but a battlefield.

The Colonies were fighting valiantly for freedom from the British Crown. The British were trying to subdue their unruly American colony. And in order to help them do that, the British hired Hessian mercenaries to fight against the Americans. Hessians were German soldiers, mostly from the German state of Hessen-Kassel (and thus their name). Many fought valiantly on the side of the British. Many died in battle. Others deserted, never to be heard from again.

One particular Hessian soldier has gained infamy.

Legend has it that the famous Headless Horseman in Irving's tale was actually a beheaded Hessian commander. Some thought he was roaming the streets of Tarrytown to locate his missing head. Others thought he had risen from the grave to lead a Hessian regiment up nearby Chatterton Hill, unaware that the British had already taken it.¹

But no one has ever explained how the Headless Horseman became headless. Was he the victim of a vicious American soldier during a battle? Had he been the casualty of a renegade cannonball? Or perhaps he came to his unfortunate end at the hands of British soldiers. Another deserter whose justice was swift and painful? Or perhaps he was just a man in the wrong place at the wrong time.

We'll never know exactly why.

Maybe you're a skeptic and scoff at the idea of a real Headless Horseman continuing his nightly ride through the mists of time. And perhaps you're right.

But as darkness falls earlier and the chill of the wind whips through your hair as you hurry home through the black, barren trees, say a little prayer for the restless soul of the Hessian soldier, won't you?

And perhaps the Headless Horseman will finally ride to his rest.

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"Wow, Mart," Brian said, glancing up at his brother. "That's terrific!"

Mart smiled at his brother before he turned to Trixie and asked, "Well?"

Trixie finished reading and looked up at him, her blue eyes blazing with hope. "It *is* terrific, Mart!" She glanced over at her desk where the pen lay, unmoving on the still crisp peace of paper and said fervently, "I hope *he* thinks so, too."

Even if Trixie had had no nightmares to face at all, she still probably wouldn't have been able to sleep that night, considering how nervous and excited she was to find out what would happen to Mart's article. His column was a weekly fixture in the school newspaper, usually with a more in-depth look at some topic that had interested him enough to research. Mr. Zimmerman, however, often curtailed his wilder flights of fantasy, and she was deathly worried that the journalism teacher would consider this to be one of them.

She waited, along with Honey and Jim, hopping from one foot to another in front of Mart's locker after school was over.

"Do you think he okayed the article?" Honey asked nervously. "I don't know what I'll do if he doesn't. I'm feeling like I did in boarding school all over again with these nightmares every night."

Trixie hugged Honey impulsively. "He'll pass it. He just *has* to."

"I certainly hope so," Jim said, shaking his head. "Last night's nightmare had guillotines in it." He grimaced as the girls looked at him in horror.

"That certainly trumps my sacrificial chickens," Honey said hoarsely.

Trixie looked desperately around her, hoping to get some glimpse of Mart, somewhere. But Di, Dan and Brian all arrived instead.

"Any news?" Dan demanded as the three Bob-Whites walked up.

"None," Honey wailed.

Di squeezed Honey's arm. "His article was so good. Zimmerman *has* to pass it!"

Brian sighed. "He's written a lot of good articles that Zimmerman has axed. He might think a headless horseman's too gory to put into the newspaper."

"Well, I certainly hope not," Jim said lightly. "I could really use some sleep."

Finally, Mart's sturdy figure appeared at the end of the hallway. Trixie didn't even wait for him to join them but ran down to meet him. "What did he say?" she demanded. "Did it get in?"

By the time the two Bob-Whites reached the others, there was a cacophony of voices questioning Mart. He finally let out a sharp Bob-White whistle, and the others fell silent. "Geez, you guys!" he complained. "Could you let a fella get a word in edgewise?"

"Like that's ever hard for you to do," Trixie retorted, grabbing on to his arm and shaking it hard. "Tell us!"

Mart hesitated, looking around at the others' expectant faces. His blue eyes twinkled as he drew out the moment, relishing being the central focus of all of his friends. "Well..."

"Mart!" Jim and Honey chorused in exasperation.

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A sheepish grin crossed Mart's face. He pulled out his paper and waved it excitedly. "It's in!"

Excited exclamations followed his announcement. Di gave him a quick kiss, her violet eyes sparkling. The boys all began talking at once about the newspaper and Mr. Zimmerman's unexpected approval of the article.

Honey squeezed Trixie's arm and whispered, "It worked! I can't believe it! Finally, it worked!"

Trixie squeezed Honey's arm in return. But a little nagging voice in the back of her head wondered if Mart's article would truly be enough for the tortured Hessian soldier.

After the bus ride home, Trixie dashed up the stairs to her bedroom, eager to see what the old Hessian soldier had written.

However, when she reached her room, the pen and paper were gone from her desk. "Where are they?" she asked, a troubled look crossing her face. "How will we know if he thinks the article was okay?"

Trixie began searching through her room, tearing through drawers and her closet, even reaching under her bed. But the only thing she found was a few candy corn she'd dropped and a page she'd ripped out of a catalog with the costume she'd thought of wearing for the party that coming weekend.

In despair, she crumpled up the catalog page and tossed it into her wastebasket along with the candy corn. A moment later, her mood completely changed. For the catalog page and candy corn bounced back out of the wastebasket.

Her eyes widened, and she hurried over to the little basket which rested next to her desk. Near the bottom of the almost empty container was a crumpled up, yellowed piece of paper and a tarnished, ink-stained fountain pen.

Gingerly, Trixie reached into the basket to pull out the pen and paper. The pen, brittle and old, broke into pieces as she attempted to free it from the wicker pieces it had been trapped between. She then tried to uncrumple the paper to read the one word in the center of the aged document.

Danke.

Once she had read the word, the paper fell apart in her hands, crumbling to a fine dust that littered the bottom of the basket. This time, when she tossed the catalog page and candy into the basket, they stayed there.

Trixie closed her eyes, a thankful, relieved smile on her face. "Rest in peace," she whispered.

Later that week...

Di had been a regular taskmaster that week, keeping the Bob-Whites hopping with her plans for her yearly Halloween party. And now, the time was here. The Lynches' large living and dining rooms were appropriately spooky with lowered lighting, fake cobwebs and eerily grinning jack-o-lanterns littered about.

Trixie grinned as she saw Di's Harlequin costume. It was tailored to match the multi-colored mask perfectly. Despite the fact that she was completely covered almost from head to toe, the fabric hugged her body in a way that made her look like no other Harlequin Trixie had ever seen.

Her brother Mart apparently thought the same thing, because he stuck to her like a second skin. He was dressed as a New Orleans Mardi Gras reveler, with layers of beaded necklaces over his "*Laissez les bons temps rouler!*" t-shirt and a jaunty bling-bling type crown on his blond head.

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Di had set several of her guests at the dining room table to carve pumpkins. Tad Webster leaned over by Mischa Petrov, explaining the whole process with great, elaborate detail. Dave Andersen, she assumed, was the lone ghost who was talking to Brian in his Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde half-and-half costume and Chuck Altemus, who actually looked rather good in Superman's famous tights.

The sound of a throat being cleared behind her caused Trixie to turn around. Jim wore a simple hobo costume, which matched hers. She smiled at him, but a mock scowl was all he gave her in reply. "I saw you checking out Chuck's tights," he said, shaking his finger at her. "You're supposed to be *my* girlfriend."

"I was just looking," she said, fighting back a grin. "I was in awe that any guy would have the nerve to actually show up in those tights." She wrapped her arms around his waist. "Not every guy would be that brave."

"Not too many guys would be caught dead in tights," Jim said dryly.

"Well, you can't say he isn't drawing attention," another amused voice said behind them.

Jim and Trixie turned to see Honey, who was wringing out her golden hair as she walked over to them. "What happened to you?" demanded Trixie as she shifted in Jim's arms to face her friend.

"I was bobbing for apples," Honey replied, gesturing over to the large tub where several of their classmates were egging Dan on. "I forgot to hold my hair back, and it all fell into the tub."

"Did you get an apple?" Jim asked, his green eyes twinkling.

"Of course!" Honey sniffed. "You didn't think that after *ruining* my hair that I was going to leave that tub without an apple, did you?"

Trixie and Jim both laughed. Honey sighed as she wrapped her hair into a long tail and tossed it over her shoulder. "Go ahead and laugh. It's nice to hear it, actually." She gave them a relieved look as she continued, "I don't know about you, but I've been the absolute worst grump with all those nightmares. I don't know how any of us functioned for so long!"

"You've got me!" Jim said, shaking his head. He tightened his arms around his girlfriend and let his chin rest on top of her blonde curls. "If I never go through that again, it'll be too soon."

"Are you sure everything was okay with our headless...friend?" Honey asked Trixie, looking at her in concern. "I'd hate to have that pen and paper pop up again someday."

"I think everything was fine," she said firmly. "The paper said 'Danke', which is German for 'Thank you!', so I think we're safe."

"Until next year," Honey said with a heavy sigh.

Jim chuckled. "We do seem to attract...well...a lot of weird stuff around this time of year."

"I don't want to attract anything more!" Honey said firmly. "I've seen enough ghosts and headless people and axe murdering fiends to last me a lifetime!"

"The Bob-Whites are all about helping people. We're *helping* people by what we're doing," Trixie protested.

"Helping *dead* people," Honey said dourly.

"Well, no one ever said the people we helped had to be alive, did we?" Jim teased.

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"I'm going to bring that up at the next Bob-White meeting," Honey said firmly. "We can only help people who are alive and breathing."

Trixie listened to Honey and Jim tease each other with only a half an ear. Somehow, she knew that mysteries to be solved were even more interesting and challenging when they involved people long dead. Look at the puzzles they'd solved at Cobbett's Island or in Virginia. Puzzles left by dead people that helped their live families in the present.

And even in cases like that poor, dead soldier, she found a simple pleasure in helping the poor souls find rest.

Yes, the Belden-Wheeler Detective Agency always solved their cases, no matter who their clients were or had been.

Except for Lizzie Borden.

A small frown etched her forehead. "We never figured out if Lizzie Borden actually murdered her parents."

Jim and Honey stopped talking, and both looked at her in surprise.

"Don't even think about it, Trixie," Honey warned. "We are *not* having another séance."

"Well, aren't you even curious to find out what really happened?" Trixie demanded.

"I'm more curious about the Victorian people that looked like us. I wonder how that guy did that parlor trick. Pretty ingenious, wouldn't you say?" Jim asked.

"Are you sure it was a trick?" Trixie asked thoughtfully. "Because it sure looked real to me."

"Trick or no trick – we'll never know," Jim replied cheerfully. "And now, I think it's time we adjourned to the refreshment table, don't you? Those orange frosted cupcakes are calling my name!"

Trixie let Jim lead her and Honey to the refreshment table. But even as she walked along, listening to their chatter, her mind flitted to those Victorian doppelgangers and wondered if, somehow, that connection to them had started them on this yearly Halloween path of seeing spirits and "dead people".

Hmmm...could be.

A small smile curved Trixie's lips.

I can hardly wait to see what happens next year!

The End

Susan's notes: First of all, I want to say that doing this yearly with Dana is such a joy! We have so much fun!!! Who ever thought that either of us would have a universe full of Halloween stories?? It's always a pleasure to write with you, baby! And we have a date for next year, too! (((HUGS)))

We used a lot of websites and research for this story. In addition to the Washington Irving sites Dana mentions below, I'd like to give credit to:

<http://www.vondonop.org/hessianfaq.html> (no longer available) for their facts on Hessian soldiers

<http://www.bartleby.com/310/2/2.html> for the text of the real "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" story

¹ https://americanfolklore.net/folklore/2010/07/the_headless_horseman.html for the story of the Headless Horseman (which Mart uses for his article, *and* you will note, puts appropriate footnotes in (because Mart is an honest boy and would never attribute other people's work as his own).

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The book Brian mentions is an actual book. *The A B C of Strawberry Culture, for Farmers, Village People, and Small Growers: A Book for Beginners* was written by Terry, T. B. and A. I. Root, copyright 1902, Medina, OH.

The Village People and Mary Poppins are trademarks of their corresponding trademark holders. No money being made off their use here. (That goes for Trixie and Co. too. ;))

A big thanks to Susi for her German translation of the Hessian soldier's words, which roughly (in English) were, "Please, please, no..." and "I beg of you. Have mercy! Mercy!" and for the German translation of our title, which is "The True Legend of Sleepy Hollow".

All the references to the books are intentional and made with love. And no, I wasn't shamelessly promoting Dana's and my other three stories within this universe, *cough* "92 Second Street", "The Case of the Mysterious Ghost" and "Treasure in the Ruins" *cough*. Why do you ask? *angelic smile*

Happy Halloween! See you again next year! ☺

Dana's notes: Ever since that first year that Susan and I wrote our Lizzie Borden story together, I have thanked my lucky stars that Susan said to me that first year, "I want to write something, but I don't know what." Who knew what a fantastic journey those words would send me on!

I know I am repeating Susan and myself when I say how much fun it is to write these stories together, but it really can't be said enough. Susan, writing in this universe with you brings me more happiness than you could possibly know. It's definitely a date! {{{HUGS}}} And thank you for being so understanding when I said, "Yeah, I know it says all of the challenge items are optional, but you know we have to include them *all*, right?" (But you knew ahead of time that I would say that!)

And, hey! I didn't stand you up this year! :)

The following websites (none of which are available anymore) were instrumental in our research this year: <http://www.tqnyc.org/NYCO51575/homepage.htm>, <http://members.aol.com/sleepy129/sh/sh-artic.htm>, <http://www.hudsonvalley.org/sunnyside/index.htm>, and <http://www.hyland.org/sleepyhollow/sleep10.txt>.

Washington Irving was known for his love of the Hudson River Valley, and we mean no disrespect to him or his descendents in suggesting he might have seen something terrifying in the preserve.

I've never been to Sunnyside, but I did my best to recreate it based on their website. If I made any mistakes, I apologize. I added it to my list of places I have to visit while I was researching it, so maybe the next time I write it, I'll know what I am talking about, lol. And there really is a collection of Irving's papers, notebooks, journals, etc. available on microfiche. No, I did not travel to the University of Maryland library (the closest library to me with a copy of the collection) to check them out, so if you happen to have read them, and something we wrote contradicts their contents, shhhh! Don't tell! :)

Like Susan says, all references to the books are intentional and made with love. The mention that Washington Irving was rumored to have stayed at Crabapple Farm is from *The Black Jacket Mystery*. And Susan's not the only one guilty of shameless self-promotion, lol! But every time Trixie comes up against more "supernatural reality" how could she not mention the previous instances? *adjusts halo*

We hope you have enjoyed this supernatural reality.

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