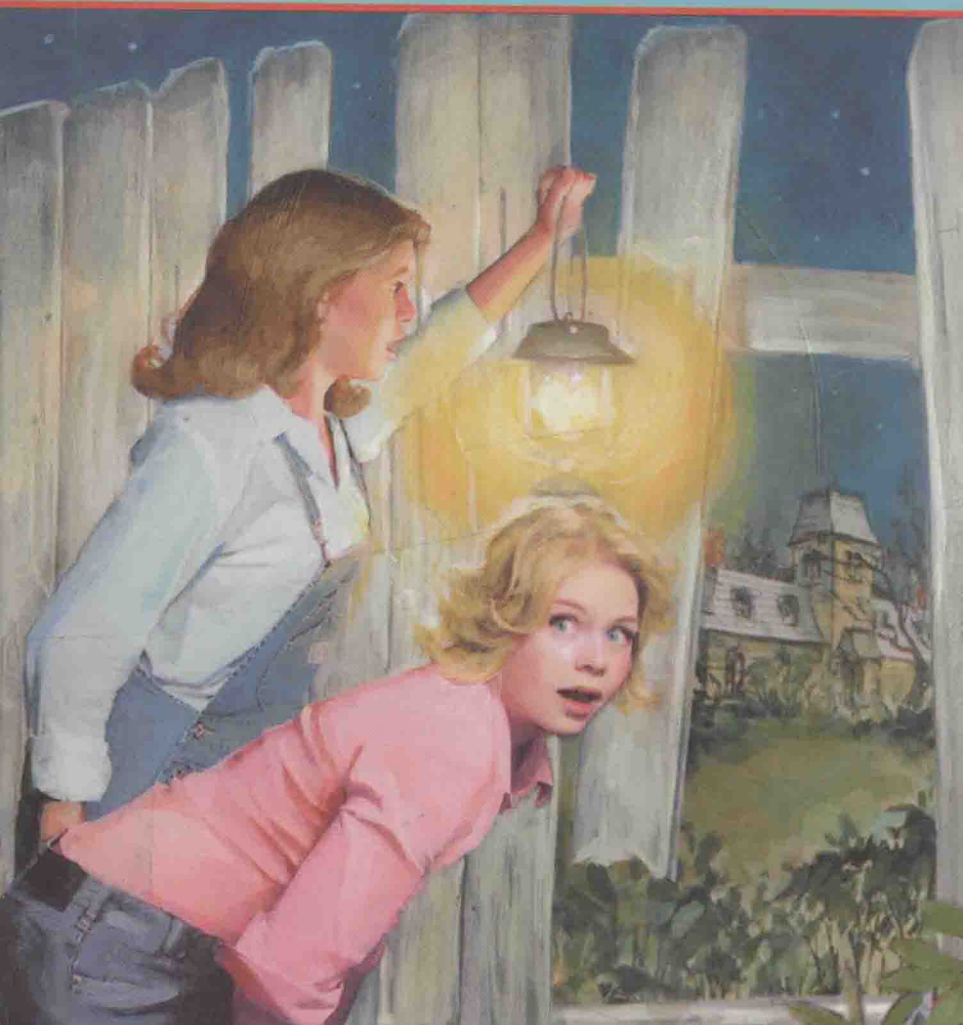




# **Trixie Belden** #1

The Secret of the  
Mansion



# **Trixie Belden #1**

**The Secret of the Mansion**



**by Julie Campbell**

**illustrated by Mary Stevens**

**cover illustration by Michael Koelsch**

Random House  New York

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## Chapter 1

# The Haunted House

“Oh, Moms,” Trixie moaned, running her hands through her short, sandy curls. “I’ll just die if I don’t have a horse.”

Mrs. Belden looked up from the row of tomato plants she was transplanting in the fenced-in vegetable garden.

“Trixie,” she said, trying to look stern, “if you died as many times as you thought you were going to, you’d have to be a cat with nine lives to be with us for one day.”

“I don’t care!” Tears of indignation welled up in Trixie’s round blue eyes. She scooped up a fat little worm, watched it wriggle in the palm of her hand for a minute, then gently let it go. “With Brian and Mart at camp this summer, I’ll die of boredom. I mean it, Moms.”

Mrs. Belden sighed. “You declared you’d suffer the same fate if we didn’t buy you a bike three years ago. Remember?” She stood up, frowning in the glare of the hot July sun. “Now listen, Trixie, once and for all. If you want to buy a horse like the one you fell in love with at

the horse show yesterday, you will have to earn the money yourself. You know perfectly well the only reason your brothers could go to camp is because they are working as junior counselors.”

Crabapple Farm, Trixie reflected, was really a grand place to live, and she had always had a lot of fun there, but she did wish there was another girl in the neighborhood. The big estate, known as the Manor House, which bounded the Belden property on the west had been vacant ever since Trixie could remember. There were no other homes nearby except the crumbling mansion on the eastern hill, where queer old Mr. Frayne lived alone.

The three estates faced a quiet country road two miles from the village of Sleepyside that nestled among the rolling hills on the east bank of the Hudson River. Trixie's father worked in the bank in Sleepyside, and Trixie and her brothers went to the village school. She had many friends in Sleepyside, but she rarely saw them except when school was in session. Now that her brothers, Brian and Mart, had gone to camp, there was nobody but her little brother, Bobby, to play with.

Trixie impatiently kicked a hole in the dust of the path with her shoe.

“It's not fair. You wouldn't let me try for a job as a

waitress or anything. Maybe I could have gone, too.”

“You’re only thirteen,” her mother said patiently. “Next year we might consider something of the sort. Dad and I are really sorry, dear,” she added gently, “that we couldn’t afford to send you to camp this year.”

Trixie suddenly felt ashamed of herself, and she impulsively threw her arms around her mother. “Oh, I know, Moms, and I’m a pest to nag at you. I won’t any more. I promise.”

“You can begin to earn the money for your horse right here, Trixie,” Mrs. Belden said, laughing. “There’s plenty to do around here with Brian and Mart away. I’ll pay you something every week if you help me with Bobby and the housework. And I know Dad would be glad to increase your allowance if you do some weeding in the garden every day and take over Mart’s chore of feeding the chickens and gathering the eggs.”

“Oh, Moms!” Trixie hugged her mother tighter. “Maybe I could earn five dollars a week. Do you think I could?”

Mrs. Belden nodded and smiled. “Something like that,” she said. “At any rate, if you really work, I should think you could count on having a horse next summer.” She shaded her eyes with one hand and stared at the car that was just coming into the driveway. “Why, isn’t that

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But Trixie was no longer looking at the Frayne mansion. She was looking in the opposite direction.

“Moms, Moms!” she cried. “Something’s going on up at the Manor House. See all those vans? Somebody must be moving in.”

Mrs. Belden turned and glanced up at the huge estate which bounded Crabapple Farm on the west.

“Why, yes, Trixie,” she said. “I meant to tell you last night, but you were too excited about that horse to listen. A family named Wheeler moved in yesterday. Your father met Mr. Wheeler at the bank. He has a daughter about your age and told Dad he hoped you’d run up and see her.”

“Oh, Mother,” Trixie interrupted excitedly. “Do you see what I see? Horses! Horses being led out toward the stables. Couldn’t I go up right now and meet Mr. Wheeler’s daughter?”

Mrs. Belden smiled. “Well, I guess it’s all right. But what about your job?”

Trixie saw her little brother racing across the lawn with Reddy at his heels.

“I’ll take Bobby with me,” she said quickly, “so you won’t have to worry about him. Come on, Bobby, hurry up.” Trixie pulled open the gate so hard she almost tore it off its hinges.