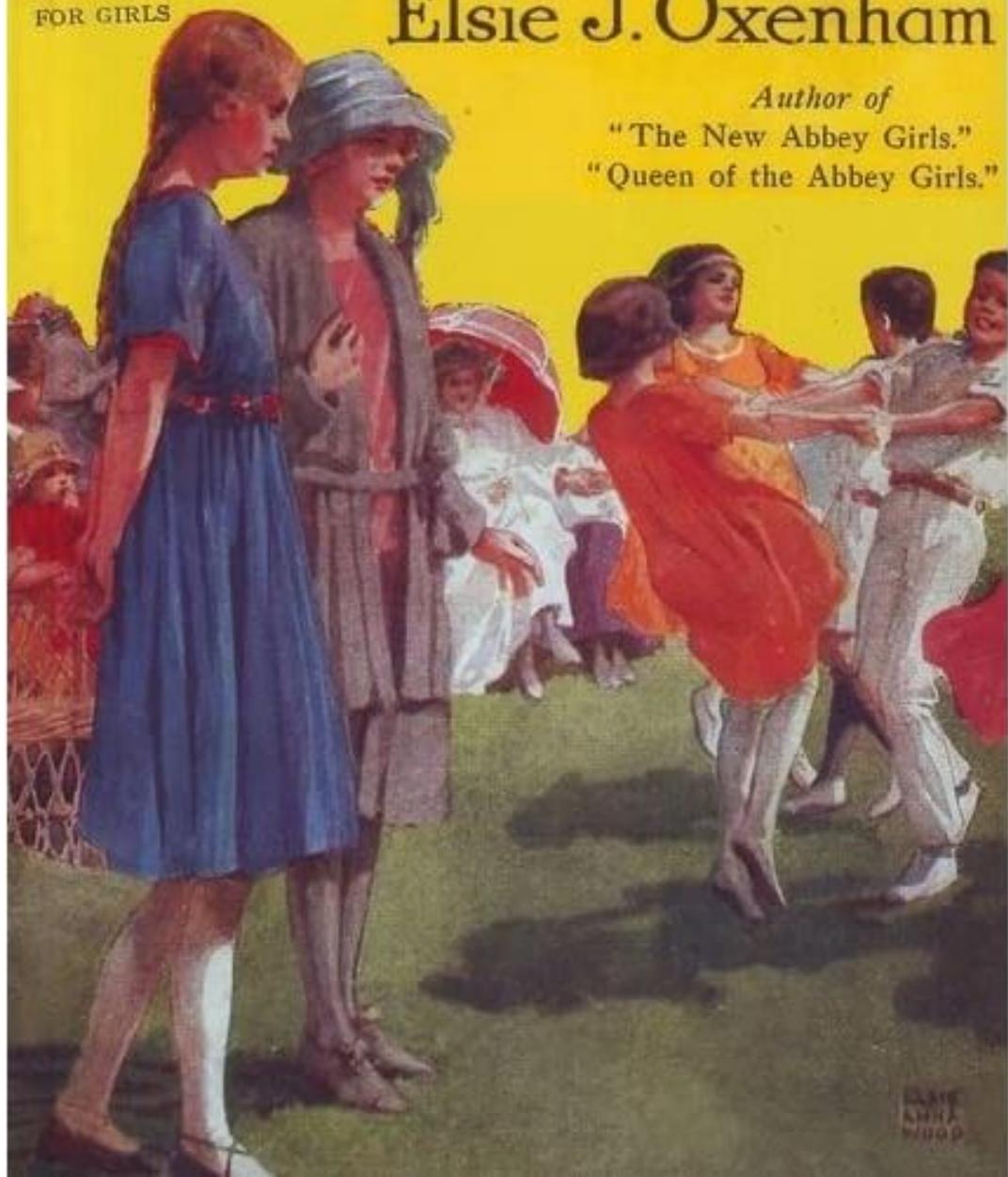


JEN OF THE ABBHEY SCHOOL

A SCHOOL STORY
FOR GIRLS

Elsie J. Oxenham

Author of
"The New Abbey Girls."
"Queen of the Abbey Girls."



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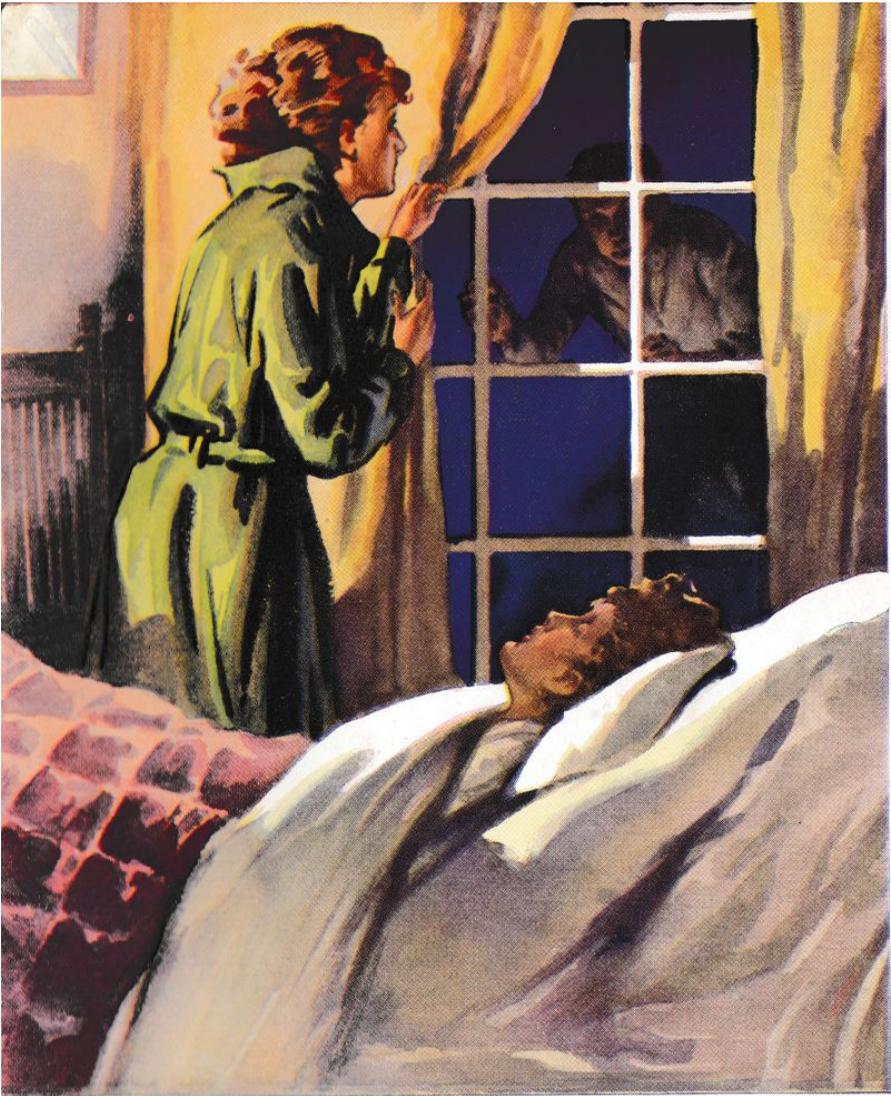
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Had the thief come back?

JEN OF THE ABBEY SCHOOL

ELSIE J. OXENHAM

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CHAPTER I

THE DANCING VILLAGES

“I don’t like the look of that sky!” said Miss Deane, with a worried glance at the clouds creeping up. “We’re a long way from home. I wonder if we could find shelter in the village over there?”

The tennis lawn and the cricket field at Rocklands School were “quite good,” as the girls said, and generally attracted a number of players. But some of the girls found nothing quite so satisfying as the moor, just beyond the garden hedge. When they had only an hour to spare, they sat among the boulders on cushions of heather, drinking in its sweetness as the bees did. When a holiday gave opportunity, they walked in every direction, picnicked on the open hills, and came back wind-blown and refreshed, ready to work better next day.

Rocklands was only the summer home of Miss Maitland’s girls, to their great regret; their school was in Sheffield, and the winter and spring months were spent there. But, to the joy of her girls, Miss Maitland had a younger sister, Mrs. Thorburn, whose tragically brief marriage had left her wealthy, but widowed and very lonely, and who tried to fill her empty heart and house with friends and kindly deeds. The invitation to her sister’s girls was one of these; before her marriage she had helped in the school; now every May, the girls took possession of the east wing of the big house, and lived there in great content till October, with a rather shorter break than usual for summer holidays, since a week of the autumn term had to be given up to the moving back to town. The girls went home at the end of October for a few days, and met again in town to settle into winter quarters, every one of them thinking wistfully of the moor and the open country, and longing for May to come round again.

Betty McLean, the head girl, was one who felt the call of the moor strongly. The school’s habit of removing every spring had delighted her, and she could always be counted on for a walk. This year she had found kindred spirits among the juniors, and one—apart from the head mistress—among the mistresses. Miss Maitland loved the moor, but could not often spare time for rambles; but Miss Deane, the new young English mistress, loved it as much as Betty did, and was always ready to go out with a party when her work and theirs permitted.

As for the juniors, Tekla, known as Tickles, and Margot, and Sara, and Barbara would have gone anywhere with Betty rather than be coached on the courts by Teesa or other seniors whom they did not like.

Teesa was a person of importance, and had been head girl during the spring term. It was still a sore point with her that this term Miss Maitland’s choice had fallen on Betty; Teesa thought the matter should have been decided by the vote of the girls, and believed her own election would have been a certainty, though many, especially in the junior school, did not share her opinion.

But at Rocklands, Teesa was deeply conscious of her own importance. For she was the niece of Captain Thorburn, who had made the beautiful house a fit home for his bride, and had then, soon after, been killed in an air-crash, leaving his young wife heartbroken and alone. One of Sheila Thorburn’s first thoughts, when she took up life again and began to seek those to whom she could show kindness, had been for her husband’s people, and particularly his niece and nephews in their city home. The elder boys were at school, but, with Teesa, spent much time at Rocklands in the holidays, so she was naturally more at home there than the rest

of the girls; her little brother, a helpless invalid, had been practically adopted by Mrs. Thorburn, and was in her care all the time, as it had been found he could not live down in the city. The strong sweet air of the high moors held some hope of life and cure for him, so he had been brought with his nurse to Rocklands, to make his home there.

Like Betty McLean, the juniors loved the moor, and Tickle and Babbles would scuttle ahead like rabbits, chasing one another over the heather and diving down the winding paths among the rocks. Tickle was only twelve, the baby of the school by a year; but, thanks to her candid criticisms and original opinions, was already of importance among the juniors. She ought to have been a person of no account, to be kept severely in her place, and Teesa would gladly have put and kept her there; but somehow, with Tickle, that did not work. Sara and Babs respected her opinions; Margot dreaded her sharp tongue. Tickle was already of some account with these three, who led the lower school; and the fact that the head girl had shown that she too thought well of her had made Tekla's position more secure.

It was Tickle who cried, in answer to Miss Deane's plaint, "Oh, couldn't we go? Villages are always funny! And that's a new one. I'm sure it's going to pelt with rain in a minute, Miss Deane, dear!"

"Going to pelt in *much* less than a minute!" Babbles cried gleefully, as heavy drops fell. "We'll be drowned before we get to the village!"

"No, we won't. *I* won't! Race me to that shed!" cried Betty. "It's the best thing to do, isn't it, Miss Deane? We can shelter there."

"Yes, run, all of you!" and the mistress hastily gathered up the picnic baskets.

Crossing the moor by a wide sweeping route, they were not very far from home, but in a direction hitherto unexplored by any of the girls. A long walk, following sheep-paths through the heather, but keeping a church tower in view to give them their position in regard to Rocklands, had brought them to the edge of a deep valley, with fields on its slopes, and woods and a river at the bottom. Lying on the ridge, the girls had eaten sandwiches and drunk tea from their flasks, while exclaiming on the long way round they had come. For on the opposite ridge stood the square tower of the church which they could see from Rocklands.

"We have worked round in a circle, by the head of the valley. We'll go down to the river and up past the church, and home straight across the moor," said Miss Deane, as they rested in the shed and the rain swept down and blotted out the view. "This won't last, of course."

"No, it's only a temporary blizzard!" Betty laughed. "But it's thorough. We might be in the middle of the Atlantic! Isn't it chilly?"

"Some one's coming!" Margot proclaimed. "Oh, it's two boys! Let's hide and see if they notice us!"

Tickle and Babs, Sara and she made for the inner part of the shed, which was divided into two by a rough partition. Betty and Miss Deane laughed and followed, with the understanding of the desires of twelve and fourteen which made them such good company.

The boys were fair-haired, brown-faced urchins of ten or twelve; they came plunging into the shed to escape the fury of the downpour.

"It's teeming!" said one, and tried to dry himself with his cap.

"Soom shoo'er!" grinned the other.

Betty's eyes danced at this modern slang in broad Yorkshire dialect. Babbles was on the verge of giggling, when Tickle touched her and pointed.

"Git oop an' hae a bit pra-actice, Bill! Coom on, man! Ah'll bash ye, an' ye can bash me. Gie's the tune, now!"

Wide-eyed, the girls watched to see what would come next. Were the boys going to fight? “Ah’ll bash ye!” sounded like it, and Margot and Tickle’s thrilled at the prospect.

But Bill did not look angry. Producing two big coloured handkerchiefs, he bunched them by the corners and held a loose bag in each hand, murmuring, “Ma boonch o’ floo’ers!” The other boy did the same. Facing one another, they began to clap their hands together and then to strike one another’s hands, hopping on one foot or the other all the time. And Bill began to sing a lilting tune in a shrill treble.

Miss Deane’s eyes were wide and astonished. She had risen from the bench, and was watching the hopping, clapping boys as if transfixed.

Tickle’s nudged Sara, and nodded towards Miss Deane. Betty whispered, “What are they doing? It’s not boxing, is it?”

“Looks like it,” Margot giggled, as Bill’s flapping handkerchief, not unlike a boxing-glove, caught the other boy on the cheek and drew forth an indignant protest.

“What art doin’, ye gowk? Her nivver said to clout t’other chap!”

“Tha steppin’s a’ oot o’ time,” Bill said sturdily. “ ’Tis fower on each fut; tha’s doin’ but three. Here’s what tha’ be doin’, Tom!” and he hopped three times only, clapping twice and tapping Tom’s hand the third time, then standing still. “ ’Tis this wa-ay!” and he ended with a fourth hop.

“Eh, but tha-at’s hard!” Tom tried valiantly to copy, and promptly fell into the opposite trap, tapping twice instead of once.

Bill fairly danced with impatience, as he shouted directions and sang the tune by turns. “Tha silly fule! Once wi’ tha han’, an’ twa times wi’ tha fut! Canst not keep tha feet movin’.”

“Naw, Ah cannot!” Tom said flatly. “They mun do t’ sa-ame, like. ’Tis fulishness! ’Tis like yon ither daft thing,” and he began to do a new step, ending with a wild attempt at circles over his head and single hops with his feet.

Bill, spluttering with laughter, sang a new phrase of the tune and fell into line behind him. “Go forrard, man! Then toorn an’ coom this wa-ay! Ah’ll show ye!” and, whistling for a change, he gave a very passable demonstration, with circles which were at least less wild than Tom’s.

“Ah can nivver dae tha-at!” Tom said gloomily. “Ma feet gae all wa-ays, an’ Ah feel a daft-like fule.”

Miss Deane exploded at that. The girls broke into laughter too, and the boys turned sharply to stare at them, though they had been too much absorbed to hear any sound before.

“What are they doing, Miss Deane?” Betty begged, while the boys stared blankly. “It wasn’t boxing, was it?”

“No, it was a morris dance; ‘Country Gardens.’ But think of seeing morris in a cowshed on a Yorkshire moor! I wonder who teaches them!” and she went out to accost Bill and Tom. “Who teaches you dancing? Do you do it at school?”

“Naw,” said Bill, staring as if he could hardly believe his eyes, for the shed seemed suddenly full of girls.

“ ’Tis Miss Jen,” Tom spoke up, gazing over his friend’s shoulder. “Her teaches t’ lasses too, but they don’t dance wi’ these,” flourishing his handkerchiefs, “an’ they don’t ha’ bells. ’Tis a man’s dance, this one.”

Miss Deane assented with a laugh. “What does she teach the girls? Don’t you join in and do it with them?”

The boys looked at one another and laughed sheepishly. "Us do—we do!" Tom corrected himself hastily; his English had improved when he found himself speaking to a lady. "'Tis good foon, an' a' that. Be you the wumman, Bill! Miss Jen, she aye says 'the wumman,' not 'the la-ady'!" and he took Bill by the right hand and led him forward and back again, then turned and did a very good "set and turn single."

Miss Deane nodded, in recognition both of "woman," and the movement. "But you like yours best?"

"Eh, that's girls' stooff! Oors is a man's dance; Miss Jen said so. An' we hae bells on oor legs!" and he produced from his pocket rings of small bells strung on elastic, and slipped them up below his knees.

"I know," Miss Deane agreed. "I've seen men dance your dance; great big men, who had been soldiers—captains and lieutenants—yes, really!" as they gazed at her open-mouthed. "They wore lots of bells. Who is Miss Jen? And where do you learn your morris dancing?"

"At t' Grange. She's—aw, she's joost oor Miss Jen! She larns us in t' big kitchen, and t' policeman he plays t' music for us," Bill volunteered.

"Us'll be la-ate!" Tom had caught sight of the time on Betty's wrist-watch. "An' t' rain beant so bad. Coom on, Bill!"

"Mustn't be late for Miss Jen!" and in spite of more questions from Miss Deane, the boys fled out into the slackening shower and away down the hill.

"What was it all about, Miss Deane?" Margot and Sara and Tickles spoke as eagerly as Betty. "You seemed to know!"

"Oh, couldn't we go after them and see some more?" Babbles hopped on one foot in her eagerness. "They looked so funny, trying to 'bash' one another!"

"We'll go down to the village, for that's our way home. The storm's almost over. I wonder where the Grange is?" and Miss Deane's eyes swept the valley and opposite hill.

"There are chimneys among those trees near the church," Tickles suggested.

"That might be it. We can ask in the village. The boys were trying to do a morris dance," she explained, as they set out. "I learned a little at college. Girls can, and do, dance it well, but as the boys said, it is really a man's dance. Bill had got some of the steps quite well, but Tom was still having difficulties with his hands and feet. I can sympathise; I've felt exactly as he said he did."

"He said 'a daft-like fule.'" Tickles mimicked the accent. "Oh, Miss Deane, you couldn't!"

"Wait till you try, my dear child! You feel a helpless silly; then suddenly it comes, you don't know how; but you find you're doing the very thing that seemed impossible the day before."

"Because you'd practised it, do you mean?" Betty queried.

"Often without practising anything to speak of. It seems to happen in your head first, and then your hands and feet respond, and obey what your brain has been thinking. It always seemed so to me, anyway. Would you like to try? I asked Miss Maitland if we could have folk-dancing, but she suggested waiting till next term, when we go back to town, as you have so many other interests here."

"It might be better in the winter," Betty agreed. "But it would be jolly if you'd teach us, Miss Deane! Would it be what those boys were doing?"

"Oh, couldn't we try? *Now?*" the juniors spoke with one voice.

“I meant country-dances, but we could do some morris too. You could learn the steps and movements for two or three dances, anyway.”

“Enough to see if we felt daft-like fules?” Sara begged.

Miss Deane laughed. “Children, I ask you to forget that expression. You are not Tom, remember, nor do you belong to a cowshed on a moor! If I hear it again I will not teach you anything.”

“We’ll say helpless idiots, then! I guess that’s what Tom meant!” Tickles said easily. “Would we do enough to feel like that, Miss Deane? Like Tom felt, whatever you call it?”

“You probably would!” Miss Deane laughed. “Here’s the village!” her eyes were scanning it curiously.

“Oh, isn’t it weird?” Betty exclaimed, and Tickles and the rest awoke to the fact that the village before them was something of a curiosity.

“Looks as if it had been bought in a box by some kid playing at houses!” Tickles murmured.

“Or ordered by the yard,” Margot added.

“I think perhaps it was.” Miss Deane’s eyes swept over the waste tract of cleared ground that filled the bottom of the valley, the unsightly heaps of sand and gravel, the pits and pools of water, the machinery—cranes and derricks, engines and mills, the narrow lines of light railway, the bricks and stone stacked up. The engines were not working now; a hooter had sounded a few minutes before, and the men had streamed away to the village just above.

It was like no village the girls had ever seen. The cottages were all of one pattern, arranged in neat rows, all with roofs of corrugated iron, with at first glance no individuality to distinguish them. A nearer view corrected this impression; some had gardens, some had flowers covering their walls, some looked neglected, some had pretty curtains and others dirty ones, or none; but from a little distance the effect was of uniformity—exactly, as Tickles had said, as if some child had built a toy village out of model dwellings all made to one pattern.

“Don’t you see what it is?” Miss Deane asked.

“It looks hideously dull!” said Tickles, the critic. “I should go crazy if I had to live in it.”

“Villages are usually old and crooked and higgledy-piggledy. This one is so neat and—and new!” Betty marvelled. “What is it, Miss Deane? Is it something special?”

“Looks like rows of dolls’-houses!” Sara murmured.

“It’s a village of workmen’s dwellings. Don’t you *see*, girls? It’s quite interesting! The valley is being turned into a reservoir, like the beautiful one below Rocklands. These are the cottages put up for the workmen. All this bareness, that looked so queer from above, is the bed of the reservoir. We’re standing right in the middle of it.”

“Gracious, how funny! But where will they get the water from? There’s only a trickle in the river!”

“Oh, they’ll get the water all right!” Miss Deane laughed. “They’ll build a big dam right across the lower end of the valley. If you really want a lecture on the construction of reservoirs, we may be able to give you one! But just now we’d better hurry on. I’d like a closer look at the village.”

“I *never* thought I should walk through a reservoir!” Tickles murmured.

“Oh, there’s a cottage right where the water will have to come! And trees, and an old bridge, and a cow! Oh, Miss Deane, they’ll be drowned!” Babbles cried in distress.

“I think somebody will manage to save the cow!” Miss Deane laughed. “The water isn’t coming in to-night, Babs! Perhaps not for years. But the cottage and the bridge will certainly

be drowned. Sometimes a whole village has to be drowned when a new reservoir is made. But cities keep growing, and they must have water.”

“I never thought of that,” Margot admitted.

“I’m sorry for the trees,” said Tickles. “Drowned cottages are bad enough, but trees are alive! Think of standing there, feeling the water creeping up your trunk, and drowning your branches one by one!”

“Perhaps the men will cut them down,” Betty suggested.

“That would be better. I hope they will!”

“Oh, isn’t it dull, and all-the-sameish!” Sara wailed, as they reached the village. “I couldn’t live in a hole like this!”

“It might help, if you had a Miss Jen come along and teach you morris dancing!” Miss Deane remarked.

“Oh, do you suppose that’s why she does it? I say, she’s a sport, isn’t she?”

“We wanted to ask about the Grange,” and Miss Deane turned into one of the cottages. The girls pressed after her, eager to see the inside and to hear the answer.

The cottage was clean and well-kept. The woman who came to the door had no trace of the broad accent of Bill and Tom; she was uneducated, but she was not a Yorkshirewoman. That, the girls found later, was typical of the workmen’s village; its people were a class by themselves, drawn from all parts of the country, with no kinship with the neighbourhood.

She answered pleasantly and readily. The Grange?—up on the hill, close to the village and the old church. The children? For Miss Deane, to draw her on, had remarked tentatively that there seemed no children about. The woman smiled; the children were all up at the Grange.

“Dancing?” burst from Tickles eagerly. “Does she have them *all*?”

Down the monotonous, dreary street, with its rows of iron-roofed bungalows, a bicycle came whirling, and drew up at the gate of the cottage Miss Deane had chosen. A schoolgirl of seventeen, with two long yellow pigtails, and wearing a very short skirt and a pretty jumper, sprang from the cycle and ran up the path. She was evidently in a hurry, and Miss Deane and her girls stood aside. The first words of the woman in the doorway stilled them all into tense, interested silence.

“Eh, Miss Jen——!”

“Oh, Mrs. Denver! I had to come and tell you myself, for fear you’d get a shock. Your Archie has gone and turned his ankle; I don’t believe it’s sprained, and we’ve bathed it and bandaged it. But he’ll have to rest it for a few days; I’ll ask the doctor to look at it, just to be on the safe side. The other boys have borrowed a pushcart in the village, and they’re bringing him home, but I thought you might get a fright, so I came ahead to tell you. It really wasn’t anything to do with the dancing,” Jen said indignantly. “If they’d be content with dancing, nothing would happen to them! But they will go doing gym stunts when I give them time to rest. I tell them to get their breath, and they go playing leap-frog, or walking on their hands, or trying to get up without using their arms! The one thing they never do is rest! Archie wasn’t even pretending to dance when it happened! So you won’t blame the dancing, will you?”

“I will *not*!” Mrs. Denver said emphatically. “Fine I know Archie, Miss Jen!”

“That’s all right!” Jen laughed. “Thanks awfully for being so nice about it! I’m frightfully sorry it happened, both for your sake and his, and for my own, for I’m afraid he won’t be able to dance next Saturday. We’ll ask the doctor, but I think it would be risky. Well, I must fly back again. I told the children that would be all for to-night, but they’re so keen on it that I

have to turn them out, and to-night all the village crowd are there too, so there are packs of them. They'll be hanging round, hoping for some more."

As she turned, she came face to face with Miss Deane and the schoolgirls. She had only seen them vaguely before, in her haste to get her confession made. Now she paused, taken aback for an instant.

Betty looked imploringly at Miss Deane. This "Miss Jen," who taught folk-dancing to whole villages, was of her own age. Betty wanted to speak to her, but felt that a mistress, being unfortunately present, would expect to take the lead.

Jen waited for no introduction, however; apparently none was needed. Her face lit up, and she smiled in eager friendship. "Oh! So you've discovered Tin Town at last?" said she.

"Help! Do you know who we are?" cried Betty, and the eager juniors crowded round, full of questions.

Jen laughed. "I've seen you on the moor. You come from Rocklands! You're the school that takes possession of Mrs. Thorburn's house every summer; her sister's school! Mother knows Mrs. Thorburn, of course."

"But why have we never seen you before?" Betty asked eagerly. "It's not our first summer at Rocklands, by any means!"

"Oh, but I've been away at school! I came home for good last Christmas. I hadn't nearly 'finished my education'!" she laughed. "And I didn't want to leave; I was having far too good a time. But they needed me at home; I'm the only girl, and there were things for me to do. I've often seen you when I've been out cycling, but of course you'd never notice me. Mother had promised to take me to call on your Head, so that I could see something of you, but she hasn't been very fit, so we'd put it off. I've hardly seen a girl since Christmas!—except the Tin Town crowd. They all come for dancing, but that's different. I'm 'Teacher' then," and she laughed.

"Do you teach folk-dancing to the whole village?" Miss Deane asked, with interest.

"And why do you call it Tin Town?" begged Margot.

"Because of the tin roofs, silly! Can't you see them?" Tickles said scornfully.

"They're iron. Everybody calls it Tin Town. This isn't the village! The village is up by the church, and round our gates—a real old country hamlet"—she laughed at the memories the word held for her—"hundreds of years old, with gray cottages, and a village pump, and a forge, and the stocks, and old inns and barns, all complete, in a quaint kind of square round the church. This place"—they had wandered out to the gate, and she was standing by her cycle—"is only two years old. It may be here for another ten years or so, but then it will pack up and go somewhere else, and we'll be left with a beautiful new lake in our valley. Isn't it a hideously dull place for kiddies to grow up in?"

"And you've started folk-dancing, to give them a new interest?" Miss Deane looked at Jen with respect.

"To be quite honest, I started it for my own sake, because I was so dull and was missing it so much! We had a dancing club at school, and I enjoyed it hugely. I thought teaching the kiddies would be better than nothing. But now I'm fearfully keen, for their sakes as well. I can see something of what it means to them. And they're getting quite good! We're giving our first show next Saturday, for their parents and friends, in our garden, if it's fine enough. If you care to come over, we'll be awfully pleased to see you," Jen said hospitably. "I'll write a note and ask you properly. Now I must get home. I'm so glad to have met you at last!"

She sprang on to her cycle and rode away, waving her hand as she turned the corner.

The girls looked at Miss Deane longingly. “*What* a jolly girl! Oh, do you think we could come next Saturday?”

“I’ll do what I can. I’d like to come too. But we, too, must get home,” Miss Deane said briskly. “Now hurry, girls!”

“‘Miss Jen’ will have had to push her bike!” Margot groaned, as they toiled up the hill.

“Hasn’t it been a satisfying day?” Betty said fervently, as they crossed the moor to Rocklands. “We’ve explored new moors, and found that valley, and discovered Tin Town, and made friends with ‘Miss Jen’!”

“And walked in a reservoir.” Tickle added. “And seen cottages that are going to be drowned!”

“And watched morris danced in a cowshed!” Miss Deane remarked. “A very satisfying day, *I* say!”

“And we’ve quite decided to learn that dancing ourselves, as soon as ever we can!” Babbles spoke for all. “For if a whole village, and all of Tin Town, are keen on it, it must be jolly!”

“It is jolly!” Miss Deane laughed. “Very well, Babs! I’ll do my best!”

CHAPTER II

THE GIRLS AT ROCKLANDS

Miss Maitland listened with interest to Miss Deane's account of the incident in the cowshed and the meeting with Jen Robins.

"I shall be delighted for the girls to make friends with her. As for morris-dancing, it was after our break in October I had thought we might take that up, with your help. When the excitements of the country were gone, it might have served a useful purpose. But to-day's adventure is likely to hurry matters. If the girls are keen to try, we will certainly encourage them."

The juniors were decidedly keen. They were eager to try if they could not do better than the boys, and during the next few days were always practising morris steps and clapping at every opportunity, to the amusement of Miss Deane and Betty, and the annoyance of some of the other girls, who could not make out what they were trying to do.

"We want to see if we feel daft-like fules," Margot explained, after a careful look for Miss Deane.

"And we jolly well do," Sara added. "Your feet go one way and your hands another. It's the maddest thing!"

"You look it, anyway," Fanny retorted. "You look as if you'd all gone crazy."

"We haven't," Babbles assured her. "Miss Deane said we'd feel daft-like—no, helpless sillies, was what *she* said! But it comes to the same thing. I like it, though!"

"I think you should wait till we've seen the show next Saturday. Then Fanny and Vera and the rest will know what you're trying to do," Betty suggested. "The invitation from Jen has come; did you know?"

"Yes, Deany told us she'd asked us all. Isn't it decent of her? But Deany won't teach us any more till we've seen a dance right through. She has shown us what they were trying to do; she said we could begin trying to get our hands and feet to—to do different things, wasn't it, Margot?" Tickles appealed to the acknowledged leader of the juniors.

"To work independently, she said," Margot replied importantly. "Mine won't do it a bit well."

"We can see that!" Teesa said crushingly.

"Wait till you've seen Jen's children dance!" Tickles cried. "I b'lieve you'll like it, Teesa! She said they were quite good. I *am* looking forward to it!"

There was some scepticism among the girls, led by Teesa and Fanny; the very excitement of the younger girls made that inevitable. There was a tendency, also, to condemn the folk-dancing as "a kids' game," and "a stunt for village infants," in spite of Betty's warm interest and Miss Deane's stories of the enthusiasm of some of her fellow-students at college. But an invitation from the only daughter of the Grange was not to be despised, and the seniors looked forward as eagerly to the outing as any one.

"You don't know Jen Robins, then?" Betty asked Teesa, as they talked it over on the lawn one morning, while waiting for Mademoiselle. Classes were held out under the trees whenever possible.

The question was reasonable, since Teesa might surely have met Jen sometimes in holidays. This had not happened, however, it appeared. "She's always been at school,

somewhere in the south, near London. When she has happened to be at home, I haven't been here at the right time. Aunty Sheila sometimes goes away at Christmas, and then we don't come here. I've never met Jen Robins, though I've often heard of her. I want to see her. She's grown-up, isn't she?"

"She's left school, but she hasn't got her hair up yet. It's in two long, thick plaits; she's about seventeen. But she doesn't look like a kid. I'd like to get to know her," Betty said warmly.

"Far more use for me to get to know her! I'm much more likely to have chances of meeting her later on. You won't be here after this year," Teesa pointed out.

"That won't stop me making friends with a jolly girl, if she's willing," Betty said sturdily.

"I guess it doesn't depend altogether on Teesa whether she's here much or not!" she said to herself. "It seems to me that's Mrs. Thorburn's business!" but she kept the comment to herself, and she and Teesa looked forward to the visit to the Grange as eagerly as did the juniors.

"What about the new girl?" Vera, the third of the "Teesa-trio," leaned across Fanny to ask. "When is she coming, Betty? What's been the matter with her? Why is she only coming at half-term?"

"I only heard about her yesterday!" Teesa's tone sounded injured. "Been ill, hasn't she?"

"Matey told me she'd been ill in the Easter hols, and had to go away to the sea for some weeks," Betty explained. "So she's waited for half-term. That's Monday week, but she's coming on Friday, as her father's travelling up this way and can bring her."

"Is she a kid? But isn't she to sleep in our dorm?" Fanny asked indignantly.

"She's sixteen. That's hardly a kid. Her sister was at school with Nancy Morrell and Rena Mackay in London, before they came here, and her folks heard about Rocklands through Nancy," Betty explained. "I was talking to Rena yesterday, and she told me."

"I hope she won't be conceited and swanky and uppish," Vera said apprehensively. "Sixteen's such a queer age to come to school!"

"We'll soon sit on her, if she is," Teesa said grimly. "I guess we're able for that!"

CHAPTER III

ROSE OF TIN TOWN

“You can’t understand quite what a great occasion this is!” Jen said seriously, as she stood with Betty McLean, watching two long rows of girls and boys dance “The Butterfly” to the music of the big gramophone.

Betty and Jen had found much in common, though there were great differences between them. Betty was a true Scot, both in her delicate colouring and ruddy-golden hair, and in her shy touch of reserve. From the first she had given fervent admiration to the friendly, happy English girl, who did not know the meaning of shyness, who shirked nothing and taught whole villages folk-dancing, who was without a trace of the self-consciousness which had always troubled Betty. Betty was a month the elder; but Jen’s natural, easy manner made her seem no longer a schoolgirl, in spite of the long yellow plaits on her shoulders.

The children she had trained were giving their first entertainment. An enthusiastic audience sat round the lawn in the Grange garden; the schoolgirls had come from Rocklands to see their first folk-dance show. Jen had received them and led them to good seats, and their eyes had followed her admiringly as she welcomed other guests, for she wore a dancing frock of deepest blue, short-skirted and full, with round neck and short sleeves edged with a touch of deep red, and rosettes to match at the high waist under her arms; her long stockings were white, and she wore flat black shoes. Was she going to dance with the children?—the girls wondered eagerly.

“Do you mean because it’s the first time the children have danced to an audience? Were they nervous?” Betty asked. “You aren’t! Any one can see that!”

“Oh, I’m enjoying it, and so are they! I don’t think they are really nervous, just excited and fearfully important! They’re almost bursting with the greatness of the occasion. That wasn’t what I meant, though,” Jen spoke soberly. “This dancing is doing a big thing! A new person can hardly appreciate the bigness of the thing it has done already. There’s always been dislike and suspicion between our village, up by the church, and Tin Town, in the valley. Our people resented the coming of Tin Town; the workmen look down on our country-folks. They have very little to do with one another; Tin Town is provided with almost everything—school, mission church and hall, two or three general shops, cricket ground, even a little hospital and isolation ward. They’re quite independent of the village, and better off than our people, in many ways. Our folks resented that, too; they hoped the coming of the ‘works’ would mean more business for them. It hasn’t made much difference, and they’ve no reason to love the Tin Towners. So there has been a coolness between the village and the Town. Among the children, it had grown almost into a feud; you know what kiddies are! The boys of both sets hid behind dykes and flung stones and mud at the others; the girls called one another names. Well!” Jen said dramatically. “Look at that lawn! Little village kids dancing with little Tin Town! Big village fellows in a morris side with Tin Town chaps! Big girls from Tin Town partners with big boys from the village! And all the parents of both sets looking on, all as happy as they can be!”

“It’s an awfully jolly thing to have seen happen!” Betty said warmly. “Just exactly how did you do it?”

“Oh, I asked if they’d like to give a show. I had to have separate classes, of course; they wouldn’t mix. They were all keen, so I pointed out that neither set could do enough dances for a whole afternoon, and that each crowd had some to show that the others hadn’t; I’d seen to that! The girls from Tin Town were crazy to do ‘If All the World were Paper’; they said, quite rightly, that we must have that because it’s the only one you sing to. But the kiddies wanted to show ‘Sweet Kate’; and both sets of boys wanted the other boys to see their picked morris team! So I proposed a practice of all the dancers of the two villages, and gave them tea, and before the evening was out they were getting over the shock and quite inclined to make friends. They all tried fearfully hard to impress the other lot, fortunately with good results. The village liked the Tin Town dances, and the Tin Towners loved to see the village kids. So then I knew I’d got them! I sent out invitations to both sets of grown-ups, and here they all are, fearfully pleased to see their kiddies dancing, and with no time to think about their private squabbles! I always think that in real folk-dancing you enjoy yourself so much that you’ve simply no time for thinking about yourself.”

“It sounds very jolly,” Betty said wistfully. “We’re very keen to have a shot at it. You must feel awfully bucked to think you’ve made two villages friendly instead of deadly enemies!”

“I didn’t do it!” Jen laughed. “The dancing did the trick! I just set it going, and then stood back and watched.”

The children had come dancing out on to the cleared lawn in a long procession, boys in flannels leading girls in coloured frocks or gay pinafores; they had circled the lawn to the music of the “Helston Furry Dance,” then at Jen’s signal had made lines for “The Butterfly,” and the pretty stars and arches, and the sudden change to jolly skipping round and round, as the couples swung out and changed places, had delighted the parents under the trees. The skipping was boisterous, but very hearty, and the enjoyment of every dancing child was unmistakable.

“They’d better rest,” and Jen called “Last time.” “They’d go on till they dropped. They wanted fearfully badly to dress up!” she laughed to Betty. “Wanted to be milkmaids and shepherdesses, and have long frocks that they’d have to hold up, and all that kind of rot. I had to be awfully stern!”

“They look very nice as they are. I’m sure they couldn’t have looked any nicer!”

“Oh, I couldn’t have had them in fancy dress! We never did at school; just loose bright frocks, you know. They wouldn’t have felt natural dressed up, and I did want them to do it naturally, just enjoying the dancing for its own sake, without the feeling of showing off. We’re only letting their people, and mine, and all of you, in to watch because we think you’ll like it too; not because we want to swank in front of you! I’m afraid I come on now. I want them to rest, and I promised them a jig. They saw it at Christmas, and they’ve been teasing for it ever since. Will you see to the gramophone, daddy?”

“Oh, are you going to dance to us?” Betty’s face lit up. “Can you do dances all alone?”

“A morris jig—my beloved ‘Jockie.’ See if you like it!” Jen took up big handkerchiefs, and slipped rings of bells up below her knees.

It was Betty’s first experience of a real morris dance. While she watched the fascinating movements, the “foot-up,” with straight falling and rising arms, the “side-step,” with exultant circles overhead, the high springing “capers,” which called forth the enthusiasm of the audience, she was conscious that what Jen had said was true. Here was no thought of “showing off”; Jen was not thinking of herself at all. She loved the dance; the children had

asked for it; she was only anxious to know how they would like it, only trying to please them and add to the enjoyment of the afternoon.

She returned to Betty, laughing, to take off her bells and ask, "How do you like morris? That's the best I can do. I don't say it's good, but perhaps it gives some idea. Now watch my kiddies dance 'Ruffy,' and 'Hey, Boys,' and 'Peascods,' and then we'll see the boys do morris with sticks."

"It's awfully pretty! And I loved your jig!" Betty murmured, as the tiny children ran in and clapped fat little hands to an invisible sacred tree.

A dozen of the bigger boys and girls repeated the dance; and then a boys' team from the village gave "Rigs o' Marlow" and "Shepherd's Hey," with rhythmic stick-tapping; and six from Tin Town gave "Blue-Eyed Stranger" and "Trunkles."

"I love those!" Betty breathed. "I never saw anything like them! That was all morris-dancing, wasn't it? It's quite different from the country-dances!"

"Oh, quite! I got hold of the boys through morris. They mocked at the dancing at first; but I bribed them with sticks, and the promise of bells to wear on their legs! That was a great draw; the girls don't have any bells! Now we'll have 'Sweet Kate' by the kiddies, and 'Newcastle' by the girls, and some more longways for everybody."

"The village policeman as orchestra is a great idea!" Betty laughed, for old Billy Thwaites had played the concertina for some of the morris dances with obvious pride and enjoyment.

"Oh, Billy's priceless! He loves every new tune I teach him. And he's awfully useful; some of the best dances aren't on records."

The younger schoolgirls, Tickles and Babs, Margot and Sara, were watching in delight, mingled with impatience because they wanted to start morris-dancing on the spot. Tickles gave squeals of excitement as the sticks flashed up and down in "Rigs." Margot cried, "Where are they going? They're lost!"—as the boys swung out in the hey, then gasped in surprise as the lines disentangled themselves.

"That's awfully clever! I was sure they were going to 'bash' one another!" Sara said admiringly.

"I want to know how they do those sticks!" Tickles wailed.

"I like these hanky things! I think they're awfully nibby!" Margot was watching "stamp and strike" of "Trunkles."

"Oh, it's what Jen did in the jig!" Sara cried, at sight of the side-step and capers. "They don't jump as well as she did, though. She went up like a feather, though she's so tall! I'm sure I should come down like a sack of coals."

"I guess she's done heaps of dancing," Tickles said wisely. "I want to start myself! I'm tired of watching other people!"

"Well, I say! Let's slip out, and nip along to the village for some sweets," Margot proposed. "They're sure to have an interval. No one will miss us."

"But we'll miss the dancing!" Babbles objected.

"I don't mind. I'll come with you, Margot," Tickles said readily. "The more dances I see, the more I want to start. I don't think I can bear to watch much more!"

"They must be getting near the interval now," Margot argued, and they slipped away while Jen and the audience were intent on the Tin Town girls dancing "Newcastle."

Up the avenue the quartet raced, for Babbles could not bear to be left behind. But the village shop was unsatisfying. Margot was very particular about sweets. Nothing in the little shop pleased her, and she withdrew disconsolately.

From a low wall by the church they looked down on the blue iron roofs of Tin Town, just above the reservoir “works” in the valley. “Might get something down there,” Sara suggested. “We saw quite decent shops the other day.”

“It would take *years!*” Tickles objected. “ ’Tisn’t worth it, just for sweets, Margot!”

“You’re afraid of what Matey would say!” Margot scoffed.

“I’m not! But I think to go down there just for something to eat is mad. But I’m going, all the same,” Tickles said deliberately. “So you’d better come and get your sweets. Don’t waste time!” and she raced off down the lane towards Tin Town.

“Goodness! Isn’t she queer?” gasped Margot, and followed, not quite sure now whether she wanted to go or not. For they were certain to be missed, and she doubted if the sweets were worth it, after all. Tickles’s crushing judgments could be very convincing.

“Are you going ’cause Margot said you were funky, Tickles?” Sara caught her first.

“What on earth would I do that for? You don’t think I care half a scrap what Margot says, do you?” Tickles rejoined scornfully. “If you want to know, I’m going to get some chocolate and give it to Archie, to make up for having a twisted ankle and missing the dancing.”

“O-o-oh!” Sara said admiringly. “The boy we heard about the other day? Oh, what a dinky idea, Tickles!”

“I was thinking about him while we were watching the dancing,” Tickles condescended to explain. “I asked if he’d come to watch, but Jen said the ankle was worse than they’d thought, and the doctor said he’d better not move it for a few days. Or they’d have sent down a trap to drive him up the hill, she said. It’s awfully rotten for him!”

The Tin Town shops were better than those in the village. Margot found her sweets, but at the last moment gave them up and added her money, as Sara and Babs wanted to do, to the sixpence Tekla had produced. This meant a very much handsomer box of chocolates than Tickles had hoped for, and she was the most radiant and excited of the four as they hurried to Archie’s bungalow.

“There’s one thing I’d have liked to do,” Sara said, “and that’s get another box and give it to Jen at the end of the show. Somebody ought to give her something! But we simply haven’t enough money.”

“She’d rather we gave it to Archie,” Tickles said sturdily. “I thought of that too, Sara. But she’s an awfully good sort; I’m sure she’d rather Archie had it,” and they went up the little path in an eager bunch.

“Please, Mrs. Denver, will you give these chocolates to Archie, because he’s missed the dancing? And how is his foot to-day?”

“Eh, miss, but it’s that kind of you! Are they from Miss Jen? If that isn’t just like her kind heart!”

“Well, in a way they are! For she’d have had them if he hadn’t,” Tickles explained enigmatically.

“But she hasn’t heard about it yet. But we’re sure she’d want him to have them. They’re from us too, though, because we’re so sorry—*what’s that?*”

“Drat the children!” said Mrs. Denver. “Here, you Rose! You stop that!” she called over her shoulder.

But Tickles had plunged past her into the little front room, from which had come the sound of tired, hopeless sobbing.

Archie lay on the couch, his leg stretched out before him; but his face was eager and expectant, for he had heard the reference to chocolates, and was young enough to find in them

a compensation for his disappointment. Tickles looked round questioningly.

In an invalid carriage lay a girl, her face turned from them, one arm thrown up to shield it from their gaze. They looked at her, then looked back at the mother.

Mrs. Denver shook her head, handed the box to Archie, and signed to the children to come outside. They withdrew silently, and she closed the door behind her.

"I can't do nothing with her," she said despondently. "'Tis mighty bad for her, too; doctor said that. Lays there and grieves because she can't never see the dancing, and Miss Jen. She's wild to know what it's like, even if she can't never do it herself. Archie was to tell her every mortal thing about this afternoon, and now he hasn't even been able to go hisself, and she's just laid there an' cried all day. Cryin' her heart out, she is, and I can't do a thing to alter it."

"Does Miss Jen know about her?" Tickles demanded, with large faith in Jen's powers and her kindness of heart.

"No, missy. I told Archie to tell her, and maybe she'd look in for a word with Rose some day, and it might cheer her like. But he never would do it, and Miss Jen isn't down in Tin Town much."

"Archie's an idiot. Of course she'd come! Come on, you lot! They'll be hunting for us. Tell Rose to buck up, Mrs. Denver. Jen will know what to do!" and Tickles turned and raced for the path up the hill.

She soon had to slow down, for the hill felt as steep as the side of a house. "I'm going to tell Jen, now at once!" she panted, as they toiled upwards. "She'll do something! She's awfully sporting!"

As they entered the Grange garden again, they were pounced on by Miss Deane, who had been searching the grounds, supposing they had grown tired of the dancing and slipped away for a game by themselves. "Children, where *have* you been?"

"Down to Tin Town, to take a box of chocolates to Archie," Tickles had no use for concealment or evasion. "Because he couldn't even come to watch, you know. And there's a girl there, crying like anything because she's ill and can't come; and we want to tell Jen."

"Ill? In what way? You were very naughty children to do such a thing," Miss Deane's voice was sharp with anxiety as she saw the possibilities. "Did you go into the cottage? Don't you know you must never do such a thing without permission?"

"Oh, it wasn't scarlet fever!" Sara said quickly. "She was lying flat in a long chair; I guess it's her back. And we didn't go near her, Miss Deane. We only heard her crying, and looked at her from the door; but it was rather awful!"

"Tekla, come here!" called Miss Deane hastily; but Tickles had darted away across the lawn towards Jen.

The Tin Town girls and boys had just retired, after dancing "Mage on a Cree" and "The Old Mole," by themselves, and "Galopede" and "Mary and Dorothy" with the village contingent. Jen was marshalling the little ones for "The Ribbon Dance," and giving out broad ribbons of all colours, as Tickles dashed towards her.

Betty held her back. "You can't go to Jen just now, Tickles! She's busy."

Eagerly Tickles poured out the story of Rose of Tin Town. Betty listened pitifully. "We'll tell Jen when the show's over. I'm sure she'll go to see the kid. But don't tell her just now, Tickles. She's promised them another jig after this; she couldn't dance those happy things thinking about a girl lying crying in a cottage!"

"No, it would be mean," and Tickles subsided, and watched "Old Mother Oxford" with interested eyes.

“We want to speak to Jen, when the people have gone,” Betty explained to Miss Deane, as after “Sellenger’s Round” by a big crowd of all the children, the delighted audience began to break up. “Tickles wants to tell her about this poor kid in Tin Town.”

“Yes, I think we must tell her,” and Miss Deane allowed the girls to wait.

At the first chance, Tickles told her story eagerly. Jen’s face softened in instant sympathy.

“The poor kid!” she said pitifully. “Why didn’t Archie tell me? Of course I’ll go! I’d have time to change my frock and run down before dinner, I believe.”

“Oh, couldn’t you——?” burst out Tickles, then pulled herself up. “But it’s awful cheek of me!”

Jen laughed. “Tell me! I won’t think it cheek!”

“Couldn’t you go now, in that lovely frock, and let her see it? And—oh, couldn’t you dance one of those jig things for her?” Tickles pleaded. “Would you be too tired? You wouldn’t mind doing it just for her, would you?”

Jen’s eyes had widened in surprise. “I’m never too tired for a jig! And I never mind dancing anywhere; I love doing it! But would there be room? And what about music?”

Her face filled with eager laughter. “We’ll make a plot! But you’ll have to help me; I can’t do it alone! Oh, Miss Deane! Would you lend me Betty and these four for an hour? If you’d take the rest home, I’ll send them in the car, when they’ve helped me down in Tin Town! They’ll be perfectly safe, and I promise they’ll be home by eight.”

“Miss Deane’s a sport!” Tickles said appreciatively, as, with much laughter and discussion, the six girls made their plans, and Jen’s small car was brought round and the gramophone and records placed in it. “She was mad with us for going to Tin Town without leave. It was jolly decent of her to let us go again!”

Rose’s hopeless crying had ceased from sheer weariness; she was lying tired out, refusing the chocolates Archie pressed upon her, wondering if any of the other girls would take the trouble to come and tell her about the dancing. At the tinkle of tiny bells and the sound of music just outside the door, she turned her head, and stared incredulously.

The window was covered with muslin curtains which made it difficult to see out. Archie had not noticed the car drawn up at the gate, and the girls had been like mice as they carried the gramophone to the open doorway. They had already wound it up; they had only to place the record and release the catch.

A glance through the crack of the door showed Jen the positions of the furniture and the invalid chair. She had left her coat in the car, and, carrying big handkerchiefs and wearing the tinkling bells, she squeezed past the gramophone and nodded to Betty.

Through the long “Once to Yourself” of “Jockie to the Fair,” she peeped through the crack and saw the unbelief and astonishment in the faces of Rose and Archie. Then Tickles flung the door wide, and with a jump and a wave of her handkerchiefs, Jen was in the room, dancing as much “on the spot” as she could. To Rose’s dazed eyes, she was an amazing vision of waving white, and vivid blue and red, and flying yellow pigtails and white legs, and tinkling bells.

“Miss Jen!” gasped Archie, and Mrs. Denver came running out from the kitchen and stood open-mouthed.

“The music’s written for two dancers,” Jen was explaining, excited and rather breathless, to Rose, as she paused during the repetition of the “foot-up.” “So you mustn’t mind if I rest during the other man’s turn! It would be too hard work to do it without stopping to breathe,” and she retreated to the doorway again, to get the biggest possible space for her side-step.

She was in the habit of flying all across the lawn or room when she danced, and, though she did not know it, her step was much improved by being curbed to the limits of the narrow room. Feeling very cramped, but managing to keep clear of the furniture, she finished with the swift mysterious cross-back-step, with circles overhead, and Archie gasped, while Rose lay staring, her eyes like stars, bright spots of excitement on her cheeks. Jen's capers made the ornaments rattle, and drew a cheer from Archie, and a sob of delighted realisation from Rose. This was what the other girls had seen at Christmas! "Miss Jen goes up and down like a ball!" they had told her.

Jen laughed at their faces, and retreated to the doorway for another turn of side-step. Coming to an end at last, with triumphant capers, she went and sat on the side of the spinal carriage.

"Well, how do you like morris? It's gorgeous fun to do! And do you like my frock? Now these girls are going to tell you and Archie all about this afternoon; the children were splendid, and danced beautifully, and everybody had a topping time, including me. Presently I'll dance 'Mother Oxford,' if you like, for that's on the same record, and then I think you'll have had quite a jolly little show all to yourselves!"

Rose had reached out to touch the blue frock and the yellow bells under the white knees with wondering gentle fingers. Jen's hand closed over hers, and found it trembling, and saw that the child could not speak.

"Archie ought to have told me. He's a silly boy, isn't he?" she said, very gently.

"Oh, Miss Jen! You came just for me?" It was only a whisper.

"Of course, silly! I'll come again, if you like. Now don't you want to hear about my children this afternoon?"

"I'll never have words to thank Miss Jen for this!" murmured the mother in the doorway, gazing at Rose's radiant face.

"I knew she'd do it! She's a jolly good sort!" Tickles said warmly.

CHAPTER IV

THE ENCHANTED PRINCE

“Oh—Jen Robins!” said Betty, as the little car climbed the hill laden with gramophone and records and girls, Betty looking a little thoughtful as a new idea struck her.

“They called me Jenny-Wren at school!” Jen laughed. “Well? Why don’t you say it? What’s the matter?”

“Would you do that again? Would you dance for somebody else?”

“Who? Who else would like me to dance?”

“There’s a wee boy at Rocklands. He’d love it so. He has to lie all day, just like Rose——”

“Oh, Bets! What a gorgeous idea!” burst from Tickles and Babs together.

“Wriggles? Oh, Jen, would you?” cried Sara.

“I’ve heard of him, of course,” Jen said soberly. “You mean Mrs. Thorburn’s little invalid nephew, who lives at Rocklands all the time with his nurse?”

“Yes, Teesa Courtney’s little brother. He lives in the west wing; it’s given up to him entirely. But last winter he was ill—worse than usual, I mean—and the doctor sent him to Bournemouth, and he’s been there ever since. He only came back to Rocklands this week, so we’ve hardly seen him yet. He has to be kept very quiet, and we aren’t ever allowed to go near him. He lies out in the garden, in his summer-house——”

“It turns round,” said Tickles. “I can turn it! But we don’t go near it now he’s come. I think he’s like an Enchanted Prince, turned into a statue by a witch. He never moves, Betty says, except just his hands and his eyes and his head.”

“And he’s as white as an image,” Margot added. “I saw him once, last summer, and I could hardly tell which was the pillow, and which was his face. I was rather frightened; I could almost see through him. I didn’t know people could be as white as that!”

“His hair’s nearly white too,” Betty said gravely. “I saw him once or twice last year. But he’s wonderfully jolly and brave, and he’s got the happiest little laugh. He’d love to see your jigs, Jen. Couldn’t you come sometime?”

“Come *now*! You’re all dressed and ready!” Tickles urged.

“No, she’ll be too tired. It isn’t fair, Tickles.”

“Oh, I’m not *too* tired! I could drive home with you,” Jen said eagerly. “But I’d have to tell mother. You get into the big car; it’s to be waiting for you at the door; and I’ll run in and ask her what she thinks. Suppose it wasn’t good for him?”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” Betty confessed. “We’d have to ask the nurse and Mrs. Thorburn.”

“We’ve got a new girl!” Tekla announced, as they drove up the avenue. “She only came last night; isn’t it funny? We didn’t see her till breakfast-time!”

“No, we don’t really know what she’s like yet. We’re still all feeling rather polite and shy,” Betty laughed. “She seemed to be enjoying your dancing. It will be something to talk to her about at supper. She’s called Rhoda; another Rose!”

“Mother says I may go, if I only stay ten minutes; just long enough to dance two jigs and then run!” Jen announced, flying out to join them in the carriage presently. “I’m starving, but I’ll eat apples and chocolate biscuits. Here are some for you; we’ll have a picnic as we cross

the moor. Of course, we're to consult Mrs. Thorburn and the nurse first. Why do you call the kiddy Wiggles? How old is he?"

"Nine. Teesa says he used to wriggle about so when he laughed."

"Like a puppy, wagging all over when it wags its tail," Margot added. "Now he can't move an inch. And yet they say he never grouses or whines, but laughs and keeps jolly all the time. *I couldn't!*"

Rose of Tin Town was not the only happy invalid that night. Little Wiggles, lying very flat in his wicker carrying-tray in the revolving house, where he slept all night during the height of the summer, had just finished the supper with which his nurse had fed him, when she was called away to the house for a word with Mrs. Thorburn. She came back presently, and sat down at his side.

"How would you like it if a fairy came out from among the trees and danced to you in the twilight, Wiggles?"

"Aw, Eddy!" he laughed, "there aren't any fairies!"

"But I saw one in the garden just now. Listen! There's music!"

"It's a gramophone!" Wiggles's blue eyes grew wide. "Gramophones aren't in fairy stories, Eddy!"

Eddy's lips twitched; she had often said that her little patient's brain was all right, whatever might be the case with his body. "No, that's so. But look, Wiggles!"

The upper lawn still held the last evening light, though it was nearly nine o'clock, and dark among the trees. Jen had found her way through the shrubbery with difficulty, led by Mrs. Thorburn, and when the gardener had placed the gramophone on a wooden stool she could not see which side of the record was uppermost, so had to wait for the music to tell her which jig to dance.

The young nurse, "Eddy," held a handkerchief in her hand, and Jen's eyes were on it all the time, for if Eddy waved the handkerchief it was to be a sign that the excitement was too much for the frail little person in the shadowy house, and the "fairy" was to vanish at once. But the handkerchief lay in Eddy's lap. Wiggles gasped, indeed, but his eyes were as full of delight as Rose's had been. He knew that the schoolgirls had gone to see dancing that afternoon; Nurse Eddy told him every detail that could possibly interest him; and his alert little mind connected this radiant blue and white figure, with the flying yellow plaits and waving white handkerchiefs, with the afternoon's show at once. He clutched Eddy's hand very tightly and held his breath, and his white cheeks burned scarlet with unusual excitement; but though she watched him very closely, and so lost most of the dance herself, he showed no sign of collapse, and Jen danced on unchecked.

Between the repeats of the tune, she retired to the trees and stood by the gramophone. As "Jockie" ended, she turned the record over, and danced forward in the "foot-up" of "Mother Oxford." But her capers were less full of life than usual and her step not so springy. At the end she turned breathlessly to Mrs. Thorburn.

"I'd better not speak to him to-night, you said? He'll be too tired?"

"Too tired for more than a word, I'm afraid. Will you be very much disappointed? I know he would like to thank you; you must come back again to see him properly. You can see how he has enjoyed it."

"I'm too tired too," Jen confessed wearily. "I said I was never too tired for a jig, but to-day has been—well, a bit thick! But I have loved it!"

She crossed the lawn very quietly, and stood for one moment looking down at the thin, tiny figure and transparent white face.

“Even fairies get tired!” she assured him seriously. “May I come and see you another time? I can hardly crawl home! Good-night!” and she vanished among the trees, and, refusing all offers of supper, rolled into the car and lay at full length from corner to corner across the seats.

“I feel as if I’d danced all through a May-day party! Oh, I’ll be *quite* all right to-morrow! But I was out of practice, you see. We did heaps of it at school. I’m glad he liked it; I’m sure he did.”

“You use your dancing to give joy on every side, Jen,” said Mrs. Thorburn, having heard from Betty the story of Rose of Tin Town.

“Oh, well! One must. That’s what it’s for, for people to enjoy. It’s folk—everybody’s; for everybody, not for yourself alone,” Jen said rather incoherently. “Please say good-night to the girls for me! I’m so glad they told me about Wiggles. Thank you for letting me come!”

“Who was she?” Wiggles in the summer-house was asking in a breathless whisper.

And as Nurse Eddy prepared him for sleep, she told quietly the story of Jen and her dancing children, and of Rose of Tin Town—“Lying down, something like you, Wiggles, but in a stuffy little cottage, not in a beautiful garden. Jen was a good fairy to her too.”

“Isn’t she kind? I think she’s ever so nice. She’s kind to everybody,” and then his eyes closed wearily, but kept that new picture of the dancing, leaping blue figure, and the tinkling bells, and the happy music, as he slept.

CHAPTER V

RHODA COMES TO ROCKLANDS

“Did you enjoy the show, Rhoda?” Betty asked pleasantly at supper-time.

Rhoda’s pause before answering was just long enough to make the rest look at her curiously. Then she said warmly:

“I loved it! A lot of it was awfully good, and the way that one girl has taught all those different sets of children is simply splendid. She’s a brick, and tremendously clever, and she must have worked really hard. I enjoyed it immensely.”

“But what did you mean? ‘A lot of it was good!’” Teesa repeated indignantly. “D’you mean to say you think any of it wasn’t?”

“I liked the feeling of it,” Rhoda said sturdily. “The kids were all so natural and happy, and they showed so plainly how much they enjoyed it. And it was a huge relief to see them dressed sensibly. I was afraid they’d have Kate Greenaway frocks, or little muslin caps and aprons and fichus, or be all rigged up as stage peasants, boys and all. You see that kind of thing so often, and it just ruins the feeling of the whole thing. It simply isn’t done, by those who know. I don’t think Jen Robins knows an awful lot, but she does know something, and she’d got an awfully jolly feeling——”

The rest was drowned in an indignant outcry. “You don’t think she knows? Well, of all the cheek! Why, she’s older than you!”

“She knows everything!” said Margot largely.

“Oh, no, she doesn’t!” Rhoda was two years older than Margot, and contradicted her without hesitation. “You could see that by her speech about the meaning of ‘Peascods.’ It was all right about the clapping and the sacred tree, but there’s heaps more, and she obviously didn’t know it. She’s happened to get hold of that one little bit, but any one could see she didn’t know the folk-lore that lies behind country-dancing, let alone morris.”

“Well, do you?” It was an incredulous chorus.

“Yes,” said Rhoda simply.

Then as they eyed her in stunned silence, she added, “And those dances were full of mistakes. It didn’t matter a scrap, of course, for an audience like that; nobody knew. But there are things that you simply aren’t allowed to do in country-dancing, and those girls were doing them all the time. And her own morris step is wrong.”

This was too much. A howl of wrath drowned the rest she would have said. She covered her ears and waited till she could make herself heard.

“Shut up, girls!” Teesa said peremptorily. “We’ll make her tell us what she means by it, but she can’t while you’re all yelling at her.”

“What *do* you know about it, Rhoda?” Betty demanded indignantly, sorely hurt for Jen’s sake. “The morris dance was beautiful!”

“I never said it wasn’t!” Rhoda retorted. “But that doesn’t say it was right! But I do say she’s an awfully good sort to have worked so hard, and to have taught the kids so well, and kept them out of so many mistakes that most people make—like dressing-up, and making fancy movements and bows and curtsies; and to have kept them all so natural and unaffected, when it’s quite obvious she hasn’t been properly taught herself. I think she’s awfully sporting,

and I wish she'd had better chances. She'd learned most of those dances out of the book; or her teacher had."

"Well, why not? It's awfully clever to take them out of a book!"

"Yes, but they'd got them wrong!" Rhoda wailed. "They'd missed all the most beautiful points! I simply shuddered in 'Newcastle,' when they all turned their backs on one another in the lines! I know somebody who says, 'Unfold the line!' Those lines didn't unfold; they simply happened."

"Well, what does it matter?" Betty said stoutly, but with a dawning conviction that the new girl did after all know something.

"And in 'Hey, Boys' and 'Paper,' the men all stood still after crossing, and the women waited on the spot, and didn't balance! It ruined the whole figure and the whole dance! Instead of the beautiful unbroken movement, the corners stood still, like posts. It was simply spoiled! I could have wept!" Rhoda said tragically. "And there were other things; wrong steps, and wrong hands given. Her country-dancing's full of mistakes. It's an awful pity, for any one can see she loves it, and her movements and rhythm are so good, and she's so keen."

"Perhaps you'd like to give her a few lessons?" Teesa said sarcastically.

Rhoda's eyes gleamed. Then she said seriously, "I don't know how keen she is. If she's keen enough, she'd be glad to be put right."

"But how do you know you're right?" Tickles voiced the question for all. "And what did you mean about her morris step?"

Rhoda said deliberately, "I'll show you. Get out of the way! This is what she does!" and before their astonished eyes she began to do the side-step of "Jockie," in a long slant across the room, her hands circling above her head without handkerchiefs. It was what the girls had seen that afternoon; they could not doubt it, though none of them could have copied it so exactly. Their eyes met, in doubtful distress; there was no denying that Rhoda knew what she was talking about.

"That's how Jen Robins does side-step! Mine isn't good, but I know where hers is wrong. She covers far too much ground; it should be much neater. That's the position!" tucking her left toe behind her right heel. "Knees close together, almost touching. Her knees get wide apart, and her one foot is miles behind the other."

"Look here, Rhoda, tell us how you know all this!" Betty said imperatively, her tone anxious, but not convinced. "Have you had an awfully good teacher?"

"She would say no," Rhoda laughed, "but she's been taught by the very best people there are—real folk dancers, who do nothing but teach and show the dances, and I've been up to town—London, you know!—with her to watch them, both in classes and in demonstrations. She's taught us for two winters now, both sword and country-dancing. She's the Guardian of our Camp Fire."

"What's that?"

"Oh, it would take a whole evening to tell you!" Rhoda laughed. "Haven't you read about it? It's a girls' society, from America——"

"I know!" Sara cried. "They have rings, and beads, and gowns, and Indian names. I read about it in a school story!"

"Perhaps my Guardian wrote it. She's written several. My ring's upstairs; I'm not allowed to wear it here, but I brought it to look at now and then. I'll show it to you to-night. My name is Ahneah; that means 'Rose Flower.' We're fearfully keen on country-dancing; I've learned all the dances those kiddies did to-day, and more. We don't do much morris as a Camp; our

Guardian says it needs too much time for practice, and we've given our time to swords instead. But she has all those records Jen Robins has, and she's shown us steps and movements. We have done 'Rigs'; I can show you how the tapping is done," and she turned to Tickles. "It's quite easy, once you've done it slowly. Get two rulers, and I'll show you now. There!" as Tekla held up the ruler as she had seen the boys do. "I tap yours twice; now you tap mine—that end! Now watch! One, two, *three! four!*" and then her ruler flashed up and down as the white sticks had done in the afternoon. "But we ought to be hopping and changing our feet, and the sticks ought to be round."

"Changing your feet?" somebody mocked.

"Yes, four changes," and Rhoda demonstrated the movement, and then the four-two step.

The girls looked at one another again; this was very disconcerting! There was no mistaking the movements after that afternoon's performance. Every one recognised them as what the boys on the lawn had done.

"I think Jen ought to know what you say about her dancing," Betty said doubtfully.

Rhoda flushed. "Well, if you tell her, be fair! Tell her I said from the first that I think she's done wonders with those children, and I haven't criticised her at all, but only the people who have taught her."

"I don't know when we'll see her again," Betty was beginning, when Tickles interrupted.

"What about that box of chocolates, Bets?" she cried shrilly.

"Oh, yes! Girls, this afternoon these kiddies took chocolates to the wee boy in Tin Town who had hurt his foot and couldn't go to the show. And they wished they'd had money enough to get a box for Jen too, and present it to her at the end. She'd done all the work, and it was jolly nice of her to invite us. Don't you think among us we could get a big box, and ask Miss Maitland to invite her here, and give it to her from us all?"

The idea was received with enthusiasm. Several had felt something wanting during the afternoon, when not even flowers were presented to the mistress of the ceremonies.

"Flowers would have been silly, with that lovely garden. But any girl would like a box of chocolates!" said Margot, and she and Tickles, Babs and Sara became collectors, while Betty went to consult the head mistress, and to tell Miss Deane, who had been deeply interested in the folk-dancing, of Rhoda's astonishing inner knowledge.

Miss Deane, surprised and amused, asked Rhoda a few questions. From whom had her "Guardian of the Camp Fire" learned her dancing? Where had Rhoda gone with her to watch classes and demonstrations? Could she remember the names of any of the teachers or dancers?

Rhoda could; the first three or four names she mentioned were enough. Miss Deane laughed, and doubted no longer.

"If you've seen those people dance and teach, I've no more to say! You've seen the best folk-dancers in England! And your friend has been taught by them? I envy her her good luck! After that, if you don't know how the dances ought to look, you ought to, that's all! I've seen those people once. But their names are known to every one who is keen on the dances."

"I don't believe Jen Robins has seen them, or she couldn't let her children stand still in some of the dances, as they do. Even in 'Peascods,' they clapped and fell back and stood still. We were never allowed even to pause before running in for the second clap. She simply hasn't understood; she'd love it, as everybody does, if she knew," Rhoda said earnestly. "There were lots of awfully good things about her show, Miss Deane! The timing was beautiful, and the feeling was just right, and they made us enjoy it as well as themselves. All that was really good. Lots of people fail on any or all those points. You will tell her I said so, won't you?"

"I'll see that she understands. But there were mistakes in the dances?"

"Heaps of them! And I'm sure her morris step is wrong."

The girls awaited Jen's visit in keenest interest, and rejoiced when they heard Miss Maitland had invited her to tea on the following Saturday. They were eager to see if their gift would please her; but still more eager to hear how she would receive Rhoda's criticisms.

Jen cycled across the moor by the broad road on Saturday afternoon, keen to be in a school again, after her happy years at Wycombe, and eager to see Rocklands. The whole school met her at the gate and escorted her up the drive, Tickle and Sara dashing on ahead to fetch out the box and thrust it into Betty's hands as the procession reached the front door.

Betty, flushed and laughing, presented the box, laid ceremoniously on a big tray, to astonished Jen.

"It's instead of a bouquet, because we enjoyed your show so much. It's only a week late! We're sorry we didn't think of it at the time. Will you please accept it now, with our very best thanks, and hearty congratulations on the success of the dancing?"

"Oh, but how lovely of you all!" Jen was radiant with surprise and delight. "I never dreamed of bouquets or presentations! I had as good a time as anybody. What a topping big box! You'll all have to help me!"

"Oh, no, you don't!" Teesa cried, as Jen began to untie the ribbons. "We won't let you hand them round a school of this size! It won't be worth taking home if you let us begin on it!"

"Of course I'm going to hand it round!"

"Of course you're not!" There was a chorus of agreement with Teesa. "You're to take it home as it is, and it will last you for weeks!"

"I doubt it!" Jen laughed. "I want to hand it round, really!"

"Well, you may give Betty one, to represent the rest of us," Tickle suggested. "Then you can have a look inside, and have one for yourself too; and then you can tie it up to take home."

Eventually Jen was induced to consent to this, and the whole school watched anxiously while she and Betty sampled the chocolates.

"Gorgeous! Tophole!" Jen said fervently.

"Perfectly scrumptious!" Betty gave her verdict seriously.

"And now let's get to business!" Teesa had been impatient for this moment. "Jen, do you know we've got a new girl, and she says your dancing is all wrong?"

"That isn't fair!" Rhoda cried indignantly.

Jen whirled round to her. "Are you the one? How is it wrong? Do you know anything about it?"

"Yes!" Rhoda met her eyes fearlessly. "But Teesa makes it sound as if I'd criticised you unkindly. I don't think I did. I didn't mean to."

"No, she didn't," Betty spoke quickly, her voice sharp with indignation towards Teesa. "Jen, Rhoda said heaps of nice things about your show. But she has seen that dancing in London, and she says you're making mistakes. But she says you've done wonders with the children."

"What mistakes? In what way are we wrong? Where have you seen the dancing? Oh!" Jen cried eagerly. "In London? Have you seen the Headquarters people? Oh, you lucky boulder! I've only heard about them. How perfectly thrilling! I say, you'll tell me every single thing about it, won't you?"

This was not the reception of her news Teesa and the girls had expected. They had not reckoned on the keenness of an enthusiast, however; Jen had no thought of self in the matter.

"Tell me one thing!" she begged. "Is my side-step bad? A strange girl turned up here at Christmas, and she told me it was, and I haven't known whether to believe her, or how to get it better. Did you think it was bad, too?" for Rhoda had laughed, as much relieved as the rest were surprised and Teesa disappointed.

"I think you make it too big," Rhoda said frankly. "I watched a class taught that jig by a very good teacher, and she pulled them all up for that; covering too much ground; 'going miles,' as she said."

"I see," Jen nodded. "But we've always done it as I do. Well, we shall soon know! But if we're really wrong in points like that—help! What a time we've got before us!" and she laughed. "And what about the country-dances? Won't you tell me all about it, and who taught you, and what people you saw dance?"

Sitting on the tennis-lawn, Rhoda told her all she could. Jen's face fell when she understood some of the criticisms. "We were never taught points like those. Of course, I can see your way would be much jollier. I say, this is serious! 'Tisn't only my kiddies; it's the girls who taught me and who learned with me. I belonged to a dancing club, and we were taught by the President and the elder May Queens; I was Maid of Honour to one of them. If they're wrong—and they must be, if you're right!—then they've taught the whole club wrong, and *how mad* they'll be!"

"With the people who taught them, do you mean?"

"No, with themselves. They take new dances out of the books."

"Oh! But do you think you can—properly, I mean? You miss the points that make the dances beautiful. You were doing them rightly, by the book! For 'Hey, Boys,' I suppose the book just says 'Men cross, women cross, hands-four once round.' It doesn't tell you how to do it so that everybody keeps dancing every minute. But if any one stops, it ruins the feeling, and the movement, and the rhythm, as well as the look of it."

"I see what you mean," Jen said thoughtfully. "Seems to me there are some shocks ahead for the President!"

"Will you tell her? Will she believe it, because a girl she's never heard of says it's so?"

Jen thought of Cicely Hobart, and laughed. "No, I'm sure she wouldn't. But she might begin to sit up and take notice if she heard you'd seen the Headquarters people dance. But I shan't tell her; I shall let it be a shock. It will be far more fun if she isn't prepared. But some one else will tell her, and she'll think far more of it than if it came from me. You see," and she began to laugh, "on Tuesday we're going to Scarborough for the whole of July. From there I'm going straight to Cheltenham, so I shan't see any of you till next term. At Cheltenham I'm to meet the President and two of the Queens of our club, and we're all going to school again for a month. It's a school for folk-dancing, run by those people Rhoda has seen in London. They'll teach us in classes and show us the dances and have parties and exams for us; and I *think* if we're wrong we shall find it out! I'm glad I'm prepared for possible shocks; but I shan't warn the others. We'll wait and see! I'm simply dying to get there! It's going to be the jolliest time I've ever known."

"Will you tell us about it next term?" Betty asked eagerly.

"I'll want to! And I'll promise you one thing!" and she laughed across at Rhoda. "If I find my dances are wrong, I'll own up. I'll tell you quite honestly what happens to us. If we're as much wrong as you say, we may have rather an awful time; I hope the person who gets hold of

us is nice about it! I'll tell you just what fate befalls us. Now couldn't we have some tennis? I hardly ever get a good game at home!"

CHAPTER VI AN ACCIDENT

“Have you heard?” the girls were meeting at Rocklands after the summer holidays. In the drive before the house Tickles ran up to Betty, her face full of tragedy.

“Had good holidays, kiddy? Why, what’s the matter? Is there bad news?”

“Then you haven’t heard! It’s Jen!” Tickles half sobbed. “She’s had an awful accident at that dancing-school place. She was in the side-car of a motor-bike, and another girl was on the bike, and they tipped over, and Mrs. Thorburn says Jen was nearly killed, and for hours they didn’t know if she’d ever wake up again. They sent for her mother, and she’s with her still, and nobody knows when they’ll get home again. And—and Mrs. Thorburn isn’t sure yet if Jen will be able to walk! She hurt her back and her side and her head. Oh, Betty! Think if”—and Tekla’s voice sank to a terrified whisper—“if Jen had to have crutches! Or had to lie all the time in a long chair, like Wiggles, or Rose down in Tin Town! Think if—if she couldn’t ever dance a morris jig again!”

Betty could see what Tickles was seeing—a vision of Jen as she had danced in the garden, radiant with life and health and joy—as she had danced to invalid Rose. The horror of what might be turned her sick and trembling. “Oh, Tickles, *no!*” she whispered helplessly.

“Have you heard?” Rhoda came up, her face white. “Isn’t it too awful for words? I can’t think of Jen having to live like that!”

“They ought to have been more careful!” Betty said huskily.

“Have you heard?” The question greeted every girl as she arrived, and the horror of the news cast a gloom over the whole school.

Better news came in a day or two, however. Jen would walk in time, though she would have to be patient; and the girls rejoiced, and felt a weight had been lifted and they could be happy again. A letter of congratulation, signed by the whole school, helped to cheer and amuse Jen in the hospital at Cheltenham, and was one of the treasures of her convalescence.

But the greatest day of all was one afternoon late in September, when a big party of schoolgirls, returning from a shopping expedition to the little town beside the station, heard wheels in the road behind them, and crowding to the bank, saw the big car from the Grange driving slowly past. Mrs. Robins sat on the back seat; a stranger was facing her, a bronze-haired pretty girl of twenty-one; Mr. Robins was beside the driver. Lying across the two seats was Jen, white still, and tired with the journey, her long plaits gone and little yellow curls already beginning to wave all over her head, but eager and happy-faced as ever.

She called to the chauffeur to stop. “Oh, please, mother! Poke him, Joan, there’s a darling! Do stop him, daddy!”

“Well, only for one minute, my dear. You’re tired enough, Jen. You shall see the girls very soon.”

“Yes, I’ll want them to come. But I must speak to them; just one word! Betty! Tickles! Oh, I am so glad to be home again! Thank you all so much for your letter!” as they crowded round the carriage. “Is Rhoda there? Push her forward, some of you; I want her! Rhoda, you were right! We *were* wrong, *all* wrong, dreadfully wrong! We got squashed flat in the first afternoon; in ‘Newcastle’ and ‘Hey, Boys,’ it was! All the things you’d said, and lots more! We had the luck to get one of their very best teachers, and she didn’t let us off one single

thing; she never misses anything. I'm awfully grateful to you for warning me. I was prepared, but it was a fearful shock to the others. Wasn't it, Joan? They nearly died!" and Joan laughed and agreed. "Oh, we were fearfully crushed! Cicely was quite chastened. But after a bit we began to pick up and improve, and our dancing's quite different now. You shall see my side-step some day, but not just yet, I'm afraid. But I'm going to do morris again soon, and as well as ever; they all say so. And I'm going to get my kiddies right in their dances as soon as ever I can; Joan's going to help me. She's one of the Queens; the one whose Maid I was. Cicely's gone home to give the club some shocks when they hear they've been wrong all these years. It was a fearful blow to her!"

"I hope your teacher-person was nice about it?" Rhoda laughed.

"She was awfully decent; we loved her from the first, though she bullied us dreadfully. But you should see her dance! Well, you have seen her! You'll know how we felt. I felt a worm!—to think I'd been pretending to show those jigs to people! I'd had no idea what they could really look like. I wonder you didn't have a fit when you saw me try, if you'd seen her! I think you were really nice about it. The things you might have said! Now I'm tired, so good-bye. But you must come over to tea quite soon, to hear all about it and see my photos. But I had to tell you you'd been right in every word you said; you didn't say half enough, that's all!"

She lay back, tired but bright-faced still, and waved her hand as the car drove on.

"How jolly decent of her! Fancy remembering, after all that's happened!" Rhoda said warmly.

"Didn't I always say Jen was sporting?" Tickles murmured to Betty, who nodded happily.

"Who is this Miss Jen?" asked Mademoiselle.

She had been convoying the shopping party home across the moor, when the girls made a dash for the road, and crowded about the carriage. From the high bank Mademoiselle had watched the greetings; seeing that here was something she did not understand, she had waited till the chance came to ask for explanations.

Mademoiselle was new at Rocklands this autumn term. She had, in fact, been there only for a day or two, and hardly knew the girls yet, for Miss Maitland had waited on, hoping that last term's French mistress, an old friend, would be able to return. But family illness away in France had made that Mademoiselle feel she must give up her post definitely, so a new little French lady had appeared, some weeks after the beginning of the term. She was small and dainty and friendly, and the girls all liked her. But she had not had time yet to grow familiar with their interests; so their sudden unanimous plunge down the bank to the car had left her gasping.

"Who, then, is this Miss Jen?" she asked, therefore, when the carriage had driven on and left the girls to scramble up into the heather again.

A babel of answers nearly deafened her. She covered her ears with her hands and stood still in the sandy path.

"No! no! no! You speak all at once. How shall I hear, in your so-noisy English? How shall I understand? Betty, you shall tell me; then I shall hear—yes! Who is the pretty girl who is ill, but still has a so-happy face?"

"She always looks happy. She's Jen Robins, from the Grange," the head girl said eagerly. "We made friends with her last summer. She teaches folk-dancing to the children in two villages, Mademoiselle; the old village by the church, and the new one, called Tin Town, down by the works in the valley. They gave a show in the Grange garden, and Jen asked us all to go and watch."

“And she went away in the holidays, to a school for dancing,” Tickles and Margot and Babbles all wanted to help in the story. Betty was so slow and Scotch!

“And there was an accident!” Sara cried shrilly. “Jen was thrown out of a side-car and run over, and for weeks we didn’t know if she’d ever be able to walk again! She’s been in hospital ever since.”

“So, of course, we had to talk to her, when we saw she’d come home,” Tickles added. “Oh, wasn’t it ripping to see her again?”

“We ought to do something thrilling, to celebrate!” Margot said longingly. “Fireworks, or a bonfire on the moor!”

“Or have a party. We could have a midnight feast, but that wouldn’t be much good to Jen,” Sara said sadly.

“We can go on doing things for her, as we’ve been trying to do ever since we heard she was ill,” Betty remarked. “Whose turn is it to take flowers down to Tin Town to-morrow?”

“Mine and Margot’s,” said Tickles promptly. “We’ll tell Rena to-night that we’ll want some flowers.”

“Where would you go? And why would you take flowers to Tin Town?” Mademoiselle asked, trying in vain to keep up with the conversation. “How is that to please Miss Jen? You say she lives there, and has no flowers?”

“No, she lives at the Grange, up on the hill. We’ve been sending flowers and letters, to cheer her up in the hospital, but she won’t need them any more. There’s a lovely garden at the Grange,” Betty explained.

“But down in Tin Town there’s a girl called Rose, who has to lie in a long chair all the time,” Tickles added eagerly. “And Jen used to be kind to her. So we’ve been taking flowers to Rose, as well as sending them to Jen, Mademoiselle. She’s used to it now, but she nearly cried the first time.”

“With joy at the kind thought. Yes, it is very pretty of you,” Mademoiselle said graciously.

The girls looked at one another, Rhoda and Betty amused, the juniors rather horrified.

“Help! I hope it isn’t!” Margot murmured. “That’s enough to cool anybody off! I never thought I’d be accused of doing anything ‘pretty’!”

“She doesn’t mean anything horrid,” Babbles whispered. “If she hadn’t the bad luck to be French, poor thing, she’d say it was awfully jolly of us! Or jolly decent; or something sensible like that.”

“One more thing tell me,” Mademoiselle went on, unconscious of their criticism. “Who is this Rena?—this girl who plays tennis and dances with you at night, and yet by day works in the garden, dressed in breeches like a boy?”

The girls laughed. “Rena Mackay! She’s ever so jolly!”

“Doesn’t she look pretty in her gardening tunic and boots and big hat? A regular Land Girl!” Rhoda said warmly. “She’s going to a gardening college presently, and I’m thinking of asking if I may go too. I’d love it!”

“Rena used to go to school with us,” Betty explained, “but her father’s ship was lost—he was captain of an Atlantic liner—and she was left alone in the world, except for an aunt and some little cousins. Rena was here when it happened, and she was so plucky about it that Mrs. Thorburn wanted to help her. So she suggested that Rena should come as assistant to Andrew, who’s getting very old, for a year or two, and then go to college and be properly trained for the post. The red-haired girl who works with her is Lisabel; she lives in the valley. She’s to go to college with Rena presently.”

“So! In the day this Rena is the gardener, then; but at night she plays with you?”

“She says she’s the garden-boy, and calls herself Andy: her name’s Andrena. We asked if she might come for tennis, and Mrs. Thorburn was delighted. Rena was keen on getting some play, so she often stays; she’s never tired! But it’s getting too dark after working hours now.”

“Last night I saw her dancing with you. The strange dance, with high jumps and big kerchiefs, which Miss Deane tells me is a so-English dance?”

“Oh, that’s Rhoda’s stunt, to surprise Jen!” Betty said, laughing.

“Rena begged to be allowed to try the morris dancing,” Rhoda explained. “She saw Tickles and the rest trying to do the steps and movements, and asked what it was. I’ve been helping Miss Deane to teach them, because I’d done it at home and she’d done some at college. So I’ve been trying to teach Rena some morris jigs, to please her and to amuse Jen. Rena loves it; she will dance in her garden tunic and boots, and she looks so like a boy, except for her curly hair! She’s to go and show what she can do, as soon as Jen’s ready for visitors.”

“Do you, perhaps, teach Miss Jen’s village children while she is away?” Mademoiselle asked, with interest.

“No, I didn’t like to. I felt it would be butting in on her job. I mean,” hastily, as poor Mademoiselle looked puzzled, “I’d have felt I was interfering with her work. If she hadn’t expected to be able to teach them again, it would have been different; but as it’s only for a little while, I thought the children could wait for her.”

“She’ll begin teaching them again as soon as she’s well enough,” said Betty.

“I expect that pretty girl in the carriage has come to help her,” Tickles said wisely. “Won’t Rose be pleased to hear she’s home again!”

But when Tickles and Margot, carrying the flowers Rena had picked for them, and attended by Mademoiselle, reached Tin Town on the following afternoon, they found that the good news had preceded them. Everybody knew that “Miss Jen” was home again. Archie, Rose’s small brother, had hung a flag out of the window. Rose was radiant, and in her excitement she shared a secret with the girls.

“Miss Tekla! Miss Margot! See what I’ve been makin’ for Miss Jen! It’s nearly finished. Mother, where’s my knitting?”

“How sweet of you, Rose!” Margot said warmly. “What have you been making for her? A scarf?”

“Whatever it is, Jen will love you for doing it for her,” Tickles said, with conviction.

And then she and Margot looked at one another in dumb consternation, as Rose proudly unwrapped a clumsy bundle, and with loving hands and glowing eyes displayed a jumper, knitted in the crudest of purples, with border, collar, cuffs, and stripes of vividest yellow—colours that, even to their eyes, were actually painful; how the hideous thing would hurt Jen, with her sensitive, beauty-loving nature, they could imagine.

“I didn’t know where to look when I saw the ghastly hideosity!” Tickles told Betty afterwards.

“So she gaped at me, like a dying fish,” Margot added. “It’s an absolute atrocity, Bets! The wrong purple and the wrong yellow to put together, of course! And the poor kid was so pleased with it! She hadn’t an idea how we felt. That was the worst of all!”

Rose was fingering the gaudy work wistfully. She had laboured at it for weeks, taking infinite pains, for love of Jen, who had come and danced, just for her, in that tiny room.

“Miss Jen told the girls to make jumpers for themselves, and she said to use pretty colours, because she liked them. She said it was bad to wear dull, horrid things, and pretty ones was

best,” Rose explained.

“Yes—oh, yes! She likes bright colours!” Tickles said hastily.

Margot was still gazing helplessly at the purple and yellow horror which was Rose’s idea of the beautiful. She could see before her eyes Jen’s blues and greens and amethysts and pinks; bright colours, all of them, but how different from these!

Tickles faced the situation boldly, and made the only possible comment. “Rose, Jen will love you for making it for her! There’s heaps of work in it, and you’ve done it beautifully. It’s such a pretty stitch, too! You must have spent weeks at it. It was awfully decent of you, and I know Jen will be very pleased that you’ve done it for her. Now we’ll have to go. We’d better not stay to-day. I’m glad you’re looking so well!” for Rose was flushed with happy excitement. “Come on, Margot! We mustn’t be late for tea!”

“I’m glad you got me out before I burst!” Margot exploded, when the gate was shut behind them. “Did you ever see anything so ghastly? That awful thing! And she’ll expect poor Jen to wear it! Oh, Tickles, isn’t it frightful? I didn’t know what to say! I don’t know how you could, Tickles!”

“What I said was all right,” Tickles said sturdily. “Jen will be awfully touched and pleased to think the kid made the thing for her!”

“Yes, but she’ll be ill when she sees it! And if she tries to wear it, she’ll die!”

“I know. It’s fearful,” Tickles agreed gloomily. “Could we burgle the cottage and steal the thing, and bury it?”

“We might,” Margot said hopefully. “Or we might offer to take it to Jen. Then we could lose it on the way.”

“No, for then she wouldn’t see what a lot of work the kid’s put into it. She will be pleased, you know, Margot!”

“Yes, but I want to drown the awful thing!” Margot wailed. “Jen won’t know what on earth to do with it! She *can’t* wear it!”

They went racing in search of Betty as soon as they reached Rocklands, to tell the awful news to her. Betty agreed emphatically with Tickles.

“Jen must see the thing, of course. Then she’ll have to decide what to do about it. The big thing, to her, will be the time and work Rose has put into it, and the thought behind it. However hideous the thing is, Jen will be pleased, I know.”

“But she ought to have warning, Bets!” Margot expostulated. “Or she’ll shriek when she sees it! We nearly died!”

“We can’t tell her, because Rose told us as a secret,” Tickles added. “But you could, when you go to tea on Saturday, Betty. Tell her to be surprised, and all that, when it comes; but I do think she ought to be prepared!”

Betty thought so too. “That’s only fair. I’ll tell her, but I’ll remind her it’s a secret.”

Tickles sought her later in the evening. “Betty, you know we said we ought to do something to celebrate, to show Jen we’re glad she’s home? Margot and I have been thinking—you know what she told us last summer, about how they crowned the May Queen at her school, and everybody brought presents?”

Betty assented. “And Jen was a Maid of Honour. I think the pretty girl who has come home with her was her Queen.”

“Well, couldn’t we all go one Saturday, and take presents, to show we’re glad she’s back? Little things, you know; like flowers and chocolates. The girls all say they’d like to. Perhaps the village and Tin Town crowds would like to do it, too.”

Betty laughed. “Did Rose’s jumper put it into your head? I’m sure Jen would be pleased and surprised.”

“Well, you ask the other girl, the Queen Joan girl, if it would do Jen any harm. If she says it’s all right, we’ll do it. But it might be bad for Jen to get excited. You ask the Joan girl, Betty!”

CHAPTER VII

“TOMMY” COMES TO TEA

Jen's first tea-party was to consist only of Betty and Rhoda. She would have liked the juniors to come too, but her mother advised that they should wait.

She was lying in the garden when they arrived, for the autumn days were as warm as those of summer, with the added beauty of wonderfully tinted trees. Jen's couch was placed under a drooping golden birch, its white satiny stem shining in the afternoon sun. She was looking stronger than at the end of her journey, and was eager to tell about her holiday and to show piles of snapshots.

“Oh, I'm getting better every hour! This air is so glorious after the heat down south. I loved the place, but I wanted to get out on the hills whenever I could. I don't go up and down stairs yet; they've made me a bedroom in the little library, so that I can step out of the window into the garden. But I can walk a little farther every day, and when I go upstairs for the first time I shall send postcards to every one I know to boast about it! Look what I'm doing!” and she proudly showed a length of wide crochet lace, kept beautifully clean and worked with greatest care. Three sides of a square were finished, with elaborate corners; it represented hours of patient work spent in hospital.

“It's lovely! What is it for?” Betty asked admiringly.

“It's to go round an afternoon tea-cloth. It's a wedding present for Madam. She's the one who told us we were all wrong in our dancing,” she said laughing, to Rhoda. “She's just got engaged. So as soon as I heard about it, I started on this for her. It's the biggest piece of work I ever did in my life! But then I never lay still for so long before. I'm desperately afraid something will happen to it before I get it finished! I won't feel safe till it's sent off. You see, I really have given a lot of time to it! I'd be awfully upset if anything happened to it now.”

“Oh, but it won't! You're being so careful of it. You've kept it beautifully clean,” Betty said warmly.

“Are you strong enough for a surprise?” Rhoda asked seriously. “I think it will be a jolly one; but I don't want to send your temp. up.”

“Oh, I've stopped having relapses! What is the surprise?” Jen asked eagerly.

“I've been teaching somebody to dance ‘Jockie,’ and she wants you to see her and criticise, now that you've seen the real thing. Could we have the gramophone?”

“Oh, who is it? Tickles?” Jen cried in delight. “Joan will fetch the record; won't you, old dear? But where is your kiddy, Rhoda? Did you leave her at the gate? What a shame!”

“She's not exactly a kid,” Rhoda's lips twitched. “She's awfully keen on morris. She came up with us, but she's sitting out in the heather. She wouldn't come in till I'd told you about her.”

“Oh, do fetch her! Betty and Joan will see to the music. Is it one of your mistresses? Or an old woman from the village?”

“Wrong! Quite wrong! I'll fetch her. You may know her already.”

Jen's eager eyes widened in delight when Rhoda returned, followed up the drive by a tall, sunny-faced girl in khaki tunic and breeches and big boots, a shady hat covering her yellow hair, which was tied in a bunch of curls behind. Rena was tanned and healthy and straight, strong with a year's work in the moorland garden at Rocklands, and very pleasant to look at.

Her gardening outfit was neat and useful, and suited her, and she looked ready for tramping the heather, digging, mowing, tennis, or morris dancing at a moment's notice.

She touched her hat in a boyish salute, as she came up to the couch. Jen stretched out her hands with an eager cry. "I know you by sight! I've always wanted to speak to you, but I never quite dared; you always look so businesslike! You always seem to be going somewhere in a hurry! But you look so jolly and so much a bit of the moor. Have you seen me out cycling? But I didn't often go towards Rocklands. It was on the moor I saw you."

"I tramp across it twice a day, from my cottage under the Edge. I lodge with Mrs. Thynne. I have seen you often," Rena looked down at her anxiously. "Are you really better? Will you be able to dance again? I was hiding among the trees with Lisabel, that night you danced and were a fairy, for Wiggles. I'd never seen anything like it before."

"It was horribly badly done!" Jen said, laughing. "Oh, I'll be all right again quite soon! They all say so. At first I was afraid they were only saying it to satisfy me," she said gravely. "I was ill, you see, and you get so horribly nervy. I was afraid there might be more the matter than they wanted me to know. But mother and daddy and Joan have all told me solemnly it isn't so; there really is nothing wrong that won't get perfectly all right. I know they wouldn't cheat me. And I can feel that I'm stronger every day. So I'm quite happy; I don't mind waiting! And I had a gorgeous time; I can always be happy thinking about it. Has Rhoda really been teaching you? How sporting of her! Do let me see 'Jockie'! Do you do it in boots?"

"They're not high-heeled boots!" Rhoda reassured her earnestly, but with laughing eyes. "Your morris men must have danced in boots; don't you think so?" She pulled out two big khaki handkerchiefs, and threw her hat on the grass.

Jen chuckled. "If you bobbed your hair, in the same way they've done mine, you'd look just a boy! But those curls give you away; the top half of you doesn't fit the bottom half!"

"Rex Courtney always calls me Tommy, but then Rex is rude," Rena said lightly. "He's Wiggles's brother, and comes sometimes in holidays. I've enjoyed my lessons with Rhoda tremendously; there's something in morris that fills a want in my nature! But my capers aren't like yours, and I'm not fond of side-step. I love all the rest, but I don't suppose it's good."

"Oh, but it is good!" Jen and Joan cried in delight, at the end of the dance, as Rena paused and waited for criticism.

"I like your morris!" Jen said eagerly. "It's like a man's, and that's the real thing. It's sturdy and solid and businesslike; isn't it, Joan?"

"Yes, it's very good, but it's all her own," Joan remarked. "That's as it should be, of course. Rena puts something of herself into it. She hasn't your lightness, Jenny-Wren; but her dancing is full of life, and very individual."

"Oh, I'm a heavy lump, I know!" Rena laughed. "When I remember that blue dancing fairy on the lawn in the twilight, I feel like a sack of sand!"

"Oh, but all that talk about fairies is silly when you're speaking of morris!" Jen insisted. "Morris was danced by village men, in boots, as you say; not by fairies, dressed in spiders' webs! I think your morris is good; it's more like the real thing. I hope you'll do some more."

"I'd love it. I like the dances with sticks, too; they're real sport!"

"Here comes tea. Oh, you're not going away!" Jen cried indignantly, as Rena picked up her hat hastily. "After just getting to know you, I'm not going to let you go like that! It isn't likely! I've been shy of speaking to you all spring and summer, because you always look so

determined, and—and in a hurry to get to some job you’re keen on! You aren’t in a hurry now, are you?”

“Purposeful!” Rhoda laughed. “That’s how I always say she looks!”

“I’m not in a special hurry, but you don’t want me——”

“Then don’t be daft!” Jen said peremptorily. “I do! I want to show you my photos of men doing morris. Another cup, Alice, please. Now, Joan, come and be mother and pour out! Rena and Rhoda can wait on themselves and me.”

As tea came to an end, Betty asked, in mock anxiety, “Could you stand another shock, Jen? Has the tea strengthened you a *lot*?”

Jen laughed. “Heaps and heaps! I can stand anything now! Is your shock as jolly as Rhoda’s?”

“Mine’s a real shock, I’m afraid. Tickles and her crowd have found out something you ought to know; and we’ve been ordered to break it to you gently.”

Jen’s eyes laughed again. “Come and hold me up, Joan! Feel my pulse; is it good and strong? Get it over, Betty, there’s a dear!”

“Rose, down in Tin Town, has been making a present for you,” Betty said solemnly, going straight to the point for once. “It’s a jumper, and she’s been working at it for weeks. And I’m sorry to say it’s the most hideous thing you ever saw; a violent purple and a ghastly yellow, in stripes. Rose knew you liked bright colours.”

Jen’s eyes, which had filled with eager light on hearing of Rose’s kind thought, dilated in horror. Then she lay back in Joan’s arms, and laughed till she cried.

“Oh, but how awful!” she gasped, when she could speak. “How perfectly sweet of the kid! But how simply fearful! Stripes! Up and down, of course, to make me look longer than ever! I’ve grown two feet while I’ve been ill! What am I to do with the thing? Have you seen it, Betty?”

“No, but the kids say it’s absolutely ghastly. You’ll never be able to wear it. They wanted to get hold of it and drown it before you saw it; but I said you ought to know.”

“Oh, rather! I’m thrilled to think the kid had the idea at all; and still more thrilled that she’d do all that work for me! But—oh, *why* didn’t she ask some one about colours? I shall have to wear it! Girls, what *can* I do?”

“Margot says you’ll be ill when you see it, and if you try to wear it you’ll die,” Betty said gloomily.

“And Tickles calls it the hideosity,” Rhoda added encouragingly.

Jen began to laugh again. “Oh, I’m tired! I’m sore! I haven’t laughed so much since they chucked me off that bike and ran over me! I don’t know what I’ll do with the thing! But it was sweet of her to make it for me. I say, Joan, old dear! You love me very much, don’t you?”

“Sometimes,” Joan laughed. “What do you want me to do for you now?”

“I’ll put on the awful thing, and then you’ll spill a whole bottle of ink, or polish, or paint, over me. And I’ll need to have it dyed! Will you, Joan?”

“If she won’t, perhaps I could burgle your room and steal the thing, and bury it on the moor,” Rena laughed.

“When is the hideosity coming? I’ll ask for a tonic, to buck me up for the ordeal!”

“You’ll be surprised, won’t you?” Betty asked anxiously. “Rose meant it to be a secret.”

“Oh, I’ll be surprised all right! I expect I shall shriek when I see the thing. I’m jolly glad you prepared me. Rose will want to give it to me herself, so that she’ll see my face of delighted surprise! I’d better drive down to Tin Town and get it over,” Jen sighed.

“I don’t think it’s quite finished yet,” Betty said hastily, mindful of Tickle’s “welcome day.” “I should wait a week or two.”

“You’ll be getting stronger to bear the blow,” Rena laughed, and rose. “I’ve some work to do, so will you excuse me now? I’m helping Lisabel to swot for her entrance exam. at college, and she’s still miles below the standard. We’ve got to put in two hours’ steady work at French and maths. this evening.”

“How jolly of you to help her! Good-bye, Tommy! Come and see me again soon!” said Jen warmly.

CHAPTER VIII

“GRANDFATHER’S OLD WHISTLE”

Tekla’s plans for her “welcome day” progressed favourably. The girls of Rocklands took up the idea with enthusiasm, and all hunted out treasured trifles, or set to work in feverish haste to make little gifts. The village children would bring flowers and sweets, they knew; and they prided themselves on being more original.

Mrs. Thorburn asked the doctor’s wife to spread the idea in the village. The cottagers loved Jen, and were rejoicing in her return; the elder folk had known her from babyhood; the children loved her for the joy her dancing lessons of the previous summer had given. Miss Maitland made the suggestion known in Tin Town, through a friend who was married to one of the engineers at “the works.” Joan Shirley, consulted by Betty on the way down the avenue, was enthusiastic and sure the pleasure would do Jen good, and the excitement would not harm her.

So Jen was told that “some people” wanted to see her on the following Saturday afternoon, and waited in eager expectation to see what this might mean. And Rose of Tin Town, and the girls at Rocklands, all worked hard at their tasks, in preparation for the great day.

“You must arrive first, Tickles,” Betty remarked, when the morning came. “You’re the organiser of the whole thing. You ought to make a speech.”

“I won’t, then,” Tickles said flatly. “But I’d like to be there from the beginning, and see what everybody brings, and if Jen’s surprised, and how she likes it.”

She was never troubled with shyness, nor was Margot; so they went together very early, and were Jen’s first guests. Jen, lying under her drooping yellow birch, had been wondering all morning who the “people” were, though she suspected they would prove to be some of her girl friends from the school.

“I’m ever so glad I’ve got to know them,” she said happily to Joan. “I didn’t till this summer. I was always away at school, and they weren’t here in holidays. I knew a whole school of girls used to take possession of Mrs. Thorburn’s big house every summer; and when I came home from school I hoped I’d see them sometimes. We made friends over folk-dancing.”

“You said the dancing had helped to make the two villages friendly,” Joan said thoughtfully.

“It didn’t only help; it did it. And it’s brought Rena in as a friend too. It’s a good friendship-maker!” Jen laughed. “Think of the friends we’ve made this summer!”

“It is Tickles!” she said triumphantly, as the juniors came up the drive. “And Margot! I guessed it would be you!” she greeted them gaily. “I’m so glad to see you again!”

Tickles’s speech was not a model one. “We’re jolly glad to see you. It’s topping! And we’re glad you’re getting well. This is from us, to show we’re glad,” and each holding one corner, they presented a little autograph book, which neither could have afforded to buy alone.

“But how lovely of you!” Jen said warmly. “You shouldn’t have troubled to bring me anything! I know you’re glad. Why, here comes somebody else!”

Tickles sat down on the grass beside the couch. “Oh, I guess there will be some more of them! We left them at the gate.”

“We made them let us come first, because it was Tick’s idea,” said Margot, sitting down also.

“Tickles’s idea? What was her idea?” Jen’s eyes sought Joan’s in questioning surprise.

“It’s Babs and Sara; and Betty and Rhoda are behind,” said Tickles hastily, and glared at Margot.

Babbles and Sara, when their moment came, could only giggle and stand helplessly nudging one another.

“Idiots!” said Margot, gazing at them scornfully.

Tickles eyed them coldly. “A lot of use that is! You’ve only got a minute. The others are just behind you. Jen thinks you’re both mad. And I don’t blame her.”

“Something for you!” gasped Babs, with a sudden gleam of intelligence.

“Because we’re glad you’re better,” Sara added, with wonderful presence of mind, and dropped a box of pencils into Jen’s lap.

Then they retreated, covered with confusion, to blame one another in a corner for being “such a silly baby!”

Jen, a glimmer of the truth beginning to dawn on her, looked up at Joan with incredulous delight in her eyes. It was not the gifts she cared about, though the autograph book was dainty, and pencils were always useful; but the thought that the girls had cared enough to show their welcome in this way touched and pleased her deeply.

But Betty and Rhoda were offering their gifts; Betty bringing a little sketch of the moor, Rhoda an album for the new photos, at sight of both of which Jen cried out in real joy.

Before their greetings were over, a party of village children came shyly in, escorted by encouraging mothers, to offer bunches of old-fashioned flowers from the cottage gardens. Jen’s eyes began to widen again; she had not imagined the celebration was to extend beyond the schoolgirls. The Grange garden was full of flowers, but these gifts would be treasured till they faded, because of the thought behind them.

Then Rena came striding up the drive, to salute Jen cheerily and bring a cake, baked by her landlady.

Jen laughed delightedly. “You are all jolly decent! Stay and help me eat it, won’t you, Tommy?”

But there was no time for talking. Girls from Tin Town began to arrive, laden with little packets of sweets and tins of toffee, and Jen was red and radiant with surprise and gratitude, as she thanked them again and again. More schoolgirls came, and Miss Maitland herself, bringing a new book, and Mrs. Thorburn, carrying grapes from her greenhouse. Village boys brought pails of blackberries; a book of pictures was presented by Mrs. Thorburn on behalf of little Wiggles and his nurse, who had heard at Bournemouth of the “celebration,” from Rena’s weekly letter. More flowers, more sweets, another cake; a basket of fresh eggs from one farm, and a jar of cream from another; even a kitten, which one small girl brought in her arms and deposited in his new mother’s lap, to the embarrassment of both.

Nobody who came would go away, for fear of missing more exciting arrivals; and Jen was whispering distractedly to Joan that they could not possibly give tea to everybody, and Joan was assuring her nobody would expect it, when a donkeycart came laboriously up the avenue, after a long, slow climb up the steep hill from Tin Town.

While Jen watched wide-eyed, it drew up at the edge of the lawn; and a small boy sprang out and came up to her, a bundle in his arms, while Rose leaned excitedly over the side of the cart to see how her gift was received. All week she had been rejoicing that she, too, would

have something to offer; something of her own; something she had thought of weeks ago, before the idea had occurred to all these other people.

“The hideosity!” Jen murmured. “The boy is Rose’s brother, Archie. Hold me up, Joan! I’m beginning to feel weak. It’s not exhaustion; it’s dread of the horror before me!”

“You mustn’t laugh!” Joan said sternly. “The poor girl’s holding her breath to know what you’ll say!”

“So am I!” Jen said gloomily, under her breath. “Thank goodness Betty warned me!”

She unwrapped the bundle, and displayed the purple and yellow jumper in all its hideousness. Tickles smothered a groan. Margot choked and disappeared to join Babbles and Sara. In the sunshine, the colours looked cruder and more vivid, and clashed more violently, than they had seemed to do in the dim light inside the cottage.

Tickles looked imploringly at Jen. “Don’t laugh!” said her eyes. “Nobody must laugh!”

But Jen, not daring to hesitate, was speaking rapidly, all regard for truth quenched in the desire to hide her real feelings from Rose’s hungry eyes.

“Archie, what a lovely present! You don’t mean to say Rose made this herself? For me? But it’s far too good of her! Why, she must have begun weeks and weeks ago! I must go and say thank you! Help me up, Joan!”

And to Rose’s everlasting pride and joy, Jen rose and came across the grass to her. Miss Jen had not done that for anybody else; every one assured Rose of that, in answer to her anxious inquiries afterwards. It was obvious the jumper had been *the* gift of the day! Any one could see Miss Jen had liked it best!

“Rose, it’s simply topping of you!” Jen was saying excitedly. “I never dreamt of such a lovely thing as you doing all that work for me!”—a tangled sentence which left Rose with the happy impression that the jumper was a lovely thing in Jen’s eyes.

“Archie got a present too.” Rose was overcome with shyness, and tried in embarrassment to divert attention from herself, though she remembered that moment with pride for months.

“Oh, has he? But that’s too good of him! What have you brought me, Archie?” and Jen turned, expecting a sticky bag of sweets, and prepared to show ecstatic joy at sight of it.

“Grandfather’s old whistle,” and Archie produced something brown and wooden. “Grandfather, he used to whistle for the morris dance, Miss Jen. Would you be able to whistle for our dancing? She’s a good whistle, and makes a rare fine noise.”

“My *hat!*” said Jen softly, and took the pipe. “Joan, come and look at this!”

Standing together, the two girls looked at the “whistle.” It had only two holes in the front, but there was another at the back, as Archie, watching them anxiously, pointed out. The pipe was almost black with age; the edges of the holes were marked with the pressure of strong finger-nails in search of semi-tones.

Jen and Joan looked at one another.

“In that museum, in the college at Cheltenham! The folk-dance curios!” Jen said softly. “There was one just like this, and they told me only one or two real old ones had been found. Oh, Joan, do you think it could be? A real morris man’s pipe; not a copy?”

“It’s certainly old. I should think it’s genuine,” Joan said swiftly. “If it is, it’s a treasure, Jenny-Wren!”

“I know. The Director would give *pounds* for it. I wonder——?” Jen thoughtfully rubbed the mouthpiece, then put the pipe to her lips and blew a clear high note. Her eyes gleamed. “It would be gorgeous for dancing to! Archie!” and she turned quickly to the staring boy. “Where

did you get it? Did you say your grandfather used to play for the morris men? Really and truly?”—this link with the past seemed almost incredible.

“Sure he did—in Derbyshire, Miss Jen. He were a Derbyshire man.”

“Of course!” Jen said wonderingly. “The milestone by the church says, ‘To Derbyshire!’ I’ve always thought it was funny. And they still have morris in Derbyshire. Joan, I believe it is real! But it seems too good to be true!”

Rose, in her carriage, could not hear all that was said, but she saw that the “whistle” was causing excitement and discussion. “Archie were upset that he hadn’t a penny to buy something new, an’ he couldn’t make nothing, not knowing how, and him being only a boy, Miss Jen. But he said as how perhaps you’d be willing to have Granddad’s old whistle. It were given to Archie when Grandfather died, him bein’ fond of Archie always. Archie’ll be upset if ye don’t want it, Miss Jen.”

“Do you mean to give me the whistle, Archie?” Jen asked quietly. “I’d love to have it! I’ll be very careful of it.”

“Ay! We can’t play her. Grandfather could play her fine. She ain’t no good to us. Will you play her for our morris, Miss Jen?”

“Oh, I don’t know! I’d have to learn, you know, Archie. I couldn’t play a tune on it at present. But I’ll love to have ‘her,’ and I’ll be very good to her!”

“Grandfather played her lovely,” said Rose proudly.

CHAPTER IX

MANAGED BY TICKLES

Jen sat with Archie's grandfather's old pipe in her lap, and gazed at Joan. The crowd had gone at last, and the gifts had all been put away in the places most suitable to them. Only the kitten and the jumper and the pipe were left on the couch beside her, as she rested after the excitement of the afternoon. The kitten was curled up in the middle of the jumper, a round, fluffy ball of black and white, already quite at home with his new mother; the adoption had been instant and complete on both sides. The purple and yellow stripes did not seem to give him nightmares, and he slept the sleep of exhaustion after a lively game with Tickles and Margot, and a big drink of cream.

"I'm sure my dreams would be lurid if I slept on that atrocity!" Joan said, laughing.

"I shall write to Avice." Jen was not thinking of appalling jumpers. "I shan't send the pipe, but I'll describe it and ask what she thinks. She's the best one to ask. The Pixie's flying about the country, and Madam's too busy being engaged. So is Cicely. But Avvy will know, or she'll know whom to ask. If it's a real old pipe, it's worth a lot, and would be a treasure to some one like the Director! I'm sure he'd love to have it."

"What will you do, if you find it's genuine?" Joan asked, with interest. "I'm thinking of Archie. He didn't know its value."

"So am I. We must be decent to him. If it's real, I'd simply love to keep it, but I don't suppose I'd be allowed to. The Director will want it for the museum, and it wouldn't be fair for me to keep it for myself. I'd give it to *him*! Because he's given us all the dances. But I do think something ought to be given to Archie. We'll see, Joan! But we will be sporting about it."

"I knew you would," Joan agreed.

It was several days later that Tickles and Margot, Babs, and Sara came to tea, and sitting on the lawn at Jen's feet, heard her explanation of the interest the pipe had caused.

"We could see you thought it was something extra special, but we didn't know why. It doesn't look up to much!" said Margot.

Tickles was hugging Little Jim, the kitten. "Is it because it's old?"

So Jen told of the pipe and tabor of morris days, and explained, as she had heard at Cheltenham, why the pipe must be played with the left hand only; and showed the picture on the cover of a morris book. The schoolgirls looked with awe at the wooden pipe.

"Do you really think it's a proper old one? Hundreds of years old, perhaps?"

"I don't know about that. But I think it belonged to an old morris man, and has really been played for the dance. Look at the marks worn by his fingers! It must have been used for years and years to get marked like that."

"Can you play it?" Sara asked respectfully.

"I can get four notes. I don't see how you get tunes, but I suppose it can be done, or it could never have been used for dancing. But I'd need to learn how to do it. So far as I can see, it can only make these four notes," and she played as much as she could.

"Sometimes I seem to be getting a higher or a lower note, but I don't know how I do it. It's quite by accident. Tickles, I want to thank you again, ever so many times over, for the idea of that welcome-day. It was a gorgeous thought, and it was simply lovely of you to plan it all."

“It brought you one ’straordinary present; that’s the pipe! And one duckshious darling one; that’s Little Jim! I didn’t know what you’d get, but I don’t think you did badly,” Tickles conceded.

“And one hideosity!” Margot remarked.

Tickles looked at the purple and yellow jumper sadly. “I couldn’t help that! But it is a ghastly awful thing! Does it make you feel sick, Jen?”

“She’d have had it anyway. That wasn’t your fault, Tick,” Babbles pointed out.

“What are you going to do with it, Jen?”

“I thought of spilling soup over it,” Jen admitted. “Or dropping it into a pail of whitewash! They’re painting some of the sheds. Of course, if you would steal it and bury it, it would save me the trouble! I wish you would. At present Little Jim uses it to sleep on; he loves it. Look at my work! It’s almost finished. It’s a present for somebody very special,” and she showed the wide, beautiful crochet proudly. “Don’t let Little Jim paw it! His fingers aren’t always very clean; he will run among the dead leaves.”

Tickles held the interested Little Jim out of the way, and the girls admired and exclaimed at the width and pattern of the lace. They were still looking at it when Joan came across the lawn.

“A letter, Jen! And it’s from Avice Everett. Do tell me what she says about the pipe!”

“Tickles, you four might go and speak to the horses!” Jen said eagerly. “You’d like to see them, wouldn’t you? Take them some sugar. This is rather an important letter, so Joan and I ought to read it at once.”

They bent over it together, and the four girls and Little Jim retired to the stables, curious as to the letter, but still more eager to say good-day to the horses. There were fascinating dogs, too, whom Little Jim defied, with much angry spitting, from the security of Tickles’s shoulder; and between these and the horses the time passed quickly, till Babbles announced, with a shriek of dismay, that it was almost six.

“Mademoiselle was coming for us at six. We’d better go and say good-bye,” said Margot. “How we’re going to tear Tickles away from Little Jim I don’t know!”

“We’ll put him to sleep on the hideosity again. Jen says he likes it, and it doesn’t make him dream,” said Tickles, and they sought the lawn once more.

Jen and Joan had disappeared, called indoors, the girls heard afterwards, to see the doctor, who felt it necessary to keep an eye on Jen’s progress.

Tickles looked about for the jumper, for Little Jim’s benefit. It was lying there, but not spread out for him as it had been; it was rolled up into a neat bundle, evidently ready to be taken indoors.

“Shall we look for Jen to say good-bye? Or shall we wait here?” Sara asked doubtfully.

Tickles turned to them with dancing, eager eyes. “Don’t you see? Here’s our chance to help Jen out of the hole she’s in! She asked us to steal it!” and she dropped Little Jim on the couch, and thrust the rolled-up jumper inside her blouse. “Come on! We’re only doing what she wants!” and she raced off across the lawn and down the drive.

“But what will you do with it, Tickles?” Margot panted at her heels.

“And we haven’t said good-bye and thank you!” Sara argued.

“They’ll guess we had to go. I’m going to bury it, as she said. In Rena’s cave, you know. It will be quite safe there, so if Jen really wants it back she can have it. But if she wants to get rid of it, we won’t tell her where it is. It’s a topping way to help her!” Tickles insisted.

“O-o-oh! What a gorgeous idea!” Sara said admiringly.

“But how are you going to get to the cave?” asked the critical Margot.

“We’ll take Mademoiselle round that way to see the sunset. We’ll tell her it’s a good place to see it across the reservoir. So ’tis!” Tickles said sturdily.

“But, I say, Tickles! She’ll ask what you’ve got down your front!” Babbles cried shrilly. “That isn’t your usual shape! You look huge!”

Tickles considered the alteration in her figure critically. “I do look lumpy,” she admitted, and pulled out the bundle again. “But I can’t lug it under my arm! Mademoiselle would send me back with it; she’d never understand! I’ll have to take off my coat and say I was too hot.”

She hung her knitted coat over her arm, hiding the purple and yellow atrocity; and sturdily assured Mademoiselle when she met them that she was “boiling,” and could not bear to wear the coat.

It was easy to persuade Mademoiselle to go home by a slightly longer route; easy for Margot to coax her up to a viewpoint among the rocks, to see the sunset across the shining reservoir; and very easy for Tickles to fall behind, to race along a narrow path out of sight, plunge down over a big slab of stone into a dimly lit little cave, and toss the bundle into a dry corner. When she rejoined the others she was panting and looked warm, but agreed that the wind was chilly and that it was time to put on her coat.

“I don’t think Rena and Lisabel go to the cave much now,” she whispered, as she fell behind with Margot. “But if they do find the thing, Rena knows how Jen loathes the sight of it. She’ll guess she’d better not give it back unless Jen asks for it.”

“You’ve managed it awfully well, Tick!” Margot said admiringly.

CHAPTER X A CALAMITY

Jen looked so flushed and radiant as she met the doctor that he felt her pulse hastily.

She laughed. "Oh, I'm all right! I'm not feverish! Only rather excited about something!"

"It seems to have done you good. I should continue the treatment!" he said, well pleased with her progress, and gave a good report to her parents.

As soon as he had gone, Jen's pent-up feelings had their way. "Mother! Daddy! Here's a letter from Avice, about the pipe, you know. And she says her married sister says if the pipe's a genuine old one she'll give me five pounds for it; not for herself—I wouldn't let her have it for herself; but to give to the Director. She's going away to India, and she'd like to give him something jolly when she says good-bye, because he's given her so much pleasure through the dances. She's been a dancer for years, and loves it. Well, don't you see? We'll give the five pounds to Archie, for him and Rose. It will seem a huge amount to them. That will be fair to everybody."

"And where do you come in?" her father asked. "You seem to come off badly! After all, the pipe was given to you!"

"Oh, but Avvy says there's an old man somewhere in the country who makes pipes; there's only one man who can make them, and they cost about a guinea. Just like mine, only copies instead of being the real thing. You have to put your name down on a list and wait for months, till your turn comes; and then some day your pipe arrives! Avvy says they'll order a new one for me, and they'll teach me how to get tunes on it when it comes, if only I'll give them the old one for the Director. Of course, I'd rather have had the old one; but it wouldn't be fair to keep it. He ought to have it, and a new one will do quite as well for me to practise on."

"I'd much prefer that you had a new one," said her mother. "There's no knowing what kind of people have been using that old one."

Jen laughed. "I don't seem to have caught any awful disease from it yet, mother darling! Joan, we'd better go and bring the precious thing in! I left it lying on the couch. Avice will be turning up in their car to fetch it. She's so keen on it that she'll think nothing of coming from London on purpose!"

A wild cry of distress from the lawn brought her father and mother hurrying out a few moments later to see what was the matter. Jen, frantic with dismay, was hunting under the couch; Joan was already searching the paths and bushes for trace of an intruder.

"Everything's gone!" Jen cried brokenly, her face quivering. "My work, and the jumper, and the pipe! I threw down the pipe when Joan brought the letter. I'd been showing it to Tickles and the rest. And they've all disappeared!"

"Where are the children?" her father asked quietly. "Could they have hidden the things as a joke?"

"I'm sure they wouldn't. They'd never touch the pipe, or my work. They knew how I felt about them both. But I did say, in fun, that I'd be glad if they would steal the jumper! And—and I'd wrapped up my crochet inside it, to bring them in together!" and Jen dropped exhausted and heartbroken on the couch. "They might take the jumper, to get it out of my way; it would be just like Tickles to think of that! She'd only mean to help me. But I'm sure they wouldn't touch the pipe!"

“Jen, dear, you must come in and rest. You are wearing yourself out,” her mother said peremptorily. “We will all hunt for your treasures; be sure we shall do everything possible. But you really must rest.”

“Could the kitten have played with the pipe and pushed it out of sight?” Mr. Robins suggested.

“No, he’s too little to take it so far. I shall die if it’s lost now!” Jen said, with the calm tragedy of despair.

“Oh, it won’t be lost!” Joan came back from her search, and spoke cheerily. “The gardener says the children went half an hour ago. Pity the doctor kept us so long! They passed him in the drive. He didn’t see them carrying any bundle, but that’s nothing to go on. They’d put it out of sight. I expect they’ve taken the jumper, to help you to get rid of it, Jenny-Wren; of course, without the slightest idea there was anything wrapped up in it! How could they know? I’ll cycle over to the school and ask them. Then we’ll be sure, and we’ll know if they took the pipe too. I don’t believe they would, but there’s just a chance.”

“I’m sure they wouldn’t. But I’d like to know. Oh, Joan, will you? But it will be dark before you can get back! You can’t come across the moor alone in the dark!”

“She must have the car,” Mr. Robins said decisively. “Yes, my dear, it is the only safe way. What would your friends say if you were assaulted by a tramp? I fancy, from what I have heard, that I should have to reckon with a certain Captain Raymond if any harm came to you!”

“Don’t tease her, daddy! Go and order the car for her! If anything happens to Joan, you’ll have the British Army down on you!—at least one quite big part of it!”

Joan, crimson, fled to fetch her big coat. When she came back, it was to demand a solemn promise from Jen that she would go to bed and lie there quietly to await results.

“When I’ve rescued all your treasures, we’ll have a quiet little dinner together, you in the bed and I sitting on it. But I’ll not go hunting for you, if you’re going to be wandering about like a distracted heroine, wringing your hands and putting straw in your hair, like Ophelia. You’re to rest quietly in bed.”

“As if I could! But I’ll go to bed and lie there, if that will satisfy you,” Jen agreed wearily.

“It will keep you still, anyway,” and Joan, well wrapped up in furs, drove away to Rocklands.

Tickles was on her way in to supper when she was fetched to confront a stern visitor and a worried head mistress. But her conscience was easy, and she answered serenely,—

“It’s all right! It’s in the cave; Rena’s cave. I mean the jumper, of course; we never touched Jen’s lovely work. But we took the jumper and hid it for her. She asked us to. She did really, truth and honour, Joan. She said she’d be glad if we would take it and bury it for her, as it would save her the fag of spilling paint on it. So we buried it in the cave. It’s quite safe. She can have it back if she wants it. But I shouldn’t think she would.”

“Her crochet, at which she has worked all the time she has been ill, was wrapped up inside the jumper,” Joan explained mildly.

“Help!” said Tickles, in real dismay. Then indignantly, after a pause, “Well, we couldn’t know that, could we? I call it a silly trick!”

The mention of the pipe called forth an instant and indignant denial, which bore the stamp of truth, however. “It was lying on the seat beside Little Jim when we came away. Perhaps he’s eaten it! We’d never dream of touching it!”

“You ought not to have touched the other things either, no matter what Jen said,” Miss Maitland said severely. “You may go, Tekla. I have no doubt you meant well, but it was a

foolish and impertinent thing to do.”

“Oh, Jen will only laugh about the jumper, and it’s her own fault the crochet was inside!” Joan said quickly. “She’s fair enough to see that. She won’t be angry, Tickle. But I must get the work back, of course. And I am worried about the pipe. It’s really valuable.”

“I’m afraid we cannot take you to the cave to-night,” Miss Maitland said anxiously. “Several of the girls know the way, but it is a very dark night, and the path among the rocks would be difficult to find. We should have sprained ankles, at the very least. Rena Mackay has gone home, of course, or she would have gone with you willingly.—No, Tekla, I would not dream of allowing you to go. Go to your supper at once!—But the things will be safe till the morning, Miss Shirley. The cave is dry, and is never used except by Rena and Lisabel. We will fetch the jumper and the work, and return them to Jen first thing in the morning.”

“But what about the pipe?” Jen wailed, when she heard Joan’s report. “I don’t want the jumper! I’d be glad never to see the ugly thing again! But I shan’t sleep or rest till I get that pipe back!”

Joan, sitting on the bed, ate her dinner hungrily and insisted that Jen should eat too. “We’ll find it, Jenny-Wren. Some one must have got into the garden while nobody was about. But how did the thief know the value of the pipe? That’s what’s puzzling me.”

“Nobody knows but us, and the girls from the school!” Jen said despairingly.

“It must be somebody who has heard us talking about it, don’t you see?” Joan said quickly. “To any one else it would seem as worthless as it did to Archie; just ‘grandfather’s old whistle.’ Who could have heard?”

“I’m afraid I’ve talked a lot about it, while we’ve been waiting to hear from Avvy!” Jen wailed, horror-stricken at this thought. “Any of the servants might have heard what I said, and might have repeated it in the village, or in Tin Town, without thinking it could do any harm! Oh, it is my fault, after all!”

And she and Joan gazed at one another in distress.

CHAPTER XI

THE ADVENTURES OF A PIPE

"If only we had never seen the pipe, I wouldn't feel half so bad! Or if we hadn't told anybody about it!" Jen wailed. "What will Avvy say?"

Joan slipped from the room and went to speak to Mrs. Robins. "I'm afraid Jen will be restless. She's very much upset over this trouble. Will you mind if I sit with her for a while, instead of going to bed? If the matter's on her mind she won't sleep, and it's better for her to talk than to lie thinking."

"If you will, dear, I will be very grateful," and Mrs. Robins, anxious that her delicate husband should rest, was thankful for Joan's presence, and knew how good for Jen the elder girl's company would be.

So Joan undressed and slipped into Jen's room in her dressing-gown, and let down her mane of bronze hair and began to brush it out.

"Your new little room's so cosy, with that tiny fire! I'm going to stay with you for a while. But we must only whisper, Jenny-Wren. We mustn't keep the household awake."

"Come and cuddle down beside me when you're ready. If only we hadn't told Avvy anything about the pipe!" Jen sighed again. "Who *could* have got into the garden, Joan?"

"Oh, anybody! Lots of people! We'll get your old policeman to advise us in the morning," Joan turned the light out and threw her thick plaits back over her shoulders, and came to sit beside her. "Let's talk it over carefully, and see what we can think of that would help him!" she was beginning, when Jen sat up, her eyes wide and startled.

"There's something trying to get in at the window!" she gasped.

The little library which was her temporary bedroom had a French window opening on to the lawn, which was very convenient for an invalid, but, as both she and Joan saw in an instant, equally so for a burglar. Had the pipe-thief come back?

Jen, startled and almost frightened, sat gazing at the window, her bobbed yellow curls in wild disorder, her eyes questioning.

Joan, anxious to calm her, said quietly, "I didn't hear anything. Are you sure it wasn't a nightmare, Jenny-Wren? Or was it Little Jim, scratching outside?"

"No, he's here," and Jen showed the black and white ball curled up at her side, under the eiderdown. "He came to tell me he didn't eat my pipe, and I said he might sleep with me, for once."

"He'll expect it every night!" Joan said grimly. "Then what did you think you heard?"

"There! Some one tapped on the window!"

Joan rose quickly, very glad she had offered to sit up, for Jen was still too nervy for a strain of this kind. "It's all right, Jenny-Wren! Neither ghosts nor burglars take the trouble to knock!"

"I'm glad I've got you, all the same, Joan!" Jen whispered excitedly.

Joan was glad too. She drew the curtains quietly. "There is some one here! Don't be scared, Jen; it's a boy. I'll see to him. Now I wonder——!" and she opened the window. "Who are you? And what do you want, at this time of night?"

Jen had switched on the light. As the boy stumbled into the room, she cried softly, "Why, it's Archie! Archie, what's the matter?"

Archie's eyes were blinded by tears. He ran to her bedside, and dropped something into her hand, and drew his fingers across his eyes. "Miss Jen! I'm sorry!"

"The pipe!" Jen said softly, and lay back and stared at him. "Archie, don't cry! What has happened?"

Joan closed the window, and came and sat on the end of the bed. "Tell us, Archie! Miss Jen won't be unkind to you. You know that!"

"Charlie came," Archie sobbed, "and he hid in the garden, an' he took the whistle. He brought it home to-night, and he said—he said——"

"Charlie's the big brother, and rather a rough chap," Jen murmured. "His people find him difficult, I believe."

"He said 'twere worth pounds, and I mustn't give it to nobody," Archie sobbed. "I'd told mother you said it. You said some folk would give pounds for it."

Jen's eyes met Joan's. "Did I? I didn't know any one heard."

"And he repeated it at home; and they were angry," Joan said quietly. "You can understand, Jen. They said he ought not to have parted with it."

"They were right, of course. They couldn't know I was going to be fair about it, and give them its value. They'd think it had gone for nothing. Yes, of course, Charlie would be mad; probably the others were too. But Charlie needn't have stolen it, Archie!"

"I said it were yours now, and he couldn't do nothing," Archie sobbed. "An' I said 'twere mine first, and I could give it to you; and I wanted you to have it. Grandfather he gave it to me hisself. I never thought Charlie'd take it back, Miss Jen."

"But he brought it home to-night, and said you mustn't give it away again?"

"Said as how he'd found it laying in the garden, and you'd never miss it, and it were ours, and he'd take it to Sheffield to-morrow and get pounds for it in a shop."

Jen's eyes met Joan's again. "I doubt it!" Jen said grimly. "The shops wouldn't know, Archie, any more than you and Charlie did. You can get pounds for it, but only if I tell you where to send it to. Charlie couldn't get pounds for it by himself; that's the point!"

"Yes, unfortunately for Charlie, it is worth nothing, unless we help him," Joan remarked.

"Tell me how you were able to bring it back, Archie!" Jen said quietly, and lay and gazed at the small boy. "And why did you bring it, now that you know it's worth a lot of money? Didn't you want to keep it, as well as Charlie?"

"I gave it to you, Miss Jen. 'Tain't ours any more, an' it never were Charlie's. Grandfather said it were to be for me, when he were dyin'. Charlie went out, and I—I took it back again, for you. It's mine," Archie said defiantly.

"Charlie didn't dare to carry it about with him, for fear one of his chums took a fancy to it," Joan remarked. "So he left it at home, and Archie stole it back again. It's had adventures since you left it lying about, Jenny-Wren!"

"And there'll be trouble in the family, when Charlie finds it's gone," Jen added. "What will he do to you, Archie?"

Archie shrugged his shoulders. "It were my whistle. It's for you," he said stubbornly.

"We shall have to settle matters with Charlie!" Jen said decisively. "But do you still mean me to have it, Archie, now that you know it's worth so much? Or do you want me to sell it for you?"

"No! 'Tis for you, to play for the boys' dance, Miss Jen."

"To do what I like with?"

"For sure. Rose, she said to bring it back to you, too. She were very mad with Charlie."

Then Jen took his hand and made him sit on Joan's stool, and told him a long story: all about the age of the pipe, and the great gentleman away in London who knew all about the morris dance, and who loved old pipes; and how Archie's grandfather's pipe was to be a present to him, and would be kept very safely, because it was so precious, and would be seen by lots and lots of people, because a real morris man had used it; and how there would some day be a new pipe for Jen to play for the boys' dancing, and some one to teach her how to make tunes on it; and how the friends in London wanted to send a present to the boy who had found the pipe, and how it would come quite soon and would be five pounds.

"So Charlie won't have anything to grumble about," she ended cheerfully.

Archie's dirty little face was full of awed surprise as he grasped it all, or some of it. It was a story he would often ask to hear again.

Joan had slipped away while Jen was talking. She returned presently, with a tray of cups of hot cocoa for all of them, and biscuits and cake; and bread and jam and apples for Archie.

"I've told your mother the pipe has come back, so that we can all sleep happily," she said. "She says Archie must sleep on the sofa in the maids' sitting-room, and to-morrow Mr. Robins will go down to Tin Town and talk to Charlie. That will put everything all right for Archie. But the five pounds isn't going into Charlie's pocket, to be spent in pubs and cinemas! He has no possible claim on the pipe. It will be for Archie and Rose; Mr. Robins will see to that carefully."

"Joan, you've arranged it beautifully!" Jen said in delight. "Now come and have some supper, Archie, and we'll wake Little Jim and give him some milk, though he had his supper hours ago. I was making myself ill over that pipe," she told the boy seriously. "I'm so glad you came to-night! I'm sure I couldn't have gone to sleep. But it will be all right now. And you've given me a much bigger present to-night than you did the first time, for now you know it's worth a lot, but you want me to have it, all the same. I shall say thank you over and over again, and I'll always remember that the old pipe came to us from you, Archie. And if a lady comes here in a motor-car, in a few days, to take the pipe away to London, I know she'll want to see you, to hear all about your grandfather: his name, and where he lived, and everything. So you must be ready to talk to her!"

And Archie's face glowed with gratified pride and happiness, and he felt more important than he had ever done in his life.

CHAPTER XII

THE ADVENTURES OF A JUMPER

Tickles, too, slept happily that night, convinced that all was well, so far as the jumper and Jen's precious work were concerned. Her conscience was clear as regards the pipe, though she hoped it would soon be found again.

All the same, she knew she would be happier when Jen's belongings were restored to her. So she and Margot slipped out, very early in the morning, in the half-hour before breakfast which they were supposed to devote to piano-practice, and raced away across the dew-drenched upper lawn, past little Wiggles's empty summer-house, out by the small gate on to the moor, and away down among the rocks and dripping heather by winding sandy paths towards the cave.

"There's a man over there!" Margot said suddenly. "I never saw any man round here before! He's going away as fast as he can!"

"I hope he hasn't been in the cave!" and Tickles made a dash for the entrance.

Then she gave a shriek of dismay. Margot hurled herself over the rock at the doorway and sprang to her side.

"It's gone!" Tickles wailed. "The hideosity's not here! I flung it into that corner, and there's nothing there! He's had a fire; look! It was a tramp, and that's his fire, and those are his messy bits of paper! And he's gone off with Jen's jumper!"

"The beast!" Margot raged. "But it does get the ghastly thing out of her way for ever, Tick!"

"But her work's rolled up inside it!" Tickles cried despairingly. "Her wedding present for the teaching lady in London! Jen will be awfully cut up if it's lost. She couldn't possibly do all that again! And it's all my fault!"

"Could we catch the beast? Could we snatch the things from him, if we did catch him?"

"We'll try!" Tickles said valiantly. "We could trip him up and hang on to his legs and yell, anyway. We can't let him walk off with Jen's things like that! Come on, Margot! To the rescue! Nobody's seen him but us; we must follow him!"

And with no further thoughts of school or breakfast, they plunged off through the heather in the direction taken by the tramp.

Very fortunately for them and Jen, it was also the direction taken by Rena Mackay every evening, and the girls had not gone far before they ran into her and Lisabel coming across the moor to begin their day's work.

"Hallo, infants? Running away from Rocklands?" was Rena's astounded greeting. "But that's not done, you know. What are you silly kids up to? Turn round and go the other way!"

Lisabel, another tall girl in khaki uniform, with a long, thick plait of bright red hair, leant back on the stick she carried and gazed at them severely.

Tickles and Margot fairly hurled themselves on Rena, and panted out an incoherent story.

"Oh, Rena! That tramp! Did you meet him?"

"Yes? What about him? We thought he must be going into the Halfway House for some liquid refreshment to begin the day. That's what he looked like. What has he done to you?" and she looked at the children teasingly.

“He’s been in your cave; he’s had a fire there, and he’s gone off with Jen’s jumper—the hideosity, you know!”

“We hid it there last night, so that she wouldn’t have to wear it,” Margot added breathlessly. “We thought it would be quite safe. She told us to steal it, so we did!”

“But we didn’t know she’d wrapped her lovely crochet up inside it!” Tickles wailed. “And that—that pig of a tramp has gone off with the jumper *and* the work! So we were going to follow him and make him give them up!”

“How were you going to do it?” Rena asked quizzically. She looked at Lisabel and herself, and the stout sticks they carried for walking on the moor. “You and I could tackle him, though, Lisabel, if you’re game. He didn’t look any too steady on his legs, even before going into the Halfway House!”

“Oh, do, do help us, Rena dear! To please Jen! Do get that crochet back for us!” Margot and Tickles pleaded in unison.

“I’m on!” Lisabel said briefly. “I’ll come, Rena!”

“But you two kids must go straight back to school. Promise!” Rena said sternly. “Or we won’t go one step!”

“Oh, we promise! We will!” they said fervently.

“Right-o!” and Rena turned and tramped away.

“Tell Mrs. Thorburn we’ll be late!” Lisabel called.

“Yes, oh, yes! Hit him *hard* for me, Lisabel!” cried Margot.

“And harder still for me! And twice over, once for the jumper and once for the crochet!” Tickles added.

Rena’s plan of campaign was simple, but held every prospect of success.

“He’ll go to the inn, and hang about there for some time. But he’s obviously on his way to Sheffield; no doubt he thinks he’ll sell the jumper and get a little for it there. He’ll take the path; it saves two miles, and that’s a lot when you’re walking. He evidently knows the moor, or he wouldn’t have known of our cave; so he’ll know enough to take short cuts. We’ll hide just where the path dips into the gully, about a mile beyond the inn. We’ll lie in the bracken; it’s thick, and four feet high all over the hollow, and we’re just the colour of it, in these tunics. You’ll crouch under the edge of the moor, and when he comes down the path you’ll trip him up with your stick. Then I’ll jump out and sit on him; I’m no light weight! You’ll come too, and we’ll jolly well make him give up those things.”

“That’s the stuff to give him!” Lisabel said briefly. “I’m game!”

They had a long wait in the bracken. The attractions of the Halfway House were great, and they were beginning to wonder if their quarry could have disappointed them by taking another route, when they heard shuffling steps above them, and a husky voice talking to itself as it came along, to relieve the monotony of the path.

“He’s had his breakfast!” Rena murmured. “All the better for us! Ready, Lisabel?”

At the right moment, the stick shot out between the descending heavy feet. There was a steep drop in the path at the spot, and the man came down with a crash. In a moment Rena’s sturdy weight was on his shoulders, and she sat there heavily. Lisabel planted her strong body on his struggling legs, and he stopped kicking and swore instead, in vast surprise.

“Yes, that’s all right. We know all about that,” Rena said peremptorily. “We want the things you took out of the cave this morning. If you’ll give them up quietly, we’ll say no more about it. Otherwise, we shall give you in charge at once, of course.”

Lisabel grinned at the thought, and her eyes swept the desolate moor. Then she said quickly, "In his pocket, beside you, Rena. Purple and yellow, you said, didn't you?"

"Yes, appalling colours," and Rena pulled out the jumper. "This is the thing of beauty! Just one second; yes, the crochet's here too. That's all we want, thank you!—Come on, Lisabel!"

They sprang off the prostrate and still much astonished man, leapt up the bank and were off like the wind. He stumbled to his feet and climbed heavily after them; but they were already vanishing round a bend of the path. He got a glimpse of big sticks, long legs, and boyish figures, and was for many a day in doubt as to what had attacked him, or whether he had dreamed it all. For the voices had been those of girls, and one of the boys had had curls and the other a pigtail. The puzzle was too much for his already muddled brain; he could not understand it. He tramped on, considerably sobered, and convinced that even if he could have caught his flying assailants, the booty was not worth another encounter with those sticks and those boots.

"We'll go to the Grange with these at once," Rena said, when they had put a good mile between themselves and the enemy. "It's on our way to Rocklands. Then we'll go on and tell Tickles it's all right."

So it came about that Jen, persuaded to have breakfast in bed after the excitements of the evening and the restless night, received another visitor before she dressed for the day. When she heard who it was that wanted her, she insisted that Rena must come and speak to her, and greeted her gaily.

"Well, Tommy! It is jolly of you to come so early! Oh, my awful jumper! And my precious crochet! Did you bring them from the cave for me? Thank you ever so much!"

"Oh, but they've a history! They've had adventures!" Rena said seriously. "Don't you want to hear the whole story? It's not by any means only a night in the cave they've had since you parted with them! May Lisabel come in and be introduced too? I couldn't have rescued them without her. She and I were the rescue party."

Jen's eyes had widened. "Whatever's happened? Oh, yes, please, I want the whole story! And do bring her in, if she won't mind my being still in bed. I'm used to seeing people in bed! What's her queer, pretty name?"

"Lisabel; Elisabeth, when you say it all. It's made out of Elisabeth and Isabel."

"How quaint! Another Tommy!" Jen laughed, and shook hands with the second khaki-clad girl. Her eyes twinkled.

"I think you ought to take off your hats, as boys would do. Hats look most improper indoors, with that costume!"

"Right-o! We'd far rather," and Rena tossed hers aside, and, invited to sit down, crossed one leg over her knee in an easy, boyish attitude that made Jen murmur "Tommy!" again.

"Now tell me about the adventures of my jumper! All my belongings seem to be adventurous at present!"

Rena told the story, and Jen's eyes widened in astonishment, and then glowed in warm appreciation.

"But how simply topping of you to do all that for me! Weren't you the tiniest scrap frightened? You are plucky! And awfully kind, both of you! I can't say thank you often enough! Everybody seems to be doing things for me nowadays! It makes me quite glad I've been ill!"

"I guess you set us all going by doing things for everybody else!" Rena remarked. "But, I say! About that jumper!"

“Yes, the hideosity?” Jen’s eyes danced. “Of course, you had to bring it back to me; I quite see that. But you’ve put me back into the hole Tickles and Margot tried to help me out of. I shall have to wear the thing! But I don’t know how I shall bear it. What would you do, Tommy?”

“Well, now, look here!” and Rena leaned forward and spoke eagerly. “Couldn’t you tell Rose that it was stolen by the tramp, and that I rescued it, and it’s safe and undamaged, but unfortunately it’s got stained, and you’ll need to have it dyed? It isn’t stained yet, as a matter of fact, but I can easily manage a little thing like that for you! It soon will be, if you say the word. Lisabel and I will soak it in bog water, or cover it with sand, or squeeze a blackberry on it! Then you’ll dye it a pretty, healthy brown or dark green, and you can wear it all winter. It’s quite a pretty stitch and pattern; it’s only the colour that’s so rotten. In brown it would suit you and be really quite pretty.”

Jen, her face alight with delighted laughter, leaned out of bed and solemnly held out her hand. “Tommy, that’s the idea! You’ve hit it! You’ve solved the problem! Its adventures last night just give us the excuse to dye it! Go and stain it for me, there’s a dear! Stain it thoroughly—badly! You’ve saved me from a frightful ordeal, and I’ll thank you for ever!”

“Right! We’ll see to it!” and Rena rose and picked up her hat. “And now we’ll go and tell Tickles that she did help, after all, and that everything’s all right!”

CHAPTER XIII

TICKLES BRINGS NEWS

“Guess what Miss Maitland has just told me?” and Tickles whirled into the big classroom a few weeks later.

Rhoda was watching and criticising the country-dancing which had become the evening entertainment of the girls, now that it was dark outside by half-past five. “Oranges and Lemons” came to an abrupt end, and the rings broke up in confusion, as pianist and dancers and teacher all turned to Tickles curiously.

“Well, what is it?” Babbles demanded.

“I don’t see why Matey should tell you anything that really matters! You’re the youngest in the school,” Margot argued.

Teesa came lounging from her window seat to say, with studied indifference, “It can’t be anything much, or I should have heard. What are you going on about, you silly kid?”

“Silly kid yourself!” Tickles said indignantly.

“I’m sure Aunty Sheila would have told me, if there were anything worth telling,” Teesa insisted, overlooking the fact that “Aunty Sheila” seemed to attach less importance to the relationship than she did, and often ignored it altogether.

“Well, she didn’t tell you this time! And it is something worth telling.” The youngest girl was no respecter of persons, and spoke out hotly. “She told me, and she said I could tell the rest; so there!”

“Suppose you do it, then,” Margot suggested.

“What is it, Tickles?” and Betty, who had been dancing, came forward, a note of authority in her tone.

Tickles calmed down under Betty’s eye. “Betty, it’s going to be awful sport!” she began eagerly. “We’re not to go back to town at half-term, as the school has done every other winter. The house in Sheffield is being papered and painted, and they’ve found a lot of repairs needed that nobody knew of, so it won’t be ready for us before Christmas, and we’re to stop here. Don’t you hope it snows, for weeks and weeks, and we’re snowed up?”

Teesa’s derisive laugh was drowned in the excited chorus of questions with which the news was received. The school had never spent a winter on the moors before, but every girl of them preferred the country to the town, and this extension of their enjoyment was hailed with delight by all.

“You won’t like it, if it does snow, though,” Teesa remarked. “I was once here in the Christmas hols., and the drifts were yards deep, and we simply couldn’t do a thing. A little snow’s all very well, but it doesn’t always know when to stop. What if we couldn’t get down to the station, and you were all stuck here for Christmas?”

“I can’t quite see that happening!” Rhoda said, laughing. “I think we’d find the station somehow!”

“You’d have to give us all presents and a Christmas dinner, and have a tree for us, and a party,” Babbles bubbled delightedly. “You’d have to amuse us somehow. For if it was holidays, we wouldn’t be at school any longer, and so we’d be your visitors.”

“Yes, you’d have to entertain your Christmas guests,” Margot agreed, and chuckled at the scorn in Teesa’s face, for they were by nature opponents, though Betty would not allow them

to be enemies.

"I'm going to ask Auntie Sheila about it," and Teesa departed haughtily.

"She thinks I made it all up," Tickles remarked. "I didn't, Betty. Miss Maitland did tell me to tell you. Oh, had you begun without me? Can't I go in now? What were you doing?"

"Yes, I've got some mending to do," and Margot retired in her favour. "Come and be Babs's man. Rhoda's teaching us a new one."

"Teach me, then! I want to know them all. Of course, there's Jen," said Tickles, with what seemed a change of subject.

It was accepted by the school as merely a development of the idea of the moment, however, for Jen and country-dancing were inseparable. She drove over to Rocklands occasionally for tea in the schoolroom, and to watch and criticise the dancing afterwards. Rhoda knew more than any one else in the school about folk-dancing, but Jen knew more even than Rhoda now. So her help and criticism were eagerly sought, and were always gladly given.

"Yes, it's a good thing we've got to know her," Babbles agreed. "We'll get Matey to ask her here often, shall we? Show us that funny setting again, Rhoda! Tickles won't understand if she only sees me do it. What do you do with your hands when you've got them up there?"

"And how high do they go? High enough to squint at your partner underneath?" asked Margot, drawing a stocking over her hand and scowling at a hole, as she sat perched on the table.

"Yes, but you needn't squint. Show them with me, Betty;" and Rhoda and Betty demonstrated the movement, while the younger girls stood round admiringly.

"Now dance that, from the beginning, all of you!" Rhoda commanded. "Betty and Teesa and I are going to lunch with Jen on Saturday, so we'll tell her we aren't going back to town, after all. She asked us to come for a good-bye talk, and it's dark so early that she said we'd better come to lunch, not tea."

"They say it gets fearfully cold here in the winter," and Fanny, lounging on the window-seat, shivered. "I think the idea of being snowed up is positively beastly!"

"She'd be warmer if she'd dance," Tickles murmured, as she bowed ceremoniously to Babbles. "It isn't a bit cold yet," she added aloud, "and it's the beginning of November. I thought it would be much worse than this."

But, as if to hint at what it could do, if it tried, the weather suddenly forsook its mild, pleasant autumn ways, and became bleak and sunless. A cold wind sprang up and blew for days, sometimes from the east and sometimes from the north; and as the three seniors walked across the moor on Saturday morning, stray flakes of snow whirled about them occasionally, and they laughingly wondered if Tickles's wish would be realised.

"All the same, you wouldn't like it," Teesa insisted. "We'd be stuck indoors for days. It would be horribly slack."

"It might be warmer than this wind, though," and Rhoda pulled her fur collar up about her ears and shivered. "An east wind a thousand feet above sea-level is no joke!"

They were all thankful when the shelter of the Grange gateway was reached, and the avenue of trees and bushes shut off the wind; and Jen's hearty welcome in the big doorway made them forget the discomfort of the walk. Jen was taller than any of them, after her weeks of illness, and she was still only convalescent; allowed to walk only a limited amount each day, though, as she told them proudly, she went upstairs now without even thinking about it.

“I can do my own hair, too. I’m getting quite independent,” she said, laughing, as she led them in to the big fire to thaw themselves.

“It doesn’t need much doing now.” Rhoda eyed Jen’s crown of bobbed yellow curls enviously, for she had a long brown plait and Betty had a thick, red one. “Are you glad they cut off your plaits? You used to have such a lot of hair.”

“I don’t think I could ever have brought myself to do it, and I’m sure mother wouldn’t have liked me to! But since it was done for me, before I knew anything about it, I’m jolly glad. And I’m going to be gladder still when I’m allowed to dance again. I’m all alone,” she explained, as they went in to lunch. “Mother and daddy went off last night, to stay with my married brother in Glasgow for the week-end. I’m wishing I’d asked them to let me go and stay with you at school, but I only thought of it this morning. Would you have put up with me?”

“Oh, why didn’t you?” Rhoda wailed.

“We’d all have loved to have you,” said Betty.

“It would have been weird to be at school again. I’d have loved it! But it’s too late now,” Jen sighed regretfully.

“Oh, have you heard our news?” and Teesa broke eagerly into her story. “We aren’t going back to town this term! So you must come another time. I’m sure Aunty Sheila would be delighted.”

“What, not at all? But how? Why? What fun! But what has happened?” Jen demanded.

“Oh, well, I’m glad!” she said, when she understood. “I shall come to see you often! It will be ripping to have friends so near. I had nobody last winter, and I was so lonely! And you’ll have to come here. This isn’t the last party I shall have!”

CHAPTER XIV

THE STRANGER IN THE SNOW

In the face of a howling north wind, Betty and Rhoda and Teesa fought their way up the hill from Tin Town. They had left Jen soon after lunch, as Mrs. Thorburn had charged them with a message to a friend who lived in Tin Town, the wife of one of the engineers; and had also given them a basket of strengthening food for Rose; so, with these errands to do, and with strict orders to be back at Rocklands before tea, they had had to cut their visit short.

"It won't be too jolly, crossing the moor in this wind!" Betty panted, fighting against it at every step.

Rhoda put her hand through her arm, and they struggled on together. "Teesa's used to it! She's always telling us so!" Rhoda shouted in Betty's ear, sure that Teesa, one step ahead, could not hear a word.

"I say, this is no joke! It's snowing up here!" Teesa was the first to reach the brow of the hill, where the roads divided, one leading to the Grange, one to the higher moors, and one crossing the moor to Rocklands and dipping down to the station.

"And it's getting awfully dark, for three o'clock!" Betty said anxiously.

"That's the snow," said Teesa. "If a little came down it would be lighter again."

"The little's coming, but I think it means to be a lot," Rhoda panted, as they peered about through the dark, whirling cloud of flakes into which they had come suddenly at the crest of the hill.

It was very bewildering, and very uncomfortable, and very cold, though the girls were hot enough with the struggle of the climb. But nothing was to be gained by standing looking at the blackness ahead.

"Let's get it over!" said Rhoda. "After all, it's a straight road. We can't lose our way. I think we won't take any short cuts to-day!"

"You'd better lead, Teesa," Betty suggested. "You know the way better than we do."

And Teesa, nothing loth, and very sure of herself, led.

"I suppose we're right?" Rhoda called suddenly to Teesa. "I thought the wind would be in our faces? We ought to be facing it, if it's north, and it was north as we came up the hill. But it seems to be behind us. What's happened?"

"Perhaps it's shifted to the east."

"Goodness! There is something wrong! Here's a house!" Betty's cry rang out. "There's no house on our road! Where are we, Teesa? Here are railings, and bushes!"

"We must be wrong, somehow. Bother!" Teesa said gloomily. "Well, if it's a house we can soon find out where we are. Where's the gate?"

"I'm not sure that we can find out." Rhoda had been the first to feel her way along the railings and reach the gate. "Don't you see where we are?"

It was a high double gate, of curious ironwork, easy to recognise when it had once been seen. Teesa and Betty gave a united groan.

"Lowmoor!" said Teesa unhappily. "We turned to the left at the cross-roads. *I* didn't know! I was sure we'd gone straight on. And the house has been shut up for months!"

They had passed it occasionally on their moorland walks, and knew it only as a deserted closed house, which could offer no hope of help in the present emergency.

"It has told us where we are, though," Rhoda said hopefully. "We'd better go back and look for the cross-roads again. No wonder the wind was wrong!"

"Half a mile—a mile—extra, is no joke in this storm!" Teesa groaned. "They'll be getting fitty about us at Rocklands. I say, I'm awfully sorry!"

"Oh, you couldn't help it!" Betty said quickly. "Any one might go wrong in this snow. But I'd like to rest for a moment. It's such breathless work. Couldn't we go into the big porch? It will be sheltered. We'd be dry and out of the wind. We could get our breath before going back."

She was not quite so strong as the other two, and she was obviously tired. Teesa hesitated, feeling that they would be wiser to push on, but Rhoda hailed the idea with enthusiasm, for Betty's sake.

"We'll all be more fit after a rest. We've had all that awful climb in the wind," she said. "The gate's not locked. Come and find the porch! It's big, and I fancy there are seats in it."

The wide stone porch faced south, so was sheltered from all the wind and snow, and there were seats at each side. Betty sank down gladly upon one, but Rhoda turned on her preemptorily. "Take off your coat and shake it well first. We could camp out here! It would hold——"

And then they had one of the surprises of their lives. For the big door of the empty house flew open, warm welcoming light streamed out, and Jen stood on the threshold, crying, "Come in and get warm! But what *are* you doing here?"

"Jen! But why are *you* here?" cried Teesa, astounded. "Are we crazy?"

"We're lost! We turned the wrong way!" Betty laughed, in great relief. "Is that a fire? Oh, may we come in? But what does it mean, Jen? We left you at home an hour ago!"

"Two hours," said Rhoda. "But we thought this house was all shut up, Jen?"

Jen made short work of the mystery. "Mother had a note from Mrs. Carr yesterday, saying she and Mr. Carr would be home to-night. Their servants were to be here to get the house ready, but mother said I might drive down this afternoon and see that things were nice. It's so awfully sad for the poor old folks; we'd do anything we could to help. Oh, haven't you heard the story?" in answer to their questioning looks. "Take off your coats and toast yourselves at the fire, and then I'll tell you."

"But we ought not to stay. We shall be so late in getting home, and Miss Maitland won't understand," Betty's conscience spoke out.

"I'm going to drive home in ten minutes," said Jen, dropping on to a big stool before the blazing fire. "I'll send you home in the car. You can't walk across the moor in this storm. Old Frost will be thrilled to show you what the new car can do. He used to be our coachman, and I believe he was very funny with our first car. Poor dear, he did hate it at first, after his beloved horses! But he's naturally just about as keen on cars now as he was on horses. I'm going to give you cups of hot tea before we go; they were just getting it ready for me. Do you think I've made the house look nice? Nice enough for a very sad old lady and a very sad old man? I brought the flowers from home."

"It does look very nice and cosy!" Betty and Rhoda spoke together. "Won't you tell us the story, please?"

"What's the matter with them? I hadn't heard any story," Teesa queried.

"Mr. and Mrs. Carr are our nearest neighbours," Jen said soberly, "and there are so few people here that of course we've been friends. They had only one son, who married, about three years ago, a London girl. He had influenza last winter, and it left trouble in his lungs. He

got steadily worse, and this summer they were told he couldn't live long. But the doctors thought a sea voyage might lengthen his life. His wife's people were very well off, and they had a big sea-going yacht; so they lent it, thinking it would be pleasanter for an invalid than an ordinary passenger ship. He sailed, about August, with his wife and the baby, a topping little boy; the grandparents just doted on him. They were making for Teneriffe and the Canary Islands. But they never arrived. There was a fearful storm, and the yacht has never been heard of. She touched at Havre, and then disappeared. The Carrs are still hoping for news; they've been up in London trying to find out what could be done, and making all kinds of inquiries.

"You see, they don't know where to look. If the yacht was wrecked, some sign of them might have come ashore; but it might be in France, or in Spain, or on the coast of Portugal, or on one of the islands. They weren't meaning to touch anywhere till they got to Madeira, so the fact that they hadn't got to Lisbon, or Bordeaux, or anywhere, is nothing to go on. They've simply vanished. And the poor old people are heartbroken. If they only knew what had happened, or if even the baby had been saved, it would be something! They knew they had to lose their son. But to lose the wife and baby, too—it's terribly sad, isn't it?"

"Awfully hard lines!" Rhoda said sympathetically. "I wonder if they'll ever know?"

"It's dreadfully sad! We'd seen the house all shut up, but we never guessed there was a story like that behind it," Betty said pitifully.

"I wonder what they'll do?" Teesa pondered. "They could send detectives to hunt all up and down the coast for news of a wreck?"

"They may do that. But all over the coast of three countries is a big job." Jen poured out the promised tea, looking very sober. "I'm afraid they'll never hear, and never know anything. It's terribly sad. If they'd only had something left, just one out of the three, they'd have felt there was something to live for."

"How old was the baby?" asked Betty.

"A year and a half, and a perfect darling. I saw him last spring, when they stayed here for a while. The father looked very ill, even then. The mother was so pretty, but she looked sad, because she knew, you know. You'll understand that we all feel we'd do anything we could to help them. Here's a picture of the baby! Yes, isn't he a dear? I can't remember to say he *was* a dear!" Jen said pitifully. "It doesn't seem possible we won't see him grow up into a boy!"

"Perhaps they'll get some news yet," Rhoda said hopefully. "Perhaps they'll be able to tell something when they get home to-night!"

"But we mustn't be here!" Jen glanced at the clock, and turned hastily to look for her big coat and fur cap. "Both for their sakes and yours, we ought to go. I'll tell Frost to bring round the car."

"A most suitable name for him in this weather!" Teesa said, laughing.

"Isn't it cosy and jolly?" and Betty and Rhoda cuddled close together on the back seat of the car. "After stumbling along in that snow and wind, this is too gorgeous for words, Jen!"

"He has to go slowly, of course, because of the snow. But it isn't lying much; the roads aren't getting blocked," Jen said cheerfully. "I'm going to drive home with you. Yes, why shouldn't I? The car's got to go and come back. Why shouldn't it have me in it? I'm perfectly warm and happy, and it's awfully slow at home all alone. I want the ride!"

"If it gets worse suddenly, you may have to stay the night with us!" Rhoda said, laughing.

"It isn't going to, I'm afraid. The snow's stopping," said Teesa.

"Then Tickles won't be snowed up, after all! She was hoping we should be," Betty explained to Jen.

“Oh, I don’t think she’ll be snowed up yet! It’s only the beginning of November,” Jen said, laughing.

They were travelling slowly, but steadily, across the moor, and were just thinking they must be nearing Rocklands, when the car came to a stop with a sudden jerk, and they heard Frost’s voice, calling apparently to some one by the roadside.

“Whatever’s the matter? Have we run over something?” and Jen sprang up.

“Why, *Rena!*” and all four girls gave a shout of surprise, as a face appeared at the window of the car.

Jen let down the window with a bang. “Rena, what’s the matter? Did we run over you? Or did you hail us? Do you want a lift? But we aren’t going your way! What’s up?”

Rena spoke quickly.

“I hailed you. I didn’t know it was you, though. I’m glad; I’m sure you’ll help. There’s a man here, and he’s fallen in the snow. He’s ill. I want to get him to the hospital. Lisabel and I were on our way home, when we nearly fell over him. I’ve put my big coat over him, but we must get him to shelter somehow, and there’s a hospital, a little one, down at the works by the station. Could you lend us the car for half an hour? I’m afraid he’ll die if he’s left to lie here much longer.”

“Let’s see him?” Jen opened the door quickly.

But Rena held her back. “We don’t know what’s wrong with him. Don’t go too near, Jen. I think he’s only been overcome by the cold, but we’d better be on the safe side. Lisabel and I have touched him, and that’s enough. Can you manage to walk on as far as Rocklands, if we borrow the car?” she asked anxiously. “I hate to ask it of you, but we can’t carry him, and we can’t leave him lying here.”

“Of course you must have the car! Frost will help you to lift him in. He isn’t dead, is he?” Jen asked anxiously.

“No, but I don’t like his breathing. I think he’ll have pneumonia, or something, after this. He’s unconscious, of course. He looks like a foreigner, a sailor, perhaps; no, don’t come and look, any of you. It might be something like small-pox, and then you’d be sorry,” Rena said ruthlessly.

The schoolgirls and Jen could not deny this. They would certainly not be received cordially at Rocklands if they had been in contact with a case of small-pox. So, reluctantly, but of necessity, they stood at one side while Frost and Rena lifted the helpless man from the heather and laid him in the car, still wrapped in Rena’s big coat.

Lisabel followed Rena into the car, and Frost was taking his seat again when Teesa called out, “Where are we, by the way? Is it too far for Jen to walk? Are we to sit down and wait for you?” for in the dusk they could not tell one part of the moor road from another.

“I don’t advise it, unless you all want pneumonia, too,” Rena said grimly. “You’re only half a mile from Rocklands. You’ve just passed the turning down to the station. The car will have to turn and go back a little way. If you go straight on, you’ll come to the gate of Rocklands in a quarter of an hour. Here’s my torch, in case you don’t get in before dark. Lisabel has hers, so we’ll be all right.”

“Oh, then we know where we are. We can do that all right.” Teesa sounded relieved.

Rena waved her hand. “We’ll let you know what they say about him. I’ll send back word by Frost, when he comes for Jen. Lisabel and I will walk by the road and not come up to the moor again—”

“We’ll want to know,” and the girls waved in reply, and stood watching while the car backed and turned and began the descent to the town in the valley.

CHAPTER XV

JEN FINDS A TREASURE

"Now let's get home!" said Betty. "Jen mustn't stand about in this wind."

"Neither must you!" Jen retorted. "Oh, I can stand the wind all right! But if the path's slippery, I shall hang on to one of you. I don't want to go falling down and banging myself. I've had big holes in me fairly lately;" a callous reference to her recent injuries, which drew a laughing protest from the rest.

"I'll look after you. I won't let you slip," Rhoda assured her.

"I wonder about that poor old chap! He was an oldish man," Jen said pitifully, as they turned towards Rocklands.

"I say, girls!" There was a shout from Teesa. "Here's something lying in the ditch! A bundle; he must have dropped it."

"Rena and Lisabel can't have seen it. They'd only think about him, of course!" Jen and Betty and Rhoda all came climbing up the bank to the heather. "Let's see!"

"It's a roll of clothes, wrapped up in sailcloth," Teesa began, examining her find hastily.

"Tarpaulin. He must have been a sailor," Jen amended.

Betty produced Rena's torch and flashed it upon the bundle and on the heather all round about. "We must take care of the things for him. Is there anything else? Things might have fallen out."

"Or out of his pockets," Teesa added.

Rhoda gave a shout, and pounced on a pocket-book lying a yard away in the bottom of the ditch. "Here's his money! Perhaps his name will be in it. There's a letter slipped through the strap on the outside. Bring the torch, Bets, and we'll see who he was."

And then came the next shock of that astounding day. For Rhoda, peering at the envelope in the light of the torch, read aloud, "*Carr, Lowmoor, Sheffield, England.*"

In utter bewilderment, the schoolgirls and Jen stared at one another, cold and wind and snow forgotten.

"*Carr!* The people from the shut-up house?" gasped Rhoda.

"He was going there," Teesa began feebly.

"Oh, come along to Rocklands! That's nearest! Come and tell somebody!" Jen cried excitedly. "Come and ask Mrs. Thorburn and Miss Maitland what they think! Don't you see? A foreigner and a sailor; he was going to Lowmoor to find the Carrs and bring them news of their son. They've been wrecked somewhere; some of them may be still alive. He knows, and he was coming to tell, and he tried to walk across the moor, and the cold was too much for him, and he fell down, and then Rena and Lisabel came, and then we came along! Come and tell somebody quickly! We can't go after him; and, anyway, he's too ill to speak; it wouldn't be any use. But Mrs. Thorburn will know what to do. We must tell Mr. Carr at once!"

Her excitement seized the others. "Let's hurry! Let's fly!" Teesa cried eagerly.

"Wait a sec., though! There might be other things lying round. He dropped everything when he fell. Let's search," Rhoda said prudently.

"What else could there be?" Teesa was all impatience.

But Betty and Jen and Rhoda were searching among the heather, and a moment later a cry broke from Jen, and then another. The first was exultant; she had found something. The

second cry was sheer amazement, as she saw what it was she had found.

“Look, oh, look! A pipe-whistle! It *must* be his! Look, Betty! It’s like the one Archie gave me a month ago; his ‘grandfather’s old whistle,’ that turned out to be so valuable! Oh, but isn’t that queer?”

“Isn’t what queer?” Betty looked wonderingly at Jen’s flushed face, with a sudden horrible dread lest the excitement had made her feverish again. “Jen, let’s hurry on to school! We oughtn’t to stand about here. We can come back in daylight to see if there’s anything else.”

“Do you mean it’s so queer that the old sailor should have a whistle, Jen?” Rhoda, too, was looking curiously at Jen’s burning cheeks and eager eyes.

“Oh, don’t waste time talking about old whistles!” Teesa cried impatiently. “I thought you were in such a hurry to send somebody to tell Mr. Carr!”

Jen, the pipe clasped against her breast, set out along the road at a smart pace, and the other three had to hurry to keep up with her.

“My dear children,” she said impressively, in the elderly tone of one who had left school nearly a year ago, “suppose there’s no name in that pocket-book, and suppose the old man dies in the hospital; where shall we be then? We’ll know he was coming to tell Mr. Carr something about the wreck, but we won’t know where he came from, and they’ll be no further on. They won’t know where to look. He may be French, or Spanish, or Portuguese, or anything. We knew already that they might have been wrecked in one of those countries; the question was, which? If he doesn’t get better enough to tell us, we shan’t know any more than we did, and it will be simply *awful* for Mr. and Mrs. Carr! Unless——” she paused dramatically.

“Go on! Don’t keep us in suspense!” Rhoda begged.

Betty had decided by this time that Jen was not feverish. “You think you’ve found out something? Tell us, Jen!” she pleaded.

“If he can’t tell us, it seems to me that I may have the clue here—the thing that will help us to find them. Did any of you ever see a pipe like that?” She held it out, and Betty flashed the torchlight on it again.

“Never! And yet it is like Archie’s old whistle,” Rhoda agreed.

“Don’t say ‘whistle!’” Jen protested. “Archie’s whistle was an Old English morris pipe; a three-hole pipe; quite different from a whistle. *This* is a three-hole pipe. The shape, and the way it will be played, are exactly the same as in Archie’s pipe. Look! Two holes in the front, and one at the back for the thumb; you never saw a whistle like that! And the grooves are at the same places; and the rounded bulge at the top; and the smooth round part at the end, for the third and fourth fingers. There! That’s how you hold this one. Avice showed me how to hold the English pipe, when she came to take it away to London. I believe I could play this one. It’s fatter than Archie’s, and whiter; it’s different wood, and not so beautifully finished as the English one; it looks rougher altogether, and I shouldn’t think it’s nearly as old. But it’s exactly the same in principle. And this is what I think! It oughtn’t to be impossible to find out what part of Europe uses the same kind of pipe as our old morris men did, especially when we can narrow it down to three or four countries. They weren’t wrecked in Norway, or Austria, or Turkey, or Russia! Somebody will know; musical people in London might know. Or they could search along that coast till they found people who had pipes like this. If the old man can’t tell us where he came from, I believe Mr. Carr will be able to trace his son, and perhaps get news of him, through this pipe. That’s why I’m so keen about it!”

“It sounds all right,” Rhoda said excitedly, as Jen paused for breath. “But I’d never have thought of it myself. I’d forgotten all about Archie and his pipe! I’d never have connected that

fat white one with his thin old brown one.”

“Oh, but you never held the morris pipe in your left hand! That’s the position!” and Jen held the foreign pipe correctly. “You could never forget, when you’d once held the English one! I wonder—oh, *how* I wonder!—what country this new pipe comes from!”

But the schoolgirls could not help her there. It was a mystery to them all. They could only hurry on, Jen very thoughtful, and clasping the precious pipe tightly, Rhoda carrying the pocket-book, and Betty and Teesa taking turns with the clumsy bundle.

The walk of half a mile was just long enough for Jen. She dropped on a settle inside the front door, but still clung to the pipe. “That’s the longest walk I’ve had! Oh, I’m all right; I’m not going to faint! I’m only dead. But we must tell about these things at once. Where is everybody?”

Mrs. Thorburn came hurrying from her sitting-room. “Girls, where have you been? We rang up the Grange, and they said you had all started in the car. What has happened? Betty, you three had better go to Miss Maitland. She has been very anxious about you. Jen, dear, you look worn out. Have you been walking? But where is the car? My dear child, look at your feet!” and she ran to Jen and drew off the thin, soaked shoes.

“I know. I’m sorry,” Jen said apologetically. “I didn’t expect to walk; I thought I’d be in the car all the time. But it’s all right, really, Mrs. Thorburn. I never take cold.”

“Bring her dry stockings and slippers at once, Betty. Quickly! Toast your feet at the fire, Jen, my dear. Come into my room; it is cosier in there.”

Jen, barefoot and laughing, followed her into the beautiful room. Teesa and Rhoda, eager to tell their story, followed, disregarding the order to return to the school side of the house, and by the time Betty had brought the stockings and warm bedroom slippers, Miss Maitland herself had appeared, looking stern and obviously wanting explanations.

Jen, toasting her bare feet on the fender, and drinking the cup of hot tea Mrs. Thorburn insisted upon, spoke up quickly, with no intention of having her story snatched from her by Teesa; she knew intuitively that Betty and Rhoda would recognise it as hers.

“Miss Maitland—Mrs. Thorburn! May I tell you what has happened? The girls really aren’t to blame for being late. They took the wrong turning in the snow and wind; we’ve had more on our side of the hill, and it was blinding for an hour or so. They found themselves at Lowmoor, and I was there, getting things ready for Mr. and Mrs. Carr, who are to come home to-night. You’ve heard about their trouble?”

Mrs. Thorburn assented; she had talked of the sad story with her sister, though they had not felt it necessary to tell it to Teesa or the school.

“I was going home in the car,” Jen went on quickly, “so I said I’d drive the girls home first, and we called in at the Grange to explain. When we were nearly here, at the top of the station road, Rena and Lisabel hailed us. They’d found an old man—well, an oldish man!—lying beside the road, unconscious, and they wanted help to get him to the hospital. Rena wouldn’t let any of us go near him, because we couldn’t tell what was the matter with him, though she thought it was only that he’d been overcome by the cold, and was exhausted and half frozen. So she and Frost lifted him into the car and took him to the hospital, and we walked on; it was only half a mile. That’s why we’re late, and why my feet are wet. But—oh, Mrs. Thorburn! We found his belongings lying on the heather, where he’d dropped them; Rena and Lisabel hadn’t found them. There was a bundle of clothes, and this wooden pipe; he must have been fond of music; and—this!” and she held out the pocket-book which Rhoda silently handed to her.

Miss Maitland came to Mrs. Thorburn's side to look. "*Carr, Lowmoor, Sheffield.*" Gracious!" said Sheila Thorburn amazedly.

"He looked like a foreigner," Jen said swiftly. "The letter was for him to show to people, so that they'd put him on the right way. Perhaps he couldn't speak much English. Don't you think that must have been it, Mrs. Thorburn?"

"You think he was bringing news of the lost son and his family?" Miss Maitland's excitement began to grow.

"It certainly looks like it." Mrs. Thorburn was flushed and excited too. "When he recovers enough to tell us——"

"Yes, but suppose he doesn't," Jen cried quickly. "Suppose he dies, and we never know where he came from? Oh, Mrs. Thorburn, look what else we found! Don't you think this might help? It's such a very queer thing!" and she held up the fat, white wooden pipe, and poured out her hopes concerning it. "Just the same, in the way it works, as the Old English ones, that our morris men used in the Middle Ages! Surely we can find out what country on the west coast of Europe uses pipes like ours!"

Mrs. Thorburn and Miss Maitland looked at one another, catching some of her excitement. "It might be a most valuable clue," Miss Maitland agreed.

"If he can't tell us, and if there's no more information among these letters," Mrs. Thorburn added eagerly. "Jen, shall I take the pocket-book and pipe to Lowmoor, at once, and tell Mr. Carr the whole story? My big car will do the journey easily in spite of the snow; it's falling again, I am afraid. You ought to rest here for a while, but this story ought to be told at once."

"Oh, will you? I am so tired! But I do want Mr. and Mrs. Carr to know to-night," Jen said gratefully. "I'd like to rest, if you could take on the job for us now, Mrs. Thorburn."

"I'll take on the job gladly! Mr. Carr will want to go to the hospital to see the man at once. I will go too, if possible, and I'll let you have all the news as soon as there is anything to tell."

"Oh, that will be kind! We're dying to know what happens!"

"Couldn't Jen stay here for the night, or for the week-end?" Betty suggested diffidently. "Her people are away; she's all alone. She was wishing she could come here."

"So since she *is* here, by accident, can't we keep her?" Rhoda's eyes sparkled, while Jen looked from one to the other and laughed eagerly. "You could ring up the Grange again, and we could send her car home, and we'd all lend her things, and she'd rest and keep warm here, and we'd simply love to have her!"

"I'd simply love to stay," Jen said warmly. "I'm lonely with mother and father away, now that Joan's gone back home!"

"Of course you must stay," Miss Maitland said briskly. "We could not think of letting you go back to-night. The girls will be delighted to have you."

"Yes, but she's going to be my visitor, not yours," Sheila Thorburn said decidedly. "If she stays in the school wing, you'll have midnight feasts and dormitory raids going on all the time, and she still has to be taken care of."

"Oh, Mrs. Thorburn!" Four indignant laughing voices remonstrated.

"We'd take care of her! We'd treat her like eggshell!" Teesa promised largely.

"You might, till you forgot," her aunt retorted. "Jen's going to sleep in my part of the house. You may entertain her for the evening. I shall claim my visitor when I come back from Lowmoor. Now I'm off, to carry the news and see what story I can bring back to you!"

CHAPTER XVI

JEN'S GREAT IDEA

"I believe we are going to be snowed up, after all!" Tickles pressed her face against the window, and pulled a curtain round her head to shut out the glow from the lighted schoolroom. "It's coming down in thumping big flakes!"

"What a way to put it, about snow, that falls so softly!" Rhoda teased, hearing her from the doorway.

"Oh, you have come back, then!" There was a chorus from the juniors, and Tickles turned hastily.

"We thought you'd all got buried—why, Jen?" and she went flying, with Margot and Babbles, to hurl herself on the unexpected guest.

"Where did you find her? Why did you bring her back with you? Is she going to stay? Oh, cheers! But how? Why? What's happened?"

"I decided to come back and cheer you all up. My folks have gone and left me all alone for the week-end," Jen said airily.

"Why have you got on bedroom slippers?" Tickles cried shrilly.

"Because my shoes were snowy, and Betty thought these would be the warmest she could lend me," Jen retorted. "Why were my shoes snowy? Because I'd been walking in the snow. Why hadn't I on boots, like a sensible person? Because I thought I'd be in the car, and didn't mean to walk. Why didn't I stay in the car? Because Rena Mackay turned us all out into the snow. Why did she do it? Because she wanted the car for herself. Why did she want the car? Oh, but that's a long story!"

A shout of indignation, and a shriek of curiosity from Tickles and Babbles, greeted this anticlimax. Vera and Fanny and the other seniors came hurrying in from their room, full of questions also.

Jen and Betty, Rhoda and Teesa, having a big satisfying tea in Mrs. Thorburn's room, though she herself had driven away to Lowmoor, had decided that the story had better be told in full, and Miss Maitland had raised no objection. So Jen seated herself on the table, as on a throne, and with a regal gesture called the girls to her feet, and dramatically told the story of the tragedy of Lowmoor, and the unexpected developments of that afternoon.

"Now you know as much as we do! And none of us can know any more till Mrs. Thorburn comes back, and she may be late. So let's do something to keep our minds off the subject! Show me the new dances Rhoda has been teaching you. I can criticise, though I mustn't dance."

The tables were pushed back in a moment, the music was brought, and Rhoda, a little nervous, bade the girls make sets of eight for "Oranges and Lemons." "I hope we've got it right. I think we have," she said.

In the summer she had been in a position to criticise Jen's dancing, but Jen's month at the folk-dance school in the holidays had altered all that, and Jen was the critic now, and spoke with the voice of authority and experience.

"We did this with the Pixie. Oh, don't you know her? I'll tell you all about her afterwards."

"I've seen her. I haven't spoken to her; but my guardian knows her. I saw her in town once," Rhoda said eagerly. "I've heard how she taught the soldiers during the war."

"Make your setting quieter," Jen commanded, when she had seen the dance, "and don't overdo the honouring. You haven't time. And the hands should be lower in the hey, or it all looks like a part of the setting. But it's very good. Now show me something else!"

All through the uproarious evening that followed, at the back of Jen's mind was the thought of the old foreign sailor in the snow, and the pipe which might be the only clue to the mystery. She kept wondering if Mrs. Thorburn had not returned yet, but no summons came for her till after supper. The girls were beginning to ask where she was going to sleep, when Miss Maitland came in to fetch her.

"My sister thinks you should go to bed soon, Jen. She has just come in, and would like a talk with you first."

Jen, eager-faced, hurried downstairs and through to the part of the big house which its mistress kept for her own use, while the school invaded the east wing. An open door showed her a cosy little bedroom with a bright fire, and she knew it must be hers, since she had already seen Mrs. Thorburn's room. She wanted more than bed, however, though she was very tired. So she sought her hostess, and found her sitting down to a very belated dinner.

"Come away," Sheila said hospitably. "Can you eat any more? I know you've had supper with the girls. Well, pretend, then, just to keep me company. I'm starving! Are you over-tired, you bad girl? We have to be careful of you, you know," and she looked at Jen's red cheeks anxiously.

"Oh, no! I've enjoyed it. I've had a ripping evening. It's so jolly to be with girls again. I love to feel I'm back at school, and yet haven't any work to do! But I've had supper. I'll sit by the fire, if I may. Girls *are* tiring, aren't they?" Jen said, with an elderly air.

"Have you been dancing?" Sheila asked reprovingly. It was not so long since she had left her own schooldays behind. She was only twenty-five, and very pretty; her married life had been cut short, after only two months, and she had taken up her lonely life again bravely, giving herself freely to all who needed help.

"No, but they have, and I've been telling them where they're wrong. It's nearly as exciting as taking part! And I get mixed, and yell 'Left!' when I know perfectly well I mean 'Right!' or 'Contrary!' when I mean 'Partner!' Contrary's a beastly word to say in a hurry, over and over again," Jen sighed. "If you knew country-dances, and I told you I'd been teaching them 'Lady in the Dark,' you'd understand and pity me, Mrs. Thorburn. They liked the name, and asked me to tell them what it was like; and, as Madam taught it to us at Cheltenham, I was able to. But it's an awful thing to call out! My respect for Madam is higher even than it was. Oh, Mrs. Thorburn, what about Mr. Carr?"

"The excitement was almost too much for him, poor old man!" Sheila said gravely. "I told him as gently as I could. He seemed very frail and broken down at first, but he pulled himself together wonderfully at the first hint of news, and the hope of it will keep him up for a while. He opened the pocket-book, which he recognised as his son's, and found in it old letters from himself and Mrs. Carr, and photos of the baby and the wife. But there was nothing to help us on with the story; no address, or clue, or word as to what had happened. The envelope on the outside, with the name, contained no letter; it was merely the address. I imagine the yacht was wrecked, and either the book was washed ashore—all the letters were sea-stained—or young Mr. Carr's body was found, with the book still on him. If he had been found alive, and had sent the book as a message, there would surely have been some letter in it."

“But the man might have had the letter in his pocket,” Jen cried eagerly.

“That is what we thought. Or he may have meant to tell his story. So Mr. Carr and I drove down to the hospital; it was very heavy going in the snow, but we got there at last. Your car was still there, by the way, so I told your man to wait to take Mr. Carr home; it saved a lot of time, and I knew you wouldn’t want the motor again to-night.”

“Yes, that was ripping. Thanks so much for thinking of it! But about the old man, Mrs. Thorburn? He wasn’t dead?” Jen pleaded anxiously.

“No, but he is very ill, and wandering in his mind. The doctors say it is pneumonia and exhaustion, and he is so worn out that they are doubtful if they can pull him through. We could not make him understand. And, unfortunately, all his talk is in some language or patois we cannot identify. Now and then we thought we caught a word of French, but we may have been mistaken. We told the whole story to the doctors and nurses, and they will listen for anything that might give us a clue, and if he should be conscious at all they will try to question him, but I could see they did not think it likely. We said ‘Carr, Lowmoor,’ to him, over and over again, in the hope of getting some response, but he took no notice. He is in a high fever, and it’s a question how long his strength will hold out.”

“And there was nothing in his pockets? No letter to Mr. Carr? Nothing to tell what had happened?”

“Nothing of any kind. There is nothing to do but wait, and see if he rallies.”

“And if he doesn’t—if he dies—if his heart gives out suddenly, and it’s all over in a minute,” Jen began brokenly. “Oh, poor Mr. and Mrs. Carr! Mrs. Thorburn, it would be too terrible! Can’t we do *anything*?”

“You have done something already,” Sheila Thorburn told her quickly. “They know at least that some news of the wreck came ashore *somewhere*. Before this, the yacht seemed to have vanished, but now they feel there is something to search for.”

“And there’s the pipe,” Jen said hopefully.

“Yes. We discussed that, as we drove down to the hospital. Mr. Carr feels, as you did, that the pipe may be the only clue. If the man dies, he will trace them through the pipe, no matter how long or difficult the task. A detective agency in London would undertake that for him; they would send a man to search the coast till he found a spot where such pipes were known and used, and then the rest would be easy.”

“It might be a long job, though,” Jen was gazing thoughtfully into the fire.

“Yes, and difficult. So he will wait until we see if the man recovers before taking any steps. It would be so very much simpler to hear everything from him.”

“But if he can’t speak English? You said you couldn’t understand him!”

“Oh, but he may be able to speak English, or French, when he is well! But that might all go from him in illness. His talk in delirium would be in the language most familiar, the tongue of his childhood.”

“I see. Yes, of course. If I talked when I was feverish, it would be in English, not in the French or German I’d learnt at school.”

“I should imagine so. So we are going to wait. Perhaps there will be more hope by the morning. We will ring them up and ask for news. But I could see they had very little hope to-night.”

“Poor chap!” Jen said pitifully. “Think of coming all this way to bring a message, from some southern country, and getting caught in the snow when he had so nearly arrived, and possibly sitting down to rest at the top of the hill, and falling asleep, never thinking of the

danger, or perhaps not understanding it, and knowing nothing about the moors, or the difficulty of crossing them in a storm! *Why* didn't he write to Mr. Carr?"

"He'd never think of it. His only feeling would be to go and find him and tell him."

"It may be days before he can tell us things," Jen said thoughtfully, gazing into the fire again. "In the meantime, I wonder if we couldn't do anything? I say, Mrs. Thorburn!" and, elbows planted on knees and chin on fists, Jen turned and gazed at her hostess with kindling eyes.

"What's your idea, Jenny-Wren? I can see one is simmering."

"Yes! Suppose I write to some one in town, describing the pipe. Cicely and Joan are spending next week in town, for Cicely to buy things; she's going to be married in January. They'd do; and Joan saw the morris pipe. They'd know whom to ask. Don't you think some of the folk-dance people, who know all about the English pipes, might know what part of the west of Europe uses the same kind? Don't you think it's worth trying? It's such a very—such a very *unique* kind of pipe! So very unusual! I'm sure they're rare. Some of our dancing people might know."

"It's well worth trying," Sheila said quickly. "It's rather a brilliant idea, Jen! I should try it. Mr. Carr would never be able to thank you enough, if you solved his problem for him."

"I'll write to-morrow," Jen said eagerly, her face alight. "But we won't say anything to him till we hear something, Mrs. Thorburn."

"No, we won't raise any false hopes. That would only be cruel."

"We won't tell anybody," Jen decided. "Not even the girls here. We'll wait and see what answer we get. I would be so glad to feel I'd helped!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE PIXIE SOLVES THE PROBLEM

Jen's letter to Joan was carried by the postman through three feet of snow that Sunday afternoon, and the schoolgirls exulted openly that no motor could come to fetch her in such weather. Monday morning brought a message from the Grange, however, to say there had been a telegram from Jen's parents, saying that in view of the severe change in the weather they would stay in Glasgow for a few days, and hoping all was well with Jen at home; and at that Jen announced her intention of staying where she was till they returned. Mrs. Thorburn promptly gave her a cordial invitation to do so, and the whole school rejoiced and made much of her.

But in a few days there came a new excitement. Frost came over in the car to bring a telegram from Joan, which had come to the Grange for Jen. She went flying to find Mrs. Thorburn as soon as she had glanced at it, waving it exultantly.

"Mrs. Thorburn! Oh, look!—from Joan, in answer to my letter! 'Pixie coming to see you Friday, on way to Manchester. Thinks she can identify pipe.' Oh, isn't that simply gorgeous? Of course, she's the very one! She's met so many people; you know, I told you about her in the war!"

"The tiny person, who taught folk-dancing in the camps behind the lines?" Mrs. Thorburn asked, with interest. "I'll be more than delighted to meet her!"

"Oh, you'll love her! Everybody does. But what shall we do with her? She must go to the Grange. I'd better go home. And we must tell Mr. Carr; the pipe's at Lowmoor. Oh, I wish mother was at home!"

"You and I will meet your friend at the station in the car," Mrs. Thorburn said decisively. "We will drive her to Lowmoor, and Mr. Carr shall show her the pipe. Then she'll come back here, and if she can stay for a few days, we shall all be delighted to welcome her."

"I'd love the girls to see her! But she won't have time to stay," Jen said regretfully. "She flies all over the country, only a night or two in each place. It's awfully good of you, Mrs. Thorburn."

"It will be a great treat to us all to see her! I hope we shall find she is able to stay with us."

"And you'll tell Mr. Carr she's coming? It would cheer him up so," Jen pleaded; for the foreigner still lay very ill in the hospital, and he had spoken no word that threw any light on the story, though in his fever he had talked much in his unknown tongue.

The two days till the Pixie came were restless and impatient days to the anxious ones at Lowmoor, as they were to Jen and the schoolgirls at Rocklands. The girls knew of Jen's letter now, and all were thrilled to the limit at the thought of a word from a stranger perhaps solving the mystery. And they knew who the stranger was to be, and had heard endless stories from Jen and Rhoda of her teaching, her work among the convalescent soldiers, her adventures in Northern France and Germany; that she could be coming to Rocklands in person seemed too good to be true.

"She ought jolly well to be able to tell stories!" Tickles voiced the feeling of the juniors. "If she will," she added doubtfully. "But perhaps she won't be bothered with us. We're only kids, and Jen says she knows Generals and people like that!"

"I wouldn't have the cheek to ask her to tell us stories," Margot said gloomily.

“Oh, I’d ask her! Jen says she’s simply sweet, and kinder than kind! But perhaps she won’t do it,” Tickle said sadly. “Perhaps she won’t have time for us.”

The Pixie, buttoned up into a big travelling coat and wearing a soft hat—very full of life and enjoyment, but needing another inch and a half to make her five feet, and therefore looking very tiny beside tall Jen—hopped out of the train to meet Jen and Mrs. Thorburn about midday on Friday, and insisted, in her own very definite way, on leaving her bag in the office to be picked up again a few hours later.

“I have to be in Manchester to-night. Can you get me back to the station? There’s a train about five that will just do me nicely.”

“Oh, but we want you for one night, at least!” Jen wailed. “Can’t you possibly stay? There are thirty-five schoolgirls simply dying to see you!”

“The dears!” the Pixie sparkled. “But I can’t stop on this journey. They are expecting me in Manchester.”

“There’s a post office just opposite, and you’ve heard of telegrams, perhaps,” Jen coaxed. “This is Mrs. Thorburn, and she’s got everything ready for you; and the girls are all waiting for you. They’ll dance for you, and they know all about you. Couldn’t you wire?”

The Pixie had heard of telegrams, it appeared, but she was not in the habit of disappointing her friends. “My dear, I’ve a party to-night, at eight. I can’t let them down. And to-morrow I’m judging a big competition. But perhaps on my way home I could manage a day. We’ll see! Now, where is this pipe? Joan told me the story.”

The car was waiting, and whirled them all up to Lowmoor swiftly. In the library, while Mrs. Carr and Mrs. Thorburn and Jen watched anxiously, Mr. Carr, tall, and old, and bent, looked down at his tiny visitor, and laid the white pipe in her eager hands.

“The man has not recovered consciousness, and so far has told us nothing. This is as yet our only clue. If you can help us, we shall be indebted to you for ever.”

The Pixie gave a little delighted cry of relief. “A Basque pipe! I was sure of it. I’ve got one myself; an old man in France gave it to me. But I can’t play it. This is just the same.”

“A *what?*” cried Jen, while the grown-ups looked at one another, mystified still.

“Basque!” Mrs. Thorburn said slowly. “Why, isn’t that in Spain?”

“The Pyrenees, you know,” the Pixie said eagerly. “A Pyrenean pipe, if you like. The Basques are the ancient people still left among the mountains, with their own very old language. That’s what your poor man has been talking to you, but he’ll speak French as well when he’s better.”

“Oh! *Thank you awfully!* You’ve solved the mystery!” cried Jen exultantly.

“I’m so glad I could help you,” and the Pixie looked up at them all, her face alight with satisfaction.

Mrs. Carr was almost in tears, Mr. Carr was deeply moved; Sheila Thorburn looked radiant and excited. Before any of them could speak, the Pixie added, “I hope you’ll find where the pipe comes from, and I hope you’ll find good news waiting for you there. But you mustn’t look in the mountains, you know. They weren’t wrecked in the mountains. The old man must have come down to live on the coast, but the pipe was his greatest treasure, so he took it everywhere with him, even when he came here. It would be his treasure, you know; those old men love their pipes. They always use them in their folk-dances in the Pyrenees, and I was told,” and she looked up at Jen eagerly, “that the men clash them together in their dances, as we do our morris sticks. But you must search along the coast for news of your wrecked people; the coast nearest the mountains first, of course! I hope you’ll find them, and I

hope the poor man will get better and be able to tell you all about it, and to play his pipe to you one day. Take care of it for him! It's the darling of his heart, most likely. Let me try it!" and she blew hard, and managed to draw one note from the reluctant pipe.

"Can't you play a tune?" Jen begged.

"No, it's too hard. I think it wants a man to blow the Basque pipe! It's not like our English ones. But this one's easier than mine. I can't get a sound out of mine. But it's just like this one to look at. Here's a queer thing!" and she turned to Jen and Mrs. Thorburn, to give the old people time to pull themselves together. "You know all our English pipes are always tuned to one note—D. The Basque pipe is D, too. Isn't that queer? Away in the Pyrenees, and here in England from the Middle Ages, the pipes are tuned to the same note. Oh, I can't tell you why. There must be something mystic and folky about it; something to do with that particular sound-wave! Anyway, it's so. Now I ought to go. I mustn't lose any time this journey. But on my way home again, in a fortnight, if you could put me up for a night, I might see those girls, and perhaps, if they can dance, we might have a party."

"Cheers! We will!" Jen cried rapturously. "I'll come to Rocklands for the night, and we'll talk all night long!"

"In the meantime," said Mrs. Thorburn, "Mrs. Carr wants us to go and have some lunch."

"I can never thank you enough for your most kind and willing help," Mr. Carr said earnestly, as he offered his arm to the Pixie.

"I'm very glad! I'm so *very* glad!" and she looked up at him in warm, eager sympathy. "I hope it will all come out all right. I shall want to hear the end of the story."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE END OF THE STORY

“If there’s one bit of geography Rocklands School could pass an examination in, it’s the Pyrenees!” Miss Maitland said, laughing, a few days later. “The questions those children have asked, and answered for themselves, out of the books in your library, would surprise you, Sheila! I’m sure they know nearly all there is to know about the Basque people, and their language, and their history, and their customs, and their country.”

Jen met the Pixie at the train on her return journey, and drove her to the Grange for lunch with Mr. and Mrs. Robins, whom she had met at Cheltenham during Jen’s convalescence in the early autumn. As soon as they were fairly out of the station yard, the Pixie demanded the end of the Lowmoor story; and Jen, her face lighting up, told it all as the car climbed slowly up the thousand feet to the Grange on the moor.

“The old man is better, and they say he’ll get quite well. But he was very ill; only careful nursing pulled him through. He speaks good French; Mr. Carr has had long talks with him. And he’s promised some day, before he goes back to France, to pipe for the girls who found him in the snow.”

“Bless him! Of course he’ll be glad to. I’m so glad he’s better. And was I right about the pipe?”

“Oh, right in every bit of it! Mr. Carr had written to London, to ask if the father or brother of young Mrs. Carr could go to make the inquiries, and her brother had started, meaning to search all along that west end of the Riviera coast, south of Bordeaux; we know all the geography of those parts now! But the old man became conscious, and was able to speak to us in French, and the doctors said he’d be strong enough to tell his story in a day or two. So Mr. Carr wired to stop the brother, and he waited in Paris till we were able to send him the name of the village, and that saved a lot of time and trouble.”

“And did he find them?” the Pixie asked eagerly. “Were any of them alive?”

“The old man had told us about that,” Jen said soberly. “He and his son, out fishing, had come across a kind of raft, with a man and woman and a baby on it; they were all that was left of the yacht. Young Mr. Carr was dead; the shock had been too much for him; he was ill already, you know. But the mother and baby boy were alive. The fisher-people took them to their cottage and nursed them there for weeks. The baby was soon all right, and none the worse for the adventure, but Mrs. Carr was very weak and very ill. About four weeks after the wreck, she had her second baby, a tiny, delicate girl——”

“Oh, the poor thing!” the Pixie said, with deepest sympathy. “Oh, the poor young thing! And all alone out there!”

“He says his wife was very good to her, and I’m sure of it. He’s a dear old thing himself. Old Mrs. Carr is just living to see her granddaughter! She’s so delighted, it almost makes you cry to hear her talk! She was so much afraid they’d both have died. As soon as they were sure that young Mrs. Carr was going to get well, which wasn’t for some time, the old chap started to find her people and bring them the news. She was too weak, and had been too ill all along to write a letter, but she printed the address for him, and told him to find those people and bring them to her. He got a ship from Bordeaux to Plymouth, and another on to Liverpool, and there some one put him in the train for Sheffield. It would have been far simpler and safer to

write, but he never thought of that, and he couldn't have written a decent letter, in any case, I'm sure."

"But was it such a lonely part that he couldn't find any one to help him?" the Pixie marvelled. "Some one could have written for him! There are always English people at Biarritz, and that's down that way!"

"You know, I don't think he wanted to write," Jen said gravely. "I can't help feeling he thought there would be a big reward for the people who had helped the English lady; as, of course, there will be; and he didn't want to share it. He and his son had done it all; she was their find; and he wanted to see the thing through without help from any one outside. Their cottage seems to be lonely, without near neighbours. They were strangers, of course; I mean, they didn't really belong there. They had come down from the mountains, where his home was; they talked their own patois, and I fancy they kept a good deal to themselves. When this big thing happened, a big bit of luck, as it would seem to them, they weren't going to share it with folks they cared nothing about. Country people are odd, of course; We hardly understand them. I'm often surprised at our village people here. You or I would have written or wired at once, without waiting over two months!"

"Yes, but one can understand their point of view," the Pixie said thoughtfully. "And they'll bring the mother and babies home as soon as she's fit to travel? How glad those poor old folks will be to see them! I was so sorry for them; and so glad to be able to help a little!"

"They're very grateful to you. They feel you helped a lot. They can't stop thinking how it would have been if the old man had never been able to speak to us. They want to see you this afternoon to thank you again. But to-night you belong to us and the girls at Rocklands!"

Speaking afterwards of her visit to the school, the Pixie was wont to say warmly, "The girls were dears! They kept getting me into corners, two or three of them at a time, and asking me to tell them things. And we had a lovely party!"

At first, of course, the girls were shy, and eyed the little lady from London from a respectful distance, amused, however, to find that Jen and Rhoda had spoken the truth, and that she was not much bigger than Tickles. She and Jen had had tea with Sheila Thorburn in her room first; then they all, with Miss Maitland, went into the big cleared schoolroom, where the girls were waiting for them, and the Pixie looked at the girls, and the girls smiled shyly back at her.

"Now we're going to dance, aren't we? What shall we have? What do you know? Have something everybody knows. What do they know, Jenny-Wren?"

"'Butterfly'? 'Jamaica'?" laughed Jen.

"Good! But you must be content to look on. We can't have you ill again. Mrs. Thorburn will dance with me; oh, yes, you will! I'll tell you what to do," as Sheila protested laughingly that she was not a dancer.

But at first the girls could not forget that a great little lady was among them. They were shy and self-conscious, remembering that she was a friend of Generals and other great people, and that she taught and criticised and judged competitions all over the country. The Pixie, acutely sensitive to every kind of atmosphere, knew what was wrong, and saw it reflected in their dancing. Before many minutes had passed, she had called to the pianist to stop, and was up on a chair, rating them in her own inimitable style, setting them all laughing, but making them look at one another, and at Rhoda, with guilty consciences.

"Yes, but look here! You aren't enjoying yourselves a *bit*! What's the good of dancing, unless you enjoy it? What do you do it for, unless it's because you want to? I'll tell you what

you're all thinking. You're thinking you'll dance very beautifully, to please the lady from London. You were now, weren't you? Yes, I knew you were. And your dancing showed it. You aren't letting yourselves go a scrap. Now let's start again, and put some life into it. *Enjoy* it! Forget all about your feet; you're thinking of them all the time! You should never think about your feet at all; not in country-dancing! They're only to hold you up; and they'll do it all right; you needn't be frightened! Dance *on* your feet, not *with* them! Now, have another shot at it, and let yourselves go. We're dancing because we're so glad all's well at Lowmoor, aren't we? *I* am! Very well, then! Dance as if you were glad, not as if you were trying to look pretty! You'll do that without trying. You can't help it, because you're all so young and well and happy, and you've got such pretty frocks on. Yes, that's better!" as the last tinge of shyness melted in the gust of laughter that swept round.

"Now, let's all have a good time, and forget everything else! And afterwards I'll tell you about the Australians dancing 'Butterfly' on the cliffs by moonlight. You'd like to hear that story, wouldn't you? Yes, of course you would. I'll tell you how the men carried my rations and fetched my hot water, too. But let's have some dancing first! You're all very good, you know. You needn't worry about your dancing. You've been well taught. You've taught them, haven't you?" with a lightning turn to Rhoda, whom she had discovered while dancing with Sheila Thorburn. "You've taught them very well; excellently! They dance beautifully. But they must forget themselves, and me, and everything, and just enjoy themselves. It's a different thing altogether then. Now, are you all ready? Then wake up and have a good time!"

In the midst of the "good time" that followed, when all the girls were enjoying themselves in a way that made the Pixie say, with much satisfaction, "Yes, *now* you're *dancing*!" Jen caught Betty in an interval and whispered to her eagerly in a corner.

"Mr. Carr wants to do something special for everybody who has helped in this business. He's going to give you and Rhoda and Teesa each some present to remember it by, and you're not to say you mustn't take anything, for Miss Maitland says it will please him to give it, so you must consider his feelings! He asked me if you'd like good cameras, and I said I thought you would, but I'd ask you first. So you must talk it over with the other two."

"I would," Betty said gratefully. "I'd love it. How very kind of him! I'll ask the others; I know Teesa wants a camera too. But Rhoda has one. I fancy she'll choose a set of the country-dance books; I've heard her say how much she'd like to have them. What about you, Jen? And Rena and Lisabel? They helped much more than we did."

"Rena's fearfully independent," Jen said, laughing. "She says she's got everything she wants. Mrs. Thorburn's going to send her to college, and that's enough for anybody! But we all insisted, so at last she confessed that the thing she was dying for was a week or fortnight in London with her chum, Nancy Morrell. So she's to go to London for Christmas, and I said to Mr. Carr that if Nancy would like it too, he might send them both to the Vacation School at Chelsea for the week, to learn folk-dancing in earnest. Rena loves what she's done with Rhoda, and she's quite good. She was awfully pleased with the idea, and she thinks Nancy will like it too. Lisabel's different; she has so little, and she wants so much. Mr. Carr's going to do something for her home folks; they're struggling hard to get along, in a tiny cottage. He thinks of helping them to find a decent house, or something like that. Lisabel's pleased about it, though she isn't often pleased about anything."

"She's better than she was, though," Betty said quickly. "Rena's done her heaps of good. She's just been the making of Lisabel! And Mr. Carr will be giving a big reward to the old Frenchman—Basque man, I mean! But what about you, Jen? The idea of the pipe was all

yours. You helped a lot. And what about the Pixie? But I suppose she wouldn't take anything!"

"Oh, wouldn't she?" Jen laughed. "She doesn't lose chances like that! Not for herself, of course! But she asked at once for a set of folk-dance records like mine, for a very poor club she's going to teach in the East End of London. She says records will be all the help in the world, and just what she's been needing, and she'll think of Lowmoor and us and the moors and the Basque fishermen whenever she uses them. Mr. Carr was frightfully pleased that she really wanted them."

"And what about you, Jenny-Wren?"

"Oh, I'm going to have a Basque pipe, like the one I found! They're going to send up into the Pyrenees to get one specially for me, and bring it home when they bring Mrs. Carr and the babies. I don't expect ever to be able to play it, but I'll love to have it as a reminder of all this story. The old man calls his Pierrot; that's its pet name. So mine's going to be Pierrette! I shall be proud of it all my life!"

"Oh, that's rather jolly!"

"Yes! Betty, I've been thinking—isn't it a good thing I got to know you all, here at Rocklands? For if I hadn't, I wouldn't have been driving you home in the snow, and Rena might not have been able to get the man to the hospital in time to save his life; and somebody would have found the pocket-book and the pipe—perhaps! But they'd never have known where he came from; they wouldn't have known what the pipe was, probably! It would have been terribly sad for the Carrs; the man would have been dead if he'd lain there in the snow much longer. It all came out all right, just because I happened to make friends with you and Tickles and the rest one day last summer!"

"We're very glad you did, for our own sakes as well," Betty said heartily.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PIXIE'S ADVICE

As the party broke up, Betty caught Rhoda and drew her into a corner. "I say, Rho! Couldn't we ask the Pixie—you know; about Stonecliffe? She'd help us; she must know!"

"Cheers!" Rhoda said warmly. "What a brilliant idea! Can we get hold of her?"

"Come and try. She's still talking to Jen."

They presented themselves before the Pixie, as Jen turned away to speak to Mrs. Thorburn. "Please, will you tell us something?"

"If I can. Is it about a dance?"

"No! Yes! It's about our dancing. Are we really good, or were you only being kind when you said we were?" Rhoda came to the point at once.

"I'm not as kind as all that. Or rather, I *am!*" the Pixie told her promptly. "It wouldn't be real kindness to say you were good if you weren't; now would it?"

"I suppose not," Rhoda acknowledged. "Then you really did mean it? At least, we're not too bad?"

"For school dancing, yours is very good. That doesn't mean it's perfect, or even first class; but it's well above a lot that I've seen. That's why it was a real relief to me, and I said it was good," the Pixie explained.

Rhoda pondered this. "But it could be a lot better, you mean?"

"Oh, well! So could everybody's! Your girls *are very good.*"

"But are we good enough to go in for a competition?" Betty asked anxiously.

Their little critic laughed. "Now we're getting at it! Where is the competition? What, or whom, would you be up against? And when is it to be?"

"Just before Christmas. It's an open competition in country-dancing, part of a three-days' Musical Festival, in Stonecliffe; that's the town down in the valley, on the other side of us from Sheffield," Rhoda said eagerly. "There's one day for schools and clubs, and we've been thinking we'd like to enter."

"There's a challenge cup for the winning team," Betty said, with a little laugh. "And the winners will be expected to dance in public at the evening concert. We're not expecting to be the winning team, though!"

"Not at our first try, anyway," Rhoda qualified Betty's modesty. "Some day we may get there! But we would like to enter a team and see how we get on. Miss Maitland says we may, if we're good enough; but she'd rather we didn't if we're only going to make fools of ourselves. She didn't put it that way, but that's what she meant."

"She said she'd rather we didn't go in and come out bottom," said Betty. "The trouble is, we don't know if we're good enough. We've nothing to judge by."

"No, you've no standard. Tell me more about it. What are the set dances? And what kind of people will be competing?"

"Schools, and Guide teams, and girls' clubs, Miss Maitland says. The dances are 'Newcastle' and 'Hey, Boys,' and we have to choose one other."

"We know them, of course," Betty added. "But we aren't at all sure that we're up to competition standard."

"She hasn't much faith in you," the Pixie shot a laughing glance up at Rhoda.

“Oh, I have! We all have. We’re sure we’ve got the dances right,” Betty said eagerly. “But we may be doing them badly; Rhoda can’t help that. That depends on us.”

“Yes, your balance, and your rhythm, and your step, will all count in competition work; and a good deal will be expected of big girls like you. You won’t be judged as children.”

“Oh, no! There’s a kids’ section as well,” Rhoda explained. “We thought of sending in a team of under-fourteeners. But we seniors have to meet Ranger Guides, and Guiders, and grown-up clubs like the Y.W.C.A. and G.F.S. I don’t know if we’re good enough! I can’t make up my mind.”

“No, Betty’s right; none of you can judge,” said the Pixie. “I should have a shot at it, if I were you. You’ll get the criticism, anyway, and then you’ll know where you are for another time.”

“But Rhoda and I won’t be here another year,” Betty pointed out. “I don’t make much difference one way or the other, but we depend on Rhoda. Miss Deane really doesn’t know much! Nothing like so much as Rhoda and Jen Robins do. The school may not be able to send in teams another year.”

“So you’d like to do as well as you can this time. I should have a try. But you must pick your teams carefully, and be quite firm about it,” the Pixie warned them. “If you go putting in head girls or form captains or seniors just because you feel you have to, you’ll ruin your chances.”

The girls laughed. But Rhoda grew serious at once. “It will be a horrid job for somebody. I don’t envy the one who has to choose the team. Those who get left out will feel so awfully bad.”

“*You’ll* have to choose them, of course,” the Pixie told her instantly. “There isn’t any one else who can. Your Head can’t; she’ll want to leave it to you. And you can do it better than Miss Deane.”

“I? Oh, I couldn’t!” Rhoda cried in dismay.

“It would be awfully hard on her,” Betty ventured.

“Well, look here!” the Pixie spoke with energy. “Miss Maitland must choose; but you must tell her first who are to be in the team. See? The girls needn’t know, of course! But you must prompt gently in the background. There’s nothing else for it. You’ll have to be very tactful.”

The girls laughed. She went on vigorously, “I shall tell Miss Maitland you’re to enter for the competition, and that she’s to consult you privately, and then to choose the teams. But give the girls warning, so that they’ll work hard. Tell them everybody’s to practise, and in a fortnight you’ll pick the teams. Then every one will have had a fair chance. You must be very firm, and only send in your best dancers, if you want to do anything worth while.”

“Teesa’s just the kind who will expect to be chosen,” Betty said anxiously. “And she hasn’t worked half so well as some of the others.”

“She’s no good,” Rhoda said indignantly. “She’s lumpy and heavy, and she doesn’t try. She’s got no spring in her!”

“Then leave her out, for goodness’ sake, or she’ll spoil your chances,” the Pixie said earnestly.

“I think it isn’t that she can’t but that she won’t,” Betty remarked. “She always has looked down on country-dancing, and thought it rather childish and silly. She daren’t say so now, because the whole school’s getting so keen, and Teesa has to be popular! But the feeling’s still there, I believe.”

“And it shows in her dancing,” Rhoda wailed. “I want to shake her often. She sets, and runs, and skips, in an affected condescending way, as if she were doing it to amuse the children.”

“Or to please us,” Betty added. “She never lets herself go. Even to-night——”

“I saw her,” the Pixie sparkled. “A good-looking girl with brown curls, in a pink frock? I know! She was the one I really meant when I told them they were stiff. So ladylike!—no, like a big doll, she was, really. My dears, *don't* let her get herself into your team! Is she so awfully important?” anxiously.

“She thinks she is,” Rhoda said, laughing.

“Well, you've no chance at all if she's in your team, unless she pulls herself together and changes her style entirely,” the Pixie said ruthlessly. “You'll have to be really firm, you know!”

CHAPTER XX

TEESA'S CHOICE

"I'd like a camera, of course," Teesa acknowledged, when the subject of Mr. Carr's offer was being discussed by the seniors around the fire next evening. "But if I may ask for anything I choose, and if we're really going in for that competition in Stonecliffe, I shall have shoes."

"Shoes? Teesa Courtney, you can't ask Mr. Carr to give you shoes!"

"I can. I'm going to, anyway. Oh, of course, I mean special dancing shoes, like Jen's and Rhoda's and Miss Deane's. They're so very extra special, and so expensive, that Mother will never let me have them in an ordinary way. And I can't afford to buy them for myself. But if Mr. Carr wants to give me something, then I shall ask for what I really want. I could dance twice as well in light proper shoes, like Rhoda's."

There was a moment's silence around the fire. Teesa's craving for dancing shoes was well known. Ever since Rhoda, coming back for the autumn term, had produced her gym shoes, and the surprised school had seen that they were exactly the same as those they had admired all the summer term when Miss Deane took part in the folk-dancing, Teesa had craved and teased to be allowed to have a pair. Rhoda's explanation that they were "the thing" for country-dancing, and that "everybody in London wore them, all the real folk-dance people," had whetted Teesa's desire; plimsolls, which were good enough for the rest of the girls, no longer satisfied her.

It was news to the seniors, however, that she considered her bad dancing due to plimsolls. But that, she explained, was the case. "I loathe plimsolls! The very idea of them for dancing is awful. I don't see how anybody can ever dance well in them; I know I never could!"

"Lots of people seem able to," Rhoda said sharply. "Betty and the others are tons better than you, even in plimsolls. I only happen to have shoes because I'd seen them used in town, and Mother gave me a pair for my birthday."

"The kids dance quite well in plims, Teesa," Fanny ventured. "Wouldn't you rather have a ripping camera?"

"Jen Robins didn't have proper shoes till after she'd been to Cheltenham," Betty suggested. "But she seemed to get on all right."

But Teesa's mind was made up, and no argument could move her. "I'm positive certain I could dance better in proper shoes. And if we're going in for the competition it really matters," she said virtuously. "We ought to do anything we can to make our team as good as possible."

Rhoda's eyes met Betty's. "How *shall* we ever make her see she isn't going to be in the team?" said Rhoda's anguished look. "She isn't half good enough! And she won't believe it!"

Betty's only reply was a helpless shake of her head, as she turned to gaze anxiously into the fire.

"I always feel a lump in plims," Teesa added. "I've never once felt light and dancy in the horrid things yet. I *know* I shall feel different in light dainty shoes!"

"If Teesa thinks hard enough that she's going to dance beautifully in proper shoes, do you suppose she will?" Betty pondered, as she and Rhoda, went upstairs to bed together. "Will her belief in the shoes really affect her dancing?"

“Not a scrap! I don’t believe it,” Rhoda said ruthlessly. “If she’s lumpy in plimsolls, she’ll be lumpy in shoes. I don’t expect there’ll be any improvement in her dancing.”

“It will be rather a shock to her,” Betty remarked.

“She’ll say she is better,” Rhoda prophesied. “But that won’t convince Miss Deane and Miss Maitland.”

The news of Teesa’s choice was not received cordially by Miss Maitland and Mrs. Thorburn, who both tried to convince her that she was being foolish. Teesa’s suggestion that she ought to ask for shoes for the sake of the competition roused Miss Maitland to a sharp reprimand.

“You aren’t chosen for the team yet. From all I’ve seen of your dancing, you aren’t very likely to be in it. Don’t talk as if you thought we couldn’t do without you, Teesa.”

“I’m a senior, and one of the heads of the school,” Teesa pointed out, in pained astonishment.

Miss Maitland looked at her gravely and rather sadly. “My dear child, you seem sometimes to have less sense and less understanding than the youngest of the juniors.”

Teesa, sorely wounded, went to pour out her woes to Fanny and Vera; and reluctantly Miss Maitland decided to let her have her way, after talking the matter over with Mrs. Thorburn and Miss Deane.

“I don’t believe for one moment the shoes will help her dancing, except in the way that she will believe it is easier to dance in them,” said Miss Deane.

“Oh, let her have them!” said Sheila Thorburn. “If she still fails to get into the team, even with swanky shoes, it will do her good. It may be a real lesson to her.”

So Teesa was bidden to write a note to Mr. Carr, giving all the details with regard to the shoes, and the address of the makers in London, which Rhoda was able to supply.

She did not dance much while she waited for the shoes to come. “I’ll join in when I have my shoes,” she said, more than once. “I can’t bear plimsolls now. And it isn’t worth while. I shall get on twice as well when I have them.”

“You’d get on twice as well when they come if you’d practise now,” Rhoda told her sharply.

“Rhoda, is Jen Robins going to send in her girls from Tin Town for the competition?” asked Tickle, tying her plimsolls with an emphatic jerk in preparation for a junior practice. She and Margot, Sara and Babbles were certainties for the junior team and they knew it. They danced together so well that they were to do “Hey, Boys,” as their own choice, the junior set dances being “The Ribbon Dance” and “Goddesses.”

As Teesa, with an indignant shrug of her shoulders and a sharp retort to Rhoda—“You talk as if *you* were going to choose the teams! You think no end of yourself!”—stalked away to join her friends, Tickle added, tying her second shoe still more emphatically, “Teesa doesn’t like you, Rhoda. She’s only bluffing. I’ll tell you something, shall I? She’s afraid you *are* going to choose the teams; by telling Miss Deane who’s to be in them, of course. I heard Teesa and Fanny and Vera talking about it, and Teesa said: ‘They’ll consult Rhoda; I know they will. And she’ll turn me down because she doesn’t like me. It’s rottenly unfair.’ That’s what she’s afraid of. So she daren’t say what she really thinks, for fear you’ll leave her out. She’s crazy to be in the team. And she knows she isn’t good enough.”

“Oh, Tickle, what rot!” Margot cried indignantly. “As if Rhoda would do that! She’s sporting!”

“I know that, idjit,” Tickle said coldly. “But Teesa isn’t. It’s what she’d do herself.”

“Oh, Teesa would, of course! But——”

“And so she thinks Rhoda would do it too. People always expect other people to be like they are themselves,” said the youngest girl calmly.

Rhoda, who had listened in dismay, her face very troubled and indignant, smothered a laugh at this. “Tickles, you absurd infant! It’s true, of course, but how did you find that out?”

“Well, they do, don’t they, Rhoda? If a girl’s a sneak, she expects other girls to be sneaky too.”

“Find your ribbons and come along!” Rhoda said sharply. “And don’t trouble yourself about me and Teesa. Remember your ‘last time,’ and don’t make a mess of the finish and spoil your dance. If any of you children lose your heads, you’ll be sorry for it afterwards.”

“But is Jen sending in teams, Rhoda?” Tickles asked again, when they were resting breathlessly after “Goddesses.”

“I don’t know, kid. We haven’t asked her about the competition. Why?”

“‘Cause if she isn’t you could ask her to pull us to pieces. She might see wrong things that you wouldn’t notice. Not because you wouldn’t know they were wrong,” Tickles added hastily. “I don’t mean that, Rhoda. But she wouldn’t be so used to us, don’t you see? Don’t you think it would help?”

“She’d be fresher and more able to judge. Yes, I see the point, and it would be jolly to have her criticism,” Rhoda agreed. “We could ask her.”

“Only if she isn’t sending in teams, though,” Margot said hastily. “She couldn’t coach us if we were going to try against her girls.”

“It wouldn’t be sporting of us to ask her,” Tickles said hurriedly. “She might not like to say ‘no,’ and yet it wouldn’t be fair to her own team if she coached us.”

Rhoda put this point of view before the other seniors that night, when they met for the half-hour round the fire which was their privilege after supper.

“Well, of course, she won’t help us if she’s got teams of her own,” Teesa said at once.

“We couldn’t ask her,” Betty supplemented. “But there’d be no harm in asking if she’s competing. She has been teaching her girls again for the last two or three weeks, and they knew these dances last summer. They’d only need to rub them up.”

“They were wrong on lots of points, though. Rhoda said so; don’t you remember?” Vera remarked.

“But she’d soon get those little things right, and their dancing was always good,” Rhoda said generously. “If they beat us, we’ll have to remember they’ve been at it for six months longer than we have.”

“Girls like us ought to beat Tin Town and village kids easily,” said Teesa. “They can’t expect to dance as well as we shall do.”

“With our beautiful shoes!” murmured Edna, the humorist of the Sixth.

Fanny heard and glared at her. There was a smothered giggle from another corner.

Rhoda hurled a cushion at Edna, and hastily took up Teesa’s attention by saying argumentatively, “I don’t see that at all. Of course, by ‘girls like us’ you mean educated and musical, and all that. But I’ve seen East End club children dance in London, and they were topping; well, I mean, simply beautiful; perfect dancers! I don’t think there’s much in that idea, Teesa.”

“You wouldn’t, of course,” Teesa said curtly.

Rhoda and Betty looked at one another, and Tickles’s unconscious psychology came into Rhoda’s mind. “People always expect other people to be like they are themselves.”

“Teesa *is* expecting me to leave her out of the team out of sheer spite! It’s hateful! Oh, I do hope she’ll dance better when she gets her shoes, so that we can put her in!” she thought. “If she’s left out, in spite of having her shoes, there’ll be a fearful explosion!”

With Miss Maitland’s permission, Rhoda and Betty rang up Jen the next morning and put their question. “Hello, Jenny-Wren! I say! Are you sending in teams for the Stonecliffe Festival?”

“Yes, rather! The kids are awfully keen. Of course we’re going to try, though we’re quite prepared to be badly squashed. But we’ll get criticised, anyway, and that’s always worth while. You’re going in too, aren’t you?”

“We’re thinking of it. We expect you to beat us, though. Cheers! We’re glad you’re going in. It will be rather fun. Good luck to you, and to us too!” and Rhoda and Betty turned away.

“So that’s that!” said Rhoda. “We’re up against her teams as well as the Stonecliffe crowd. I’m glad, though. It will be more thrilling to know one of the other teams. And Jen’s will be worth competing with. We don’t know anything about the Stonecliffe people; they may be good, or they may be very bad. But we know the Tin Town girls are good. So now we’ll buck up and beat them, if we can!”

“We’ll need our very best team to do it,” said Betty doubtfully. “And we can’t ask help from Jen now.”

“Rather not! Oh, we’ve got to be so good that if they win they’ll feel it was really worth while beating *us*!” said Rhoda hopefully. “But we can’t have Teesa in the team, shoes or no shoes!”

CHAPTER XXI

A SPORTING OFFER

“Well, Teesa, your shoes are certainly very neat and pretty,” Miss Maitland remarked, at the close of a practice a few days later. “But I can’t honestly say I see much improvement in your dancing, my dear.”

Teesa’s face fell grievously. “I feel much more like dancing, Miss Maitland. My feet feel ever so light and jolly. It *must* look better too!”

“I can’t say I see any sign of it yet,” the head mistress said ruthlessly. “I don’t mean to be unkind, my dear girl, but my criticism of your dancing at present would be that you are thinking altogether too much about your feet.”

“But one must think of them!” Teesa argued in astonishment.

“I understand rather that one must *not*! You’ll have to be less affected and self-conscious before you’ll be a good dancer,” and Miss Maitland left her to think this over.

It was a criticism for which it was impossible to blame Rhoda, much as Teesa would have liked to do so. Rhoda had been dancing all the time while Miss Maitland had been watching; the opinion was clearly the head mistress’s own.

Teesa, much distressed, waited and thought the matter over for a day or two, and then, after a couple of practices, seized a chance to speak to Miss Deane privately.

“Miss Deane, you’ll let me go to Stonecliffe, won’t you?”

Miss Deane saw the real anxiety which lay behind the casual question, and was sorry for the girl. After all Teesa’s boasting, and especially considering her trust in her new shoes, it would be a serious blow to her pride and to her prestige in the school if she were left out of the team. But, just because it would be such a shock to her, it might do her good.

Miss Deane answered bluntly, “To dance, do you mean? I’m very much afraid not. We haven’t picked the senior team definitely yet, but you are far from being one of the best dancers. Your step is bad, your setting isn’t right, and your weight and balance are very often wrong. You need to work really hard to correct faults like those; it’s not a matter of shoes at all! Rhoda has tried to help you, but you won’t take it from her. Since you’ve asked me, I can only tell you that I, personally, feel it would pull down the level of the team to have you in it, Teesa. We have better dancers than you; and for the sake of the school we must, of course, send in only our best.”

“I have tried!” Teesa cried vehemently.

“For the last few days, perhaps. But that isn’t nearly enough. You were very slack before. You must remember that the school, as a whole, has been dancing for six months, while you have only taken any real interest in the dancing during the last few weeks. There’s a lot of hard work behind the good dancing of Betty and Edna and Doris and Violet, and several others.”

“Doris is a great heavy lump!” Teesa cried wrathfully.

“Oh, not when she’s dancing! She’s beautifully light, and moves easily, though she is so stout,” Miss Deane said at once. “You are stiff and tense and jerky. And, though you don’t like me to say it, you’re affected, my dear Teesa.”

Very much upset, Teesa went gloomily away. In her cubicle, she kicked her dainty black slippers into a corner. “I wish I’d never got you horrid things! If I’m left out, the girls will all

shriek with laughing at me, because I took the trouble to get proper shoes and still can't get into the team! I wish I hadn't got them!"

That evening Jen rang up the school, and begged to be allowed to speak to Rhoda. "I say, when you asked the other day if we were going in for the competition, what were you after really? Did you only want to know? Or was there something else?"

Rhoda laughed. "If you hadn't been sending in a team, we were going to beg you to criticise ours. Tickles suggested it; not, she explained carefully, because they aren't satisfied with Miss Deane and me, but because you wouldn't know us so well and you'd see things we might miss. *I* feel, too, that you'll have got hold of finishing touches that I don't know; I was going to beg you to pull us to pieces. But, of course, you can't. How are your girls getting on?"

"Not too bad. The kiddies are much better. *We* have a mixed children's team!" said Jen haughtily. "*I* am able to show boys and girls dancing together!"

"Oh, swank!" Rhoda laughed. "We can't manage that! I'm so glad your boys are rising to the occasion."

"They're frightfully keen. But, I say, Rhoda, I guessed that was what you were after. I've been thinking it over *hard*, and I'd like to help your crowd, if you'll let me. I couldn't offer, for fear of seeming to butt in on your job; but if you'd meant to ask me, then I'd like to do what I can. Could your teams come over here one afternoon? I'll tell them anything I can."

"But, Jen Robins! What about your own girls? It isn't fair to them! We'd never have dreamed of asking you!" cried Rhoda, astounded.

"I can't see that it would be fair *not* to help, if you really want it. It's frightfully difficult to know what's right, but I have thought about it a lot," Jen explained, "and it seems to me it would be perfectly piggish of me to refuse to help another team, if they ask me. I know you didn't ask, but you want me to. It's just an accident that I've had chances no one else about here has had. I can't keep what I know just for my own lot. It gives them an unfair advantage, which is quite accidental; don't you see that? Anyway, I know if I don't help you, and we're first, I'm going to feel that I haven't played the game and it wasn't a fair win. I should feel utterly mean and ashamed. Once I realised that, I decided to help anybody who asked me."

"It's tremendously sporting of you," Rhoda said gravely. "I'll have to think all that over carefully, Jenny-Wren. I hadn't gone as far as that. Betty and I just felt that we couldn't ask you, if you had a team of your own."

"You couldn't, of course. But I've got to offer. Look here, Rhoda! You want the best team to win?"

"Of course. I hope we're sporting."

"Then they've got to start even, without special advantages to any of them. You come and see my girls and kiddies, and tell me any points you can; and I'll do the same for yours. Then the crowd that dances best will win."

"It's far jollier like that, of course," Rhoda said warmly. "It's jolly decent of you. I hadn't seen it that way."

"Don't you see," Jen argued, "it has to depend on the girls themselves? If they won't learn, or if they lose their heads and get stage-fright, it doesn't matter how well they've been taught? I may tell mine everything I know, and they may be so nervy that they'll forget it all when the time comes! I shall howl with rage if they do, I know; but I won't be able to help them. *I* can't make them win; and you can't make Rocklands win! So we may as well give them all the help we can, for either lot may go and disgrace us when the time comes."

Rhoda laughed and agreed. “We’ll simply love to come over to you to be criticised. And if you’ll let us see your girls, it will help us too. I say, Jen! There’s one thing you can do that will be a real help—a huge help! Miss Maitland was going to ask you to come over on purpose, till we heard about your team; then she said we’d better not tease you.”

“It won’t be teasing,” said Jen. “Right-o! I’ll do it. What is it, by the way?”

“If you’re willing, we’ll bring over ten seniors; we only need eight, of course. Our own choice is ‘Boatman.’ Matey wants you to write down the names of the eight you think best, and the two who would be the best as reserves, and send the result to Miss Deane. They’re awfully worried over choosing the team; we have one or two who are fearfully keen to be in it, but who aren’t really good enough, and we’ve got to leave them out. It would make things easier if they knew you had helped to choose.”

“I see,” Jen said soberly. “I’ll do it, Rhoda. But it’s a job I don’t like; I hated choosing my own team. I’ve done it now, and they were all very nice about it; but I felt bad when I had to tell some of the poor kids they weren’t good enough. If you’re having difficulties, I’ll be glad to help.”

“We are,” Rhoda acknowledged. “I’d better not mention names; then you can really judge as an outsider. Just tell us which are the eight best seniors; the juniors are chosen already.”

“Tickles, I suppose?” Jen asked laughing. “She’s so keen, and a jolly little dancer.”

“She’s first man in ‘Goddesses’; and she and Margot, and Sara and Babbles are doing ‘Hey, Boys.’ They do it beautifully, Jen.”

“Jolly fine! My kiddies are doing ‘Paper,’ and the girls have chosen ‘Sticks.’”

“‘Sticks’ and ‘Paper!’ It sounds Camp-Firey,” Rhoda said laughing.

“I’ll bet sixpence Teesa is the difficulty!” Jen said to herself, as she turned away.

“I *say!* How decent!” was the verdict of the seniors, when Jen’s invitation was made known.

“It’s a weird way to look at things, though,” said Teesa doubtfully. “It’s all right for us, but if I were in Jen’s team I don’t know how I’d feel about it.”

“I know how you’d feel,” Rhoda said promptly. “I’d probably feel just the same—annoyed and surprised at first, because Jen wouldn’t keep everything for us. I wouldn’t understand till she explained. Then I hope I’d see it, and feel that she was right.”

“I think, if I were in Jen’s team and had been taught by her, I’d feel anything she did was right,” Betty observed. “I might not understand, because sometimes Jen seems a bit grown-up. But I guess her team are so keen on her by this time, that they’ll put up with anything she likes to do and feel she must be right.”

“In a sense, it is a grown-up way of looking at things,” Rhoda agreed. “It’s understanding, and all-round, and looking right to the end; that’s what I mean by grown-up. Jen is like that, of course. Perhaps it’s with being ill. Jen looks all round and through things, and sees how they’re going to work out. She would feel her crowd had won unfairly if she hadn’t shared all she knows with us. But none of us saw that. We hadn’t got nearly so far as that. Besides,” she added laughing, “it’s *folk* dancing! Folk means for everybody. Jen’s got the folk feeling right inside her, and so she has to share.”

CHAPTER XXII

JEN'S VERDICT

"You Rocklands people will have an unfair advantage, after all!" Jen greeted Rhoda and Betty and Teesa laughingly, in the crowded back kitchen at the Grange. "Don't you see? Rhoda's going to dance with her team, and if she sees anybody going to pieces she can whisper 'siding' or 'lines' or 'arches,' and pull them up. I'm not allowed to dance with mine yet, so the poor little things have got to depend on themselves."

"Well, shall I drop out of ours? There are enough without me," Rhoda began.

"Don't be an idiot! I was only ragging. Of course you've got to be in it, for the sake of the school. Tuck yourselves into corners, or sit on the dresser, while my crowd dance; and please watch carefully and tell me how to improve them! Then we'll do the same for you."

While the rest took off their coats and hats, Betty and Rhoda together whispered a hasty private word to Jen.

"Jen, *dear!* Keep one eye on Teesa Courtney! She's dying to be in the team, and we don't think she's good enough, and she's got new shoes on purpose and thinks she dances heaps better in them—and she *doesn't!* Do tell us what you think of her!"

Jen nodded, a gleam of understanding in her eyes, her face growing resolute. She glanced at the neat black shoes Teesa was slipping on with conscious pride. "I heard about them, of course. Poor kid! Right-o, Rhoda! You *are* in a hole, sure enough! I'll keep an eye on her."

"Say she's good enough, if you honestly can, Jenny-Wren," Betty begged. "She'll be awfully cut up if she's left out. She's been head girl, you know. She'll feel it a fearful slur on her; it will be a real blow."

"Sorry! She's an idiot to feel like that. But I can't say she's good if she isn't," Jen said briefly.

Perched in a row on the old dresser, in 'the front row of the gallery,' Rhoda and Betty and Teesa watched the village and Tin Town teams closely, but found little to criticise. The girls and children danced well and had been carefully taught; they made no mistakes and they did not lose their heads.

At the end, Jen came up to Rhoda. "Well? I've my own opinion about that performance, but I'd like to hear yours before I say anything about it."

"It's jolly good," Rhoda said doubtfully. "But there's something; I don't know what it is; I can't put it into words. But I'm not quite satisfied. Mind you, it's tons better than we shall do; I'm not measuring it by our dancing, or I'd say it was perfect."

Jen laughed. "You'd better not! I'll lose all respect for your opinion if you say it's perfect. But you've seen better, and so have I. You're measuring it by the best you've seen, of course. My dear, it's dull! It's correct but dull. I know any judge would say so. But how can I make them dance? I've told them till I'm tired. They dance that first figure of 'Sticks' as if the ground were sticky! There's no life in them. I think perhaps I could work them up a bit if I could go in and dance with them, but Daddy won't hear of it this side of Christmas. I *know* they're dull! I've told them they're a set of sticks and I'd like to pick them all up and shake them, but they only giggle."

"It must be because they've chosen 'Picking up Sticks.' The dance has got on their minds and turned their step sticky," Teesa said, laughing. "That is what's wrong with them, of

course. I don't *think* we're sticky!" and she swung her feet and eyed her shoes complacently. The discomfort of Miss Deane's verdict had passed off and she was feeling more hopeful.

"Don't you think perhaps the Tin Towners were nervous of us, Jen?" Betty suggested.

"Of course they were! Scared stiff! They know you're going in too. But that's no excuse; and it's certainly no comfort. If they're nervous of you, what will they be at Stonecliffe?"

"Perhaps they'll have got over it by then," Rhoda said consolingly.

"I doubt it. Now let's see whether you're scared of us!"

The schoolgirls laughed, and eight went out into the middle of the room to dance "Newcastle," while Jen changed the record and wound up the gramophone.

"Aren't you going in, Rhoda?" cried Tickle and Margot, crouching on the floor at the foot of the dresser.

"I'll go in the second lot. We haven't quite decided on our eight yet, you know." Rhoda turned to Jen, and spoke in an undertone. "You'll remember to put down the names of those you think best?"

Jen nodded. "I've a pencil here. They aren't nervous, but they aren't quite natural, my dear chap. That's their fault. *Look* at Teesa's arm in that arch! That's affected, if you like. She's trying to be as pretty as she can!"

"I know," Rhoda groaned. "She can't—or won't—believe it. If only she could see herself! How about Betty, Jen? She's very certain of her place."

"I can see that. She's a little stiff and shy; very Betty-ish! But she's quite good. Now let's have the second set!" as the Tin Town girls and all the juniors clapped wildly. "Four of you will have to dance again. You four who haven't danced had better choose the places you like best; it's rather perilous to change positions in 'Newcastle!'"

"Oh, that's all right!" Rhoda said quickly. "We really do know it. We can take any place. Where would you like us to go?"

"Oh, good! That's doing the thing properly! You deserve to win the cup, if you can do it anywhere! *We* can't!" Jen admitted laughing. "I haven't ventured on *that!* Then will Teesa, Doris, Betty and Vera please dance again, with the new four?"

"What does that mean?" Doris asked curiously. "That we're so good that you want to see us again?"

"That the others are too hopeless?" laughed Teesa, flushed and pleased, and much relieved to be chosen.

"Or that you think we need the most practice?" asked cautious Betty.

"For different reasons, I want to see you four again," Jen retorted. "Ready?"

She scribbled for a moment at the end of the dance, then asked to see the sets of four do "Hey, Boys," and again made a few notes. When the girls' own choice, "The Boatman," had been danced, she gave her verdict.

"I don't claim to be a really good judge, but I consider you've a very good chance of doing well. One or two of you aren't quite natural, and that may tell against you. Teesa and Fanny, you try too hard to dance nicely; you ought to think more of enjoying the dance itself. At present any one can see you're thinking of your movements too much. And I hope you won't mind my saying this, but it seems to me you *all* look too worried and careworn! I believe it's the kind of thing that might lose you marks. Couldn't you smile a little now and then?"

A ripple of guilty laughter ran round the Rocklands girls. The juniors giggled, and, when their turn came to dance, nudged one another and whispered: "Smile, can't you? Grin hard!"

"I'm grinning like a Cheshire cat," Betty heard Margot retort.

“Yes, don’t overdo it!” Jen heard too, and spoke warningly as they honoured and paused; and there was another giggle from the team.

“Jen, it is true; and you’re a sport and a perfect angel to have pointed it out to us,” Rhoda said warmly. “We’ll remember, and try to look a bit happier. I’m sure it’s a good point.”

“I’m sure it is too. There are one or two other little things I don’t quite like,” and Jen gave some rapid technical criticism in an undertone to Rhoda. “I may be wrong, but you can think over these points.”

“No, I think you’re right. We’re more than obliged, and we think it’s tremendously sporting of you to help us so much,” Rhoda said warmly. “Now we must be getting home, or we shan’t get in before dark.”

“Yes, you ought to go. But I think—yes, I think I’ll say it! Girls! I want to say this! We all hope the best team will win. And if the moor can beat Stonecliffe town, we won’t mind too much whether it’s Tin Town or Rocklands that gets the cup! At the request of Miss Maitland and Miss Deane, I’ve written down the names of those I should choose for the team if I were asked. They want to know if my opinion agrees with theirs. I don’t know whom they meant to choose, of course, but I’ve done my best to pick out the most suitable girls, and I hope it will help. It’s always horribly difficult to choose a team. But you know that only eight are wanted. I’m quite sure those who are left out will be sports and wish the rest luck. You all want the school to win, and if you can help it to win by staying out better than by dancing, you’ll be glad to do it. Betty, this is the list; will you give it to Miss Maitland?” and she gave the sealed note to the head girl.

“Oh, won’t you tell us?” cried Teesa anxiously.

“Shouldn’t think of it,” Jen said firmly. “Your people may not agree with me. It doesn’t really matter whom I choose. Now good-bye, all of you! You’re jolly good, and your juniors are ripping, and I shouldn’t wonder if you beat us. But whoever wins, it will be fun to go in. And we shall see the Stonecliffe people.”

Even now, Jen did not feel she had quite done her duty, however. With an innate wish to help in every way she could, and aware of difficulties ahead at the school, thanks to Rhoda’s warning, she took one more step to try to smooth the way. While the rest of the girls were changing their shoes, Jen drew Teesa out of the big back kitchen for a private word. All afternoon her eyes had been on Teesa, while not missing anything else that was going on. She had seen the delighted relief with which Teesa found herself chosen to dance a second time, and knew the incident had raised false hopes, which it was not fair to allow the girl to carry away.

“I say, Teesa, you won’t be too awfully cut up if you aren’t in the team, will you?” she asked bluntly.

Teesa stared at her, and gasped. This was like a plunge in cold water. “I—why, I do want to be in it,” she admitted, and flushed suddenly. “Have you left me out?” she demanded sharply. “But you made me dance again?”

“I wanted to see if I couldn’t possibly pass you as good enough,” Jen said ruthlessly. “I was giving you a second chance. That didn’t apply to all the four. I’d missed one point with Betty; I wanted to see her ‘cast,’ and it was quite good. And Doris had made a slip; I wanted to see if she’d repeat it, but she didn’t, so that was all right. But I was looking to see if you could possibly be good enough, and I decided not. Of course, Miss Maitland may decide otherwise, but I feel you wouldn’t be any help to the team. I thought it was only fair to tell

you. You won't mind too much, will you? So long as the school does well, what does it matter who are the actual team? You've had all the fun of the dancing, and that's the great thing."

That was not Teesa's attitude at all, however. Her face had fallen grievously as she understood how little reason there had been for her new hopes. She looked almost white as she said desperately, "I've been feeling so much happier since I had these shoes that I thought I must be dancing better."

"I'm sure you are dancing better," Jen said warmly. "But you haven't had long enough; you need to practise a lot in the new shoes—don't you see? You haven't had time. And you need to be more natural, Teesa. Try to make every movement natural. By next year I'm sure you'll be in the team!"

But Teesa knew that by next year she would no longer be at school. She was very downcast and silent as she joined the others for the walk home across the moor, and tramped ahead alone, not speaking even to Vera or Fanny, struggling hard to keep back her tears as her mind faced the picture—horrible to her—of the team setting out for Stonecliffe,—Betty, Rhoda, Fanny, Vera, Doris, all of them—and she, Teesa Courtney, ex-head girl, left at home with the unimportant rest of the school.

"They'll all laugh because of those wretched shoes, too," she thought miserably, with no hope that Miss Maitland would ignore Jen's advice, and no possibility left of blaming Rhoda. "I wish I'd never taken up the silly dancing! I never was keen; but everybody was doing it, so I felt I had to. I never dreamt of anything so awful as this happening!"

CHAPTER XXIII

HEAD GIRL AND HEAD MISTRESS

As the crowd of girls drew near to Rocklands, Tickles and Margot and Sara charged down upon the seniors. “Betty! Rhoda! Couldn’t we have just a peep into Rena’s cave? We haven’t been there for weeks. We want to see if any snow gets in in the winter.”

“Just one peep, Betty!” Tickles pleaded. “It won’t take half a second!”

“Because we danced so beautifully!” Babbles added coaxingly.

Rhoda laughed. “You silly infants! But we’re in good time, Bets?”

“Yes, there’s time, if they really want to go,” Betty assented.

The juniors went off up the path like rabbits, and most of the elder girls followed. Even Teesa went listlessly; but she had realised that she was betraying her feelings too plainly and that it was time to conceal her chagrin.

Rhoda was following too when Betty touched her arm. “Rho, stay and speak to me. I don’t want the rest to hear. Do you think Jen has put Teesa out of the team?”

“Sure she has. And Matey will feel the same. Miss Deane does already. Teesa hasn’t an earthly chance of being in the team this year. My dear chap, she isn’t beginning to be good enough.”

“I was afraid of that. But she’ll feel awfully bad. Do you suppose they’ll want me in it, Rhoda?”

“I want you! Yes, I think they will,” Rhoda said frankly. “I asked Jen about you, and she said you were very good. I’m sure you’ll be in, Bets.”

“Well, could you do without me?” Betty asked anxiously. “There are eight good people without me, aren’t there, Rhoda?”

Rhoda stared at her. “Just eight, I should say. But what’s up, Betty? You aren’t going to funk the show, are you?”

Betty seized this excuse eagerly. “I felt horribly nervous when we had to dance alone before all those other girls and Jen. I should feel simply awful doing it before a crowd, in public. What I’d like would be to go with you and watch you dance. I’m not really needed, am I, Rho?”

Rhoda turned and, as Betty said afterwards, “looked her through and through.” “Betty, what *is* the matter with you to-day?”

“I don’t want to be in the team, if you can possibly get enough without me.”

“We could put you as reserve, in case anybody sprained her foot. But *why*? You were keen enough before.”

“I hadn’t danced with an audience looking on and criticising till to-day. I really did feel nervy, Rho.”

“On your honour, is that your only reason?” Rhoda demanded, that straight steady look piercing Betty’s soul again.

Sensitive Betty coloured. “It’s one of my reasons. Don’t be horrid, Rho!”

“Is the other reason anything to do with Teesa?” Rhoda demanded, with a flash of insight, prompted by her knowledge of Betty and the sympathy of their close friendship. “*Betty!*” as the head girl grew crimson—“Are you offering to stay out so that it won’t seem so bad for Teesa?”

"I'm sure it would make it easier for her," Betty pleaded eagerly. "Rho, do try to understand! I won't funk if you really need me. The school comes first. But I don't believe you do. I'm not particularly good, only average; you can get eight good people without me. I wouldn't let you down if I were the only one you could have."

"As to that," Rhoda said grimly, "you are the only one; the only Betty! There may be other dancers, but we all want you to be in the team. No one can take your place, so don't you think it! There'll be weeping and wailing if you're left out. Betty, is Teesa at the bottom of all this?"

"I've been thinking about her," Betty said unhappily. "I'm sure Jen has told her she's too bad for the team. It's rotten for her. But if I were left out too, she wouldn't feel half so sick about it, Rhoda. She's upset because she's been head, and she feels it will be awful to be passed over; but I *am* head now, and if I were left out too, it wouldn't seem half so bad. Don't you see that?"

"Oh, I see it jolly well! I quite believe it would soothe Teesa's feelings. But I don't see why you should stay out for her sake. And I don't see why we should have to do without you just to comfort Teesa," Rhoda said disgustedly. "It's like you to think of it, of course."

"I'm going to ask Matey to leave me out," Betty's tone was relieved that she had made Rhoda understand, and quite determined. "I shall tell her I'm afraid of feeling nervy and losing my head when the time comes. I'll remind her of the one time—the one and only time!—they put me in a form play. I had only about five words to say, but I lay awake all the night before, saying them over and over; and then when the time came I stammered and stuttered and couldn't get my poor little sentence out. They never put me in again; it was my first and last appearance! Now I help to change the scenes, or turn over for the pianist, or act as dresser for people like Teesa and Vera. Matey won't be surprised if I try to get out of this show."

"Oh, but dancing in a set isn't like doing anything alone! And you don't think of yourself at all; just of the music," Rhoda argued.

"I know. I could do it, if I had to; but I'll be quite glad not to," Betty said decisively.

"I don't believe it! It's only to make things easier for Teesa. Matey will see through you; but if she doesn't I shall tell her what you're up to."

"Rhoda!" Betty said indignantly.

"Well, she ought to know. But I believe she'll guess."

"I can't tell fibs. If she guesses, as you did, I'll have to own up. But I know she'll understand. You'll be sporting and keep quiet about it, won't you, Rho?" Betty asked anxiously. "If Teesa guessed, it wouldn't be any good. I mean, she must think I'm left out because I'm not good enough for the team; everybody must think so. Or else there's no point in it. You see that, don't you?"

"It's Teesa's silly conceit you're trying to be so kind to," Rhoda stormed. "I don't see why you should worry over her!"

"I can't help your not seeing it," Betty retorted, as the juniors came racing back. "If I know Teesa's going to feel awful, and I see a plain way to take the edge off it for her, I'd be an utter rotter if I didn't do it. You can't say you really need me, so I'm not letting you down. Now lie low about it, Rho! But do be an angel, and help me to help her out!"

"Betty, the snow hadn't got into the cave at all!" Tickles cried, as the crowd charged down on the two seniors. "It was all as tidy as tidy!"

"And that's very tidy, I suppose," Betty said, laughing. "Then if you're satisfied that the cave's all right, suppose we go on?"

“And since you’re so keen on tidiness, just remember that Jen said your cast-off in ‘Goddesses’ was inclined to be untidy!” Rhoda said severely.

That evening Betty sought the head mistress and made her request. She had thought the matter over again since talking to Rhoda, and had realised that to ask to be left out of the team on the score of nervousness would not be enough. If Teesa’s pride were to be saved the shock they, and Teesa herself, all feared was in store, Betty must share her position by being judged not quite good enough for the team. There was nothing for it but a full explanation to Miss Maitland, and this was such a real ordeal to Betty’s shyness that she postponed it from hour to hour, until at bedtime, unable to face the thought of a whole night with such a burden on her mind, she brought herself to the point of speaking out.

“I don’t want to do it,” she thought unhappily. “But it’s the lesser of two evils, anyway, now that it’s got on my mind like this!”

Scarlet and stammering with nervousness, as if she had again been taking part in a hated play, she somehow managed to explain what she wanted; and told very much more by her embarrassment than she knew.

“Miss Maitland, we’re afraid Jen has told Teesa she can’t be in the Stonecliffe team, and Teesa’s feeling very bad about it. She feels it will be such a disgrace to be left out because she isn’t good enough, when she’s a senior and has been head, and always likes to be in everything. I don’t know if you meant me to be in the team, but if you did, couldn’t you leave me out too, and say I’m not good enough either? It would make Teesa feel so much better; it would be much easier for her, I’m sure. Rhoda can do without me; there are plenty of others just as good—I’m only average. And I’d very likely be nervous when the time came; you know how silly I am! So won’t you please leave me out, and say it’s because of my step, or my arms, or that I’m not reliable, or something?”

“I can’t say you’re not reliable. Nobody would believe it, if I did. You’re about the steadiest we have. I see your point, of course. But is it wise to consider Teesa so deeply?” and Miss Maitland looked thoughtful. “Wouldn’t the shock to her pride be good for her?”

“It would be very horrid for her,” Betty said earnestly. “And I honestly don’t mind being out of the team. Of course,”—and a still deeper honesty forced itself to expression, and she coloured with the effort of speech—“I’d rather you didn’t have to say I’m left out because I’m not good enough! But that’s the whole point, isn’t it, Miss Maitland? Teesa wants to feel she isn’t the only one who’s turned down. Any excuse about being nervous of dancing in a competition wouldn’t help at all.”

Miss Maitland gave her a keen look. “You have thought it over very carefully. . . . Well, Betty dear, I will let you have your way, if only because you have thought it out so thoroughly and bravely. I won’t spoil your generous plan. I would like Teesa to understand; it might be the thing that would help her most of all. But I won’t betray you. We’ll put you and Teesa as reserves, without any comment, and the girls can draw their own conclusions.”

“Thank you very much, Miss Maitland,” Betty said gratefully. “I don’t want Teesa ever to know. I only want to save her from feeling so fearfully bad.”

The head mistress laughed a little. “But sometimes it is good for people to feel bad, my dear. Then, if they have any good in them, they pull themselves together and ask why it is; and then they set to work to put things right. That’s really what ought to happen to Teesa! She needs to realise that her dancing is affected and her step is bad; then perhaps she will begin to improve. You don’t always help people most by trying to spare their feelings all the time.”

“Oh, but if I’m bad too, we can help one another to get better!” Betty said swiftly. “We can swot at steps and style together!”

“Very true; and with your help Teesa may make something of herself yet. It’s a kind thought, and very generous; a real head girl’s idea,” said the head mistress warmly.

Betty’s face lit up. No other comment could have rewarded her so thoroughly. Any words of appreciation or praise would have embarrassed her horribly. But to be a good head and to help the school were her great ambitions, as Miss Maitland knew very well.

“You won’t, of course, say anything about who is chosen for the teams until we announce the names,” the head mistress added. “We shall have a final practice on Monday evening, and Miss Deane and I will come and watch, and put up the lists of the teams afterwards. You must be as anxious as the rest till then! And you ought to be properly disappointed when you find yourself only a reserve, of course!”

Betty laughed. “I’ll remember that I don’t know anything about it. Thank you very much, Miss Maitland!”

“There’s real hope for Rocklands in this situation,” the head mistress said to herself, when Betty had gone off to bed. “I shall tell Sheila all about it; but no one else, of course. Betty is being a big help. She conquered the juniors and welded the school into one, and she has created a real feeling of unity of purpose by entering so thoroughly into this folk-dance interest. The way she always dances with the juniors has won their respect, and they will follow her as they would never have followed Teesa, who tried to rule them by authority. But there has been a division in the upper school; Teesa has always been in a sort of unconscious opposition to Betty and Rhoda. If Betty can heal the breach and find something in which she and Teesa can work together, she will really have done a big thing for the school.”

CHAPTER XXIV TEESA'S EXCUSE

"Special practice at six o'clock! That's to choose the teams," Tickles cried excitedly, at sight of the notice on the board.

Teesa came to look, and turned away quickly, her face strained and anxious.

"The junior team's a certainty," said Fanny. "I don't feel so sure about ours. Shouldn't wonder a bit if I were chucked out. As there are ten of us, two have to be either reserves or out altogether. After all, what does it matter? It's not deadly not to be in the team," and she slipped her arm round Teesa's waist.

"Oh, shut up!" Teesa's state of tension found relief in an outburst of irritation.

The girls were gathering for the practice after tea when Teesa dashed wildly into the room. "Has anybody seen my shoes? Who's hidden them?"

"Your shoes?" everybody turned to stare at her blankly.

"Can't you find them?" asked Vera unnecessarily.

"Would I be hunting for them if I could, idiot? I can't find them anywhere. Has anybody taken them? Is somebody trying to keep me out of the team?" Teesa asked stormily.

On every side Teesa met with indignant denials; in some cases also with warm sympathy. No one had seen her shoes; no one would have dreamed of touching them; nobody wanted to spoil her chance of being chosen for the team. If the shoes were really lost, just on this particular day, it was rotten luck.

"Go and hunt again, Teesa," Rhoda advised. "We'll ask Miss Deane to see the juniors first. Have you looked in your shoe-box?"

"I've looked everywhere! Some one must have hidden them," Teesa said wildly, and raced away to hunt once more.

But the shoes seemed to be hopelessly lost. She had to come without them at last; and, thoroughly upset, and unhappy in her plimsolls, she danced badly, lost her head and her position in the lines of "Newcastle," and knew she had thrown away any possible chance of a place in the competition team.

She was not needed in the other two dances; there had never been any question of that. "Hey, Boys" was for the best four only, and "Boatman" for the same couples with another added; and Teesa had never been included. She disappeared, and was nowhere to be found when the practice was over.

"It's just as well," said Rhoda ruthlessly. "She knows she made a mess of things. She can't say it's unfair if she's left out now."

"Awfully queer her shoes should disappear just at that moment," said Doris frowning. "Do you suppose anybody——"

"My dear kid, who *would*? She's lost them, that's all."

"I'm rather glad Tee did lose her shoes," said Vera thoughtfully. "Of course, I hope she'll find them again soon! Fan's helping her to hunt for them now. But I don't believe she'd have got into the team even if she'd had them; I believe Jen said she wasn't quite up to it on Saturday. Tee'd have felt awfully bad to know she wasn't considered good enough. Now, don't you see, she'll feel she wasn't good enough because she hadn't got her shoes? It gives

her a jolly good excuse. And she can say she was upset and worried, and that's why she couldn't dance, and so she wasn't chosen. I'm rather glad it happened."

"I'm not!" Rhoda said bracingly. "I'm *very* sorry! It would be better for Teesa to know she isn't good, and to have to believe it. Then perhaps she'd pull herself together and begin to work. That's what she needs."

Betty, on duty during the junior supper hour, heard the younger children discussing the event, and found that something of Vera's idea had occurred to Tickles, though in another form.

"I think Teesa lost her shoes on purpose," the youngest girl proclaimed. "She knew she couldn't get in the team, an' she lost her shoes so's she could say that was why."

"Oh, Tickles, do you think so, really?" Babbles asked wonderingly.

"You perfectly absurd infant!" Betty scolded. "Any one can see how much upset Teesa is! She won't say a word to anybody, and she's spent all evening searching for her shoes."

"Oh, she doesn't want to lose them altogether, of course! But I b'lieve she didn't want to have them for that practice," Tickles said obstinately.

This, of course, was quite absurd. Every one knew, as Betty pointed out sharply, how extremely anxious Teesa had been to get into the team, and the practice had been her last chance. To say she had lost her shoes on purpose and spoiled her chance was too silly and childish for words.

Tickles continued to say it, however, and several of the juniors agreed with her, for Teesa was not a favourite.

Betty argued and scolded, and finally told Rhoda all about it. "Aren't they little geese? I couldn't convince them Teesa hadn't done it on purpose."

Rhoda began to laugh. "What about that deep saying of Miss Tekla's—'People always expect other people to be like they are themselves!' Wasn't that it? Does Tickles mean it's what she'd have done?"

"You've got her there," Betty agreed, laughing. "I should ask her."

Tickles looked rather blank when Rhoda flung the question at her before breakfast. "Since you suspect Teesa of being utterly unsporting, do you want us to understand it's the way you'd have liked to behave yourself, by any chance?"

Tickles, scarlet and cornered, for once found herself without an answer. "I didn't mean that. I don't know. I don't understand, Rhoda. Well then, I suppose Teesa didn't lose them on purpose! But it *is* funny about her shoes, isn't it, Rhoda?"

"Very funny. But don't you go making it any funnier than it is already," Rhoda said severely. "And don't think evil of your elders and betters!"

"The lists of the teams are up!" cried Margot, from the doorway; and seniors and juniors surged together round the notice-board and forgot Teesa's troubles and Tickles's suspicions.

"Oh—Betty's out! Oh, I *say*, what a shame!" a shout went up from the juniors.

"What's that?" Rhoda pushed her way in with well-pretended indignation. "Teesa and Betty reserves! Oh, I say, why is that, old thing? But we want you in the team!"

"Oh, what rotten luck, Bets!" cried Fanny.

"She's head; she must be in the team!" Margot cried wildly.

"I call it wicked," Tickles said solemnly. "And perfectly absurd," she added, with such a good imitation of Betty's tone of the night before that there was a shout of laughter.

"Reserve, am I?" Betty said, laughing too. "I'm not surprised. Jen told me I was stiff. Shake hands on it, Teesa!" as Teesa, apprehension in her face, came slowly to join the group,

reluctant to hear her fate. "We're companions in misery. We must console one another. I hope they'll let us go to watch. We'll criticise the rest and tell them what they looked like, won't we?"

Teesa's face lit up in relief. She had never dared to hope that the second reserve would be Betty. Everybody wanted the head girl to be in the team. "Are you out, too? Oh, I say! But I wonder why? Of course, I know I danced badly yesterday, but I was upset and worried over my shoes; and I've got out of the way of plimsolls now. They felt awfully queer. I didn't expect to be in the team, since last night; but I thought you were safe enough."

Tickles looked at Rhoda. "Whether she did it on purpose or not, she's going to make an excuse of those shoes for ever and ever!" said Tickles, in an undertone. "It was lucky for her she happened to lose them, not on purpose, wasn't it, Rhoda?"

"It has given her a jolly convenient excuse," Rhoda admitted. "I wonder where on earth the wretched shoes can be? You wouldn't think they could disappear completely; but that's what seems to have happened."

"Betty only a reserve?" cried Doris, coming up. "Oh, but how simply silly! We can't go to Stonecliffe without Bets! You wanted her in the team, didn't you, Rhoda? You've said so heaps of times."

"Oh, I wanted her badly! She was the first on my list. Matey must have had a reason, I suppose, but it's hateful to have Betty left out."

Mrs. Thorburn, pausing as she crossed the hall, remarked, "There may be several good reasons why Miss Maitland thinks Betty will be more useful as a reserve. For one thing, Betty's very reliable; if any one has an accident between now and Saturday, we can fall back on Betty to take any place, and can trust her not to lose her head. A reserve has to be ready to fill in anywhere. It's far harder than to know only one's own place."

"I don't believe I could take any place," Teesa said hurriedly. "I'm not at all sure of 'Boatman.'"

"Then you aren't much use *even* as a reserve," her aunt said crushingly. "It's a very responsible position," and she passed on to her own part of the house.

"That's one way to look at it," Vera remarked.

"I shall have to break my leg on Friday night, that's all," Doris said calmly.

Rhoda laughed. "Do, dear! I hope it won't hurt much. It will rather spoil your Christmas parties, won't it?"

"H'm! Do I love Betty as much as that?"

"Couldn't you manage a little temporary twist to your ankle, that would be all right in a week?"

"Yes, that would be better. I'll have to practise, though."

"Don't be a goat!" said Betty. "Your dancing's far and away better than mine. I am stiff; I can feel it myself. Teesa and I are going to watch the rest of you hard, and learn where we're wrong, and then practise like anything next term till we get ourselves right. We'll be as good as the rest of you yet. As for—why, here's Rena!"

Rena Mackay, in her gardening tunic and breeches, and big coat and soft hat, stood in the doorway, just arrived for her morning's work, her high boots covered with mud from her tramp across the moor.

"Good-morning, all! Lisabel went down to her cave last night, and she found these. We think they must be Rhoda's. Have you been dancing in the cave?"

"Teesa's shoes!" a shout went up from the whole school.

Teesa, scarlet, went forward to claim the shoes. "They're mine. In the cave, did you say? We looked in there on Saturday night, on our way home from the Grange. I must have dropped them; I only missed them on Monday evening. Thank you very much! It was awfully stupid of me. I'm jolly glad to get them back safely."

"All's well that ends well!" Rena said cheerfully, and touched her hat in her boyish salute and turned away to go to her day's work.

"Yes, but it isn't ended, in this case," Vera remarked. "I mean, the wretched shoes have done you out of the competition, Tee. It is hard lines!"

"Can't be helped now," Teesa said shortly. "I wish Rena had found them one day sooner, of course. But I'm glad to know where they were. I was beginning to think they'd been stolen by burglars."

As Teesa went in to class, there was in her mind a vague feeling of relief. She was glad her loved shoes were safe; but she was glad also, without admitting the fact even to herself, that they had been lost just at that particular time. For in her heart she knew she had not been good enough for the team. The loss of her shoes had saved her from being openly declared a bad dancer. It was an extraordinarily convenient chance that had made her lose them just at that time. Thoughts like these were at the back of her mind, but were not clearly faced; and she would have denied them strenuously if taxed with them. She knew only that she was relieved and glad to have got through the matter so easily.

It was a decided relief to have Betty as companion reserve. No one could scoff at her for being left out of the team when the head girl was out also. It was a bit of luck Teesa had never dared to hope for.

Rhoda saw her relief, and longed to blurt out the truth. But not even for the sake of crushing Teesa's self-esteem could she risk the loss of Betty's friendship by a betrayal of her confidence. Miss Maitland saw quite clearly what was in Teesa's thoughts also; but she had given her promise to Betty and could not go back on her word. She felt much dissatisfied with the position, however.

The two reserves soon found that they were not by any means exempt from future practising. Miss Deane foresaw the possibility of illness or accident to one of her team before the competition on Saturday, and Teesa's remark about "Boatman" had reached her through Mrs. Thorburn. Between them, Rhoda and Miss Deane made sure that Teesa did know "The Boatman" before Saturday; and Betty entered into their anxiety and practised hard also. The teams both worked hard, but the reserves were worked harder still in the attempt to ensure their knowing every place in case of emergency; till Betty declared she could do "Hey, Boys" backwards, "Newcastle" blindfold, and "Boatman" in her sleep.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MOOR V. STONECLIFFE

In the highest spirits, the teams set out from Rocklands on Saturday morning, all carrying shoe-bags and all wearing white frocks under their big coats, for Rhoda's vote had been given emphatically against gym tunics for a public competition. The juniors were to dance at eleven in the morning, the seniors at three o'clock. So the trip had to be an all-day jaunt, with lunch at a tea-shop; and in spite of a certain amount of nervousness, the girls were looking forward to the outing as to a sort of winter picnic.

Betty and Teesa were included in the party, and a couple of very second-rate juniors, just in case of accidents. Doris's sympathy for Betty had not carried her quite to the length of her first kind suggestion, and so far no one had broken her leg, sprained her ankle, or developed measles.

"But there's always getting in and out of the train, and going across the tram-lines, and the streets are sure to be slippery with mud," Tickles said hopefully. "You never know what will happen. Betty might have luck yet."

"Or you might have bad luck," Vera heard her and retorted readily. "If you fall and get smothered in mud, you won't be able to appear on the platform, my dear kid." And the warning served to subdue the juniors slightly and to make them go carefully.

"I hope nobody will have an accident," Betty said warmly. "I'd very much rather look on. Ever since Miss Deane wrote to ask if people would be allowed to watch, and got that awful answer: 'All competitions will be held in public,' I've been only too thankful I wasn't in the team. I expect there'll be a huge crowd. Teesa's been to a concert in the Town Hall, and she says it's an enormous place, and holds an audience of three thousand. You people who want to dance before a crowd of that size can do it; I'll stand by the piano and find the places."

"Funker!" Rhoda said, laughing. "That's all rot, and you know it, Bets. You'd dance as well as any of us."

"Rhoda, Babs says she's going to be sick!" Margot proclaimed.

"She'd better!" Rhoda's tone struck awe into the hearts of the team, and Babbles hastily thought better of it.

However, as the girls filed nervously into the Town Hall, one burden of anxiety fled, for the great building was half empty. In their apprehension they had overlooked the fact that an audience of three thousand could not possibly be expected at eleven o'clock on a Saturday morning; the crowd might be there at the evening concert, to see the winning teams and to hear the winning choirs and soloists, but the audience of the early morning was largely composed of competitors, with a few interested friends up in the gallery.

"It's not so bad!" said Rhoda, in relief, as they took off their hats and coats, and the junior team, feeling very important and a trifle scared, changed their shoes. "It's only a lot of kids and teachers at present; you infants needn't look so squirmy. Just do the best you can and don't worry. I wonder if Jen and her crowd are here yet? They were going to drive round by the dale road."

All the school children of Stonecliffe, in charge of their teachers, seemed to be in the hall, though in reality only the chosen teams from each school were present. There were elementary school children, some in white dresses, some, to the amusement of the Rocklands

crowd, in fancy costume, with sun-bonnets and milkmaids' frocks, which they no doubt thought peculiarly appropriate for country-dancing. There were High School girls, very neat in loose green jibbabs, with gold monograms on their breasts, holding themselves aloof from the crowd; Guides in uniform, looking alert and businesslike, if a trifle superior; a set of club girls in gay cretonne frocks, with their heads swathed in brilliant handkerchiefs—"the Wraggle-Taggle Gipsies, oh!" as Margot named them at once; secondary school girls, in blue gym suits.

"I like the green crowd best," Sara murmured. "But they don't half think a lot of themselves!"

"The dressed-up ones look simply silly," Tickles said scornfully. "I'm glad we've got on our own clothes, anyway. Oh, look! Here's a lot dressed up as boys! How mad!" as a rather self-conscious school trooped in, half of them wearing pink frocks with white fichus and muslin aprons, and wreaths of pink roses on their very-much-curled hair, the rest in green smocks and big hats.

Tickles chuckled. "I'd like to see those hats go down the middle in the Ribbon Dance! I wonder how they're stuck on?"

"They'll have to do 'Goddesses' like this!" and Margot clutched her head wildly and pretended to cast off. "Those really are the limit! Where's the judge? I should think he'd tell them to go and take them off."

"It's a Her. A She, I mean. Well, a lady then!" Babbles explained with difficulty. "She's going to sit at that table, in the corner of the platform."

"I say, kids, do you know you come on first?" Rhoda had bought a programme, and came up to the juniors anxiously. "It's rather hard on you. You won't go and lose your heads, or do anything silly, I hope? Well, see here! I'm not making it up; 'Rocklands School, Junior Team.' I suppose that does mean you?"

Startled and subdued, the junior team admitted that it probably did; and the dancers looked at one another in consternation.

"How beastly rotten! Fancy going first!" wailed Sara. "Can't you make them change it, Rhoda?"

"I feel I'm going to be sick!" gasped Babbles.

"Say—say we haven't arrived yet, Rhoda! Say we haven't had time to change! We'll put our shoes on again in a second!" Margot begged wildly.

"I think it's rather nice to be first," said Tickles, independent as usual. "We'll get it over, and then we'll be able to watch all the gipsies and ploughboys and fairies and people."

"Not *fairies*, Tickles! 'Tisn't as bad as all that!" Babs giggled, forgetting her desire to be sick.

"Don't be a set of silly goats!" Rhoda said forcefully. "All you've got to do is to run up there and dance 'The Ribbon' and 'Goddesses,' as if you were in the schoolroom at home. You won't think of the crowd once the music starts."

"'Rocklands School, Junior Team,' " called a man's voice from the platform.

"Go on! Good luck to you! It will all be over in three minutes, like having gas at the dentist's," said Rhoda cheerfully.

With a scared look at her, the juniors grabbed their ribbons and pushed their way through the crowd.

"They're stiff with fright!" Rhoda groaned. "If they go on looking like that, they're done for."

Betty took decisive action. Slipping out at the end of her row, she raced round the back of the hall, and met the trembling team at the platform steps.

“Smile, every one of you! You look like a funeral!” she hissed. “Rhoda’s saying awful things about you!”

Her tone took effect. Tickles and Sara, first couple, marched forward, smiling valiantly if a little unnaturally, to the front of the platform and faced the audience.

“Not much room,” Tickles said airily. “We shall all fall off the edge.”

The lady from London, sitting at the judge’s table, leaned forward and called to them.

“Children! Turn your set this way; make me the top of the room—that’s right. Now you’ll be happier, won’t you? It gives you more space too.”

“Oh, that’s much better! That’s topping! Thank you awfully!” and Tickles gave her a beaming friendly smile.

Sara and the rest of the “women,” with their backs to the hall, forgot the crowd and lost their nervousness. Tickles and Margot and the other “men” looked only at their partners and handed them the gaily-coloured ribbons. The music and the dance began, and a thrill of close interest filled the hall—the interested tension of an audience who understood and could appreciate the points of the performance, not merely of those who looked on at a pretty show.

Rhoda sat back in her chair with a sigh of relief. “They’re all right; they’re very good. I don’t know how they’ll compare with other people, but they are good. I never saw anything funnier than that set grin of Sara’s when she appeared first. I nearly wept!”

“So did I, but it was with rage,” Teesa observed. “After the times they’ve been told! Tickles looked as if she were going smiling to the stake.”

“It was tragic. But they’ve bucked up now,” said Fanny. “Will they remember their ‘last time’?”

“I left that to Margot and Babs. Margot’s safe,” said Rhoda. “Betty, you’re an angel!” as Betty returned to her place. “You saved the situation that time! Has Babs stopped being sick yet?”

“We couldn’t have them go up looking as if they were in church,” Betty remarked. “Oh, good ‘last time’! I say, Rho! It is pretty!” as the children “honoured their partners,” and then began to roll up the ribbons, their eyes apprehensively on the judging lady.

She was very businesslike, however, and made no comment. She wrote a few words on her sheet of paper, and merely said, “Now, ‘Goddesses.’ Face the same way.”

At the end of the dance she dismissed them. “No, not just now. Perhaps later,” as Tickles ventured to ask if they were not to do their “own choice.”

The team retired, to make way for the “ploughboys and pink-rose-girls,” as Sara had nicknamed them.

“Looks like a Rose-day crowd!” she said scathingly.

Tickles crept up behind the seniors. “Was it too bad, Rhoda? My knees were shaking, and you know what Babs is! And Sara was stiff with fright.”

“Really? You didn’t show it. It was jolly good. Squeeze in here and watch this lot. What do you think of them?”

“If they’d take off the roses, and the hats, I’d like them heaps better. Do they think she’s come from London to see their clothes? They’ll have to duck when they swing down under the ribbons; yes, we knew they would!” as the bedecked first couple crouched awkwardly in their swing. “That’s hidjus!”

Rhoda laughed. "I don't know if they'll lose marks for their frocks. They won't gain any, I'm sure. I'd rather have gym things than fancy dress. But I like plain white or coloured frocks best. Now here's a really sensible crowd!" as another team came up, the "men" wearing simple frocks of light tan, the "women" deep green. "That shows the difference and yet isn't dressed up. I wish we'd been able to go in for special frocks; then we'd have had two colours too. But Miss Maitland said it wasn't worth while for one afternoon. You know the syllabus said: 'No marks will be given for costume. Elaborate dresses should be avoided.' But I would have liked to show whether we were men or women, for the sake of the pattern of the dances."

"I guess that pink-rose crowd can't read," Tickles observed. "Rhoda, that judging lady's a dear. Do you know her?"

"Only by name. I've heard of her. Why didn't she want you to do 'Hey, Boys'? It looks as if she hadn't thought you good enough," Rhoda said anxiously.

"It wasn't that," Margot said eagerly. "She said, 'Perhaps later. Not just now.' So we'll have to be ready."

"Oh! Perhaps she'll see all the 'own choice' dances at the end. What a funny idea! I should have thought she'd get all the teams mixed up."

"She won't mix our kids with the pink roses," Teesa said, laughing. "They weren't up to much, were they, Rhoda? Didn't they use wrong steps?"

"Skipped all through the 'Ribbon,' and slipped the rings of 'Goddesses,'" Rhoda said briefly. "Didn't you see?"

"I see what's happening in this hey," said Betty, with energy. "Poor kids! They've lost their heads. And they started off so well," as the green-and-tan lines ended in a disastrous muddle.

"What a pity! But it is a hard thing for kids. Now it's the school lot, in tunics. They look businesslike, anyway."

"Yes, but they make their rings very badly," Vera said severely. "Not one of them was ready. Awfully jerky! I say, Rho, you've taught our kids jolly well! They're the best so far."

Rhoda flushed. This, from Vera, was worth having worked for. "They did do well. I'd have hated to let them go in unless they were right on obvious points like that."

"I guess you know all the points," Vera conceded. "These people don't. It's a good thing for us we had you!"

"We wouldn't have dreamed of going in, if we hadn't had her," said Betty gravely. "We might have been dancing or we might not; but we'd never have reached a high enough standard for a show like this, if it hadn't been for all the work Rhoda's put into us and the way she's made us practise. And you *do know*, Rho! Watching these others, I feel as Vera does. These kids are missing all sorts of finishing points that you've given us. It will show up even more in 'Newcastle' and 'Boatman.'"

"I believe that's because I'd learned from some one who had had it direct from town people," Rhoda said thoughtfully. "These have probably taken the dances out of the books; and how can they know? The books can't tell you everything. They don't say a word about *how* to make those rings, for instance."

Betty laughed. "We understand that now. We can see it for ourselves. But, I say! Do you remember that day last June, when you were quite new, and you told us you knew more than Jen? Do you remember our horror?"

"I felt *awful!*" Rhoda admitted. "But I had to say it. I don't now, of course; she's left me far behind. This is a nice crowd!" as the green-clad girls from the Stonecliffe High School

began to dance.

“They’re shy, or something, though. What’s the matter with them?” asked Teesa. Somehow they all turned to Rhoda now, to have their own attempts at criticism confirmed. It seemed only natural to do so.

“A bit self-conscious. Trying very hard to dance nicely. Our juniors were more natural, I should say. But they’re careful; they’ve been well taught. Where *are* Jen and her crowd?” Rhoda asked anxiously. “I know they come near the end; but we’re getting through the list very quickly, and I haven’t seen anything of them yet.”

“What do they call themselves? Where’s the programme? We haven’t seen it yet,” and Tickle leaned forward eagerly.

“There; ‘The Grange Team. Junior mixed.’ It’s the only mixed team. Swanks! I hope they haven’t lost the boys on the way!”

“They’re coming in now,” said Betty. “Over at that side, see! Jen won’t find us till their turn is over; they’re the next but one. Only just in time! I wonder what’s been the matter?”

“Jen looks hot. Perhaps they lost somebody,” said Margot. “Her mother’s there to help her.”

“I’ll go and help to undress them,” and Betty slipped out of her place again. “I’m Maid-of-all-Work to-day!”

They saw her set to work undoing shoes and taking off coats, but not stopping for more than a word with Jen. When a set of little Guides had danced, the Grange team was called, and a ripple of amusement ran round the hall as the small boys led the girls to their places. Some one began to clap; and Jen turned to Betty with a laugh.

“Are they the one and only team with boys? What fun! How did your kiddies get on? I’m awfully sorry I missed them, but we had a chapter of accidents. I’ll tell you later; I must watch my babes!”

The village children looked very simple and natural, and yet picturesque, dressed as they had been for the show at the Grange in the summer; the boys in flannels, the girls in short loose frocks of brilliant colours, deep red, bright green and blue and brown, soft lilac and yellow; they all toned together with delightful effect, and each girl held a ribbon to match her frock.

“Jolly pretty!” Betty said admiringly. “And how beautifully they dance, Jenny-Wren! You’ll beat us; I don’t believe any other team will. We’ve seen one or two very funny versions of the dances; but your kids are the best yet.”

“They’re very good,” Jen admitted. “Oh, don’t we do our ‘own choice’? They’re dying to do ‘Paper’!”

“She hasn’t seen any ‘own choices’ yet. Our kiddies went up first, with their knees knocking together with fright, they declare. But no one could have guessed.”

Jen laughed, and shepherded her team into seats. Then bidding them sit still and watch, she went with Betty to speak to the Rocklands girls.

“We had an awful time getting here! The coach didn’t come, and we had to ring up the garage in Sheffield, and they’d had trouble with the engine. When it did come, the silly thing gave out about half-way, in the loneliest spot you can imagine. I thought we should never get here. What are you people doing for lunch?”

“Oh, we’re going to look for a decent shop. Miss Deane knows one or two not too far away.”

“Well, will you join us? Mother’s arranged for us all to have a meal at The Sportsman’s Arms; they’ve a big room at the back, for parties, and we’ve taken it for an hour. There’s room for all of you as well. If you’d like it, we’ll send along a message to prepare for twenty-five extra. We’re only having sandwiches and eggs and tea and cakes, and things like that. We’re going back for another tea later. It would be jolly to join forces!”

“We’d love it!” Betty and Rhoda spoke together.

“I’ll ask Miss Deane,” and Teesa hurried away, and presently came back to accept, with very many thanks.

“Right-o! I’ll see to it,” and Jen waved her hand as a signal to her mother, who slipped out to interview the people at the inn.

“And that’s the last team. What happens now?” asked Tickles, in breathless excitement. “When do we hear who’s won? I think Jen’s kids were best!”

“Own choices,’ I expect. Be ready, you four! And don’t go and spoil the good work you’ve done already!” Rhoda said severely.

“I want now to see the chosen dances by the following teams,” said the judge. “Teams One, Three, Four, Five, and Seven, please be ready.”

“Cheers! Rocklands and the Grange are both wanted,” Vera said warmly.

“Good luck, kids!” cried Jen, as Tickles and Sara, Margot and Babs went off to represent their school.

“I feel sick!” Babs was beginning excitedly, as she passed Jen.

“If you are, I’ll eat you,” the seniors heard Tickles say heatedly.

“Poor Babs! But she forgets it once she starts,” Rhoda said, laughing.

“I know just how she feels,” Betty remarked.

“The judge doesn’t want any more pink roses,” Teesa observed. “They were Number Two. They look upset, but I don’t blame her, do you?”

“Pink roses?” queried Jen. “Oh, I see! Poor kids! Their leader has let them down badly. That’s enough to prejudice any judge.”

“They weren’t good, though. It isn’t prejudice,” Rhoda said quickly. “They skipped the arches in the ‘*Ribbon*,’ Jen.”

“Oh, well! That’s bad, of course. How jolly these four of yours are, Rhoda! I wish it wasn’t so short. I like watching them. Jolly good, kids!” as the two couples returned, much relieved that their ordeal was over.

“She grinned at me. I believe she likes us,” Tickles said exultantly.

“I guess you grinned at her first, and she just felt she had to grin back,” Fanny retorted; and the rest, used to Tickles’s friendly smile, giggled in chorus.

The High School girls danced “The Old Mole.” “Correct, but frightfully tame and dull!” said Jen oracularly. The green-and-tan team showed “Jenny Pluck Pears,” and gained a round of applause because it was so pretty.

“Very effective in the two colours,” Rhoda commented. “But wrong hands, surely, Jen? I always have to think.”

“Wrong all the way through,” Jen said ruthlessly. “Wrong every time. What a pity!—Here’s a school crowd in gymmies. Oh, they’re doing ‘*Sellenger*’! What a weird choice!—*Oh!* Oh, but it’s *wrong!* Where’s the second figure? Oh, that’s cheating! That’s where everybody’s so bad, in joining up for the second figure! Any one could do ‘*Sellenger*’ like that! I do call that a fraud!” and, very indignant, she hurried away to send up her own team for “If All the World were Paper.”

The children sang out well, and again the audience broke into applause. Then in a very few minutes it was all over, and a buzz of excited talk filled the hall, while the judging lady bent over her papers and made hurried notes, and added and altered figures.

She rose and came to the edge of the platform. A tense stillness filled the hall, as every one realised she was going to read out the marks. Tickles, with scarlet cheeks and blazing eyes, sat staring fixedly at her; Margot was white with excitement; Babbles shivered, and Betty kept an eye on her anxiously, in fear lest she should have an attack of hysterical giggling, or really be sick at last. Sara sat with bent head and dared not look up.

The seniors looked at them in sympathetic amusement, but all felt uneasily conscious that their own time was yet to come. Rhoda and Jen, standing together beside a big pillar, waited calmly, both confident that their teams had done well, but curious to hear an independent opinion of their work. Jen was the least concerned of the two; Rhoda's heightened colour showed that she was nervous, and so was Betty, though they concealed it better than the juniors could do.

The judge criticised the general standard of dancing in a careful speech. Then she spoke of standards—85 per cent. marks would mean first class; 80 per cent. second, and 70 per cent. third. "And after that you needn't trouble."

"I'm sure we're both safe to be second class, anyway," Jen murmured. "I like that way of marking tons better than just first and second teams, and so on. Now we'll really know how good we are, measured against the whole country, don't you see? She'd have the same standard anywhere."

Rhoda nodded, deeply interested. The other seniors looked suddenly serious. It was no longer a question of whether Rocklands could beat the Grange and both could beat the Stonecliffe schools, but of which teams could reach a universal standard of second or even first class work, a very different thing.

"I'm a bit scared!" Rhoda whispered. "Suppose we've under seventy marks!"

"Don't be an ass!" Jen rippled with laughter. "I prophesy eighty-four or eighty-six. The question is which? Those two marks make a lot of difference!"

"*All* the difference!" Rhoda agreed fervently.

After a few remarks on the music, the judge proceeded to take the teams singly, and the Rocklands girls were soon put at their ease. Their dancing was good, full of rhythm, and natural; their "Hey, Boys" excellent; they had 86 marks—and the loud applause, led by Jen Robins, made the lady pause for an instant.

Rhoda dropped into her seat, relieved and exhausted. "Thank goodness! I don't mind about anything else! First class! Oh, good for you, dear kids!"

Tickles and Sara were one beam of delight. Margot looked ready to cry. Babbles gurgled in joyful surprise.

"Listen to the rest of the marks!" Betty said with energy. "You must be sports and clap the others! And I expect Jen's kids will have ninety!"

The "pink rose" team had seventy marks, and looked very downcast. The "gipsy" club girls, the green-and-tans, and the school in tunics, all had eighty-two; the "milkmaids" seventy-five, the green-clad High School team had eighty-four. The Rocklands girls, relieved at first that no one had beaten their record, looked at one another suddenly, in a spasm of fresh interest, as she began to speak of the Grange team—"Nice to see the boys dancing!"—and criticised some points of balance and wrong use of the weight of the body by the boys.

“Will they beat us?” Margot murmured. “Will they have ninety? Of course, I don’t mind *much* if they do!”

“They were topping,” Tickles said bravely. “They ought to have ninety! Oh, I say! Babs is going to be sick again!”

“I’m not!” gasped Babbles. “But I wish she’d hurry up and tell us!”

Jen was absorbed in the criticism, trying hard to understand and remember it, and was not listening. Rhoda, Betty, Teesa, and all the rest were on tenterhooks to hear the marks, however. They knew that anything under eighty-five would be a real blow to Jen; nothing else mattered very much.

“Eighty-six!” said the judge.

Jen drew a long breath of relief. “That’s all right! First class—topping! How pleased Joan and Cicely will be! Why, what’s the joke?” at the ripple of laughter from the schoolgirls.

“Why, we’ve tied,” Rhoda pointed out, laughing happily. “Neither of us has beaten the other. Isn’t that ripping?”

“I’d never thought of a tie,” said Betty. “But it is much the jolliest way.”

“I don’t like ties, as a rule,” Rhoda added. “But this time I do think it’s fair. They were both very good.”

“Oh, that’s tophole!” Jen said warmly. “I’d forgotten all about being first, and I’d forgotten your marks. I was scared stiff that the boys had let us down—they aren’t up to the girls, I know—and that we’d have only eighty-two, since she seems rather fond of giving eighty-two! I was going to run sobbing to Mother, or swoon, or weep on Rhoda’s chest, if we had less than eighty-five!—What’s this? Guide team, seventy-five. Well, they weren’t up to much! And that’s all. So we’re equal for first place, and the High School greenies come second, and then all that crowd of dressed-up people third. But we’re the only first class teams. Oh, *cheers*! The moor has beaten Stonecliffe out and out!”

“I’d feel rather bad if we’d had eighty-four,” Betty remarked. “To lose a first for one mark would be sickening!”

“Don’t you go cheering too soon, Jen Robins!” Rhoda said warningly. “There are still the senior teams to come! Wait till tea time before you begin shouting!”

CHAPTER XXVI

THE RESERVES TO THE RESCUE

The big refreshment pavilion at The Sportsman's Arms rang with talk and laughter for an hour. The elder girls saw that the children were seated and served, and then went hungrily to their own lunch. At the end Jen mounted one of the long tables and made a speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen and fellow folk-dancers, we really have made a topping beginning to-day. We've shown these clubs and Guides and school people how to dance, and beaten them out of sight. The only team that came near us was the High School, and next year, when they're a little more used to themselves, they'll do very well indeed; so don't go home thinking there's no one can compete with us. If we want to enter again, we've got to go on working hard all the time. By the way, the gym mistress at the High School is an old Chelsea student; Chelsea Physical Training College; and they do a lot of dancing. We've done jolly well to beat her crowd. You mustn't feel too sure you'll be able to do it again. And remember we were only *just* first class! We mustn't swank too much! But we have done jolly well. It's the first year country-dancing has been included in the Festival, but I'm sure it will be a regular feature now. We must try not to drop out if we can help it. Of course, all the clubs will want to challenge our record. So we've all got to go home and work. Work *hard!* I hope our senior teams will do as well as the juniors have done. Three cheers for the juniors of Rocklands and the Grange!"

The seniors gave the cheers heartily, while the juniors looked self-conscious and shy. Margot and Sara poked Tickles in the ribs.

"Say thank you! Get up and be polite! Those village kids can't; but we do know what's what. Come on, Tickles! Make a speech for us!"

"Make it yourself! I'm the youngest!" Tickles retorted indignantly.

"Yes, but you're the cheekiest," Margot pointed out.

"Oh, Tickles, *do!*" Babs pleaded. "You know nobody else can! You know what would happen if I tried!"

"Save us from that, Tickles," Sara begged.

Tickles, prodded and poked on every side, scrambled up on to her chair. "Three cheers for Jen Robins! And couldn't we all dance 'Sellenger's Round' before we go back to the hall?"

The tables were cleared to the walls in a moment. Miss Deane struck up the air on a very tinny piano, round which beanfeasts and picnic-parties were wont to gather after their meal, and which had certainly never heard sixteenth-century music before. The big ring was formed, and Rhoda and Betty thrust Jen into the middle.

"You must take part somehow! And you aren't allowed to dance," they told her.

Jen stood and bowed to every side in turn, while her mother watched and laughed. Then some one shouted, "Half-past two!" and there was a wild hurry into coats and hats, and a race back to the hall.

"All the same crowd as in the morning," Jen remarked. "Only in bigger editions! Senior club members; higher forms; Ranger Guides. The very small kiddies have mostly been sent home."

"Will the seniors in each club have the same faults as their juniors?" Betty questioned. "Here are more club girls in gipsy headdresses and cretonne frocks; will they dance just as

their little ones did?"

"Very much, I should think, because they'll have had the same teacher. But the dances are different," Jen pointed out. "You can, and you ought to, put much more into 'Newcastle' than into 'The Ribbon,' for instance."

Betty agreed, and watched in absorbed interest as the High School seniors went up to dance, for this time Rocklands came fourth on the programme and the Grange fifth.

"Yes, they're jolly good," Jen admitted. "They'll get over eighty, I'm sure. Now the gipsies! But they aren't really dressed up, you know; I've seen just as bad at Cheltenham. The hall must be full of dust; they're quite sensible to tie their heads up in bags if they like the feeling of it. It isn't fancy dress."

"I'd rather have the dust myself, and a good brush afterwards," said Fanny.

A set of Rangers in uniform came third, and after all these the Rocklands girls in their white frocks were a pleasant relief. Jen had gone to encourage her own Tin Town team and to be sure they were ready for their turn. Betty and Teesa were left sitting alone, in an empty row of chairs, as their companions filed on to the platform, looking undeniably serious and a little frightened.

"They're *very* good, Teesa!" Betty said suddenly.

Teesa, strung up to a high pitch of excitement by the morning's contest and the present tense anxiety, spoke out swiftly in a genuine expression of deep feeling. "I'm glad I'm not in it. I wasn't good enough for this. I'd have spoiled it."

Betty turned to her, stirred deeply also by some emotion she could not have explained. What made her ask the question she never knew; the matter had not been in her mind at all.

"Teesa, did you lose your shoes on purpose last week? Some of the juniors keep saying you did, so that you'd have an excuse."

"No!" Teesa answered promptly. "I was awfully upset about it." But then she added, with that strange impulse to frankness which the excitement of the moment had aroused, "But I was glad I had lost them—afterwards. For I wasn't going to be in the team; Jen had told me I wasn't good enough. Don't you see, it gave me an excuse? But I didn't do it on purpose."

"I was sure you didn't." Betty was watching "Hey, Boys" with critical eyes.

As the team, coming down, passed Jen's girls going up, Jen said warmly, "Jolly good, all of you! You didn't look nervous, only serious. I rather fancy we're going to have stage fright." And as the girls went up the steps she added to Rhoda, "They always have been awkward and giggly from the very first. I've tried to get them out of it, but it comes back at a time like this. They won't be as natural as you were. I guess you'll win this time!"

"We felt horribly shaky," Rhoda admitted. "Oh, they don't show it, Jen!"

"I think they do. They're stiff; and it's sheer fright, poor dears! They *can* dance, when they like!" Jen wailed softly. "You should see them at a party! Well, you saw them in 'Sellenger's' at the pub.!"

"They're not so bad. They'll be all right. They're heaps better than most of the teams; and I'm sure they're better than we were," Rhoda said warmly.

"I don't believe they are. Well, we can only hope for the best! But I'd like to tell her they aren't always such pokers! Now who are these? We haven't had these before. 'St. Cecilia's Girls' Home.' I don't know them."

"There's something funny about them," Vera remarked, as eight big girls in dark blue frocks—an obvious institution uniform, very neat and simple—followed a lady up on to the

platform. “Why does their leader need to take them up? Look! She’s putting them just where they’re to stand! How odd!”

“I *say!*” Jen breathed softly. “Don’t you *see?*”

Slowly the truth dawned on the schoolgirls, and then on the rest of the audience. The blue team danced correctly, but each girl felt for her next partner in a strange unusual way, and always found her where she expected her to be. Their drilling and preparation were perfect.

“Yes, they’re blind!” Rhoda whispered. “Well, I call that wonderful! They ought to be *given* the cup!”

“How plucky!” Jen said softly, her eyes dim for a moment. “And it’s beautifully danced! Oh, I wish they could be first!”

“Do you really think they’re blind?” Fanny asked, awed and incredulous.

“Some can see a little, I think. But some—look! Watch ‘first man’ in ‘Hey, Boys.’ She doesn’t see a thing. She feels for her opposite each time. It’s frightfully clever! Oh, clap them! Clap hard, all of you!”

The hall rang with sympathetic applause, as the blind girls were led down by the lady in charge of them. She guided them to their seats, and another team of Guides went up to dance.

“These are good, aren’t they, Jen?” Rhoda asked doubtfully.

“Too gymnastic, I should say, and not dancey enough. They look as if they were at drill.”

“They do, rather,” Rhoda agreed, laughing.

“Only one more. Then ‘own choices.’ I wonder if we’ll be wanted? I’ll feel crushed if we aren’t even good enough for that,” Jen acknowledged anxiously. “‘Stonecliffe Country Dancers!’ Fancy calling themselves that; swanks! I wonder who they are? And who has taught them?”

“They’re all grown-up. I like their frocks,” Rhoda remarked, as eight girls went up, the “men” all wearing white, the “women” all in blue. “The colours remind me of the people I once saw dance in town.”

“It’s not such a gorgeous blue, though. I’ve a feeling they’re going to be very good,” Jen said warningly.

And then the “Country Dancers” began to dance; and a thrill ran through the hall, as attention deepened on every side into surprised and rapt enjoyment.

“Oh, these get the cup!” Rhoda cried softly. “They’re far and away the best! They *are* good, Jenny-Wren!”

“Yes, we’re amateurish beside them,” Jen admitted regretfully. “That does it! Nobody can touch that. Well, Rhoda, it gives us all something to work up to, old thing! Stonecliffe beats The Moor and gets the cup, after all!”

The judge made no comment, but the feeling in the hall was unanimous and was expressed in the rounds of applause which greeted the “Country Dancers.” Presently “own choice” dances were called for, and Jen and Rhoda were relieved to hear their teams were to dance. The High School seniors showed “The Old Mole”; the “gipsies” danced “The Merry Milkmaids,” and the Rangers “Scotch Cap.”

As this last began, Jen turned to Rhoda. “You’ll be next. I say, where’s your team gone to?”

Rhoda, looking wildly round, found only three girls and herself. The fact had just dawned on Doris, and she, too, was looking wildly for Fanny and Vera, who were first couple in “The Boatman.”

"They all went out to get a drink," faltered "third man." "We told them to wait till afterwards, but Vera said she was going to faint with thirst. They said they'd hurry back."

"Goodness gracious! I hope they'll turn up!" Jen said anxiously. "I say, Rho! What if they let you down?"

Rhoda's face was tense with anxiety. "Doris, race round and fetch Betty and Teesa, just in case. The other two will hear about it later, if they do fail us," she said grimly.

Looking startled, the two reserves came hurrying back with Doris.

"Rhoda, we can't!" Betty gasped, in a bad attack of stage fright.

"You've got to. The others aren't here. Buck up, Bets! You've got to pull the school through."

"Rhoda, I'm *not* good enough!" Teesa said desperately. "I've known it all afternoon. Isn't there any one else? What are those other idiots doing?"

"Rocklands Senior Team," called the secretary.

Betty was hurriedly changing her shoes, with no time for further thought of herself. "We can't keep them all waiting. Be quick, Teesa! Think of the school; we'll be disqualified if we can't do our own dance, I expect."

"Betty'll pull you through, Teesa," Rhoda's tone was peremptory. "You're first man; come into the first hey *left*. And be careful how you break into the lines in the second figure; you're the difficult place the first time. Help her, Betty! You're always safe."

Quite unable to believe the evidence of their senses, Betty and Teesa found themselves dancing as first couple. And out in the passage Vera and Fanny heard the characteristic "A music," and looked at one another in blank horror.

"It's 'Boatman'!" Fanny gasped.

"We've done it now," Vera groaned. "What on earth will Rhoda and Deaney say? I say, how have they managed it? Oh!" as she reached the door. "They've hauled in Betty and Teesa. They're doing well, too."

Very apprehensive on their own account, the culprits watched their substitutes.

"Jolly good!" Fanny murmured, as the heys and turns gave place to sidling and the second figure. "Nice and smooth and curvy! Betty always makes a bulgy hey!"

"She's telling Teesa every single step," said Vera. "Look! She reminded her about the lines, and Teesa made hers beautifully. Watch the arming; you'll see Betty tell her to go into the ring round Rhoda. There! Betty's as steady as a rock. I wonder why they left her out?"

"She's more reliable than I am," Fanny remarked. "Now for it! Come and be slain by Rhoda! I don't mind so much about Deaney. But Rhoda and Jen will be frantic."

"We didn't do it on purpose!" Vera spoke before any of the team could get out a reproachful word. "But we think you ought to be jolly grateful to us, for Teesa and Bets danced beautifully."

"Rhoda, why *on earth* didn't you have Betty in the team all along? She's worth six of me," cried Fanny.

"I know that. Ask Betty!" Rhoda retorted, over-excited and off her guard for a moment. "What have all you lunatics been doing?"

"We got lost in the passages coming back. It's a huge place. And a jolly good thing too," Vera insisted. "We're sorry we let you down, and we apologise a thousand times. But it's lucky for you that we did, for we couldn't have danced as well as the other two did."

Betty, flushed and happy, was watching Jen's girls do "Picking Up Sticks." "Oh—look!" she cried softly. "A beautiful second figure! Well done, Jen!"

“Oh! *Oh!*” wailed Rhoda. “Oh, the *silly* kid!” as Jen’s “second man” lost her head and her place in the hey and dashed wildly round, and the other two “men” crept limply to their places.

“She’s done it before,” groaned poor Jen. “I was waiting for it. That’s done for us! Now the ‘women’ will all go to pieces, of course! They can’t stand a shock like that!”

It was a sore blow that her team should make a mistake in public, though it was obvious to every one that the failure was not from any fault in teaching. The “women” did their hey correctly till the very end, when the leader turned in again instead of leading the line home; and the three straggled to their places in confusion.

“That’s happened before, too,” Jen was a true sportsman, and smiled bravely as she turned to Rhoda. “I knew she’d lose her head after that first shock. Oh, well! Better luck next time!”

“It’s rotten for you, though, for they were dancing beautifully, Jenny-Wren,” Rhoda said earnestly. “Any one could see what happened. I shouldn’t think you’d lose marks for that.”

“I should! Now the blind girls. I’m glad she’s called them again. They’re very good, too.”

The blind team did “Rufty Tufty,” and the Guides followed with “The Black Nag.”

Doris leaned across to Betty. “I say, Bets! Such a joke! Did you realise Teesa had to dance in plimsolls? And she danced better than I’ve ever seen her. So much for her swanky black slippers!”

“I don’t see they’ve been much good to her,” Betty admitted. “But don’t tease her, Doris. She did dance well.”

Teesa was very soberly taking off the white plimsolls which had been necessary with her white frock. For one member of the team to wear black shoes could not have been allowed for a moment.

“I say, Betty!” she said in an undertone. “It sounds awful, I know, when I’ve been head, and a senior for a year, and I’m leaving soon. But I’ve only just felt what it’s like to do things for the sake of the school. I forgot everything just now, except the dance and that we must do well for Rocklands. I never felt that before. I’ve always thought of myself.”

Betty’s hand shot out to her along the back of the seat, unseen by any one. “Jolly decent, old thing! It’s a ripping feeling, isn’t it? We two did pull the team through for the school, you know.”

“You helped me, though. I’d have lost my head. It was awfully good of you.”

“I want to watch this. Don’t talk any more!” Betty pleaded, and turned to the platform again.

And then the “Country Dancers” went up and danced “Nonesuch,” and so perfect was their rendering, and the playing of the tune, that as music and dance died away together Jen’s eyes were misty for a moment and Rhoda swallowed hard the lump in her throat.

“It made me want to cry!” Betty whispered, in awed surprise.

“Oh, that was beautiful! Worth coming for!” Jen murmured. “They must have a ripping teacher, who has been to Vacation Schools! Of course, Sheffield’s very good! Some one must have come out to teach them. And their music’s wonderful.”

“That’s the most perfect thing I’ve ever seen,” Doris spoke in heartfelt appreciation.

“It was lovely,” Rhoda said soberly. “The cheek of us, to try to compete with them!”

“Oh, we haven’t done so badly!” Jen’s spirits were reviving. “Cheer up, old thing! You’ll see. You’ll beat us, any way.”

Coming to the front of the platform, the judge spoke of the higher standard to be expected from older dancers, and of how she looked for more in this class than had been possible from

the children. After general criticism, she took the teams singly, and Rocklands were relieved to hear their dancing “showed great promise.”

“This team wants experience in dancing, however,” said the much-experienced lady. “They have obviously not been dancing very long yet. They will do very well when they have been at it longer. At present they have not much conception of the dances as a whole.”

The girls looked at Rhoda, all feeling a little crushed and bewildered. “What does that mean, Rho?”

“I don’t know!” Rhoda said helplessly. “I’m sure we haven’t *any* conception of the dances as a whole! I haven’t! I never dreamt we ought to have!”

“This is too clever for me!” Doris murmured sadly. “I thought we were just supposed to dance!”

Jen smothered a laugh. “Eighty-three! Oh, good! Congrats, Rhoda!”

Rhoda’s face had fallen. “But it’s only second class!” she faltered. “The juniors got first!”

“My dear kid, she’s asking quite a different style of work from us. You’re only just not quite up to first class standard. It’s jolly good. For a first shot, it’s awfully good, Rhoda!”

“Do you think so, really?” Rhoda asked doubtfully. “You aren’t just saying it to——”

“No time for that,” Jen said practically. “Now how about us?”

The Grange seniors wanted more life in their dancing, it appeared, and were inclined to be stiff Jen nodded vigorously and murmured—“Nerves! Chiefly nerves, poor dears!” and Fanny giggled. Their rhythm was good, and they had more idea of the dances as a whole.

“I don’t know where they got it!” Jen commented. “Must be unconscious genius!”

“On your part,” Rhoda added. “You’ve put it into them unconsciously. Oh, they couldn’t develop it by themselves!”

“There were mistakes in their ‘own choice,’ which were obviously due to nervousness,” said the judge. “But the dancing was good, and the difficult second figure was well done. Eighty-five!”

“Oh, congrats., Jenny-Wren! *Two* firsts! You’ll go home swollen with pride!” cried Rhoda; and the Rocklands team surrounded Jen and thumped her on the back.

Her face was radiant with surprise and relief. “I *never* thought——! Oh, how tophole!”

“Perhaps you’ll get the cup, and have to dance to-night,” Fanny suggested recklessly.

“Don’t be an idiot!” Jen retorted sharply. “Were you *asleep* during that ‘Nonesuch’? Nothing that’s been shown to-day could come anywhere near that.”

So, it appeared, thought the judge. The blind team were given eighty. “A most interesting and courageous effort. But they were handicapped, and I have marked them, as I am sure they would wish, without making any allowance for their disability. I would like to speak to their teacher afterwards.” Rangers, Clubs, and senior schoolgirls all had varying markings, from seventy to eighty-one; the “Country Dance” team were awarded ninety.

“Their ‘Nonesuch’ was, of course, a most finished and perfect performance; and it was beautifully played. I congratulate the team on its accompanist,” said the judge.

“Quite right too,” Jen was pleased to give her full approval to the verdict. “And now for tea and home. I’m dead with exhaustion!”

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CONQUERING HEROES

As the Grange and Rocklands teams, with Mrs. Robins and Miss Deane, were leaving the hall, they were waylaid by a message from the Secretary, to the effect that the Committee hoped the winning Junior teams would be able to wait in town to dance at the public concert at night.

But here Miss Deane was firm. Miss Maitland would not hear of it. The possibility had been discussed, and the head mistress had refused to allow either team to stay out so late. Miss Deane pointed out that it would be almost impossible for them to get back to Rocklands, up on the moors, after the concert, and the girls could not possibly be out all night.

The juniors heard and knew there was no hope. "We'd have been fearfully nervous, anyway," Sara said philosophically. "I know Babs would have been really sick!"

The Secretary, fetched to deal with the problem, argued to no effect. Jen suggested doubtfully that perhaps her big coach, after taking the village children home, could take the juniors across the moor. But Miss Deane had no authority to accept such a suggestion, and insisted that all the girls must return to Rocklands as soon as they had had some tea.

"We shall be quite late enough. You must remember our long dark road from the station up to and across the moor. Of course we shall have to drive, and Miss Maitland has arranged for a private bus to meet the six o'clock train. We must not miss it, on any account," she said firmly.

In consideration of their private coach, which would take all the children home to the village and the girls to Tin Town, and could also take Jen back to the Grange, Mrs. Robins agreed to let both the Grange teams stay for the concert, to the ecstatic joy of the whole party. The Secretary was appeased with the news that the team which had included boys would be available, and also the second senior team, if he cared to call on them; and with this he had to be content.

The teams adjourned to the inn for tea and to discuss the whole matter; and Jen, when her children were attended to, insisted on squeezing into a corner between Rhoda and Betty, for she had seen the slight shadow still on Rhoda's face. Betty, cheered by those few words of Teesa's, was not at all downcast.

"You do honestly think we didn't do so badly, Jen?" she asked. "Rho can't get over those two marks that lost us first class."

"Look here, old thing!" Jen said vigorously. "It's the first time your dancing has come up against the standard of the whole country. I tell you, she was judging with no allowances for what we were—just girls still at school, or village or club girls; she made no allowances, but judged on what we did—how we danced. And you've never had a Headquarters teacher. You must have been jolly well taught yourself, and you've taught the rest of your crowd awfully well, to come through criticism like that and be almost good enough for first class! I think you did just wonderfully well. After all, I have had a month at a Vacation School, and it soaks into one, somehow. You'll have to go too, some day, of course. But to get eighty-three was *jolly* good, when you consider you've had no experience, and the girls have only been at it six months!"

Rhoda's face had cleared. "I hadn't realised what we were up against," she admitted. "In the way of criticism, I mean. If I had, I don't suppose we'd have dared to go in. I thought we were only trying to beat the Stonecliffe clubs and schools."

"I didn't understand either. I do now! I tell you, that judging made me sit up. The criticisms were brilliant. You got a jolly good crit., and you ought to be proud and thankful!"

"As for the other side of it,—I mean beating the other clubs—after all, we came out third, Rhoda!" said Betty.

"And the only other teams with second class were the blind girls with eighty and the High School with eighty-one," Jen added. "I'd warned you the High School would be good. Every one else was only third class or under. You won third place very handsomely! Next year you'll probably be second, for I doubt if I'll be here long enough to train mine again."

"Oh? But where are you going? You've always lived at the Grange?" cried Betty and Rhoda together.

"We're afraid Daddy may have to go to London for some special treatment. He isn't getting better," Jen said gravely. "Of course, we'll do anything to get him well. So we may all be in town for some months. But it isn't decided yet."

As the tired, excited girls filled two carriages in the train, Teesa pushed her way in among the juniors, with whom were Betty and Miss Deane. Not even Tickles and Margot needed any watching this evening, however; they were talking it all over, and especially discussing the fact that the two reserves had had to dance for the senior team. Betty and Teesa were teased to say how they had felt, whether they had been pleased, what they had thought. But at last the children began to talk of the judge's comments on their dancing, and the seniors were left in peace.

Teesa seized the chance she had been waiting for. "Betty, what did Rhoda mean? They asked why you were left out of the team, and she said: 'Ask Betty!' You hadn't anything to do with it, had you?"

A wave of colour swept into Betty's sensitive face. "I was afraid I'd be nervous," she faltered.

"Did you *ask* Rhoda to put you reserve?"

"I didn't mind dancing when the moment came," Betty tried to turn the subject. "But I didn't want the thought of it hanging over me for a week."

Teesa gave her a searching look. Her deepest thoughts had been stirred by all the strong feeling of the day, and she saw more clearly than usual. "Betty, were you thinking about me? Did you think it wouldn't be so bad for me if you were left out too?"

"I wish you wouldn't tease!" Betty, hot and embarrassed, spoke sharply. "Can't you leave it alone now? It's all worked out jolly well."

"Jolly well," Teesa said soberly. "And you're a jolly lot decenter than I understood! I have been a silly infant! You must have thought me a babe if you felt you had to do that to save my feelings!"

"Oh, I didn't!" Betty said quickly. "It was rotten for you, and you cared a lot. Honestly, I didn't care much—except that these kids had to think I wasn't good enough! And that doesn't matter now."

"They never thought it. They only thought somebody was crazy to leave you out. And they think it more than ever now. I shall tell them——"

"If you ever do, I'll never speak to you again!" Betty flared out, altogether overwrought with excitement. "Teesa, I'd—I'd hate that worse than anything!"

There was a dangerous quiver in her voice. Teesa looked at her curiously, and then said hurriedly, "Well, I won't, then. But I hope you'll be head again next term—I rather think you will!—so that I can let you see how I feel about all this. You're a downright sport, and a much better head than I ever was."

"Oh, do shut up!" Betty pleaded, and leaned forward across the carriage. "Tickles, have you got a comb? We ought to have a band, and then play 'See the Conquering Hero Comes,' as we roll up the drive to Rocklands in our bus! Don't you all want to practise?"

"Betty, what a ghastly idea!" Teesa smothered a laugh. "Poor old Deaney!"

"Right-o!" Tickles said excitedly. "What's the tune?" and combs and paper appeared as if by magic.

"What a fiendish row!" and at the next little station Fanny's head appeared at the window. "What are you supposed to be, any way? Nigger minstrels?"

"We're an orchestra!" and Betty's suggestion was gleefully explained by Margot and Babbles.

"Can't say I recognised the tune!" Fanny retorted. "You'd better practise hard if you want any one to know what it is."

"You'd better help us!" Tickles suggested. "Did you know Deaney wired at tea-time? So they'll be ready to rush out and congrat. us. She wired—'Juniors first place. Seniors third.' Jolly good for a first shot, I call it!"

Fanny laughed and retreated hurriedly to her own carriage; and presently the strange sounds from that direction suggested that the seniors had taken the hint and had also become an orchestra.

"This is a most triumphal progress!" Betty said, laughing, as the bus drew up at the door of the school, with the band doing its very best.

The remnant of the school bore down upon its heroes, cheering wildly.

Miss Maitland came out to welcome Miss Deane, Rhoda, and Betty. "Most hearty congratulations! You have done well for Rocklands! I want to hear all about it. But come in quickly out of the cold; we have a big supper waiting for you. Then, when you have told us the whole story, you shall all dance 'Sellenger's Round' before you go off to bed!"

[The end of *Jen of the Abbey School* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]