

THE
SECOND
TERM AT
ROCKLANDS

Elsie J.
Oxenham

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COLLINS

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THE SECOND TERM
AT ROCKLANDS

BY
ELSIE J. OXENHAM

Author of “Queen of the Abbey Girls,” “The Abbey Girls,” etc.

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CHAPTER I

AN ACCIDENT

“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 carriage 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.

Tickles said quietly, “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 II

“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? Tickle?” 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!” 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 III

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

“I won’t, then,” Tickle 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 Tickle!” 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!”

Tickle’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 donkey-cart 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 fingernails 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 IV

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. Tickle, 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,” Tickle conceded.

“And one hideosity!” Margot remarked.

Tickle 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.”

Tickle 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!”

“Tickle, 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 Tickle’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 Tickle 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 Tickle, 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.

Tickle 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 V

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 Tickle 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 carriage,” 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 carriage 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, Miss 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 Tickle, 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 VI

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 VII

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 VIII

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 Auntie Sheila would have told me, if there were anything worth telling,” Teesa insisted, overlooking the fact that “Auntie 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 Tickle'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 Auntie 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 IX

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 peremptorily. "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. I might feel I oughtn't to if we had only horses; but now that Frost has learned to drive the new car, we ought to use it and let him practise! Poor dear, he did hate it at first, after his beloved horses! But he's really getting to like 'her' now, as he says, and a car is better on our hills. 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 X

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 XI

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, by the war, 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 XII

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,” Tickles 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 XIII

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 want to see you this afternoon to thank you again. But tonight 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!"

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 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 guiltily.

"Yes, but look here! You aren't enjoying yourselves a *bit*! 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!"

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 Tickle and the rest one day last summer!”

“We’re very glad you did, for our own sakes as well,” Betty said heartily.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Second Term at Rocklands* [*"Tickles"*, or *The School that was different*] by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]