

SELMA
AT THE
ABBEY

E. J.
Dixenham

COLLINS



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SELMA
AT THE ABBEY

by
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CHAPTER 1

ANGUS COMES TO THE ABBEY

“Joy, come and look,” Joan called softly.

Joy’s Schubert Impromptu came to a sudden end and she rose from the piano.

“Bother you, Joan! Why did you spoil it? I was miles away.”

“I’m sorry. But you can dream some other time. This seems likely to be important. It’s very odd.”

Joy came through the long windows on to the terrace, where her cousin leaned on the stone balustrade and gazed across the lawn. They were much alike, tall, good-looking girls, with brown eyes and beautiful dark red hair; Joan, the elder by a month, wore hers in big plaits round her head; Joy’s was rolled up over her ears. They were nineteen, and had left school a year ago.

The Hall, on the terrace of which they stood, had come to Joy from her grandfather three years before. The Abbey ruins, in the grounds of the big house, had been left to Joan, to her great joy and pride.

“What’s very odd?” Joy stood beside Joan and stared at the drive, where a figure had appeared at the end of the beech avenue. “Somebody coming? Who is it?”

“Yes, who is it? Look again.”

“It looks like Angus Reekie. It can’t be Angus! He’s in Glasgow.”

“He’s in our drive,” Joan said. “I can’t imagine why, but he’s certainly coming across our garden.”

“Has he come to ask for another ruby, to help him in his career?”

“Don’t be unkind,” Joan scolded.

“But, of course, he didn’t ask last time. He took—or at least he tried to take.”

“But he didn’t do it,” Joan said quickly. “We gave him the ruby. Joy, you ought to forget that horrid story.”

Joy’s thoughts had gone back two months, when this same lad had come to the Abbey by night, urged on by his small half-sister, and had been tempted by the sight of the jewels inherited from Joy’s ancestress, Lady Jehane, into nearly committing a great folly. Discovered just in time by Joan and her younger friend Jen, he had been deeply penitent and ashamed. Joan had sympathised with his distress and Joy with his craving for a musical education; they had sold one ruby and given the proceeds to help with his lessons from a good teacher in Glasgow, his home town.

“If he’s come to ask for another ruby he won’t get it,” Joy remarked, as they watched Angus in his approach to the house. “It would be thundering cheek.”

“He’s coming very slowly,” Joan said. “He’s doubtful of us and a little bit afraid. I wonder if he really is going to ask for something more?”

Angus did, indeed, seem hesitant, as if not sure how he would be received.

“We’re not going to give him any more of Jehane’s jewels.”

“There might be something else,” Joan said. “He didn’t seem to have anybody to turn to, if he was in a hole. He may want advice.”

“You’re good at advice,” Joy observed. “But I’m not good at giving away rubies. Once was enough. He hasn’t brought the fiddle,” she added.

Joan gazed down at Angus gravely, as he stood below the terrace, cap in hand. He was a thin, fair-haired lad, not looking in the least like his twenty-one years. Then she smiled a welcome.

“Come up here and talk to us. We didn’t expect to see you again so soon.”

“Don’t stand there like a criminal in the dock,” Joy scolded. “Joan and I aren’t as horrible as all that, I hope.”

Angus came up the wide stone steps. “I feel rather like that, Miss Joy—like a criminal, I mean. I’ve come to ask you to help me again, and when you were so good last time it seems—well, I’m no’ feeling too good about it. But I don’t know where else to go, and you’re so terribly kind that I thought maybe——”

“I’m not terribly kind,” Joy scoffed. “That’s Joan. You’re mixing us up.”

“You’re both kind,” Angus insisted. “I don’t feel I can ask any more. It’s been hard to come, and it’s hard to tell you. But you were so good to Rykie all summer, and then so marvellously generous to us both, when—when we——”

“Don’t!” Joan interrupted him. “We don’t want to think any more about that. What do you want us to do for you now?”

“Not another ruby, I hope?”

“Joy! How can you?” Joan cried indignantly. “That was brutal, and very ungenerous.”

Angus had grown white. But he said sturdily, “I deserve it, Miss Joan.”

“I’m sorry,” Joy exclaimed. “I didn’t mean it. I spoke without thinking; I’m always doing it. Angus Reekie, I apologise abjectly! But if you’d tell us what you really have come for, we wouldn’t need to imagine horrible things.”

“I thought maybe you would help me with Selma,” Angus said simply. “I’ve nobody to ask, and I don’t know what to do.”

The girls stared blankly at him. “With—with whom?” Joan stammered.

“Or what?” Joy added. “What, or who, is Selma?”

“My girl,” Angus said, more simply still.

“Your—Angus Reekie, don’t tell us you’re engaged?” Joan cried.

Joy pursed her lips. “That would be mad, with all your career before you. Don’t go and do anything crazy! You’ve your way to make yet.”

“We’re no’ engaged. She doesn’t know. But she’s my lassie, all the same.”

“Tell us more!” Joan commanded. “Who is she? And how can she be your girl, if she doesn’t know?”

“Sounds silly to me,” Joy said severely. “And what’s her name? What did you call her?”

“Selma. Selma Andersson, Miss Joy.”

“How odd! Where did she find a name like that?”

“Never mind her name just now. You can tell us all that later.” Joan spoke with authority. “Angus, tell us more about—about Selma! Why doesn’t she know you want her to be your girl?”

Angus looked at them, his face set and determined.

“I want her, when she’s old enough. She’s only sixteen. I’ve no’ said a word; I’m ready to wait. I know some girls get engaged at sixteen, but Selma’s no’ that kind. She’s no’ thinking like that. But we’re pals; she’s my friend; and when the time comes I want her for my own.”

“I see,” Joan said slowly. “But you may change your mind. She won’t be ready for some time yet.”

“That’s a thing I want to know,” Angus cried. “How old should a girl be before she marries? I know lots of them do it quite early, but is it right? Is it fair to her? I don’t know, and I’ve nobody to ask.”

“It seems to me you want a mother,” Joy said solemnly.

He looked at her. “Well, I do. I haven’t anybody. I want to do the right thing by Selma. I don’t want to tease her too soon. Will you no’ help me?” He turned to Joan, his face wistful.

Joan’s voice was almost motherly, though she was two years his junior, as she said gently, “It’s very nice of you to consider Selma like that, Angus. Some boys would think only of themselves and would try to rush the girl along too quickly. If you can wait till she is eighteen, I think you should. But if you feel she really cares, you could have some understanding with her. If she begins to care for you, she ought to know you care for her too. Don’t talk of marrying before she is nineteen; that’s quite early enough, I should say.”

“Spoken like a mother!” Joy mocked. “I’ll do the heavy father. Don’t talk of marriage till you’ve made a good start on your career. Don’t hamper yourself with a wife till you really see where you are going. And—Angus! We don’t know Selma, but if you are going to be a great violinist and play at big concerts, be sure she is the right kind of wife for you. *Is she, by the way?*”

Angus looked at her steadily. “Not yet, Miss Joy. I’ve thought of that. But she will be some day; she must, because she’s my lassie and I can’t do without her.”

“This is very intriguing!” Joan murmured, gazing at him with fascinated eyes. “Angus, I’m beginning to like you rather a lot!”

Angus knitted his brows. “I don’t understand. I want Selma. She’s no’ ready yet; I want to help her. I thought perhaps you would advise me, Miss Joan. I’ve no one else to ask.”

The girls gazed at him, not yet grasping the real reason for his coming.

“You sound a bit forlorn,” Joy observed. “But what can we do?”

“Tell us more, Angus!” Joan coaxed. “How can we help? We’ll advise you in any way we can, but Mother could help you still better. We’ve had no experience in this sort of thing.”

“And we don’t want it,” Joy said emphatically. “Getting married must be an awful bore; a man always fussing round and having to be consulted and expecting to get his own way! Not for me, thank you!”

“There’s more in it than that. Don’t be silly, Joy! Angus, how can we help you?” Joan asked.

Angus, with desperate courage, threw back his head and took the plunge.

“If Selma could come here and—and stay with folks like you, and learn to be like you! That’s what she needs and what I want for her, Miss Joan.”

“Oh!” The girls stared at him again, dumb with surprise.

CHAPTER 2

ALL ABOUT SELMA

“What colossal cheek!” Joy cried.

Angus grew scarlet. “I know. I feel like that myself. But it would be the making of Selma.”

“It’s not really cheek,” Joan said. “Joy, it’s the most tremendous compliment, if you’ll only look at it that way.”

Joy gave a groan, half amused, half indignant.

Angus turned to Joan, his face ablaze with eagerness. “Oh, Miss Joan! It’s no’ easy to ask you. It’s harder for me than for anyone else in the world, after—well, you know! But I do want to help Selma, and it would just change all her life. You were so good to Rykie; I thought perhaps——” He came to a sudden stop.

“That we could take your Selma in her place,” Joan finished for him. “It’s Joy’s house; you’ll have to ask her. But first, tell us about Selma, Angus.”

“Her folks lived at a wee place down the water from Glasgow,” Angus said breathlessly. “Inverkip, it’s called; they had a bit of a farm. But her mother died and there’s only a stepfather left, and Selma doesn’t like him. Small blame to her! He’s no’ a nice chap. So she’s got a job in Glasgow, where she went to school—her mother would have it that she must go to a city school. Selma’s working in a shop, but she doesna—doesn’t like it. I’ve seen her a lot lately, and—and I want her for my girl, Miss Joan.”

“But you think she needs more education?”

“Aye! Yes, Miss Joan. She hasn’t met people; she doesn’t know the right things to say. When I’m playing with an orchestra in yon great hall in London, and she comes to hear me and she’s my wife—well, she’ll need to talk, won’t she?”

“Not while you’re playing,” Joy grinned.

“She certainly will,” Joan agreed. “She’ll have to meet people; she mustn’t disgrace you by seeming a country cousin.”

“Aye, that’s it!” Angus cried. “It’s no’ so much book-learning; she’s been to school. But it’s meeting people and seeing how they think and what they do——”

“Social education,” Joy remarked. “Are we qualified to do that for Selma, Joan?”

“If she could get to know people like you!” Angus began fervently. “And—and if little Miss Jen would be a friend for her! She’s a good, bonny lass, is Miss Jen.”

“She is,” Joan assented. “That just describes her. You think Jen could help your Selma? Oh, she doesn’t live here!”—as his eyes swept round the garden, apparently in search of Jen. “She’s at school; the autumn term has just begun. We borrowed her for the summer, so that she could help us with Rykie. I don’t know that we could do it again.”

“I thought she’d be the one to be friends with Selma,” Angus said wistfully. “Miss Joan, I’ve got some money; I can pay. I’m no’ asking you to take Selma for nothing.”

The girls looked at him curiously. “There’s no need for that,” Joy said abruptly. “If we want your Selma we can afford to take her.”

“How do you happen to have money to spare, Angus?” Joan’s voice was gentle. “You hadn’t any, when we knew you before.”

Angus went scarlet; the question was a fair one, he knew. He looked at Joy, expecting a sharp comment. “And look at the way you tried to get it!” or something of the kind. But Joy restrained herself and waited for his answer.

“Terry gave me a cheque, Miss Joan, before he went back to Hollywood.”

“Terry! It’s useful to have a wealthy half-brother-in-law!” Joy exclaimed.

“He wanted me to go with them and be one of the family, for Belle’s sake, but he knew I wanted to stay in Glasgow and have lessons from McAlister, so he gave me a cheque instead. I want to use it for Selma. She matters more to me than new clothes, or concerts, or better rooms to stay in.”

“That’s really very nice of you, Angus!” Joan’s tone showed how she was warming towards him. “If Selma comes here I don’t think Joy would want you to pay, but if——”

“Rather not!” Joy exploded. “We don’t keep a boarding-house! We’ll invite her, if she comes at all.”

“Yes,” Joan agreed. “But it’s nice of Angus to offer it. Don’t be ungracious, Joy! But if Selma goes to school with Jen, you could pay her fees, Angus. Mother and Joy paid for Rykie, but there would be no reason for them to do it for Selma. And I feel she should go to school. She’d see far more of Jen, and it would be much more interesting for her than staying at home with us. If she’s only sixteen, a little more school won’t hurt her.”

“Will you let her come, Miss Joan?” Angus asked humbly.

“We’ll have to talk it over with Mother,” Joan explained. “We’ll consult her presently. She’s much stronger than she used to be, but I still persuade her to rest in the afternoon. Tell us more about Selma, Angus!”

“Tell us about her odd name,” Joy demanded. “Where did she find it? Is it her real name, or is there more of it? It sounds like a short version of something else.”

“She’s Janet Selma Andersson, Miss Joy. Her father was a sea-captain, sailing between Stockholm and Glasgow, with timber. I think Selma is a Swedish name.”

“It sounds like it. But you said she came from a farm,” Joy objected.

“Her mother’s people had the wee farm near Inverkip, down the water from Glasgow, and her mother stayed with them when the captain went to sea. Almost opposite Inverkip, across the Clyde, there’s a white castle on the hill, and its old name was Dunselma; when he heard that, Captain Andersson laughed and said it meant the hill or fort of Selma, and who could Selma have been, in Scotland, as it was a girl’s name in his country? They called their baby Janet for her mother, and Selma for her father’s country. The captain went away and never came back; his ship was lost off the Orkneys. Mrs. Andersson married again after a time, a chap called

Macgregor; and then she died, and the stepfather was horrible to Selma. As soon as she could, she took a job in Glasgow; school friends of hers helped her to find it. It's no' much of a job yet, for she's only a kid; but she's keen to learn and she'll get on. But, Miss Joan, it's no' good enough for her; just a shop-girl! She needs more than that, if—if some day——” And he paused.

“If she's going to marry a world-famous violinist,” Joy finished for him.

“We see that, and we'd like to help,” Joan agreed. “But there's plenty of time. You've still a long way to go yourself.”

“Aye, but I've started, because you folks were so kind and helped me to go to McAlister. I want Selma to start too. I've no' a scrap of right to ask you to help her as well as me, but I don't know anybody else, and you were good to Rykie.”

“Rykie and Selma! You do go in for odd names!” Joy said. “We must talk to Aunty before we promise anything. Why do you have Swedish names in Scotland? Who called your castle Dunselma?”

“I wouldna ken that—I mean, I wouldn't know, Miss Joy.”

“Vikings,” Joan said, without hesitation. “They sailed all over those Northern seas; they were sure to visit Angus's shores of Clyde. I expect there are plenty of old Scandinavian names, a bit altered during the centuries.”

“Is your Selma a Viking in looks, Angus?”

“What would that be, Miss Joy?”

“Tall and fair and blue-eyed. Is she like her father?”

“No, Miss Joy. Her hair's dark, like her mother's.”

“That will be a change in your family; you and Rykie are so very fair.”

“Belle is dark,” Joan reminded her.

“Selma's lovely, Miss Joan,” Angus broke out. “Her hair's like—like a soft dark cloud, and her eyes are like brown pools in a peat-burn, and her voice is like the wee burn itself, as it ripples along.” He stopped and reddened, at the twinkle in Joy's eyes.

“Dear, dear!” Joy mocked. “I didn't know you were a poet, as well as a fiddler, Angus Reekie.”

“That's how I feel about Selma,” Angus said doggedly.

“Then we must take care of her for you,” Joan decided. “If she's really pretty she mustn't be left to knock about in a city, with nobody to protect her. I'm glad you spoke out and told us how you feel about her, Angus; it's how you ought to feel, if she's to be your girl some day. Come along indoors and we'll talk to Mother.”

CHAPTER 3

AN APPEAL TO THE ABBEY

“But the girl is too young, Joan!” Mrs. Shirley protested, when Joan, in her bedroom, was explaining the position.

“I’m not so sure of that, Mother dear.” Joan sat on the bed and spoke earnestly. “Nowadays girls seem to start that sort of thing very early. I think it’s a pity, but they will do it; I remember how the seniors at school used to talk. It never appealed to Joy or me; we weren’t in a hurry to grow up, but a great many girls are. Angus says Selma isn’t thinking like that, but I don’t see how he can tell. Girls can think a lot without saying much.”

“She must know that his feeling for her is more than mere friendship. He is really in earnest, I suppose?”

“I’m sure he is. Make him talk about her to you, and you’ll think so too. He means it very deeply. How much Selma understands is another matter.”

“It depends on the sort of girl she is,” Mrs. Shirley said. “In any case she would be better away from Angus for a while. It would give him time to make sure of himself, and she may be able to adjust her mind and to find out what she really feels. We must help them, Joan. The child had better come here.”

“Yes,” Joan agreed. “We can’t turn down Angus’s appeal. He has come to us for help.”

“To the Abbey.” Mrs. Shirley smiled at her, with full understanding of Joan’s feeling in the matter. “Angus wants sanctuary for his distressed sweetheart and he has come to the Abbey for help.”

“Mother, how lovely of you! It makes it sound like an ancient romance. The Abbey must welcome the lady-love and protect her.”

“And educate her,” Mrs. Shirley added. “One can understand how the boy feels. He is ambitious, and we believe he will succeed. But his girl-friend must grow up along with him; he can’t leave her behind.”

“In a shop,” Joan added. “As he says, she must learn to meet people. She’s probably terribly shy.”

“But it depends on you,” Mrs. Shirley warned her. “We can’t count much on Joy. You were willing to cope with Rykie, but she was your cousin. Will you take on the job of this new girl?”

“With help from Jen, which is what I said about Rykie,” Joan said promptly. “Jen is almost Selma’s age; she will be a companion for her. That is Angus’s idea; he seems to think a lot of Jenny-Wren. I am sure Selma should go to school, for a while, at least.”

“Has she been to a good school, do you think?”

“Aren’t all schools good in Scotland?” Joan laughed. “I’m sure she has; Angus sounded proud when he said she had been to school in Glasgow, not merely in her village. But I don’t expect

a little more French and maths will hurt her. You'd be willing to have Jen here again, if we can arrange it, Mother? Then they could be friends, and they'd go to school together every day."

"You know I am always glad to have Jen here. She feels like one of us; not a visitor, in the least."

"One of the family. Joy and I feel that too, and yet we've only known her for two years. It will make things much jollier for Selma, if Jen is here. Come and see Angus, Mother, and make him talk about his lassie!"

As Mrs. Shirley welcomed the guest and he looked into her gentle eyes, Angus knew again that this was what he wanted for Selma—to live with people like these and to learn their way of life. He tried to put the thought into words, as he sat by his hostess.

"If Selma could be with people like you, and Miss Joan and Miss Joy and little Miss Jen! There are lots o' folks I'd no' care for her to be with, but here you've got something—I don't know what it is or how to say it, but it's what I want for Selma."

Embarrassed and shy, he sprang up and came to the table, where Joan was attending to cups. "She's no' got anything to eat. Will I take these cakes to her?"

He saw a gleam in Joy's eyes and knew he had done the right thing. Joan looked pleased, too, he thought, as she suggested bread and butter and handed him the plate. Angus made a mental note, and thereafter he waited on Mrs. Shirley carefully.

"Social education!" Joy said to herself. "Good for Angus too. He isn't used to afternoon tea. But he's doing it quite neatly."

Mrs. Shirley listened with attentive sympathy as Angus, in answer to her questions, talked about Selma, while Joan drew Joy into conversation.

"We would like to help your little friend," Mrs. Shirley said, when tea was over. "But it needs some arrangement. We must see if Jen Robins can be spared to us again, and that does not depend only on us. We will think over the matter carefully and see what can be done."

"Are you staying in London, or are you going back to Glasgow, Angus?" Joan asked.

"Back to Glasgow, Miss Joan. I found a chap to take my place with the dance orchestra, but only for two nights."

"Then you'd better get along, if you're catching the night train. We'll write to you in a day or two. And you might leave your Selma's address with us, in case we need to write to her for any reason."

"Funny way to spell Andersson," Joy commented, when Angus had obeyed. "Swedish, I suppose! Shall I run you in to Wycombe station? It will save you time and trouble," and she went to get out the car.

"We might call at school and have a talk with the Head," Joan said, as they set out.

"On the way home," Joy agreed. "The Head is the important one. Jenny-Wren's mother will always let her come to us. She thinks you're such a good influence for a growing girl."

"Ass!" said Joan indignantly.

Angus looked wistful. "Selma's a growing girl, too, Miss Joan."

Joan laughed. “And you want us to adopt her?”

“Aye, just that. She’d be a different girl.”

“Is she as bad as all that?” Joy asked. “It sounds terrible.”

“That’s no’ what I mean.” Angus struggled to explain himself. “There’s nothing—she’s a good lass, but——”

“Joy’s only teasing, Angus. Don’t listen to her.”

“Oh!” and Angus sat silent, pondering.

As they reached the town he began stumblingly to thank them, but Joan cut him short.

“Not yet, Angus. Even if Selma comes to us she may not want to stay. We can’t keep her against her will. She may not like us! The most we can do is to invite her to stay with us for a while and see how we get on together. If we can help her we will. That’s all we can say at present.”

Angus still struggled to express his thanks, but they checked him and left him to find his train, and Joy drove off to the big school on the outskirts of the town.

As they entered the building, confident that, as it was still early, Miss Macey would not have gone home, they heard music coming from the hall.

“Dancing?” Joy raised her brows. “Jenny-Wren will be there.”

“Singing,” Joan said. “But I think Jen will be—yes, listen, Joy!”

The sound of children’s voices came through a half-open door. The Abbey Girls looked at one another and laughed, and paused to peer through the glass panels of the door.

Small girls and boys were walking round in a big ring, singing lustily, “When I was a schoolgirl,” and acting the song, some bending over imaginary books, some apparently in tears over difficult lessons. The verse changed to, “When I was a teacher,” and with great gusto they scolded and shook their fingers at one another.

Two girls were watching them; one was a tall dark senior; the other, also tall, was fifteen, with blue eyes and hair worn in two thick yellow plaits.

“Jen’s practice night, with her babies,” Joy murmured. “I wondered if she’d go on with it, now the show is over. She is a brick!”

“She didn’t do it for the show,” Joan remarked. “The show was an afterthought. She loves it, and she wouldn’t want to give it up. But who is the other girl? She’s new since our time.”

“I know who she is and I’m jolly glad to have the chance to speak to her,” Joy said. “Don’t you recognise her? She’s Aileen Carter, who was such a perfect sport about giving up her part as Jaques, when our rotten little Rykie bagged it.” And she pushed open the door and strode into the room.

CHAPTER 4

ALLIES AT SCHOOL

With a wild whoop, Jen leapt across the hall. "Joan! Oh, Joan, have you come to ask me to tea on Saturday?"

Joy went over to the other girl. "You are Aileen, aren't you? I wanted to speak to you at the fête in July, but there were such mobs of people that I didn't think you'd like it. I say, you know, you were most awfully decent about that play last term!"

Aileen coloured. "I'm glad you didn't speak of it at the fête. What else could I do? Your cousin made a much better Jaques than I should have done."

"Not my cousin, thanks be! Joan's relation; nothing to do with me! I know; she was jolly good. But all the same it was your part and the way she grabbed it was simply foul. You could have hung on to it quite well. It had been given to you."

"I couldn't do that, when everybody knew she'd do it better than I ever should. Please don't talk about it any more! I couldn't do anything else."

"I won't keep on. But I'm glad to have the chance to say I think you were an absolute brick over the whole business."

Aileen reddened again. "It's nice of you. My cousin Carry seems to have had a big row with you, but that's nothing to do with me. Thank you, Miss Shirley."

"Oh, Carry and I used to fight no end. But that was because I didn't like her little ways. As you say, it's nothing to do with us. There's one of the family I like a jolly lot, and that's you. Were you watching Jen's class?" Joy changed the subject, for Aileen was looking uncomfortable.

"She wanted to give the kids an easy dance, so I said I'd play for her. They've been doing 'Butterfly'; she taught it jolly well. But they like the games better."

"The actions, and the singing. Yes, they would, at their age. Piano or violin?"

"Piano," Aileen smiled. "I wish I was a fiddler, but I'm not."

"Well, I say! Come to see us one day and try my piano; it's rather special and I love it. We'll discuss Chopin and Schubert, and Joan will show you the Abbey. We'll arrange a day; can I ring you up?"

As Aileen gave her number her eyes were glowing and a quick thought shot through her mind. This was what Carry, her cousin, had wanted; to be invited to the Hall and the Abbey on terms of friendship. Carry had been Joy's maid-of-honour, when Joy had been May Queen, having failed in her ambition to be Queen herself. But a serious quarrel had put friendship out of the question; Joy had never relented and had shown plainly that she was not prepared to accept Carry even as an acquaintance, when they had both left school.

"Carry will rave with envy," Aileen said to herself. "But I shall go, if I'm really asked. I wonder what she did to upset Joy Shirley so badly? But she won't tell me. She'll try to go

with me, if I go, but I shall see that she doesn't."

"Perhaps you could do something for us presently," Joy said, thinking hard. "I don't know yet, but if certain things happen we may ask you to help. Will you do it?"

"If I can," Aileen laughed. "What sort of thing?"

"Oh, just to be friendly to somebody. But it isn't arranged yet."

"I'll try, Miss Shirley."

"Nice to know we can ask you! We can depend on Jen, but two friends are better than one."

"Is another Rykie coming to stay with you? Jen says she's in Hollywood now. She'll love it."

"It's the right place for her," Joy assented. "Not another Rykie, we hope, but perhaps somebody else. You'll hear about it later, if it comes off."

Joan was laughing across at Jen. "To ask you to tea? Why should we ask you to tea? We've come to call on the Head."

"She's in her study. You often have asked me on the first Saturday of term," Jen urged. "I want to see the Abbey and the cats and Aunty Shirley. Is she all right?"

"Third in importance to the Abbey and the cats! She's quite well and really stronger. I'm very proud of her."

"I am glad! Living at the Abbey is being good for her. I didn't really mean that she mattered less than the cats! How horrid of you, Joan!"

"Forgive me! I was only ragging," Joan laughed. "If we ask you to tea, will you come?"

"I'll always come! You know that quite well."

"No dancing or matches on Saturday afternoon?"

"Only hockey practice, and I'm no good at hockey. They'll let me off."

"You don't try very hard over hockey, do you?"

"I don't try at all," Jen said candidly. "I don't like it, and I don't want it to butt in and spoil my dancing for the whole winter. Cricket's bad enough; I won't take on hockey as well."

"What does Jack say about that?"

For more than two years Jacqueline had been Jen's close friend among the girls of her own age. A keen cricketer, she had tried to draw Jen away from the Hamlet Club and its dancing, for the sake of the cricket team, and had succeeded at times, during the summer.

"Jack's got to put up with me and she knows it. She's good at hockey; she's good at everything to do with games. But she says it's too late to make me keen now; I ought to have begun years ago."

"I dare say that's true. I'm glad you've started again with your children. Have they forgotten everything since July?"

"A good lot, and we've crowds of new ones. But they'll soon pick up again. I tried them with 'Butterfly,' but they like the games best."

“Stick to the games, then. You carry on, while we go and talk to the Head.”

“You are going to ask me, aren’t you?” Jen said anxiously.

“For sure, Jenny-Wren. But we must ask Miss Macey first.”

Jen was dismissing her children, and Aileen had gone home, when Joan came back to the hall.

“Joy’s seeing to the car. It’s more than an invitation to tea, Jenny-Wren. Will you come to us for the week-end?”

Jen gave a shout. “Will I? Oh, Joan, you angel! How I’ll love it! I never like the first Sunday at school awfully much; I miss Mother and Father when there’s more time to think. But a Sunday at the Abbey is always a joyful occasion. You are jolly kind to think of it!”

“I didn’t think of it quite like that,” Joan admitted. “We knew you’d be willing to come, but _____”

“Willing! Joan-Queen, how can you? You know how I love to come!”

“But we weren’t thinking particularly of your point of view this time. We want you to do something for us. No, I can’t tell you about it now; it’s time we were home. But you shall hear all about it to-morrow afternoon; Joy will fetch you.”

“I’ll do anything! Is it something hard, Joan? I’d like to do something really hard for you.”

“I don’t suppose it will be hard at all. But I can’t tell you any more now. You can dream about it all night.”

“Oh, I shall! I sha’n’t sleep a wink.”

“Don’t be silly!” Joan said severely, and went off to join Joy in the car.

CHAPTER 5

A JOYFUL OCCASION

“Now tell me all about it!” Jen had kissed Mrs. Shirley and greeted the cats, and had arranged cushions for herself and Joan outside the door of the chapter-house, where the afternoon sun shone full upon them. “I didn’t ask Joy, in the car, and she didn’t say anything,” she added. “You’d said you would tell me, so I waited for you.”

“Joy’s full of a new tune. She says she dreamt it and now she has to work it out.”

“I thought she looked a bit dreamy. I shall ask her to play it to me. Isn’t this really a joyful occasion, as I said, Joan? It’s lovely to be here with you again!”

“It’s a very serious occasion,” Joan warned her.

Jen gave her a quick look. “Nothing can make it less joyful for me. But tell me, Joan! I’m dying to hear.”

The stout black cat, the Mother Superior, came pacing across the garth, tail very erect, and laid a large soft paw on Jen’s knee; then changed her mind and went to Joan, and did the same thing, looking up into her face.

Jen thrust her into Joan’s lap. “Joan’s your missus. I’ll have Timmy. Come on, Shaggy-Mat! Now settle down and be happy, for we want to talk.” She stroked the long gray locks which Timmy wore and looked eagerly at Joan. The third cat, the Curate, aloof as usual, glanced at them and went off for a lonely prowl.

“We had a visitor yesterday.” Joan fondled the Mother Superior, and plunged into the story. “We took him to the station before we came to school to see you. Guess who it was!”

“I couldn’t possibly.” Jen stared at her wide-eyed. “You said ‘him.’ Joan, you couldn’t mean—it couldn’t have been—no, it simply couldn’t!”

“I don’t call that guessing nicely at all! I fancy you’re getting warm, all the same.”

“Not Angus?” Jen gasped.

“Yes, Angus. He came to ask us to help him.”

“But what ghastly cheek! After all you did for him! How could he, Joan?”

“He was very humble about it, but he wanted something and he was quite sure we could do it for him, if we would.”

“And will you? You never say no, do you? Joy does, sometimes, but not you.”

“We talked it over last night. We’ll try to help, but only if you’ll back us up.”

“Me? Oh, Joan dear, don’t talk silly! What can I do? What did Angus want?”

“Angus has a girl-friend and he wants to help her. He can’t do it alone; he’s right there. He wondered if we’d lend a hand.”

“Well, that’s a relief to my mind!” Jen said fervently. “You mean there’s a girl he wants to marry? That’s all right! I was afraid he might want Joy, or even you.”

“Gracious, Jen! What put that into your head?”

“I don’t see how any man could help wanting to marry one of you, and I suppose Angus is a man, though he doesn’t behave like one. I thought Joy was the most likely, because of her music. You’re far too good for him.”

“Your mind can be quite at ease! Neither of us is thinking of marrying Angus Reekie, even if he becomes a famous violinist. His girl is in Glasgow, working in a shop, and he’s really terribly keen on her. I liked him better, when he talked about her, than I’ve ever done. Terry has given him a cheque, and he wants to spend it on this girl.”

“That’s decent of him,” Jen acknowledged. “But what does he want you to do about it? I suppose they’re engaged?”

“No, nothing like that. Selma is only sixteen.”

“Who?” Jen’s eyes widened again.

Joan smiled at her. “Her name is Janet.”

“Poor bloke! I couldn’t like anybody called Janet.” Jen disliked her own name heartily. “But that’s not what you said. You called her something else.”

“She’s Janet Selma Andersson,” and Joan told of the origin of Selma’s name, so far as she knew it.

“Selma! Oh, that’s better! It’s rather pretty! Yes, I like Selma.”

“Angus says she is pretty too; he was quite poetical about her. But—don’t you see?—it’s too early to talk of marrying. He is twenty-one, but she is only sixteen. He can’t ask her to be engaged for a year or two.”

“Some girls would,” Jen said thoughtfully. “But I think it’s silly. I’m nearly sixteen myself, but I’m not going to get engaged just yet.” And she gave Joan an impish grin.

“Please don’t! You haven’t heard yet what Angus wants us to do for Selma.”

“No. Tell me, Joan. What can you do for her?”

“He wants us to have her here.”

Jen had settled herself comfortably to listen, stroking the happy Timmy, but at this she sat up suddenly.

“Joan! But why? Oh, Joan, tell me more! I’m sorry, Timsy; I know I startled you, but Joan made me jump right up in the air. Settle down again, Angel. Joan, why?”

“He said, quite simply, that if Selma could live with people like us it would be just what she needed.”

“He’s right there! It was jolly clever of Angus. But, Joan——”

“I think it’s because of Mother,” Joan said. “He looks at her as if she is something very special—precious and rather rare. I watched him, and there was something almost touching in the way he looked at her and held her hand. He has never seen anyone like her.”

“I’d never have believed Angus had so much sense! Does he want her to adopt Selma? But hasn’t she any family?”

“Only a stepfather, whom she dislikes. Angus is thinking of the future. He’s determined to be a great violinist and play with big orchestras in London; he’s also determined to marry Selma. But he feels——”

“If she’ll have him,” Jen interrupted.

“Yes. But he’s quite firm about it. She is his girl, his lassie, as he says.”

Jen pursed her lips. “When Selma grows up, she may like somebody else better.”

“He has to risk that. I don’t think it has occurred to him. Well, you see, he feels that she is not having the education she needs for the future. She has been to school; a good school, I think, from his tone; but now she has a job in a shop, and he feels it isn’t good enough. He is going ahead, with his first-class lessons from McAlistair, but she is stuck in a rut.”

Jen nodded. “A change would be useful for her. He wants her to come here and see if she’ll get infected with your niceness?”

“Oh, Jen!” Joan laughed. “Not our niceness; I daren’t claim that. But he thinks it would be good for her to live with new people for a while.”

“And especially with you and dear Aunty Shirley. I do think Angus is sensible! You’ll let her come, won’t you? But you said I was to back you up. Do you want me to be friends with her? How can I, if I’m at school?”

“What if you were here?”

“To live with you? Is that what you mean?” Jen gave her well-known shriek of delight, and once more had to apologise to Timmy. “Oh, Joan, will you have me again, like last term?”

“We might manage to bear it,” Joan said seriously. “We shall have to ask your mother, but the Head understands and is willing you should come.”

“The darling! She really is a lamb sometimes. Oh, Mother will let me come. It’s so much better for my health than living in Wycombe.” Jen’s solemnity matched Joan’s.

Joan laughed. “We feel Selma should go to school. You’ll take care of her, won’t you?”

“I’ll take care of a dozen girls, if I may live with you! But will she like going back to school, if she’s grown up and been in a shop?”

“Angus wants her to get experience in meeting all kinds of people. He didn’t put it that way, but that’s what he meant. And the right sort of people. He particularly asked if you would be friendly with her; he seems to have a high opinion of you. Showing his good sense again, you see!”

“Goodness!” Jen cried. “But I was the one who jumped on him and knocked him down!”

“It seems to have made a good impression on him; he thinks a lot of you. Perhaps he liked being jumped on. Will you be kind to Selma, Jen?”

“Joan, I will!” Jen promised fervently. “Whatever she’s like, I’ll be nice to her. But I hope she’ll be a good sort. Do you suppose she’ll be like Rykie?”

“Why should she be like Rykie? And you managed Rykie all right.”

“Only sometimes. She was a bit of a trial to me. You’ll write to Mother to-morrow, won’t you?”

“And to Angus. We haven’t promised anything yet. We’re thinking it over and consulting Miss Macey, and your mother, and you.”

Jen grinned. “Miss Macey and I are willing, and we know Mother will say yes. You can write to Angus. But there’s one thing bothering me.”

She sat gazing across the garth at the broken remains of the cloisters, her yellow plaits falling on each side of her grave face, Timmy in her lap forgotten.

CHAPTER 6

A NEW POINT OF VIEW

“You look very sober,” Joan said. “What’s the matter?”

“I was wondering,” Jen explained, “just what Selma is going to say about it. How do you suppose she’ll feel?”

Joan looked at her curiously. “How do you mean? Do you think she won’t want to come?”

“If she knew what it’s like here, and what you are like, of course she’d want to come. She’d just leap at the chance. But she doesn’t know. She may hate the very thought of it, and of us. I wouldn’t like it.”

“This is serious.” Joan’s tone was grave. “I’m afraid I hadn’t realised Selma’s point of view. You think she may not like the plan?”

“I wonder what Angus has said to her?” Jen pondered. “For if she’s not engaged to him and if she’s not supposed to know how he feels, she may ask why on earth he should go sending her places—to the ends of the earth, to stay with strange people? Into a new country, to people she has never heard of? She may say it’s no business of Angus Reekie’s.”

“It’s perfectly true. We ought to have thought of that.” Joan, too, gazed across the garth, her eyes troubled.

Jen glanced at her, and they sat silent, both looking thoughtful.

“I don’t believe Angus has told her the plan,” Joan said at last. “He said something in the car; that he’d wait to hear from us before he said anything to Selma.”

“He’d be afraid you’d refuse,” Jen assented. “Then you can tell him to be careful, when he tells her. I think he’ll need to be very tactful.”

“Can Angus be tactful?” Joan asked doubtfully.

“I shouldn’t think so. He’s much more likely to rush at Selma, all thrilled with his big idea, and have a ghastly shock, if she says she won’t come here.”

“If only we knew a little more about her!” Joan exclaimed. “What will she do? What is she like? Everything turns on that!”

“A complete mystery,” Jen agreed. “She’s X, the unknown quantity. How can we make plans, when we don’t know what X is like?”

“We’ll see if Joy has any ideas,” Joan said, as they went to the house for tea, leaving the cats purring happily in a sunny corner.

“Joy won’t have any. Aunty Shirley might be able to help.”

But Mrs. Shirley merely looked dismayed, when the problem was put to her. “I hope the child will not be difficult,” she said dubiously. “It is quite possible she may resent Angus’s action and look on it as interference.”

“She’ll get her back up, if she thinks he’s trying to boss her,” Joy said. “It’s not as if they were engaged. He’d have some right to butt in then. Well, amuse yourselves nicely, dear people! I’m going to wrestle with my tune.”

“Play it to us, Joy!” Jen pleaded.

“It’s not nearly ready for that,” Joy retorted.

“Is it a dance? Or a lullaby?”

“A love song. Angus and Selma must have given me inspiration.”

“You don’t know anything about love songs!”

“Not much, but I have some imagination. It never occurred to me to try something sentimental before,” and Joy went off to her piano.

Joan was almost ready for bed when a tap came at her door, and Jen slipped in, in slippers and blue dressing-gown, with very neatly braided hair.

“May I come for one minute, Joan-Queen? I want to get something off my mind. I can’t go to sleep till I’ve asked you about it.”

“Quickly, then!” Joan commanded, and tossing back her long red plaits she came to sit on the bed. “Get inside, if you like.”

“This will do,” and Jen squatted beside her and drew the eiderdown over their knees. “It’s not a midnight feast; I’ll only stay for two minutes. I nearly sat on the Curate. Does he always sleep with you?”

“He never sleeps indoors. He comes for half an hour and then he goes off on his own, to prowls in the woods. He’s a restless person. Tell me, Jen!”

“Well, Joan dear, why don’t you write to Selma, before Angus tells her, and invite her to come here?”

Joan gazed at her. “That strikes me as quite a brilliant idea. You think she’d like it better?”

“Better than being told by Angus that he’s arranged everything without asking her.”

“Yes. Let me think! Yes, I believe you’re right. A direct invitation from us, saying we’ve heard of her from Angus and we’d like her to come and stay with us for a time; is that right?”

“And make her feel you really want her. But if she says ‘No, thank you,’ it’s going to be jolly awkward,” Jen added.

“Then Angus would have to persuade her. We won’t say anything about school. That would look too much arranged and it might give her a shock. If she comes, you can tell her about things and ask her to go with you. She’ll think she’s only been invited for a short visit, but if we seem to be getting really friendly, I shall have to talk to her; I’ll say we’ll be pleased if she will stay for some time, and that I think Angus would be pleased too.”

“And then you’ll see what she says and you’ll be able to guess what she thinks of Angus.”

“How she reacts,” Joan agreed. “I’ll do it, Jen. Thank you for a very helpful idea. You may have made things much easier for Selma.”

“I only know how I’d feel, if I were in her place.”

“Yes. I’ll write to-morrow; what a good thing we asked for her address! I’ll write to Angus too, and warn him not to say anything. Let it come from her! If they are really as good friends as he says, Selma will tell him of the invitation at once.”

“Especially as you’ll have told her that you know him,” Jen added. “I wonder if she’s heard the story of how you got to know him? But I guess not; he wouldn’t tell her.”

“We won’t tell her either. That story must be buried,” Joan said firmly.

“Righto! I won’t give him away. Thanks for letting me tell you! I can go to sleep now.”

“Thank you for a useful and brilliant idea!” Joan said, looking much relieved. “You’ve helped us already, Jenny-Wren.”

“If only we knew what Selma is like!” Jen sighed again, as she went off to bed.

“Any more brilliant ideas?” Joan asked next day.

Jen looked doubtful. “Perhaps a little tiny one. I’m afraid it isn’t worth very much. Joan, if Selma is working in a shop, with other girls, they’ll have talked to her about her boy-friend; girls do, you know.”

Joan looked interested. “You mean Selma will know that Angus wants to be more than just a casual friend?”

“It’s all very well for him to talk as if she was still at school. She isn’t; she’s grown-up and she’s with grown-up girls, even if she’s only sixteen. I think she’ll understand.”

“You may be right,” Joan assented. “It might make things easier.”

“She can’t be as—as simple and infantile—as he thinks. She may not be in love with him, but she’ll know what he wants, and she may be thinking that perhaps some day she’ll want it too.”

Joan agreed. “I shall be careful what I say. We mustn’t try to hurry her.”

“No, but remember she isn’t a school kid, as Angus thinks.”

“You really are very useful to us, Jenny-Wren!” Joan said, with conviction. “But I wonder if Selma will want to go back to school?”

“After being in business? Perhaps she’ll say she won’t go. I think Angus is all wrong about her age. She may be much more grown-up than he thinks.”

“It makes her still more of a mystery; the unknown quantity. It’s difficult to know how to write,” Joan said.

Jen grinned at her. “You write the letter and I’ll crit. it. What frightful cheek! Don’t take any notice of me. You’ll write a beautiful letter, Joan-Queen.”

“With your help I may manage it,” Joan retorted. “We’ll make it up together this afternoon, in the Abbey.”

“Oh, yes! I’ll love that. I’ll tell you what to say!”

“It will be safest to say as little as possible, so long as we sound cordial and welcoming,” Joan said. “There are so many pitfalls in writing to an unknown quantity!”

“We’ll ask the Mother Superior to help. Anyone can see she’s bursting with wisdom.”

“With experience, anyway,” Joan assented, with a laugh. “There’s nothing young and innocent about her.”

“But she’s very nice! Her experiences have had a—a gentling effect on her.”

“Mellowing is the word,” Joan told her. “All right! We’ll ask the Mother Superior’s advice.”

CHAPTER 7

AN EXPLORER AT HEART

“See you to-night at Club!” Mollie Macpherson waved good-bye to her friend and went off to her home.

“What’s happened?” she demanded, an hour later, as Selma Andersson appeared for the meeting of the Youth Club, to which they belonged. “You look gay queer!”

“I feel queer! I’ve had the funniest letter. It was waiting when I went in. So odd, Mollie!”

“From the boy-friend?”

“I wish you would no’ call him that! He really isn’t, you know; not as you mean it. No, from somebody I’ve never heard of before.”

“Weird! But you’ll have to keep it till later. They’re making up sets; you’re late. Are you going to do ‘Petronella’ with me?”

“I am so!” and Selma ran to the dressing-room to leave her coat and change her shoes. She liked the country-dance class best of all the activities of the Club, and even with thrilling news to tell she did not want to miss any of it.

But when “Petronella” had been followed by “Strip the Willow” and “Haymakers,” and then by a boisterous Eightsome Reel, even Selma and Mollie were ready to rest. The others in the class felt the same, and a babel of talk filled the hall, while the leader went to stand by the pianist and chat.

“All exhausted and breathless! But they can still make a good deal of noise,” she laughed.

“Now tell me!” Mollie demanded, waving off several boys who would have joined them. “Go away! Awa’ wi’ ye! We’re busy!”

“I wish Angus could play for the reels,” Selma remarked. “A piano’s feeble; it just can’t play reels. I know Miss Davidson’s good, but the piano isn’t—no’ for reels. Angus does it marvellously. All right, Mollie! It was a letter from somebody in the South, in England, asking me to go and stay with her. Now what do you think o’ that?”

“Either she’s mad, or you are, or I am,” Mollie said simply. “Why should you go and stay with her? Who is she? And how has she heard about you?”

“She knows Angus. His sister stayed with her in the summer.”

“The boy-friend again! He’s definitely useful, is he no’? Oh well, if he kens these people, they must be a’ right.”

“I’m sure they’re all right. It’s a jolly kind letter. But I don’t see why they should want me.”

“Is his sister still there?”

“No, she’s gone to Hollywood, to be a film star; he told me. I know her; her name’s Rykie, short for Frederica. I don’t like her awfully much. She’s crazy about films and acting, and I’m not.”

“Do they want to make you into a film star too?”

“They’d better no’ try! Rykie was keen before she went there. No, they just say they’re friends of Angus Reekie’s and he spoke to them about me, and they’d like to get to know me.”

“Very queer!” Mollie acknowledged. “I wonder what he said about you? It must have been something nice, since it made them want to see you! What will you do?”

“Ask Angus about them, the first chance I get. I wondered if you’d cut canteen and First Aid and come with me, and we’d go round and ask him what he thinks about it. He’s playing at the dance hall, and I’m no’ keen on going there alone.”

“He’ll no’ have time to talk, if he’s playing, and he’ll no’ love you for bothering him.”

“He doesn’t like me to go there,” Selma admitted. “But I must ask him about this, Mollie!”

“Leave a note at his digs, asking him to see you at lunch-time to-morrow. You must eat, and so must he. Why not eat together?”

“I could do that. I’d love to go to England!” Selma said yearningly. “It would be a real adventure!”

“You and your adventures! You’d go to the North Pole, if anybody asked you!”

“Oh, aye! I would that! Angus says it’s because of my father; I’ve inherited it from him. He was a sailor, you know. I’d like to go to sea, and I’d like to sail to odd countries. I wonder if England’s very different from Scotland?”

But Mollie knew nothing about England. “I don’t see how it can be. It’s no’ so far away. But they speak differently; you’ve heard English people talking.”

“I’d soon get used to that. Do you think I could possibly go, Mollie? Think what a lot I’d see!”

“They’ve asked you,” Mollie argued. “I don’t see why you can’t go. The boy-friend must want you to go, if he told these folks about you.”

Selma gloated over the possible prospect. “England—and the South of England! She says they live in the country, near Oxford. Oxford’s in the South; I do know that much!”

“What’s her name?”

“Joan Shirley. It’s a queer name, but jolly.”

“She’ll think yours is a queer name, I bet. Was it a nice letter?”

“Jolly nice; friendly and welcoming. She seems to think I might stay with them for some time; Rykie was there all summer, and this person says they miss her and perhaps I’ll come and take her place. That doesn’t sound like going for a week, does it?”

“They mean you to stay for a good while. You’ll have to give up your job; the boss wouldn’t give you as long as that for a holiday.”

“I’d get something else. I’m no’ a scrap keen on the old shop. And I’ve had my holiday. I could no’ ask for another.”

“Do these people want you to go at once?”

“As soon as I can arrange it, the letter says.”

“You’d better give a week’s notice. But talk to the boy-friend first. There may be snags you’ve no’ thought of. I will miss you, if you go! Oh, don’t go, Selma! It would be horrible without you!”

“You’ll have to chum up with Jean or Margaret or Bella. I’m not a heartless brute, Mollie, but I do want to go, if Angus thinks it’s all right. It’s such a marvellous chance!”

“Oh, aye, it’s that, and you’re in luck.” Mollie sighed. “Are you sure you’ll no’ need anybody to take care of you? You’re only a kid!”

Selma’s laugh rang out. “I can take care of myself! I’ll write and tell you all about England! Come on! Time to do some work. Don’t tell anybody, Mollie! It may come to nothing, you know.”

“I’ll no’ tell a soul,” Mollie promised, and they joined the First Aid class and bandaged one another with great gusto but not much skill.

As a rule they lunched together, since their hours coincided, but next day Mollie, with a rueful grin, turned the other way.

“My love to the boy-friend! Tell him I’m no’ wantin’ to lose you.”

“But I want to go. I’m wanting it more all the time. I’ve been thinking about England all night,” Selma confessed, as she hurried away.

Angus was waiting outside the tea-shop she had suggested in her note. He watched her as she came demurely up the street; she was remembering that she was a business woman and that it would not do to rush on him like a whirlwind, demanding to be told everything.

In vain he tried to see her with Joan Shirley’s eyes. How would she appear to Mrs. Shirley? Would she fit in with the family at the Hall? But he could only see her as he had done ever since he had first met her; dark brown hair hanging loosely just to her shoulders in natural waves, deep brown eyes; neat working suit of dark blue. Her eyes at the moment were full of excitement, and he thought all would be well.

“Angus! Tell me! You know about the letter, don’t you?”

He took her elbow and steered her into the crowded shop to a small table in a corner. “I can no’ stay long. McAlistair wants me at two sharp. But you can’t stay, either. I’ll order; what will you have? Their sausage-and-mash is quite decent.”

“That will do fine. I don’t care what I have; I’ll no’ notice what I’m eating. A bun and milk would do.”

“It would not,” and Angus gave his order. “Now, out with it! Have you had Miss Joan’s letter?”

“A lovely letter! Oh, Angus, I want to go! I’d give anything to see England! Would I have to go through London? It’s a super thrill! But ought I to go? Why have they asked me? Do they really want me? Tell me about them, and what it all means!”

“There’s Miss Joan and Miss Joy—she’s keen on music and she writes tunes. And there’s Miss Joan’s mother, Mrs. Shirley. She’s——” Angus stumbled. “I don’t know how to say it.

She's beautiful; a wee old lady, and so douce and gentle and kind. And there's Miss Jen, who goes to school but comes to stay with them a lot; she's about as old as you. She was jolly decent to Rykie; they all were. I—I saw them when Rykie was there."

"What's the matter?" Selma eyed him keenly. "Why have you gone so red? What's odd about your going to see Rykie and meeting the folks she was staying with?"

"I told them about you," Angus hurried on. "They said they'd like to see you and perhaps you'd come and stay for a bit, as Rykie had gone away. I knew how keen you were to see new places, and you've never been to England. It's the bonniest place, all country and trees and gardens and flowers; and they're the kindest people. You'll love them, and—and everything. I hope you'll go, Selma."

"You really mean it? You think I ought to go?" Selma's eyes gleamed.

"Miss Joan will be disappointed, if you don't."

"How old is she? An old body?"

Angus laughed. "She left school a year ago. She and Miss Joy—they're exactly alike, though they aren't twins, but only cousins—have the loveliest red hair; dark red, not ginger. They're both very bonny and only just grown-up. Miss Joy works at music; she plays the piano beautifully. Miss Joan takes care of the house and her mother, and the Abbey belongs to her. It's ruins, in their garden." His colour rose again, but once more he hurried on. "The house is called the Hall, and it belongs to Miss Joy."

"A big place?" Selma looked startled. "A big country house? Oh, Angus, I'd be scared! I'd no' ken how to behave!"

"You couldn't be scared of those folks. There'll no' be anybody else. Why do you no' give notice at Macdonald's? You'll easy get taken on somewhere else when you come back, and it's no' been good enough for you. You've always felt it was only for a start."

"To get experience. Oh, I'm no' going to stay at Mac's all my life! But I had to begin somewhere."

"Write to Miss Shirley and say you'd like to come."

"And thank her," Selma added. "When could I go? You'll tell me how to get there, won't you?"

Angus grinned. "I know you're an explorer at heart, Selma Andersson, but you're no' going all that way alone. I'll take you and hand you over to them."

"Oh! That would be fun! But is it no' going to cost an awful lot?" Selma asked doubtfully. "And will I no' need heaps of new clothes, to stay at a place like that?"

Angus took up the bill. "I'll have to rush. Yes, I'm paying to-day."

"No, please! Go shares as usual, Angus!"

"No' to-day. Will you come out with me on Sunday afternoon? We'll take the bus to Ashton and sit on the rocks."

"And talk. I've heaps more questions! Yes, I'll do that; I'd like it. I'll no' write to Miss Shirley till you've told me more about it. But if you think I can go, I'll go on dreaming about

England.”

“Don’t dream while you’re on the job! You’ll give the wrong change.”

“I could give the right change in my sleep,” Selma retorted.

CHAPTER 8

IN A CROWDED TRAIN

"I've done it!" Selma ran to meet Angus on Sunday afternoon, hatless as usual, but wearing her best green frock and a big coat.

He led her to the station. "Aye, I ken you like the bus better; so do I. But the train's quicker, and we've no' too long. What have you done? Written the letter?"

"Not yet. There are a thousand things I want to know, before I write. I've given notice at Mac's."

"Have you so?" Angus cried, half admiring, half doubtful.

Selma glanced at his face. "I had to do it. I'm going to England; I can't miss such a wonderful chance. Besides, it happened; I'm no' sure that I didn't get the sack."

Angus took the tickets and guided her to the train. "Better tell me all about it."

"Where are we going? You said to Ashton."

"Gourock. We'll walk along to Ashton and sit on the rocks; the train saves time. What's this about getting the sack?"

"I made so many mistakes that they had me up to the office and lectured me," Selma said ruefully. "I could no' think of anything but England, and the journey, and London, and the new people, and what clothes I'd need to take, and——"

"I bet you made mistakes! Did they fire you on the spot?"

"They were rather nice about it," Selma said, with dignity. "I told them I'd had an invitation to go and stay with people near Oxford, and as I wanted to go frightfully badly and I couldn't ask for more holidays, I thought I'd have to leave the shop. They said it might be just as well, if I was going to be so careless, but I'm to go and see them when I come back, and if they've a vacancy they'll take me on again. They say my work's good enough as a rule, when my mind is no' full of other things. I thanked them, but I'll no' go back. I'll look for something better. Angus, I'm boiling over with questions!"

The carriage was filling up for the quick run to the coast. Angus sat in the corner opposite to hers and they leaned forward, their heads close together.

"Fire away. But don't shriek," he said briefly.

Selma's dark eyes, always large, seemed to grow larger still. "I've been thinking and worrying, ever since you told me about those girls."

He looked at her quickly. "Miss Joan and Miss Joy, and little Miss Jen?"

"Yes, but no' the little one. The grown-ups; you say they are bonny, with lovely hair, and one of them's keen on music, like you. You're no' going to—to like either of them very much, are you?"

There was acute anxiety in her voice. Something had happened to her, since Angus had spoken of the English girls, three days before. The talk of Mollie and the rest had had its effect and she had come to look on him as her special property. Suddenly she had known that she did not want him to like any other girl—not in that special way. The more she had thought about it, the more likely it had seemed that he would be swept off his feet by these girls and that she would be forgotten.

“I’m only a kid. He wants somebody older than me,” she had said to herself, again and again; and she had neglected her duties and had given the wrong change.

To her immense relief she saw his eyes fill with laughter. “You cuckoo!” he said. “Wee idiot! Those girls would no’ look at me. They’re rich, and—well—different. I could never ask one of them to marry me.”

“No, but you might worship her from far off!” Selma had been reading novelettes. “You’d work, and become famous, and she’d wait for you, and one day——”

“Oh, stow it!” He laid his hand on her knee. “I’ll work, and I’ll be famous, but it’s somebody else I want to wait for me, not Miss Joan or Miss Joy.”

Selma shot a quick look at him. “Are you—you couldn’t be proposing to me—in a crowded train? Do you really mean me?”

“I’m no’ asking you to marry me yet,” Angus said, sudden fierce intensity in his tone. “And I’d no’ meant to speak of it to-day, or for years yet. But you’ve witched it out o’ me. Some day I shall ask you properly. Will you wait for me?”

“Aye, will I!” Selma said fervently. “I’m no’ wanting to be married, but it would be awful nice to know we belonged to one another.”

Angus laughed under his breath. “My lassie! And you’ll mind I’m your man, Selma girl?”

“I’ll mind that! But it’s no’ a good place to ask me,” Selma protested.

“Nobody’s taking any notice of us. Let’s leave it like that. We’ll belong to one another, and some day we’ll get married.”

“That’s what I’d like,” Selma said eagerly.

“Shake hands on it!” Angus’s lips were quivering with amusement.

They clasped hands, and Selma added, “And you’ll no’ look at any other girl, ever, no matter how rich or beautiful she is?”

“I’ll no’ look at anybody but you,” he promised. “And you’ll no’ go off with any English chap you meet? You’ll be a dreadful long way from me. I don’t know how I’ll bear it.”

“Don’t worry! I’ll no’ be too far away to think about you. Now, Angus! How am I to get to this place? It is a long way! I’ll love to travel; you know I’ve always wanted to see new places. But I’ll no’ ken how to start. Do I go to the Central and ask for a ticket to London? But what happens after that? And how much will it cost? I’ve only got a little money.”

“You go with me,” Angus explained, his eyes twinkling. “I take you and hand you over to Miss Joan. Of course! I told you I’d no’ let you go alone.”

“Oh!” Selma drew a long breath. “Did you really mean it? It would be sort of comforting to have you there. But will it no’ cost an awful lot for the two of us?”

Angus leaned nearer and spoke earnestly, telling of the cheque from Terry Van Toll, who had married Belle, his half-sister, and seemed anxious to adopt her whole family. “It makes heaps of things possible. I’m going to take you south, but I’ll no’ be staying. I must hurry back; McAlister gets mad, if I miss his lessons; and there’s the club-playing at night. But I’ll see you safely into Miss Joan’s hands.”

“But you can’t spend all your cheque on me!”

“I can so, now that you belong to me.”

“Oh! Does it make a difference?”

“I’ll say it does! I can use my cash to help my girl.”

Selma laughed. “And can I take all that money, because you’re going to be my man?”

“I guess so. And, look here, Selma! If you want to buy frocks, I’ll pay the bills.”

Selma shook her head. “I don’t think that’s right. It’s no’ fair to you.”

“It is, if it’s what I want. Terry told me to get things for myself, but I’d a lot rather buy them for you.”

Selma sat gazing out at the chimneys and tenements of Greenock’s east end. “No,” she said at last. “Not just now. I don’t know what I’ll need; I might waste your cheque on the wrong things. It’s terribly kind of you, and I’m sure you mean it, but I can’t feel it’s right for me to take your money.”

“Well, I say! Ask Miss Joan what she thinks! She’s grown-up; she’ll tell you what to do.”

“I could do that, if you’ll no’ object.” Selma’s face was very sober. “It does seem queer to be going to stay with new people! I can no’ get used to the idea.”

“You’ll feel at home in that house after the first five minutes. Here’s Fort Matilda; we’ll be at Gourrock in no time. Shall we take a bus along and sit on the rocks by the Cloch? Or do you want to go on to Inverkip?”

“No,” Selma said abruptly. “I don’t want to see my dear stepfather. We’ll no’ go past the Cloch. I suppose”—yearningly—“we couldn’t go on a boat? There’s one at the pierhead now. How I’d love to go down the water once more, before I go away! You know how keen I am on sailing!”

“No’ to-day,” Angus said firmly. “Perhaps we could have a sail before you go, but to-day I want to talk, and you’ll go all excited, if you get on a boat. There’s something I’ve got to tell you.” His voice changed suddenly.

Selma gave him a startled look, as they jumped from the carriage, in the midst of the hurrying crowds. “What is it? Angus, how queer you look! What’s up? Are you ill?”

“You’ll understand, when I tell you.” He steered her through the crowds to the waiting bus in the station yard. “We could walk; it’s only a few miles; but we’ll no’ do that to-day. We’ll ride as far as the Cloch and go down on the shore.”

“And then you’ll tell me?” Selma asked anxiously. “I don’t like you to look like that.”

“I didn’t mean to tell you. I could no’ decide,” Angus said abruptly. “But what we said in the train made up my mind; I’ve got to tell you now. We must have things all clear between us.”

“Oh, aye! Don’t have any secrets! But is it something dreadful?” Selma wailed, as he put her into the bus. “You look quite green! Oh, Angus, what’s wrong?”

“You may want to go back on what you said,” he told her grimly. “I’ve a story for you, and when you’ve heard it you may no’ want any more to do with me. That’s what is bothering me, my lassie.”

“Well, it needn’t. Whatever it is, it won’t make me change my mind,” Selma said stoutly. “I’m glad to belong to you. It gives me a nice, settled, comfortable feeling. And I’m no’ going back on it. So stop worrying about that, anyway.”

Angus groaned. “Wait till you hear!”

CHAPTER 9

A REFORMED BURGLAR

Leaving the bus just before they reached the Cloch point, they went down on to the rocks, with the tide creeping to their feet and the white pillar of the lighthouse behind. In front was all the panorama of the Firth, with the northern peaks thrusting into a blue sky, each vividly clear, and the sea-lochs opening out to run up among them.

Selma stood perched on a flat rock and gazed, her hair blown back wildly by the breeze. She had known this all her life, but it still fascinated her. The Viking in her blood longed to be off, exploring those lochs and the hills and glens beyond.

Angus squatted on a big stone, waiting for her. To-day he had no eyes for the beauty of the scene.

A sudden wave splashed almost to Selma's feet, disturbing the peaceful lapping of the tide. Her eyes swept over the stretch of sunlit water.

"What did that? Oh, I see! A motor-boat. Fancy the wash coming all this way!"

Angus did not respond. She glanced round, and then, at sight of his attitude—his head bent and his hands hanging loosely between his knees—she forgot the wave and the motor-boat, and dropped quickly on the rock beside him.

"Angus, what is it? Tell me! There's something terribly wrong, to make you look like that!"

"It was last summer." Angus spoke hurriedly, with desperate courage. "Rykie was staying with Miss Joan, and she was crazy to go to Hollywood. It was before Belle was engaged to Terry, and there was no money to pay for Rykie to go. She tried to borrow from Miss Joy, who has plenty of money; but they all said she was too young to go to Hollywood, and they wouldn't give her the cash. I was in London, after that voyage on the beastly ship, and she——"

"I'd have loved the ship! And you went to South America; lucky you! Never mind. What did Rykie do?"

"I hated the ship. She wrote to me, and she said that in the Abbey ruins there were some jewels, and if she could get hold of one, just one little one, I could sell it for her abroad somewhere, and we'd share what it brought. She'd asked Miss Joy to give her one, but nobody would listen. She said the stones were no good to anybody, just lying there in a glass case, and they were being wasted, and we needed them so frightfully badly. I was desperate; I'd loathed the ship, and I wanted music lessons. I'd been to a big concert in London—up in the top gallery, where it cost almost nothing; and there was a chap playing the violin—the Tchaikovski concerto, a marvellous thing. I knew that was what I wanted to do; to play with a big orchestra like that; and I believed I could do it, if I had the right lessons."

He paused for breath, and Selma nodded. "I believe you will, too, when McAlister has finished with you."

"Yes, but there wasn't any McAlister then! I was no' having any lessons, and I could no' see any way to get them. There was nothing for me, so far as I could see, but playing at dance

halls and night clubs. I could no' stand that for ever. Then Rykie's letter came, and I saw that one of those stones would mean lessons for me and Hollywood for her. Oh, Selma lass, do you no' see? Do you no' see how hard it was?"

Selma's hand slipped into his. "What did you do? Rykie ought to have been spanked. Oh, Angus, did you—did she——?"

"We tried," Angus said brokenly. "She let me into the Abbey at midnight and took me up to the big hall and showed me the case with the jewels. They fascinated me! There were a lot of them, and it seemed to me that one little one would no' be missed. And then—well, there were so many and I knew they were worth a fortune, and—and I said I'd bag the lot. She shrieked at me that I must no' do that, but I'd lost my head at the sight of them. They flashed in the torchlight, red and green and blue, and—and I was just going to take them when Miss Joan and little Miss Jen came in and found us at it."

"Oh!" Selma gasped. "But what were they doing there at midnight?"

"Miss Jen had heard Rykie go out, and they'd followed her. She—Miss Jen—gave a yell and flung herself on my back. I was bending over the case, no' expecting anything like that, and it threw me off my balance and I fell. They all sat on top of me, even Rykie, and I could no' do anything."

"What a ghastly mess!" Selma cried indignantly. "Rykie ought to have stood by you! She'd made you go there!"

"She was upset because I said I'd take the lot. It was mad; I knew that as soon as I'd said it. One little one might no' have been missed, though Miss Jen said they'd have known."

"But they were sure to know, if you'd taken the lot." Selma nodded. "Oh, Angus, what a good thing they stopped you! You'd have been a burglar, would you no'?"

"I tried to be one," Angus said sombrely. "Do you feel like marrying a burglar? I'll no' blame you, if you change your mind."

Selma's hand squeezed his. "Go on! What happened?"

"They sent me away. They said they'd no' prosecute me, unless I came back and tried again. I'd come to my senses by that time, and I knew what an awful thing I'd nearly done. I walked all that night, hating myself more every minute. I went back to London, for I was sure Rykie would want to write. I thought perhaps they'd fling her out; after all, though I was soft, it was her idea in the first place. I stayed on in the digs I'd found, and in a few days a letter came from a lawyer fellow."

"Oh!" Selma cried. "Were they going to summon you, after all?"

"No. The next bit is partly why I'm telling you all this. Chiefly, it's because I want to have no secrets between us, and so you have to know how awful I've been. But I feel, too, that if you're going to stay there you ought to know how wonderful they were. The lawyer said the Miss Shirleys had sold one of their rubies, a big one, and the money was to be used for me, to help my musical education. He asked me to say what teacher I'd like to go to."

"They were going to *give* you the price of the ruby?" Selma shouted. "They'd given one of their stones to help you, after—after——"

“After I’d tried to pinch it. That’s what you’ve got to know, if you’re going to stay with them. They gave me the price of a big ruby, and that’s how I’m able to have lessons from one of the best men in Glasgow.”

“What lovely people!” Selma drew a long breath. “Oh, I’m glad I’m going to see them!”

“You had to know,” Angus repeated doggedly. “It’s only fair to them.”

“Did they send Rykie to Hollywood?”

“No; Terry and Belle came home and took her back with them. They didn’t give Rykie anything.”

“That was fair. It was all her fault. Did you write to say thank you for the lessons?”

“I went. It was beastly, but I had to go. I couldn’t possibly take the money until I’d thanked them.”

“Oh!” Selma gazed at him. “That was jolly brave. You’d no’ like doing it, I bet.”

“I did not. But it had to be done. Rykie had told them about my music and about what I wanted, and they asked what teacher I’d choose. I’d taken my fiddle; I felt if they were going to help me they ought to hear me play, if they cared about it. They were pleased, and they seemed to think I had a chance of making good.”

“You’ll make good! You’ll be playing at big concerts quite soon. I expect the Miss Shirley who’s keen on music understood how you’d been feeling.”

“Miss Joy; aye, I think she did. It did something to me.” Angus spoke slowly, pondering his words. “Their kindness, and their understanding like that and being so decent and generous, and—and my having nearly done such an awful thing! It was all a big shock, Selma lass. I think it made me a bit different inside.”

Her hand squeezed his once more. “You couldn’t ever do anything like it again, could you?”

“Rather not! I’ve been pulled up sharp, and—I’m glad of it now. We’ve always done as we liked; we’ve been determined to get on, and we’d do anything that we thought would help; Belle for films, Rykie for acting, and me for music. We didn’t care what we did, so long as it would help us to get on. I’ve seen what that leads to; you go too far. You must be honest, and decent to other people, like Miss Joan and Miss Joy have been to me. I’ll be more careful after this.”

“You were nearly a burglar,” Selma whispered. “But you’re a reformed burglar now.”

“Will it make any difference?” he asked wistfully. “Do you still feel like us belonging to one another?”

“Don’t be daft!” Selma pressed his arm, her eyes on a passing steamer. “The only difference is that I think you were fearfully brave and sporting to tell me. And—oh yes, Angus! It makes us belong more than ever, because we both know and we feel the same about it, just terribly sorry it nearly happened, but so frightfully glad it didn’t quite. And we know it could never happen again. It’s a sort of secret, joining us together; do you no’ see?”

“You are a dear wee brick!” he said unsteadily. “I didn’t really think you’d throw me over, but I’d no’ blame you, if you did. And I’ve been so terribly keen on you for a long time.”

Selma shot a look at him. There was something here she did not yet understand; his feeling was very much deeper than hers and she realised it. But the afternoon's talk had warmed her to him, and she drew close to him, as she said, "It was lovely of you to tell me! You did it because we belong, didn't you?"

"I did so! I'd no' want anybody else to know."

"Except me. I do like you, Angus!"

He gave a small laugh. "My girl, you know."

"Yes, rather! Angus, you were daft to do it, of course, but I think you were a sort of hero to tell me, and to go back to thank those girls, after what had happened!"

"Neither was easy. I felt jolly bad about both," he told her. "Come on! Let's walk back to Gourrock. I can enjoy a tramp now. I felt too bad before."

Selma sprang up, and they set out briskly along the road between the hill and the water.

"I want to give you something," he said suddenly. "A good-bye present, but you must choose it. I thought perhaps you'd like a nice umbrella; it's the sort of thing a girl ought to have. Or a hat!" with a suggestive glance at her wind-tossed curls.

"I never use an umbrella; they're an awful bore to carry, and I know I'd lose it. And I loathe hats. Will these people mind? Do they wear hats all the time?"

"They had no' any hats when I was there, but they were in the garden or the car."

"The car!" Selma exclaimed. "That sounds fine! But must I have a hat? Oh, Angus, if you really want to do something, don't give me hats! Take me on the water once more, before I go away! I'd like that better than anything!"

Angus laughed; his mind was greatly eased and he was himself again. "Sure? I can no' afford a lot. I'm going to hang on to my cash till I know what new things Miss Joan says you need. But if you're no' wanting hats or umbrellas——!"

"I'm not! I'd far rather have a sail!"

"Righto! You write to Miss Joan and ask her when you may come, after you've left the shop, and I'll plan a last trip down the water. There are no' many boats running now; winter service! But we can always get to Rothsay, and we could walk over to Etrick Bay and picnic on the shore."

"Angel!" Selma said happily.

CHAPTER 10

DARK DAUGHTER OF THE VIKINGS

All Selma's life, a trip down the water on one of the river steamers had been her greatest treat. For this she had saved her scanty pennies, and had teased anyone who was able to take her.

Now, for her last gift from Angus, on the day before they were to go south, she stood in the extreme bow of the boat, radiant with delight, the wind whipping her face, her hair blown back wildly, her cheeks glowing, her eyes gazing steadily forward.

Angus, sitting on the rail close at hand, looked at her with carefully concealed but loving pride. She was his girl, and she was so gallant, facing the wind and the unknown future with joy.

All he said, however, was, "You'll need to do something about your hair; it's a perfect mop. If you'll no' wear a hat, could you no' tie something round it?"

Selma pulled a mackintosh hood from her pocket and jammed it on her curls, tying it under her chin. "I knew I'd need it. I don't mind rain, but the spray's salty, and I don't like that. Will the new people think I look an awful sight? I could wear a ribbon, tied round my head."

"Might be a good plan. Aye, you do that! Does it no' take an awful time to comb it?"

"It does, rather. But I'll no' be going on boats, will I? Will I like it, Angus? I can't believe that to-morrow night I'll no' be here!"

"Finish your words!" Angus said austere. "Say 'not,' not 'no'.' You don't want to have Miss Joan telling you how to speak."

"I will not be here," Selma said, with dignity. "It's just that I don't remember. Besides, you do it yourself."

"You'll need to remember. You've started talking like Mollie and the rest at the shop."

"Well, I've been talking *to* Mollie and the rest! Have I got to—must I do school speaking all the time?"

"Aye, you must!" he said firmly. "You can do it when you like. Speak the way you had to do at school. Don't say 'I'll no' do that', when you mean 'I won't do it.' See?"

"I'll no' mind all the time, I'm afraid," Selma sighed. "But I'll try, or you'll be black affrontit, I suppose. Will I like this place, Angus?"

"You'll like every minute of it; I keep on telling you. It's a bonny place. There's no need to be feared."

Selma's chin went up. "I'm no' feared!—or, since you like that better—I am not in the least afraid. I like new things and new places and new folk. But it feels gey queer, all the same."

"You'll never want to go away. There's your castle!" and they looked across at white Dunselma on its point.

"Will they think my name is very odd?"

“I told them how you came by it. Miss Joan said the Vikings must have brought queer names, and she asked if you were like them to look at—tall and fair, with blue eyes.”

Selma chuckled. “I’m a dark daughter of the Vikings! I’d have loved to live in those days and go adventuring in the long ships with shields on the sides! Perhaps I did, in some earlier life. Perhaps I came here in a ship, a thousand years ago.”

“Havers!” said Angus. “But you’ve a lot of your father in you. Perhaps some day you’ll sail round the world.”

“There’s nothing I’d like better! I feel I’m setting out on an adventure to-morrow.”

“You are that!” he agreed. “But the Dark Daughter of the Vikings must go by train, in these days.”

Selma laughed. “My new name! It suits me, I believe.” She clung to a rope and braced herself to meet the wind, as it came sweeping up from the sea.

“When I come back and want a job, I shall put on slacks and a jersey and cut off my hair, and then I’ll come on one of these boats as a cabin-boy,” she said.

“You might get taken on as a stewardess. But that would no’ be much use, for you’d be below all the time, serving teas and looking after seasick ladies.”

“No’ much fun in that! No, I’d better be a cabin-boy. But I’m going to see England first.”

He rejoiced inwardly in her gallant courage. But it was no surprise to find that he had to keep reassuring her at intervals during the next day’s long journey.

She was worn out long before they reached London, and he wondered how she would stand the noise and bustle of the traffic as they crossed from Euston to Paddington. Her excitement was so great that she could not settle to the book he had bought for her, but was constantly dashing out into the corridor to see what lay on the other side of the line, or springing up to look at the map on the carriage wall and see where they were now and how far they had still to go. The length of the journey startled her; she had never thought one train could go such a distance. Her experience had been limited to the run from Glasgow to Gourrock, or to boat trips across or down the Firth; that a train could go on and on at full speed all day was frightening and quite incredible.

As they rushed through the southern Midlands during the afternoon, she subsided into her corner from sheer exhaustion, and lay leaning on Angus and gazing out at the miles of green country.

“More hedges than we have and no’ so many stone walls! Oh, Angus, I do feel queer!”

His arm went round her quickly. “Does the shaking upset you?”

“Oh no! I don’t mean sick. But—well, just a bit shy and—and almost frightened. Suppose I don’t like your Miss Joan?”

“Then you’ll come back to Glasgow,” he said cheerfully. “And that will be jolly for me, because I’ll see you again. But I hope you’ll no’ do it too soon.”

“It would be wasting an adventure,” Selma agreed. “I guess I’ll stick it out for a bit. But I hope it’ll no’ be too bad. You say the old lady’s nice? What are you laughing at?”—

indignantly.

“You,” Angus told her. “You’re going to have the time of your life, and you talk about ‘not being too bad,’ and ‘sticking it out for a bit.’ You’ll love Mrs. Shirley; she’s the perfect grandmother, but rather a grand lady too. You’ll no’ want to do anything that would upset her. Come and have some tea! That will wake you up.”

Their lunch had been sandwiches and cakes, chocolate and apples. Tea in the restaurant car was a new experience that thrilled Selma completely, and she was very wide awake when at last the train began to run through the London suburbs.

“We have to get another train, out into the country,” Angus was explaining, as they stepped down to the platform. “We’ll need to take a taxi to the other station, because of the luggage.”

“Oh, no, you won’t!” said a masterful voice behind him. “We’ve come to look after you.”

They both swung round, to face a tall, pretty girl, in a big leather coat, with dark red hair tucked under a cap, and another girl only slightly smaller, with long yellow plaits, and eager blue eyes which matched her coat, and hatless.

“We’ve come to take you home. We thought you’d be so tired of trains,” the younger girl cried. “Are you Selma? Janet Selma, isn’t it? I’m Janet too, but I’m always called Jen.”

“Miss Joy! Miss Jen!” Angus stammered, taken completely by surprise.

Selma, suddenly tongue-tied, could only stare, not yet understanding why they had come.

“We’ve brought the car,” Joy said briskly. “You must be sick of trains. It’s a long ride, but it saves the change of stations and the crossing of town. Where’s your luggage? A trunk in the van? You find it, Angus, and tell a porter to bring it along. The car’s just here.”

“I’ll carry that!” Jen seized Selma’s case. “I’m sure you’re tired to death. Joan said I wasn’t to make you talk; you’re to rest in the car. Come on! This way!”

Dazed, Selma followed her to the big car which stood waiting. “Oh!” she said. “Did you come to fetch us? But how jolly nice of you! And what a lovely car!”

Joy grinned at the Scottish accent. Jen, from Yorkshire, noticed it but found it less strange.

“Jump in and make yourself comfortable, Dark Daughter of the Vikings!” Joy said, and turned to look for Angus and the porter.

“Oh! But how did she know?” Selma turned to Jen. “I’ve been calling myself that. But who told her?”

“Your name,” Jen explained. “We always call you the Daughter of the Vikings. Do you mind? Here’s Angus; now we can get home. Joy’s a marvellous driver; she’ll do it as quickly as is safe. Did the journey seem dreadfully long? I live near Sheffield; I’ve never been as far as Scotland.”

“We didn’t come through Sheffield,” Selma said doubtfully. “I’ve been watching the map all the way.”

“No, it’s on the other line. I go to school near the Abbey, and I’m staying at the Hall with Joan and Joy. I cycle or go by car every day. If you’d go with me I could always go by bike; they

won't let me ride alone, so Joy has to take me in the car. If we could go together it would be marvellous."

"Jenny-Wren, how could you spring that on Selma before you've known her for five minutes?" Joy cried indignantly.

Selma was looking still more dazed. "Go to school?" she echoed. "But I've done with school."

"I'm sorry," Jen said contritely. "I'm always in a hurry. Don't think about it just now; forget I said it. But we did think it would be jolly for both of us, if you went with me."

"Come in front, Angus," Joy commanded, taking her place. "We'll leave these two to chatter. Don't keep it up all the way, Jen! Remember how far Selma has come to-day."

"I'll try," Jen said sadly. "But I do like talking!"

Selma's eyes were busy, as they crept into the traffic. "I want to see London," she said.

Jen grinned. "You look at it. I won't talk. You'll see quite a lot before we get out into the country."

"Millions of cars and people!" Selma murmured, gazing entranced.

Presently the crowds grew less, and she turned to Jen, who was watching her with interest. "Who is she?" She nodded at Joy's back. "Is she Miss Joy Shirley?"

"That's right. She's the one the house belongs to; no, that's bad grammar! The Hall, to which we are going, belongs to her," Jen said primly.

Selma gave a sudden laugh. "Do you have to be careful what you say? Angus has been warning me about things."

"What sort of things?" Jen's eyes danced.

"The way we talk at home."

"I'd like to hear you do it. I'll come into your room some night, and you'll talk Scots and I'll talk Yorkshire."

Selma laughed. "We will so! Angus calls you 'little Miss Jen.' "

"Like his cheek! I'm nearly as old as you. But I'm talking again, and Joan said you were to rest." And Jen was resolutely silent.

Selma's eyes twinkled, but she was very tired, so she followed Jen's example and sat silent in her corner.

CHAPTER 11

GOOD-BYE TO ANGUS

“Daughter of the Vikings, you’ve been asleep.” Jen poked her companion in the ribs. “Jolly sensible,” she added. “I nearly dropped off myself.”

Selma sat up, startled. “Did I go to sleep? How dreadful! Was it no’ very rude?”

“Not a scrap. You must be dead tired. But we’re almost home.”

“It’s dark.” Selma peered out into the night. “Is it trees?”

“The beech avenue; two rows of huge beeches on each side. They’re frightfully ancient; Joy’s tremendously proud of them. Here we are!”

Selma could see little of the house but a wide-open door and welcoming light streaming out. Then someone threw open the door of the car, crying, “We’re very glad to see you! Come in, Selma! Are you worn out? Has Jen talked you into a muddle?”

“I’ve been tactfully silent and she’s been to sleep,” Jen said haughtily.

“Well done! The best thing she could do. Let’s look at you, Selma!”

“Oh!” Selma cried. “But you’re just like”—and she looked at Joy, who still sat in the car, waiting to take it round to the garage.

“Just like Joy,” Joan said cheerfully. “There are two of us; can you bear it? We aren’t twins, but our fathers were. We’re cousins, and I’m one month older than Joy. But Joy is the lady of the house; it belongs to her. Come in and get warm!” and she led the way to the big entrance door.

Angus looked at Joy. “Will I say good-bye to Selma and clear out? I can get a train back to town. You’ll no’ want me here now.”

“Ass!” Joy said brusquely. “You’ll stay the night, of course. Go in and get some supper! I’ll be along in a few minutes.”

Selma stood before the daintiest little lady she had ever seen. By some odd impulse, she bobbed a tiny curtsy, as she took Mrs. Shirley’s hand. “I hope you’re very well, ma’am,” she said.

Jen was staring with wide eyes. Joan’s face was full of amusement.

Angus, in the background, stared as blankly as Jen.

“It’s exactly what I wanted to do myself,” he thought. “But I did no’ ken how. Good for Selma! She feels just as I did!”

“I am very well, my dear, I thank you. Are you tired after your long journey? You must be hungry. Jen will take you upstairs; a wash will refresh you, and supper is ready.”

“Thank you, ma’am. And—and thanks for letting me come here.” Selma struggled with a host of new thoughts aroused in her by the big house and the little lady.

Mrs. Shirley smiled. "We hope you will be happy with us. You must stay for some time. Go with Jen, my dear. I must speak to Angus."

"Why did you do that?" Jen burst out, as they reached the bedroom. "That curtsy, you know. Do you always do it to people?"

"I never did it before in my life! I don't know why, but she looked like a wee queen. I never saw anybody like her; I wanted to kiss her hand, but I didn't dare. She's—I don't know—she's lovely. Angus said she was, but I didn't understand."

"How frightfully nice of you!" Jen cried. "Aunty Shirley's very choice and we all love her. But I didn't think you'd see it so quickly. You are jolly clever! Look, here's your room, next to mine. Do you think you'll like it?"

She switched on the light, and Selma looked round the pretty bedroom, decorated in pink and white and lit by a rosy lamp.

"Oh, how bonny!" she cried.

"Rykie slept here. You know her, don't you? My room's blue and it's just through there, so if you want anything, tap on this wall. Now come to the bathroom, and then we'll go down and get something to eat."

Conscious that though nobody stared unkindly, everyone had looked at her curiously—and, she thought, with approval—Selma was shy and silent. Very anxious to do Angus credit, she was afraid of slipping into the Scots talk of Mollie and her friends and was too nervous to say much, lest her "school speaking" should desert her.

To cover her shyness Angus bravely did his best to talk, telling of his lessons in Glasgow and his teacher's high opinion of his progress. But presently he hesitatingly renewed his suggestion that he should go back to town at once, to catch the midnight train.

"It's easy," he urged, as Joy and Jen cried out in protest and Joan and Mrs. Shirley looked at him thoughtfully. "I ken—I know"—colouring suddenly and shooting a quick glance at Selma's dancing eyes—"the road to your wee station here and how to get the train for London, and I'd be in Glasgow by the morning."

"But you can't travel all night, after coming from Scotland to-day!" Joy said indignantly. "Don't you ever rest?"

"I'll sleep in the train. I'm good at it. I'd like to be home to-morrow," he urged.

"He's no' blate." Selma spoke suddenly. "He's thinking o' McAlistair."

Everybody looked at her, Jen chuckling, Joy with a broad grin, Mrs. Shirley puzzled, and Joan with a smile of sympathy.

"Selma!" Angus cried in horror.

Selma grew crimson. "I forgot," she apologised hurriedly. "I can talk properly, really I can. I wasn't thinking. I'm frightfully sorry."

"You speak two languages, and that's the one that sounds like home to you," Joan said. "Don't look so worried! We don't mind. But tell us what you mean about Angus."

“It isn’t that he’s shy about stopping here,” Selma explained, grateful for the understanding. “He’s thinking about McAlistair and to-morrow’s lesson.”

“I had to miss to-day.” Angus spoke quickly, to cover her confusion. “And yesterday I cut my lesson, and McAlistair was mad; he was ill last week, so he told me to go every day this week, and I’ve missed two days already.”

“But will you be fit for a lesson, if you travel all night?” Joan asked.

“Oh, aye! I will sleep, and to-morrow I’ll put in a bit of practice before I go to him.”

“What were you doing yesterday?” Joy asked severely. “Why didn’t you have your lesson, when you knew you’d be in the train to-day?”

“It was Selma’s last day,” Angus began.

“It was for me,” Selma said quickly. “He wanted to give me a good-bye present, so we went out together.”

“To shop?” Jen’s curiosity was aroused. “What did he give you? But did it take all day? Couldn’t he fit in the lesson?”

“Don’t ask so many questions, Jenny-Wren,” Joan scolded.

“He wanted to buy me an umbrella, or a hat.” Selma turned to Joan and spoke desperately. “I would no’—I wouldn’t!—let him do it. I haven’t got an umbrella, and I haven’t one single hat. Do you mind very much?”

“No doubt we can find you one, for going to church,” Joan assured her. “Our vicar prefers ladies to wear hats. But for other days we don’t mind at all. We aren’t keen on hats ourselves.”

“Then what did he give you?” Jen asked eagerly.

“He took me down the water to Rothesay. I’d rather have that than anything. It’s the thing I like best in the world.”

“Tell us about it! It sounds thrilling. In a boat, do you mean?”

“A steamer!” Selma looked bewildered. “We went to Rothesay and walked across to Ettrick Bay, and sat on the sands and looked at the Arran hills.”

“You must tell us more about it later,” Joan said. “But now we must let Angus decide what he’ll do. Do you really want to travel to-night, Angus?”

“I ought to go home, Miss Joan.”

“Then make an extra good supper, and Joy and I will take you through the woods to the station. You can’t find the path in the dark, and we’ll enjoy the walk.”

“Let us come too!” Jen pleaded. “Selma ought to see the last of him. She went to sleep in the car; a walk would be good for her! Do you want him to go?” and she turned to Selma. “Do you mind being left alone with us? We’re not in the least fierce or terrifying.”

Everybody looked at Selma, realising what this parting might mean to her. Would she be tearful, or frightened?

Selma’s chin went up. “I want to stay here. I think it will be fun, and I’m sure you’ll all be nice, when I get to know you. Angus has to go; his lessons are what matter most. I’ll write and

tell him how I'm getting on. Aye, I want him to go. It's better than putting it off till the morning. Angus, I'll be all right here. Don't worry about me!"

"Viking Daughter, valiantly looking ahead," Joy said. "Well done, Janet Selma!"

Selma reddened, but looked at Angus. "Thank you for bringing me. I'd like to come to see you off," and she looked at Joan, recognising her already as the one to be consulted, although the house belonged to Joy.

"I don't approve, but we'll do it. We'll all go," Joan said. "It won't take us half an hour, Mother. Angus will just catch a train, if we start at once, and there's not another for an hour, so he'd better not miss it. Get your coats, girls, and strong shoes; the wood path may be muddy."

As they went through the beech woods to the railway, Angus and Selma fell behind, and Joan shook her head at Jen, who would have joined them.

"Sorry! I didn't think. Last words, I suppose." And Jen walked sedately between the elder girls. "But they aren't talking much," she added.

The two behind were almost silent. Angus had too much to say, and dared not begin. Selma did not know how to put her thoughts into words.

"I'm going to like it, Angus. I'm glad they asked me."

"Aye, you'll like it, lassie. But I'll be missing you."

"You'll be too busy at your lessons. I've wasted a lot of your time lately."

"I've been glad. I'll work better because of it."

"Nothing could go wrong in a house with that dear old lady in it."

"That's so. Miss Joan's like her, too. Do you like little Miss Jen?"

"I'm going to like her rather a lot. I don't call her that, do I?"

"No, she wouldn't like it. It's different for me."

"I think she'd have a fit," Selma said. "I believe we'll be friends. Good-bye, Angus! I shall wave to you from the platform."

Angus nodded, and they clasped hands.

"I'll remember I belong to you," Selma promised.

CHAPTER 12

THE HEART OF A VIKING

As the train disappeared round the bend, Joan drew Selma's hand through her arm. "Let's go home and get to bed. You must be terribly tired."

Selma, very quiet but quite composed, gave her a tiny smile. "I'd like to go to bed. Thank you for letting me come to the train."

"You wanted to wave good-bye, didn't you? Did Angus take care of you nicely on the journey?"

"Oh, aye!—I mean yes! He took me for tea in the tea-car," Selma said importantly.

"That was fun, I'm sure. I've done very little travelling; it just hasn't happened. We lived in London, and then we came here. I hope I'll see more of the world some day."

"I'd like to see the whole of the world! I want to go everywhere and see all the places there are. I was thrilled to be coming to England."

"It's a start," Joan agreed. "You ought to see England before the far-away places. We'll ask Joy to take us to London for some sight-seeing. Are you a real Viking, in your feelings? Would you like to sail across oceans, as they did?"

"I would that! I wish I'd lived then. But I'm no' like them to look at," she added.

"Oh, I don't know! They can't all have been fair-haired."

"I thought they always were?" Selma cried. "Do you think there were dark Vikings too?"

"They went sailing to all sorts of coasts, didn't they? They plundered and robbed and carried off the women and the treasures. Some of the women that they married would be dark, and they would have dark children. I expect they took home Irish girls, and perhaps French or Spanish ones too. Probably the fair Viking ladies were madly jealous of the dark beauties who came among them! There would be plenty of dark daughters among the Vikings."

"I never thought of that!" Selma's tone was full of satisfaction. "Then I may be descended from them, after all. I love exploring! Where we live there are lochs running up among the hills, like the fiords in Norway; and ever since I can remember I've loved more than anything to get on a steamer and sail up the lochs to some wee place, and then go ashore and find out all about it. We could no' afford it often, but if ever I could have a treat, that was what I wanted to do. It's what we did yesterday. We had a lovely time."

"Far better than a new hat or an umbrella," Joan assented, with a laugh. "Joy must talk to you; she's our wanderer. She used to tramp all over the countryside; we say she knows every footpath for miles. Now she goes by car, and explores more distant places. I'm a stay-at-home; I take care of Mother and the house and garden."

"But Miss Joy's keen on music, isn't she? Like Angus?"

"Oh yes! Music and roaming the country are her two great joys."

“Angus is going to play wonderfully some day.”

“I’m sure he is. But here we are! You must tell us about Angus another time. Off you go to bed!—Jen, too,” and she paused on the terrace for Joy and Jen to come. “Bed, Jenny-Wren! I know it isn’t nine o’clock, but you’ve been to town and back, as well as going to school. It’s a good thing to-morrow’s Saturday!”

“Wasn’t it tactful of Selma to come on a Friday? We’ve two whole days to get to know her and to show her everything, before I have to go to school and leave her. But perhaps she’ll come with me,” Jen added.

Joan glanced at Selma’s startled face. “We won’t talk about that to-night. Don’t chatter, Jen! She’s tired; let her get to sleep. No visits; promise!”

Very reluctantly Jen gave her word. “I’ll only go if she wants me. She might be homesick! Couldn’t you manage to be a little bit miserable?” she asked wistfully, turning to Selma. “Then I could come and sit on you and we could talk. Tap on the wall, if you want me.”

Selma laughed. “I’m no’ even a wee bittie homesick. This house is much more homelike than any I’ve been in since mother died; I’ve been living in digs—with nice people who were quite kind, but it’s no’ the same. There’s nothing to be homesick for.”

“Then you’ll soon feel at home with us,” Joan said heartily. “She won’t need any comforting, Jenny-Wren. Good-night, both of you!”

“Did you manage to draw her out about Angus?” Joy asked, as they went to report to Mrs. Shirley.

“I was aching to do it, but I didn’t feel it was fair. It wouldn’t have been difficult; she’s quite ready to talk about him; about his music, at any rate. She’s sure about his brilliant future, and she’s proud of him. But I couldn’t ask her about their feeling for one another.”

“It would be rather soon,” Joy acknowledged. “Not being young Jen, we can’t dash into things; Jen was talking of going to school together before they had known one another for five minutes. Selma looked positively scared.”

“She thinks she has come for a fortnight or three weeks,” Joan agreed. “Jen should go more carefully. I hope Selma will stay. I like her. And she’s very pretty!”

“She seems a jolly kid, so part of our question is answered. We know what she’s like and she seems to be all right,” Joy said. “As for the rest—about Angus, I mean—we must wait.”

“She’s older than I expected. I suppose that’s with being in business and meeting older girls. She isn’t just a child, like Jen. I shouldn’t wonder if she has a very good idea of what Angus wants and what she means to do about it. Perhaps she’ll tell us some day. All we can do just now is make friends and help her to be happy. Play to us, Joy! I’ll talk to mother about Selma.”

“Sure it won’t scare her? She won’t know what’s going on. But she’ll have to get used to it.”

“She knows about your music. I found out one thing, by the way. She has the heart of a Viking; she’s an explorer. She wants to see every place in the whole world.”

“That’s a big order! Good for the Viking Daughter!”

“I hope you’ll take her round and show her things. We could have some days in town.”

“She’d better see the Thames, and the Tower, and the Zoo,” Joy assented. “My work’s cut out for me, evidently!”

As the music rose from the hall, Jen tapped on Selma’s door. “It’s all right! I’m not breaking my word to Joan. But I thought you might not understand. That’s Joy; she always plays at night.”

“Angus told me about her music. Is it something she made up herself?”

“No, Chopin,” said Jen proudly. “It’s a Nocturne. She plays it often; that’s how I know.”

Selma, in a crimson dressing-gown, stood listening, the ribbon from her hair in her hand and her curls falling about her face. “It’s lovely,” she said. “How beautifully she plays!”

“I thought I’d better tell you what was happening,” and Jen went back into her own room. “Jolly pretty kid, she is!” she said to herself, as she loosened her long plaits.

CHAPTER 13

SALT ON THE PORRIDGE

Selma slept till ten o'clock next morning, to Jen's amusement.

"I peeped in without making a sound, Joan, and she's fast asleep. So I crept away; you wouldn't believe I could be so quiet! I suppose I mustn't wake her? I want to talk."

"Certainly not! Keep on being quiet; or, if it's too much strain, go out into the garden," Joan commanded.

Jen grinned. "I can be quiet, if I like. But I could go into the Abbey and tell the cats she's arrived and that she's nice. I told them yesterday that we weren't sure. Joan! Is she in love with Angus?"

"No," Joan said decisively. "Not yet. But what does it matter to you? You've nothing to do with love-affairs!"

"I haven't had anything so far, but I'd like to help in one. It would be a real thrill."

"Go and talk to the cats! You needn't think about love-affairs for years yet."

"Oh, I don't know," Jen argued. "You might get engaged, and you've promised I shall be your bridesmaid, so I'd have to know all about it. I could find out things from Selma and practise on her."

"You'll do nothing of the kind. If you say one single word to upset her or make her feel awkward you'll go right back to school."

"How Jack would laugh! I'll just wait and watch, then. I'll fetch my coat and go to the Abbey."

As she ran upstairs, Selma's door opened, and the visitor peered out, looking frightened. "I slept in. I've just this minute wakened up and it's almost ten. I'm so terribly sorry! Will they be cross?"

Jen gave a shout. "Oh, cheers! I did want you to wake! Hop into bed again and I'll fetch your breakfast. You've had a lovely long sleep!"

"Oh, I could no' do that! I never stop in bed for my breakfast!"

"You're going to do it to-day. I'll tell Joan. We'll bring a tray in a minute or two."

But Selma knew her own mind and she began to scramble into her clothes, horrified by her bad behaviour in a strange house. When Joan appeared with a tray, she was washed and half dressed, and was brushing her hair.

"I'm sorry! I'm so sorry! I'd have been down in five minutes," she faltered.

"No need to be sorry, but I wish you were still in bed," Joan said cheerfully. "Pull that small table to the window in the sunshine, Jen. You shall give Selma her breakfast. Are you warm enough in your pretty red gown, Selma? How the colour suits you! Finish doing your hair

afterwards; it looks nice all loose. Now, Jen, come and pour the tea. Your porridge is still hot, Selma. I hope we've made it properly. What are you looking for?"

Selma had taken the porridge bowl. "The salt," she explained shyly.

"Salt? What for?" Jen cried, pausing with the teapot in her hand. "There's the milk, and sugar."

Selma knit her brows. "Don't you sprinkle salt on them?"

"On what?" Jen put down the pot and stared at her.

"On them; on the porridge."

Joan was leaning back against the end of the bed, her eyes dancing. "On the oats, I suppose, Jenny-Wren. You shall have salt, Selma, though it sounds horrid to me. Run and fetch it, Jen! I remember when Jandy Mac had been staying in Scotland she told me her cousins put salt on their porridge and that they always called it 'them.' They asked her if she would have a few for her breakfast, meaning a little porridge. Jandy was stunned."

"Gosh! What a language!" Jen ran to fetch the salt. "Here you are, Selma! Cover them with it, if you like!"

"Just a wee sprinkle!" Selma said anxiously. "I'm sorry if my talk seems odd, but it's no' my fault if you eat our porridge and call them 'it.' Do you put sugar on yours?"

"A very fair rebuke," Joan laughed. "Porridge comes from your country, and we ought to speak of it as you do."

"It's no' everybody," Selma owned. "I know lots of people who say 'it,' as you do. But the old country folk say 'them,' and I learned it from my mother. We lived in a wee place, and I say the things she used to say."

"I'm afraid I could never remember to call porridge 'them.'" Joan smiled at her.

"I could never bear it with salt on it," Jen asserted. "Is it nice, Selma? Is it properly made?"

"Oh, aye, they're very good." Selma held firmly to her custom.

Joan laughed again. "I'll leave you to get on with it. Look after her nicely, Jen!"

Selma's eyes went to the garden, where the lawns were overhung by great trees. "How bonny it is! I could no'—could not; I'm sorry!—see it last night."

"Wait till next month, when the trees are all gold and red and brown! The woods are a sight then," Jen said proudly.

"What did you mean about going to school? You said it twice."

"We thought perhaps you'd like to go with me. It's a jolly school, with jolly nice girls. I know you've left and grown up, but you might feel it would be fun to go to school again and meet lots of new people. They wouldn't expect you to work too hard; you wouldn't be going in for exams. But French, and some other things, are always useful; most people could do with a little more."

"Very true," Selma said seriously. "I'd like it; the new ways and the new people. I like new things and having adventures, and it would feel like that. But——"

“Oh, cheers! Then you’ll come, won’t you? It will be sport! Joy will lend you her bike, and we’ll ride together.”

“But is it worth while?” Selma stared at her with wide dark eyes. “How long will I be staying here? It’s a lovely place and I like everybody a lot, but they’ll no’ want me to stay for a long while! What’s the use of going to school for a week or two?”

“Oh, you’ll stay longer than that! You must, when you’ve come such a long way. We want you to stay with us for ages.”

“But I don’t see why?” Selma began.

“What about your job? Do tell me! I’m aching to know about it. What did you do? Did you give it up to come here?”

Selma’s eyes laughed at her. “I got the sack. But I’ll find another job. Angus will help me.”

“What happened? Why did they get rid of you?” Jen’s questions tumbled out. “Wouldn’t they give you a holiday to come here?”

“I gave the wrong change once too often. And I made other mistakes. I was thinking about coming to England. They got fed up, and they said I’d better go, if I couldn’t keep my mind on my work.”

Jen grinned. “I don’t blame them—or you. What was your work?”

“I was in a big store, with all sorts of departments.”

“Sort of Woolworth’s?”

“Yes, but not quite the same. I was in charge of stationery; I was new, and they thought I’d no’ go far wrong selling packets of envelopes or four-penny exercise books, or pencils. It was all right; the money was good, for a beginner, and there were some jolly girls. My pal was Mollie Macpherson. I promised to write to her.”

“To tell her all about us. You must tell me heaps more about the shop and Mollie, and what you used to do. So you haven’t got a job just now?”

“They’ll take me back. But I’d rather get something better. That was only for a start.”

“Then you must stay here for a long time. You’ll get a better job, if you’ve been back to school for a while.”

Selma looked doubtful. “They’ll no’ want me to stay here for as long as that.”

“I’m sure Angus would like you to stay.”

“Would he so? Aye, I think he would. But it’s no’ Angus’s house.”

“Joy will ask you to stay. She has a plan for to-day, but she won’t tell me what it is. Hurry up and get finished, and we’ll go and ask her. This is bacon,” and Jen lifted the cover. “Shall I give you some? You won’t take long to finish dressing, will you?”

Selma, fed and clothed and with hair neatly bound by a fillet, went down with her presently, pausing to look over the gallery railing into the hall.

“I never saw a house like this before. It’s gey bonny.”

“You’ll soon get used to it. There’s Joy; hi, Joy! Here’s Selma! What are we going to do today?”

CHAPTER 14

OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY

Joy came in by one of the long windows, her hands full of crimson dahlias. “Here, Joan! You arrange them better than I do. Well, Dark Daughter of the Vikings, how do you like my house?”

“It’s wonderful,” Selma said shyly. “I’ve no’ been anywhere like this before. But I slept in. I’m terribly sorry.”

Joy stared. “Slept in? Of course you did! You didn’t think we expected you to sleep out, did you?”

“I mean I didn’t wake up. I’m sorry to be so late.”

“Oh, you overslept! What a funny way to put it! Best thing you could do; you were dead beat last night. Are you rested and ready for anything?”

“Tell us, Joy!” Jen pleaded, not interested in strange idioms at the moment.

“I thought the Viking Daughter might like an adventure. Can you walk, Janet Selma?”

“I can walk fifteen miles, or more, if you want me to.” Selma’s face lit up eagerly.

“Then, my children, we will walk over the hills to Wycombe. No car for you to-day! There’s shopping to be done, so the Viking Daughter will explore; she’ll have seen quite a lot of new places by the time we come home.”

“Oh, good! I love the hills!” Jen cried.

“Hills?” Selma’s eagerness deepened.

“Oh, not mountains! Do you remember Rykie’s scorn of our hills, Jen? Just some little chalk mounds and green uplands, but quite steep, all the same, Janet Selma.”

“I’m coming too.” Joan took the flowers. “Mother insists on it. There are some things she wants; embroidery silks.”

“And she won’t trust me to choose them!” Joy said mournfully. “Oh, all right! Four’s a better party than three.”

“And we’re going to buy a hat for Selma,” Joan added, “so that she can go to church with us to-morrow. I want to help her to choose it. The service will be strange to you, Selma, but I’m afraid our village can’t provide a Church of Scotland, and it’s too far to go to London. I’ll take care of you and tell you what to do.”

Selma looked startled. “Do you do very odd things in English churches?”

Joy and Jen laughed at the alarm in her face. “You can’t think how funny we are!” Jen chuckled.

“Don’t tease!” Joan scolded. “No, Selma, but you won’t know when to stand up and things like that. I’ll sit by you and prompt you.”

“We sha’n’t be home for lunch, if we start buying hats,” Joy said.

“No, we’ll take sandwiches and have a big tea at night. Jen and Selma shall help to cut and spread.”

“Take some apples. I could live on apples and bread and butter,” Joy remarked. “Could you, Viking Daughter?”

“I could so!”

“I do like the way you say that!” Joan laughed. “It sounds so emphatic.”

“What do I say?” Selma looked puzzled.

“I could *so*! It sounds as if you really meant it. But I want to show you the Abbey.”

“You can do that to-morrow,” Joy decreed. “We can’t do shopping on Sunday, but you can take her round the Abbey and tell her all the stories.”

“What is the Abbey? Please, I don’t understand.”

“You will, when you’ve seen it,” Jen told her. “Come and spread potted meat!” and they vanished to the kitchen.

Selma appeared presently ready for the hills, wearing a short scarlet coat over her dark green frock. “I thought my big coat would be too heavy for walking,” she explained, seeing Joy’s eyes on her.

“Quite right.” Joy approved her choice. “No hat? Good!”

“I’ve a hood with my mackintosh. Will I take that?”

Joy cast an experienced eye at the sky. “You won’t need it. It will keep fine till night.”

“Then I’ll no’ wear anything on my head. I like that much better,” Selma said happily.

They set out by a curious flight of steps, mossy and slippery, running straight up through the woods behind the house; then by footpaths cutting across white roads and climbing steeply, to a quarry at the top of the hill. There, while they rested and gazed down at the Hall and its gardens and out over miles of green country fading into blue haze, Jen told the story of the Monks’ Path, by which they had come, and of the old men who had toiled up here to pray and meditate.

“You’ll understand all about the monks and the hermit, when you’ve seen the Abbey,” Joan said.

“Forward, children! We’ve a long way to go,” and Joy set out across the hills.

“Oh, I like this!” Selma cried. “The wind’s fine! I like your hills! We have moors at home, near Inverkip.”

Joy looked at her with approval as she went, gazing straight forward, head well up, hair blown back.

“Well done, Viking Daughter! That’s the way to walk! ‘Over the hills and far away,’ should be your motto!”

“It feels like an adventure. I don’t know where I’m going.”

“And that’s what you like?” Joan smiled at her.

“Aye, I do so! I mean, yes, I do like going ahead to new things.”

“You must find a better job than serving in a shop. It’s not good enough for an explorer, and that’s what you are at heart.”

“I told Angus I’d put on slacks and cut my hair and go as a cabin-boy on a steamer.”

“Oh, good sport!” Jen cried.

“We might find something even better than that for you, when the time comes,” Joan said.

They sat on the hillside, on ground-sheets which Joy had rolled and carried on her back, and ate their sandwiches and fruit, and gazed out over a new countryside, of hills and woods and villages.

Selma told of her expeditions at home.

“I mind one day, in the holidays——”

“Just a minute!” Jen begged. “When you say ‘mind’ like that, you mean ‘remember,’ don’t you? I’m beginning to learn the language!”

“I expect it means ‘I call to mind.’” Joan smiled at Selma.

“I remember one day,” Selma said, with dignity, “when I started off very early and caught a bus to Gourrock and went on the Arrochar boat, which was lying at the pierhead. We went to Kilcreggan and Cove and then across to Blairmore, near the castle that has my name, Dunselma, and then up Loch Long to Ardentinny. There’s no pier at Ardentinny.”

“How I love those weird names!” Joy said.

“And she says them so beautifully,” Jen added. “The one that’s all r’s; I love that one!”

“I didn’t go on to Arrochar that day,” Selma continued, unheeding their comments. “I got off the boat at Ardentinny——”

“But you said there was no pier!”

“The ferry comes out to meet the steamer, a big heavy boat, with two or three men to help you ashore. Glen Finart opens out there, and I climbed and climbed, with walls of hill and heather on each side and a wee burn splashing down all the way. I came to the top of the glen and looked over the other side, and there lay Loch Eck, a narrow shining bit of water, reaching both ways. I’d have liked to go down and walk by it, but there was no’ time for that; I wanted to catch the steamer again on its way down the loch. So I ate my scones and apples”——with a glance at Joy——“and drank from the burn; it was very wee up there. Then I went down Glen Finart again and got the ferry to the steamer. I never forgot that day. I walked to Loch Eck from Kilmun, another time, but I always think of it as I saw it from Whistlefield, lying far away below me.”

“But did you go all alone?” Joan asked.

Selma gave her a swift smile. “I did so! That’s how I like to do. But I was well scolded when I got home, for no’ telling where I was going. They said, if anything had happened to me, they’d no’ have known where to look for me; I might have sprained my ankle, they said, and

I'd have lain there for hours, or days. But I knew I'd no' fall. It was after mother died, and I did no' think to tell anybody else."

Joy laughed. "I've been blamed for the same thing. I like to tramp alone! Come on, let's go down to town!" and they gathered up all the signs of their feast and went on, for shopping and cups of tea at a café, and then home by train. Selma and Jen would have walked back across the hills, but Joan and even Joy would not hear of it.

"We mustn't kill you on your first day with us," Joan laughed. "To-night you'll rest and Joy will play to us, and Jenny-Wren must finish the home-work she neglected last night."

Jen groaned. "I suppose I'd better. But I shall listen to Joy while I'm doing it."

"A lot of work you'll do!" Joy scoffed.

"I don't suppose I shall listen to you very much," Jen retorted.

In the little train Joy stood with Selma by the window, pointing out the places at which they had looked from the hills.

"There's the Whiteleaf Cross; we told you about our Club at school and how it started with the Cross. And here's King's Bottom, running out from the hills. D'you remember how we went round the top of it and told you the story of Vinny Miles?"

"Aye, I mind that fine," said Selma.

Jen, sitting with Joan, whispered, "She's nice, isn't she, Joan? But we must show her the Abbey. You'll let me come too, won't you?"

"On one condition, Jenny-Wren. Yes, I like her very much."

Jen looked startled. "What condition? You don't usually make conditions about going into the Abbey!"

"This is about you, not the Abbey. You'll be very, most particularly, careful, won't you?"

"What about?" Jen asked indignantly. "Do you think I'll scribble my name on the walls?"

Joan stifled a laugh. "No, about Angus. Don't say anything about him when we go to the refectory."

"Oh!" Jen gave her a quick look of complete understanding. "About the jewels, and about how I jumped on him? I won't, Joan; of course I won't. I know I talk too much, but not about things like that. You don't think Selma knows?"

"How could she know? I'm sure Angus is most anxious she should never hear of it."

"Yes, he would be. I won't say a word. She hasn't said much about him, has she? She's talked about other things, but not about Angus."

"I noticed that," Joan agreed. "Don't tease her about him."

CHAPTER 15

THE HEART OF A HERO

“Now come into the Abbey, with Joan and me!” Jen said, on Sunday afternoon. “We must introduce you to the cats too.”

The week-end was making a difference in Selma. A very real companionship had grown up during the tramp on the hills; many things had been discussed, and she had shown no shyness in telling of her doings at home and her excursions among the sea-lochs, in which she had delighted—of Mollie and the club and the other girls in the shop—of her village of Inverkip, with its glen and wild snowdrops and tumbling river. She had heard all about Jen’s plans for the future, with her large family of children—“Ten, at least, but Joan thinks eight would be enough”—and had inquired anxiously about the husband.

“Oh, him! I don’t know yet. I’ll find him when I want him,” Jen had said airily. “I know there’s got to be a father for the family, but it’s the children I’m interested in.”

And in the shout of laughter from Selma, Joan and Joy had joined and all remnants of shyness were swept away.

At night, pleasantly tired, they sat round the piano and listened to Joy’s beautiful playing of Beethoven Sonatas and Schubert Impromptus, while Jen in the background pretended to work. Selma’s eyes had been fixed on Mrs. Shirley, and presently the little lady moved nearer to the fire and invited Selma to join her.

“Come and sit with me, my dear. If we speak softly we sha’n’t disturb Joy.” And she, in her turn, drew Selma out with gentle questions and found pleasure in her frank replies.

“She is a nice child,” Mrs. Shirley said to Joan, at bedtime. “I like her very much.”

“She likes you, Mother dear,” Joan said, laughing. “She looks at you as if you were too good to be true. Did you make her talk about Angus?”

“Not much. She seems reserved where he is concerned. But she is very fond of him and very proud of his music.”

“That’s quite a good beginning. I like her too, and Jen has taken her to her heart—or she will do, if Selma likes the Abbey. She hasn’t passed that test yet. Jen can’t be really keen on people who don’t care about the Abbey! Joy likes her for her adventurous spirit and her wandering instincts; her Viking side. They talked together a lot this morning on the hills.”

Selma went readily, when invited to come into the Abbey, not knowing it was the final test to gain Jen’s complete approval. She would have been nervous, if she had understood, for she was growing fond of Jen, but she was entirely unselfconscious and merely eager to see this Abbey, of which Jen spoke so often.

She passed the test triumphantly. After watching with interest while Joan led her down a shrubby path and unlocked an ancient door in a wall, she followed her into a small garden, filled with late roses, and looked up at wide windows in an old high building; then down a stone tunnel under the building towards a gleam of green.

“Oh!” and she stood and looked round the small enclosed square of the cloister garth. “Oh, how bonny! What is it? What are all those windows and doors? Are they rooms? Is it—what sort of place is it? I’ve not seen anywhere like this before. Please tell me all about it!”

“Fire away, Jenny-Wren! You’re quite a good guide,” Joan smiled.

“It was a monastery,” Jen said breathlessly. “Monks lived here; no nuns, only men. Up there was the bedroom; we call it the dormitory. Just here is the day-room, where they worked when they weren’t out in the fields or the garden. I expect it was a herb-garden. We’ll show you the refectory, where they had their meals; that’s the arch of the lavatory, where they washed; and up there’s the place where the bell was hung. There’s all that’s left of the cloisters, but in the old days they went right round the garth, of course.”

“This quiet green place is the cloister garth,” Joan added. “The monks were buried here. There’s no church; it was destroyed by Henry the Eighth, but it used to be all along that side, looking down on the garth. We can show you the vestry, or sacristy, and we have pictures of the church, painted soon after it was broken down, so we know what it was like. Here’s the chapter-house, where meetings of the chapter were held. Would you like to explore by yourself, or shall we come with you and tell you all about everything?”

“Oh, please tell me! Can we go into all those places—where they slept and worked, and the dining-room?”

“Oh yes! Come along and see it all!” and Joan led her up the uneven stair to the dormitory, to look down on the garth and across at the cloisters, to see where each monk had slept and where the steps had been by which they had gone to service in the vanished church.

Selma was enthralled by this glimpse into the past.

“I’ve been to the Cathedral in Glasgow,” she said, “but that’s a church. I’ve never seen anything like this. It makes it all so real to see their bedroom!”

“Jen shall tell you the story of Ambrose and Lady Jehane,” Joan promised, and led her on to see the day-room and the chapter-house and the sacristy.

“The tunnels can wait.” Joan glanced at Jen. “It’s too much for one day, if Selma really likes the Abbey. It’s all very well to show everything at once to casual people, but she has plenty of time and she’ll enjoy the underground parts more another day.”

“Underground? I do really like it, Miss Joan! It’s just fine!”

“Passages,” Jen said. “Made by the monks; all sorts of ways out of the Abbey—up on to the hill, and to the gate-house, and to the Hall. It’s an old house; it was here when the monks were here, for Jehane lived in it.”

“Parts of it,” Joan remarked. “It has been added to since then. Now come up to the refectory; the dining-room, you know. We keep the Abbey treasures there; the books and parchments, and the dishes they used.”

Jen stared across the garth, very carefully not looking at Joan, lest her eyes should betray her as she thought of the treasures no longer kept in the refectory, the jewels of Lady Jehane.

“We have tourists here on week-days,” Joan explained, as they mounted the refectory stair. “But it’s quiet on Sundays. We must tell you how Mother and I used to be the caretakers.

There, Selma! This is the refectory,” and she stood aside to let Selma see the big light hall, the wide windows, and the high arched roof, with its carving.

“Oh! It’s lovely!” Selma cried. “It’s so big!”

“There’s a lot to see in here. The reader’s pulpit was up there; he read aloud, while the Abbot and the rest of the brothers dined. Come and look at the strange old tiles over here! And we must show you our treasures; the pictures of the church, and the relics of Jehane and Ambrose.”

Selma suddenly became very quiet. She followed Joan round and listened to her stories, but her mind seemed to be far away. She was, indeed, in her thoughts on the rocks by the Cloch lighthouse, with the waves lapping at her feet, while Angus in bitter shame told his tale.

By the long table which held the parchment books she stood and gazed at Joan. “Was it here that it happened?”

Joan and Jen stared back at her. “That what happened?” Jen cried breathlessly.

“That—that Angus and Rykie——”

“Do you *know*?” Jen shouted. “We’ve been so careful not to say anything! Do you know all that story?”

“How do you know, Selma?” Joan asked quietly, an eager light in her eyes.

“Angus told me. He said he could no’ let me come here unless I knew.”

“Oh, gosh!” Jen leaned limply against the table. “I’d never have believed he had it in him!”

“No, Angus is very much braver than we thought,” Joan agreed.

“He has the heart of a hero!” Jen said solemnly. “Just fancy *telling* her, when there was no need! I wouldn’t have thought he would do it!”

Selma looked from one to the other, bright-eyed and eager. “I thought it was very brave. I told him he was a sort of hero, but all he would say was that he’d nearly been a burglar, but now he’d reformed.”

“A reformed burglar!” Jen chuckled. “Yes, that’s Angus!”

“But there was some need for him to tell me,” Selma said urgently. “He had to be fair to you, if I was coming to stay with you. He wanted me to know how awfully, frightfully decent you had been, when you forgave him and sold the ruby to give him his lessons. I had to know, so that I’d understand about you. It was the kindest, most marvellous thing I ever heard.”

“We knew he was sorry,” Joan said. “And we understood a little of what he had been feeling, when we heard about his music. We wanted to help.”

“Did he tell you what I did?” Jen turned to Selma, half laughing, half confused.

“You jumped on him and knocked him down. You had to stop him somehow.”

“Joan would have done that. I didn’t really need to knock him down. But we had a shock when we found what was happening, and I didn’t stop to think.”

“When do you stop to think?” Joan asked severely. “Selma, we would never have told you, but since Angus felt he had to do it, we’re glad you understand. Now you know all about him.”

“He said we must no’ have any secrets,” Selma said gravely. “He’s no’ really like that, Miss Joan. He’ll never be a burglar again.”

“Oh, I’m sure he won’t! He was very silly, but it was only for a moment. He was sorry afterwards.”

“He was terribly sorry! He felt awful when he told me. And it really was Rykie’s idea, though Angus did no’ say much about that.”

“There was no need for Angus to take on Rykie’s silly idea,” Joan said. “We can’t excuse him; he was tempted and he lost his head. But he had a shock when he found what he had nearly done, and it sobered him.”

“He’s been terribly upset about it,” Selma said earnestly. “If he had no’ felt so bad, he’d no’ have troubled to tell me. He really is honest, and he wanted me to know. He said”—she hesitated, her innate reserve struggling with the impulse to explain—“he said that since we belong to one another, we must no’ have any secrets. It must be all clear between us.”

CHAPTER 16

A PROGRAMME FOR SELMA

There was a moment's startled silence. Jen's eyes blazed with excitement and she looked eagerly at Joan. But Joan's hand pressed lightly on her shoulder, to restrain her from too hasty speech.

Selma watched them curiously. "Didn't you know? About Angus and me?"

"We knew about Angus," Jen exploded. "But not about you."

"What did he say about me?"

"He called you his lassie, and he said lovely things about you."

Selma coloured and looked at Joan.

"That's enough, Jenny-Wren," Joan said quietly. "Selma, Angus thinks a great deal of you; he is very fond of you. He spoke of you as his girl, but he said you didn't know. He felt you were not old enough, so he hadn't said anything to you. But it sounds as if you knew a good deal."

"It was in the train," Selma said, speaking frankly and with no trace of shyness. "We went down to the coast and sat on the rocks by the Cloch, and on the way I asked him about you and Miss Joy, and—perhaps it was mad, but I was worried—I asked if he was going to like one of you extra specially much. I'd felt as if Angus was mine; the other girls had been teasing me about him and calling him my boy-friend, and although I told them he wasn't—no' in that way—all of a sudden I knew I did no' want him to be anyone else's particular friend. So then he said he never would, and—and that I mattered more than anybody to him. And perhaps some day we'd get married."

"And did you say you would?" Jen cried.

"I did so! But we knew it would no' be for a long, long time."

"Well now, that's very nice for you both," Joan said cheerily. "It means waiting, but neither of you is ready yet."

"Oh, it'll no' be for ages! But I'm glad to feel we belong to one another." Selma sounded a little forlorn. "I haven't anybody, you know. Mother died, and the stepfather just does no' exist, so far as I'm concerned. I don't like him and he can no' be bothered with me. So far as I know I've no aunts or cousins; no' in Scotland, anyway. I shall get along all right, of course; I can always find jobs and I don't mind working. But it's lonely to be on one's own. It's marvellous to think I belong to Angus."

"And that Angus belongs to you," Joan agreed, with instant sympathy. "I'm glad you've arranged matters with him, and I hope some day the rest will happen too. I've an idea that Angus won't change his mind."

"I'll no' change mine! He's going to be famous one day. I'll be gey proud to be married to him!"

"Of course you will. And he'll be proud of you. But all that is a long way off, isn't it?"

“Aye, but it’s the reason he wanted me to know—what happened here, that night. He asked me if it would make any difference, and if I’d be willing to marry a reformed burglar.”

“And you said you would, if he’d really reformed?” Jen asked eagerly.

“I said it made no difference at all, and that I thought he was very brave to tell me.”

“It was brave,” Joan agreed. “We’re glad that you know and that you’ve told us. Now there isn’t a secret between us and you either, so we can forget all about that horrid story and bury it. Angus is making good and we trust him; you’re going to wait for him, and some day you’ll marry him and take care of him.”

“I’m no’ good enough for him.” Selma voiced a hidden fear. “I’m no’ fit to marry a great man.”

“Angus thinks you are. He wants you,” Jen said, eager to comfort her.

“You’ve plenty of time. Your job now is to get ready for Angus,” Joan explained.

“How will I do that?” Selma’s question was pathetic in its anxiety. “Is there any way I can do it?”

“As a start, why not go to school with Jen?” Joan smiled at her. “Every little extra thing you learn will help you to feel more ready. If you could talk French, for instance, think what a help you could be to Angus, if he wanted to go to Paris to study, or if he was asked to play in places abroad! And you can read all the books that people ought to have read. *I* haven’t done that—yet; but Joy has a very good library and you can help yourself.”

Selma’s face blazed with eagerness. “Would more school really help?”

“Of course it would! And meeting new people—the girls and mistresses at school; all that will help. We’ll ask the President of our Club to lunch, and she’ll ask you to Broadway End and tell you about her travels to Ceylon. And our first Queen, Miriam; she’s just married and she has her own new little home; you’ll love her.”

“Will people laugh at the way I speak? I know it’s no’ like Jen, or you.”

“Rather not!” Jen cried. “I think it’s just awfully pretty! I hope you won’t change it.”

“I’ve no’ got the Glasgow talk,” Selma said shyly. “Mollie and the rest laughed at me and said I had a country accent; West Coast, you know. Inverkip is a good long way down the water.”

“Whatever it is, it’s very pretty and I like it,” Jen assured her.

“Nobody will laugh at you, Selma,” Joan said. “Shall I tell you what I think you should do?”

“Aye, please do!”

“Wait till half-term; that’s in three weeks. Get to know the country and to feel at home with us. Then go to school with Jen; work at French and literature and grammar and history; join the Hamlet Club and learn our dances, which are rather different from those you did at your Youth Club, but the same sort of thing; and write long letters to Angus to cheer him up. How’s that for a programme?”

“Aye, I’d like it all. But, Miss Joan——”

“And if you could stop calling me ‘Miss,’ I’d be so much happier,” Joan said, laughing. “It was quite all right when you had just arrived; very polite and proper! But aren’t we going to be friends?”

Selma grew crimson. “It’s no’ suitable. I’d no’ like to——”

“I’m only three years older than you! You make me feel like a middle-aged lady, and Joy said last night that *she* felt like an elderly maiden aunt! If you’re going to stay with us, we can’t go on as ‘Miss Joan’ and ‘Miss Joy’! It bores us terribly!”

“Aye, but that’s the trouble, Miss Joan. Am I——”

“Joan! Please, Selma!”

“It’s easy, really,” Jen said encouragingly.

“But am I to stay with you as long as that?” Selma insisted. “Will I no’ be going back to Scotland?”

“We’d like you to stay. Why shouldn’t you?”

“Don’t you want to stay?” Jen asked. “I’m sure it’s nicer than being in a shop.”

“Aye, but—but why?” Selma struggled to put her thoughts into words. “Why would you be bothered with me?”

“I don’t know I’m sure.” Joan smiled at her. “It’s very odd; but if we want to be bothered with you, why shouldn’t we?”

“You won’t be a bother,” Jen said solemnly. “Look how nicely they put up with me! I’m a bother, if you like, coming to stay here over and over again! They’ll like to have you here.”

“Let’s stop talking nonsense and go home to tea,” Joan suggested. “We’ll be glad to have you stay here, Selma. We don’t have many visitors; we haven’t a great many friends yet, except at school. During our growing-up years, Mother was the caretaker of this Abbey and I did the work. We were as busy in our job as you were in the shop; we had no chance of making outside friends. I’ll tell you about those days, and about how we came to live at the Hall; Joy inherited it from her grandfather, you know. Since that time Mother hasn’t been very strong, though she’s a great deal better lately. We still haven’t many friends, except those we made at school. We aren’t at all a gay or lively house! You may find us rather dull. But if you can put up with us—what are you giggling at, Jenny-Wren?”

“I don’t think it’s a dull house! I’ve never been dull for half a second.”

Joan laughed. “We’d like you to stay for quite a while, Selma. It will cheer us up. Don’t bother any more about it; just settle down and be jolly and happy with us.”

“It’s wonderful of you to say that, Miss——”

“*Selma!*”

Selma reddened and laughed. “Then—Joan! But it does sound queer.”

“That makes me seem rather an ogress,” Joan warned her. “Come along! We’ll show you the rest of our treasures another time. We were a little nervous about bringing you here—because

of Angus, you know. But now that there's no secret we shall feel much happier. Yes, Jen? What is it?"

"Aren't you going to tell her why you're so nice to people? About the Abbey and the monks?"

"I'll leave that to you. When you go to bed you may talk for half an hour; not more, because of school to-morrow."

"Will Joy take me in the car? It's an awful fag for her."

"Sometimes. Or Selma and I will cycle with you and go to the Wycombe shops; we'll hire a third bike in the village. Or you can go by train quite well."

"I can, but I don't like going by train. Still, it's worth it, to get living with you instead of at school."

"Will Miss Joy play to us again to-night?" Selma asked shyly. "I love to hear her play."

"Miss Joy won't," Joan said promptly. "But Joy will, if you ask her nicely."

"Oh! But it's her house. It seems such cheek!"

"Poor Joy! Do you want her to feel like a maiden aunt?"

Selma laughed. "Tell me more about your monks!" and she changed the subject.

"And we never saw the cats!" Jen said mournfully.

"They must go for walks! Selma shall meet the Mother Superior and Timmy another time. She's seen the Curate already."

"Is that the thin black one, who runs about the house?"

"With a white patch under his chin. He's always prowling about; he goes to call on people in the village."

"Like a proper Curate," Jen grinned. "He has a large parish to visit."

Selma was quietly summoning up her courage, and when they reached the house she went bravely to Joy.

"Joan"—she said the name steadily—"says I've been making you feel like an aunt. I'm sorry; I didn't mean it. Will you play to us to-night—Joy?"

"Oh, cheers!" Joy cried. "That sounds more homelike. Selma, my dear, I will. I've given you Beethoven, and Chopin, and Schubert. To-night you shall have Mozart."

"I know I will like it, whatever it is," Selma said happily.

CHAPTER 17

JOAN'S FAMILY

“Is it a real proper love-story, Joan?” Jen whispered, under cover of Joy’s Sunday night concert.

“Not yet, but it will be some day,” Joan replied. “It’s a very good start, but so far it’s just a happy arrangement between two nice young people. They’ll both be the better for it. Angus may be in love with Selma, but she is merely very fond of him.”

“Isn’t that enough? I don’t know anything about being in love.”

“I don’t pretend to know much! But Mother says it’s not enough, though plenty of people may marry on that.”

“You mean, after they were married they might find somebody else they could be madly in love with, and that would be rather awkward?”

“Rather awful, I should say. Just that, Jenny-Wren. But I believe Selma will love Angus some day.”

“I loved the way she said, ‘Ah’ll be gey prood to be marriert to him!’”

“That’s exactly what it sounded like,” Joan laughed. “What are you going to say to her about the monks?”

“You know quite well what I’m going to say!”

“I’ve a very good idea,” Joan admitted. “Don’t be too late, or she’ll ‘sleep in’ again, as she says.”

“So Angus owned up!” Joy said, when Jen and Selma had gone to bed, and Mrs. Shirley and the girls sat by the fire to hear Joan’s story. “Jolly decent of him! And more honest than I’d expected.”

“Their relations are just as I thought.” Mrs. Shirley sounded satisfied. “Some day Selma will wake up to what love really means, and then they will be very happy. For her age, her attitude is right and natural; the boy must wait till she is ready to give him more.”

“I like Angus much better than I did last summer,” Joy commented. “Thank goodness, you’ve stopped that ‘Miss,’ Joan! It was getting on my nerves. I was beginning to feel like a proper grown-up lady, and I didn’t like it one bit.”

Upstairs, Jen turned to Selma. “Shall I come to your room, or will you come to mine?”

Selma looked startled. “Why would we do either way?”

“Joan said we might talk for half an hour. I want to tell you something.”

“I’ll come in your room,” Selma said, with a half-realised thought that if Jen’s “something” was not to her mind she could always come away, but that Jen might be difficult to dislodge, if she had settled down.

“Righto! Slip on your jolly red dressing-gown and come and squat on my bed. I’ll call on you another time. Have a choc? Take that thing off your hair and let it flop; I like to see it dangling round your face.”

Selma obediently removed the ribbon and let her hair fall about her cheeks. “I look like a wild thing, I know. Angus told me to tie it up; when we went on the steamer my hair blew all over the place and he said I’d need to do something about it.”

“You look very neat with the ribbon, but I want you to be comfy and feel at home.”

Selma was a little bewildered, but she said politely, “I’m comfortable, thank you. Did you want to say anything special?”

Jen laughed. “You aren’t used to bedroom visits! I want to talk about the monks.”

“The monks? The men in those old places we saw?”

“The Abbey. It’s called the Abbey of Gracedieu, and that means ‘Grace of God’ or ‘Thanks to God.’ It belongs to Joan, and she takes care of it and sees that it isn’t damaged and doesn’t get decayed or anything. The monks were awfully decent old chaps, and they welcomed everybody and took them in and gave them just the help they needed; they had an infirmary, though it’s gone now, and they nursed sick people, and they were kind to everybody.”

Selma looked thoughtful. “That’s what Joan and Joy and Mrs. Shirley are like.”

Jen leaned forward and patted her on the knee. “Well done, you! It’s exactly what I hoped you’d say. They—but mostly Joan—have got infected by the thought of the monks and they try to be like them. It’s in the air of the Abbey, I think; the infection, I mean. Anyway, if you ask Joan why she does nice things she’ll say, ‘Because I want to and because of the Abbey.’”

“It’s very nice of her,” Selma said. “Then I suppose she feels she has to be kind to me, for that reason? Am I a person coming to the Abbey to be looked after?”

“It’s not only you. She wants you to stay because of Angus; it will please him to think you’re here. And she likes you; we all do. But there have been other people; Vinny Miles—we told you about her; and old Boniface Browning—Joan was just marvellous to him; and Rykie, last summer. For that matter, there’s me! Never mind the grammar; they’ve been most awfully decent to me, having me here at all sorts of times. You’ve come into Joan’s family, that’s all.”

Selma gave a sudden laugh. “What a funny idea! The family of people she’s been kind to?”

“That’s what I mean. Joan’s crowd; it’s a nice sort of crowd to belong to.” And Jen plunged into stories of Joan’s “family” in the past.

“Will I go to my bed now?” Selma asked at last. She had been interested, but she had a conscience and she knew they had talked long enough.

“Gosh, yes, you’d better! I forgot the time,” Jen cried in dismay. “It will be letting Joan down, if you stay any longer. I’m sorry, really I am. If she says anything I’ll tell her it was my fault.”

“It’s been very interesting. Thank you for telling me,” Selma said sedately, as she picked up her discarded ribbon. She paused at the door. “I think I will like going to school with you.”

“I wish you’d come to-morrow! But Joan’s plan is sure to be best. I’ll tell Jack and the others about you, and they’ll be glad to see you at half-term. Jack’s my very special chum; we’re

rather like a married couple. We once adopted a daughter for a few weeks. You'll like Jacky-boy. She's one of the very best."

"Then I know I will like her," Selma responded suitably.

CHAPTER 18

SELMA ASKS QUESTIONS

“Will I no’ help you, Joan?” Selma came into the kitchen, when Jen had reluctantly gone off to school, racing through the woods to the little train.

Joan looked up from the porridge bowl she was drying, while a small maid washed another. “That’s very nice of you! I do this for Susie, to save her time. This is Susie; Susie Spindle.”

“How do you do?” Selma said politely.

“Nicely, thank you, miss. That’s the last one, Miss Joan.”

“Suppose you take my tea-cloth and dry the silver, Selma, while I put these things away. Then we’ll go and find some fresh dahlias for the hall, and I’ve some dusting to do. After that, Joy has a plan for you, and I think you’ll like it.”

“Is it as nice as her plan for Saturday? If it is, I know I will like it.”

“It’s the same sort of plan. She has to go to Oxford for a music lesson; a very fine pianist lives there, and Joy goes to him once a week—sometimes twice. If you’d like to go with her in the car, you can prowl about Oxford for an hour and a half; the city’s well worth seeing.”

“I would like that!” Selma’s face lit up. “I like new places. Oxford is famous, isn’t it?”

“Oh, everybody ought to see Oxford! You’ll want to go more than once; I expect Joy will take you with her often. We know it rather well, through going with her when she has her lessons.”

“I’d no’ have thought she needed any more lessons.” Selma polished forks carefully.

“She doesn’t feel like that. She says she still has lots to learn.”

“Has she any book about Oxford? I’d like to read about it. And will she lend me a map, to see the way we’re going?”

“That’s doing the thing properly! You’re a real explorer,” Joan exclaimed. “Joy will love you, if you like maps and guide-books. Oh yes! She’ll lend you both, and plans of Oxford, so that you can find your way, without wasting time.”

“I like to know all about places.”

“Joy will approve of you,” Joan said, laughing.

“I want to know something,” Selma said abruptly, as they went out to the garden, armed with basket and scissors.

“Is it anything I can tell you?”

“I’m no’ sure o’ that, but I thought I’d ask. It’s about money.”

“Yes?” Joan asked gently, not much surprised. “Money’s important, isn’t it?”

“It is that, when you’ve no’ got any.”

Joan laughed, and agreed. "But you don't need much money just now. You're our visitor, and we're very glad to have you here."

"You're very kind," Selma said gravely. "But if I go to school, who's to pay for that? You must no' pay for my schooling."

"Rykie never asked who was paying for her at school! But you're a very different person from Rykie; much more grown-up."

"And clothes," Selma insisted. "Will I no' need to have things like Jen has?"

"A blue tunic and blazer, and a beret for the winter. Yes, you'll want those. We must see about it. Don't worry, Selma! It will be all right."

Selma looked at her with troubled dark eyes. "It's no' just the school things. I've no' got lots of clothes, and if I stay here a long while I'll need more dresses and shoes and a winter coat."

"That sounds like a jolly day's shopping in town. Joy will drive us in and we'll get you a regular outfit."

"But the money!" Selma persisted. "I've no' got the money for all those things. Who's to pay for them?"

Joan sat on a wooden bench under a chestnut-tree which had already turned rusty brown.

"Sit down, Selma, and we'll talk about it. The flowers can wait. You won't want very many new things; we live quietly, as you can see, without much need for dressing-up; but you must have enough to make you feel comfortable. You'll want a dancing frock, if you join the Hamlet Club, but we can help you to make it, if you're any good at dressmaking; the pattern is very simple. Jen will show you hers; we all made our own. You should wear pink or red or gold; you'll look nice in gay colours! I'm content with grey, but Joy has bright green and Jen has deep blue. As for paying"—she had been talking lightly to give Selma's mind time to calm down, and now she finished in a completely matter-of-fact tone—"Angus wants to see to that, you know."

Selma turned deep brown eyes, even larger than usual, upon her. "I ken that fine. I mean, I know he does. He said it to me on the steamer. But is it right? Can I let him pay for me? He said I could ask you and you'd tell me."

"How clever of Angus! I think you must let him do it. He wants it so much; he's really in earnest about it. He wants you to have what you need."

"It's no' as if he was my father!"

Joan laughed. "Oh, Selma! It isn't your father he wants to be; it's something much more important!"

"You think it makes it different—that he wants us to get married some day?"

"It does make a difference! He feels you belong to him, and he wants to give you things. He hasn't asked you to wear a ring yet, and I think he's right in that; it's too soon. But you can let him give you other things."

"He's no' got a lot of money."

Joan looked at her in approval. "Nice of you! No, but he has enough for this. Mr. Van Toll sent him a present; did you know?"

Selma nodded. "But it was to buy things for himself."

"He'd much rather buy things for you. Really, Selma, he'll get far more fun out of it. We'll ask him to come for a week-end, and he shall see the things you've bought."

Selma's face grew suddenly wistful. "It would be nice to see Angus."

"Then do as he wants, and write a letter thanking him and saying you're going shopping in London."

"But the school?" Selma was still uneasy. "Will he pay for the school too? Ought I to go to school?"

"He'll be very glad that you should go," Joan said gently. "Don't disappoint him! Angus feels that some day he will have a very different life, wider in every way, meeting people and travelling. At present he is preparing for it. He wants you to share it, and he is eager to help you to prepare for it too. The more experience you have, the readier you will feel; and going to a new school will be a big new experience. Throw yourself into it and enjoy it and learn all you can, and you will repay Angus for anything he spends on you. As it happens, and thanks to Mr. Van Toll, he can afford to do it. He'll get far more pleasure in using the money for you, in helping you to feel more fit to be his wife some day, than in spending it on clothes or concerts for himself."

Selma reddened. "I'm no' wanting to be married yet. And I'm no' fit to be anybody's wife, forbye."

"Oh, not for some time, of course! You're only sixteen. But it's time to be getting ready. Do you know, Selma, I believe you'll make a big step towards being ready for Angus, if you can learn to take presents from him graciously? It isn't always an easy thing to do. You can't be proud with him if you're really fond of him. And you couldn't hurt his feelings!"

"I'd no' like to do that," Selma admitted.

"It would hurt him badly, if you refused to let him help. And it's for himself as well as for you, for he wants you to be ready for him, when the time comes. You will write and thank him nicely, won't you?"

"I will that!" Selma made up her mind. "I'll go to the school with Jen and I'll learn all I can. But we'll no' waste Angus's money. We'll only buy what I need to have."

"Oh, surely!" Joan said heartily. "We won't be extravagant. We'll tell Angus what we spend and what school is going to cost, and he'll send a cheque; and then you'll feel that you don't owe anything to us but only to Angus, which is right and proper. You won't mind owing your pretty frocks to him, will you?"

"No' if it's truly right and proper, as you said. But I was no' sure o' that," Selma confessed.

"I'm certain it's right. And you must remember what a lot your letters are going to mean to Angus."

"I'm no' very good at letters."

“Oh, but you will be! You’ll want to tell him everything. Now go and ask Joy for her guide-book, and read up what you’re going to see in Oxford!”

CHAPTER 19

MAPS AND ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Selma came home from Oxford radiant with joy in the new experience. She had seen a great deal in the time, and she talked more readily than she had done since she came. Jen, at night, listened enthralled and watched her eager, vivid face with delight.

“She’s prettier than ever when she gets excited,” she murmured to Joan.

“Oxford has stirred her up thoroughly,” Joan agreed.

When Jen heard the plans for shopping, she raised a new point. “Well, I say! Don’t get a tunic, till you’re sure she’ll need it. Won’t she be a senior? The Head won’t have seniors in tunics, except for gym and games.”

“Blouses and a skirt, then. But she’ll need the tunic too.”

“But will I no’ be with Jen?” Selma asked in dismay. “She’s not a senior, is she?”

“Rather not!” Jen grinned. “I may have to be next year, but you may as well know the worst, Viking Daughter; I’m not a serious student. I do just enough to keep the mistresses calm and because it bores me to have to stay after school and do returned lessons. But none of it thrills me very much. If you’re any good at all, you’ll be at least one form above me, and perhaps two.”

Selma looked alarmed. “I thought I’d be with you. I don’t think I want to go.”

“Oh yes, you do!” Jen said briskly. “You’ll love it, after the first day. And I want you. I’m fed up with going by train. You’ll see plenty of me; don’t worry! I’ll find you nice people to be friends with. There’s Aileen, for one, and as she’s coming to tea with Joy on Saturday, you’ll know her before you go to school.”

Selma looked disappointed. “Maybe I could be with you at first, till I get used to it.”

“I’m sure you could. The Head will understand,” Joan reassured her.

“What are you going to do at home till half-term?” Jen demanded. “Explore the country? Don’t get lost!”

“I’ll no’ lose myself,” Selma said with dignity.

“She’s going to write long letters to Angus, and make a Hamlet Club frock, and help me, and go out with Joy,” Joan said.

She sat on a broad window-seat with a basket of mending next morning, and to her delight Selma came to help at once. “Will I no’ do some? Do you darn for everybody?”

“Joy’s supposed to do her own, but I help Jen, as she’s busy at school; she really hasn’t much time. And I always do Mother’s darning. Thanks very much! I’ll be glad of help.”

“I’ll do this pair. Will you tell me something?”

“As I said before—if I can, of course I will.”

“Tell me how to speak like you do.”

Joan laid down her work and gazed at her. “In what way?”

“I know I don’t speak like you, or like Jen. If I go to the school, those girls will laugh at me.”

“I don’t think they will. I like the way you speak, and I love the way you trill your r’s. You ought to be a telephone girl! But there are little things I could tell you, if you really want me to do it.”

“Please!” Selma begged. “I will try to remember.”

“You say no’ for not. ‘I’ll no’ do that!’”

“Oh!” Selma cried. “Do I still do it? Angus told me; he said ‘Finish your words.’ Have I been forgetting? I don’t think what I’m saying.”

“I like it. I don’t want you to change, and I’m most certainly not criticising you. But you asked me, and if you are going to school, it’s only fair to tell you. Say not, when you mean not, Selma.”

“I will try,” Selma said humbly. “We had to do it at my school, but I’ve been away from school for nearly a year, and—and Mollie and the others——”

“Weren’t so particular as they were at school.” Joan finished the sentence, as she hesitated. “You’ll soon get into the way of it again. There’s another thing, but I’m not sure that you’ll ever put it right. I’ve heard that Scots always get tied up with their ‘shalls’ and ‘wills.’ You do overwork that poor little word terribly! You say ‘I will’ when you mean ‘I shall.’ ‘Will I do this?’ is what you say. You ought to say ‘Shall I do it?’”

Selma looked puzzled. “I didn’t know about that. But how will I know? Do I always say ‘I shall?’”

“You should say ‘How shall I know?’ You only say ‘I will’ when you want to be very emphatic.”

“Or when you’re getting married.” Joy appeared suddenly outside the window.

“That is a time for being very emphatic,” Joan retorted.

“You surely aren’t lecturing the poor kid? Leave her alone. I love the way she says things,” Joy protested.

“I asked her to tell me,” Selma cried.

“I like the way she talks too,” Joan said calmly. “But she’s going to school, Joy, and she asked me to help her.”

“Don’t you do it! We don’t want her any different. As for ‘shall’ and ‘will,’ she’ll never get that right, so you needn’t worry her over it. It’s born in her to say, ‘I will go out on the hills with Joy this afternoon, if she asks me kindly.’ That sounds all right, doesn’t it, Viking Daughter?”

“It sounds nice.” Selma broke into a laugh. “Do you mean it, or is it a joke?”

“I want to walk; I feel like it. You’d better come, and we’ll go in a new direction. I’ll show you tiny churches in folds of the hills. Forget all that stuff Joan has been talking! We like you

to be a real Scot.”

“That’s all very well. I like it too,” Joan agreed. “But Selma asked me to tell her.”

“But I don’t understand,” Selma objected. “When do I say ‘I shall’? And should it be ‘You shall’ too?”

“No; oh no! ‘I shall’ and ‘you will’,” Joan cried. “But don’t worry about it, Selma. Listen to what we say, on that particular point, and you’ll soon get used to it.”

“I don’t believe I will—I shall, I mean,” Selma said doubtfully.

“Correct!” Joy told her. “But I hope you won’t, all the same. I’d rather you sounded homely than correct.”

After hours on the hills, they pored over maps at night, and Joy explained contour lines and colouring, and showed how they could tell where they had gone up or down, which had been the very steep slope where they had been forced to go sideways, and which were woods and which bare hillsides. To Selma maps had hitherto been those in an atlas, of distant countries, or of towns and rivers, and the big ordnance map fascinated her. She hung over it, asking questions, English grammar forgotten; and Joy delighted in such an apt pupil and told her all she knew.

“You’ll be the perfect wife for Angus,” she announced.

Selma turned big startled eyes on her. “Will I? But why?”

“You’re so keen on seeing new places. He might marry a girl who wanted only to have a settled home and sit there darning his socks, while he wanted to go all over the world, playing in Paris and Vienna and Rome, and in New York and Australia. How you’ll love going with him and exploring the world!”

Selma’s eyes grew wider still. “Will I see all those places?”

“I believe you will, if you marry Angus Reekie.”

“Almost worth getting married for, isn’t it?” Jen looked up from her essay.

“No,” Selma said, taking her literally, as she always did. “But it will be lovely to go all over the world. And I can darn his socks just the same,” she added.

“You’ll need to,” Jen chuckled. “Are you any good at darning? I’m not up to much, I’m afraid.”

“Selma darns beautifully,” Joan said. “She did your gym stockings this morning.”

“Angel! Oh, angel! But, I say! I think you ought to make Angus change his name.”

“Change his name?” Selma stared at her. “But why?”

“Angus Reekie’s not a bit a good name for concert programmes and posters.”

“I feel rather the same,” Joy agreed. “But there’s plenty of time for that.”

“But what would he change his name to?”

“I’ve no idea. You can think of a name you’d like, and then tell him he’s got to change it,” Jen said.

Selma made no further comment, but she looked thoughtful for some time.

CHAPTER 20

THE JEWELS OF LADY JEHANE

On Saturday Aileen Carter came to tea, to exchange musical experiences with Joy. Looking very happy to be at the Hall, she went round the Abbey with Joan, followed by Selma, who listened attentively to the stories and descriptions, but shyly did not say much.

Joy and Aileen played alternately on the beautiful piano, while Joan and Jen and Selma listened with respect and applauded vigorously at the end.

“It’s been a lovely evening,” Aileen exclaimed, as she said good-night. “Thank you both so awfully much—Joan for the Abbey and Joy for the music. I have enjoyed it!” She turned to Selma. “You’re coming to school in a week or two, Jen says. I hope I’ll see a lot of you. If there’s anything I can do, please come straight to me; I’ll be glad to help.”

Selma coloured in pleasure. “Thank you. I shall be glad to see you at school.”

Her eyes met Joan’s, and Joan smiled and nodded.

“I expect you’ll be in the senior school,” Aileen added. “If Jen Robins wasn’t such a little slacker she’d be moving up soon. But she only cares about dancing and cricket.”

“Well, I like that!” Jen protested. “I provided a whole item for the summer fête—my children and me! Everybody said it was one of the best turns in the show!”

“It certainly was,” Aileen agreed, laughing. “But I don’t apologise. You could work much harder in school, as well as training the kids in singing-games.”

“Can’t do everything,” Jen said haughtily.

In Selma’s bedroom lay yards of soft yellow material, bought in Wycombe that morning, with advice from Joan and Joy and Jen; and in the following week she worked hard on a dance frock, under Joan’s direction. The dress was simple in design, and she sewed well and enjoyed the task, much intrigued to hear about the Club she was to join and about its dances and its Queens. The big photos of Joy and Joan in their robes and crowns, which hung in the hall, had prepared her for what she would see, if she stayed long enough to be present at a coronation.

“You look gey bonny,” she said wistfully. “I must see you all dressed up. I’m beginning to feel I will never want to go away.”

The more serious shopping was postponed till half-term Monday, at Jen’s urgent request. But Joy, insisting that there would be no time for sightseeing when there was so much important business to be done, took Selma to London for a long day and showed her the Tower and St. Paul’s and Westminster, the Thames and its bridges. “You’ll see the West End when we come for shopping,” she said.

Not all Selma’s days were given to excursions and dressmaking, however. Joan missed her one morning, and after a search found her in the library, a heavy book in her hands, another on her knee, and a worried look on her face.

“What are you reading? You don’t seem very happy about it,” and Joan came to investigate. “Oh, Selma!” she cried. “Who told you to read that? I’m sure you won’t like it!”

Selma laid down *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* with a sigh. “I do not! I don’t understand it a bit. But is it no’ one of the books everybody ought to have read? You said I was to read books like that.”

Joan took *The Decline and Fall* firmly from her and replaced it on the shelf. “What is the other one? *The Origin of Species*? That’s more modern, anyway. But those aren’t the books I meant. My dear, I haven’t read them myself.”

Selma’s eyes widened. “Have you no’? But does everybody no’ have to read them?”

“In theory, perhaps. They’re classics, and people are supposed to read classics. But nobody does. You’d never get through them. Don’t bother with them!”

“But then, what books did you mean?” Selma heaved a sigh of relief. “I’ll be glad no’ to go on with that one! And I was feart to begin the other.”

“I should think you were! I meant Dickens and Jane Austen; things like that. Do you know who Emma was? Or what it means if someone talks of ‘waiting for something to turn up’, or says ‘I could never desert Mr. Micawber’?”

Selma looked at her and laughed. “Are they out of Dickens? I’ve read about Little Nell and the old grandfather and the horrid dwarf.”

“Mine were out of *Copperfield*. Emma is from Jane Austen. I’ll lend them to you; and Shakespeare. And I know what would be really useful for you. Read lives of the great composers, the men whose music Angus wants to play. You’ll be fascinated by the story of Mozart. Joy has a very fine book; she’ll lend it to you.”

“I’ll do more than that,” Joy said, when asked for the book. “I’ll play Mozart to her, when she has read about him, and I’ll tell her what to look out for in his music. Then we’ll do Schubert, and Beethoven; and we’ll put on records of bits of symphonies.”

“Oh, good! That really will educate her! Angus will be pleased and touched,” Joan exclaimed. “I had to get her away from *The Decline and Fall*!”

“Poor kid!” Joy said, laughing.

“She’s going to love *Copperfield* and *Emma*. I’ve supplied her with them, and she’s deep in David and Peggotty already.”

“Hadn’t she read them?”

“She hasn’t read very much. She could really do without school, if you are going to educate her musically and I’m giving her English literature.”

“You can’t give her French, and I certainly can’t,” Joy remarked. “And there’s the Hamlet Club. She’ll like meeting the girls, even if she doesn’t work very hard. She’d better go to school.”

The shopping day was a riotous occasion and all four girls came home exhausted but triumphant. “Most improper for our schoolgirls,” Joan said. “Jenny-Wren is supposed to be having a half-term rest, but she’s so tired that she can hardly keep her eyes open.”

Selma, happily conscious of a new dark green coat and hat for the winter, which suited her perfectly, and of a wine-red woollen frock and another of delicate pale green for evening wear, exclaimed, "You've all been most awfully kind. I love my new things! I will write to Angus and thank him and tell him all about them. It's his birthday on St. Andrew's Day; I'll write another letter then."

"Which is St. Andrew's Day?" Jen asked.

"Jenny-Wren! The last day of November." Joan was looking thoughtful.

She had a private word with Joy that evening, and then proposed a plan to Selma.

"Would you like to invite Angus to come here for his birthday week-end? Could he escape from McAlister for a day or two?"

Selma turned a radiant face to her. "Would I no'? Would you let him come? Oh, I would like to see him!"

"Joy thinks it's a good plan. You'll have so much to tell him, by that time. You'll have been to school, and you'll have met our Club. There are all your new things to show him, too. I expect he's missing you a lot."

"I miss him," Selma admitted, a touch of colour in her face.

"I thought you did. Angus has been very good to you; I'm sure you'd like to see him. Write and ask him, then. Say we'll be pleased to see him, and if he can come on the Friday before his birthday and stay for a few days, all the better. Can he get some friend to take his place with his evening orchestra?"

"Oh, aye, he'll do that! It's the lessons that matter more than the dance band."

"Write soon, then, to give him time to make arrangements. There's one thing you ought to see before he comes," and Joan opened the door of the big drawing-room. "As you'll have noticed, we don't come in here very often. It's too huge and too stately! If ever we have receptions or weddings in the house, this room will be useful, but for ordinary life we like the small drawing-room or the library better. Look here, Selma! As these were rather a sore subject we haven't shown them to you before, and you haven't asked to see them. But if Angus is coming, you'd better be introduced to the jewels of Lady Jehane. I know Jen has told you the story of Jehane and Ambrose."

She unlocked a glass-fronted cabinet in a corner, and Selma gazed at the stones spread on the shelves.

"Oh, lovely!" she whispered. "Oh, they're bonny! You can almost understand Rykie and Angus, can't you?"

"It wasn't their beauty that tempted Rykie and Angus. They wanted the stones so that they could sell them," Joan said bluntly.

"Aye, it would be that with Rykie. But I'm thinking when Angus lost his senses and was foolish, it was because all the colours and the sparkle went to his head for one moment."

"Well, perhaps. You may be right; you know him better than we do. You can understand how we felt when we thought he was going to take them."

“I can that! I don’t wonder Jen tried to save them.”

“And jumped on Angus. I really didn’t blame her,” Joan agreed. “We thought they’d be safer in the house than in the Abbey.”

“What like would be the one you sold to give Angus his lessons?” Selma asked shyly.

“A ruby; like this. There were two large ones, so we chose one of them.”

“And now you’ve only got the one left!” Selma looked at her with tragic wondering eyes. “It was the most marvellous thing I ever heard!”

“Both Joy and I wanted to do it; we decided quite separately. They belong to us both; they were found in my Abbey, but Jehane comes from Joy’s family history. I haven’t any family history!” Joan laughed, and picked up some of the stones and held them to the light. “Yes, they’re beautiful. Perhaps some day we’ll have them made up into jewellery that we can wear.”

“Jen showed me the gold ring that belonged to the old monk.”

“Ambrose’s keepsake ring. She’s very proud of it,” Joan agreed. “And I have a sapphire ring that he made for Jehane. It was handed down in the family as an heirloom, and after various adventures—in Australia!—it came home to us, and Joy gave it to me, as she had one almost exactly the same, which had been her mother’s.”

“I’m glad to have seen these lovely things,” Selma said wistfully. “Thank you for showing me. I understand better now.”

“We felt you ought to see them before Angus comes.” And Joan locked the cabinet carefully.

CHAPTER 21

THE LAST SECRET

“Joan! Joan! I’ve done the most awful thing!” Jen, half undressed for bed, hurled herself into Joan’s room and collapsed into heartbroken tears.

“Jen, what is it?” Joan cried. “What is the matter?”

“We were talking about school, Selma and I,” Jen sobbed. “She likes it, and the girls like her, and she says she got on most awfully well to-day. So I said that was marvellous, and—and then—oh, Joan! I didn’t mean any harm! I never thought she’d care!”

“What did you say?” Joan asked, knowing the answer before it came.

“I said, wasn’t it a good thing Angus asked you to have her here? I forgot she didn’t know how it had happened.”

“You needn’t have done that,” Joan said, very quietly. “What did Selma say?”

“She stood up and stared at me, looking awfully funny. Then she said something like—‘Angus *asked* them? Didn’t they want me?’—and then I think she began to cry. So I came rushing for you. Oh, Joan, I never meant to upset her! Why does she care?”

“Stay here. Or go to bed. Don’t come, Jen!” and Joan went quickly to Selma’s room.

Jen dared not disobey, when Joan spoke in that tone. She crept to her own room, and closed the door quietly, and wept.

Selma had dropped on her bed and was crying passionately. Joan sat beside her and slipped an arm round her and patted her shoulder. “Don’t, Selma dear! It hurts me,” she pleaded. “We’re so glad to have you here.”

“Angus *asked* you to have me?” Selma choked. “You didn’t really want me? It was his plan?”

“That isn’t fair,” Joan said steadily. “We wanted you as much as we could want anybody whom we had never seen. We really wanted you quite a lot, for Angus had told us how he felt about you and had talked of ‘my girl’ and ‘my lassie,’ and we wanted to see you very badly. I don’t mind telling you we were a little nervous till we saw what you were like. But we liked you from the first moment, and very much better than we had expected to do.”

“I thought—it was just that you’d heard about me—and—and you wanted me to come,” Selma gasped.

“That’s exactly how it was,” Joan said cheerfully. “If the suggestion that you should come here came from Angus, what difference does that make?”

“Oh, it *is* different! You know it is! You felt you had to ask me.”

“Because we wanted to see you,” Joan said firmly. “Angus had made us curious about you. And we wanted to help. It was so obvious that he felt you were not having a proper chance in life, just working in your shop. He wanted you to see new places and new people, and he was

right, Selma. You have enjoyed it; you can't say you haven't. I really don't see what you have to be upset about."

"But—that he should *ask* you! And after you had been so terribly kind about his lessons! It was such—such an awful thing to do!"

"We felt like that, but only for one minute. And you won't go on feeling it when you've thought a little more. Don't you see what a compliment Angus paid us, when he decided we were the right people for his precious girl to live with for a while? I really mean precious; his treasure, if you like. He wanted the best for you, and he decided we could give it to you. I think really it was Mother who made him so sure; he wanted you to know her and live with her."

"But he oughtn't to have asked!" Selma insisted brokenly. "If you'd thought of it, it would be different."

"I'm sure we should have thought of it, if we'd had time to think it over. But he gave us no time; he told us about you and asked us to have you here, all at once."

"If I'd known, I'd no' have come," Selma sobbed again.

"I'm sure you wouldn't. And think what you'd have missed! You know you've been happy here."

There was silence, while Selma pondered this. Joan gave her a moment or two, and then began on a new line of thought.

"Don't you think Angus was rather a hero, Selma? And it was for your sake."

"How do you mean?" Selma jerked.

"Well, my dear, he simply hated asking us! You can surely understand that, after what had happened here only two months before! You know the whole story; how do you think Angus felt, about asking us to do something more for him?"

"I don't know how he could!"

"To tell the truth, neither do I," Joan said frankly. "He has far more courage than I'd ever imagined. And it was for you. Don't you see how much he must care about you, when he could do such a terribly hard thing for your sake?"

"Did he—really—hate doing it?" Selma whispered.

"He loathed it," Joan said definitely. "I think it was one of the hardest things he ever did. He said something about its being harder for him to ask us than for anybody else in the world; and of course that was true. Give him credit for being brave, Selma—very brave!"

"Aye, it might be brave," Selma admitted unsteadily.

"And it was for you," Joan repeated. "Nothing else in the world could have made him do it. I want you to promise to think about that and not to cry any more. I know you had a horrid shock; I'm sorry Jen was careless. We knew the idea might worry you and we felt it would be better if you didn't know. Jen speaks too quickly at times. She's very sorry she upset you."

"You knew I'd no' be pleased."

“We guessed it. But we were sure that once you knew us you wouldn’t feel so bad. And we felt that, if you were honest, you’d admit you were glad to be here. Are you glad, Selma? Are you honest?”

“I’m glad I’m here.” Selma spoke after a pause. “But I wish——”

“No, you don’t! Most certainly you don’t wish it had happened in another way, so don’t imagine you do,” Joan said breezily. “If it hadn’t happened, you’d never have had this particular proof of how much Angus cares about you. If you think of that long journey, all alone in the train, with nothing to think about but what lay before him, and dreading it most terribly all the time, you’ll realise how very much he must have cared for you, and how hard it was for him. Now that you understand, I’m rather glad you know all about it. Angus told you the story of the jewels so that when you and he are married it should be all clear between you, with no secrets; but there was this one other thing he had kept from you. Now there isn’t anything. It was his last small secret, and it was for your sake he did it and for your sake he didn’t tell you. All that is worth thinking over. You are a very lucky girl, to have a man care for you so much, and you should be very happy. I’ll not say any more; I want you to think about Angus until you go to sleep. I’ll speak to Jen; she’s very unhappy about you. May I tell her it’s all right?”

“It’s no’ her fault. Maybe it’s better I should know.”

“I’m sure it is. There’s nothing to be upset about. I’ll tell her you’re not going to be unhappy any more, shall I?”

There was a pause. Then Selma whispered, “Yes, please. Say that to her. I’ll be sensible.”

“Good! Now get into bed and think how much Angus must have loved you, when he put away his own feelings for your sake.”

Selma sat up. “You’ve made it seem different. I want to think about all that.”

“That’s a good girl. But don’t lie awake too long.” Joan bent and kissed her and went away.

Selma gave a little gasp. No one had kissed her since her mother died. “She—oh, she’s kind! What if I’d never known them all? And Angus wanted it for me. He knew how I’d love them!”

Suddenly she ran after Joan and caught her at the door of Jen’s room. “I’d like to speak to her. Will I tell her it’s all right?”

Joan paused, her face lighting up. “Oh, yes, Selma! That’s a far better way. Tell her I say it’s all right too.” And she went on to her own room, looking satisfied.

Selma slipped into the blue room and found Jen in bed, lying face downwards, sobbing quietly into her pillow.

In a moment Selma was upon her, an arm thrown round her. “Jen! Oh, my dear, don’t do that! It’s all right.”

“Selma!” Jen gave a smothered shout. “Oh, can you forgive me? I know I upset you most frightfully!”

“I don’t care so much now. I hadn’t thought, but Joan explained things to me. Isn’t she kind, Jen?”

“Joan? She’s simply marvellous! But I let her down badly, and you too. I do so hate to hurt people!” and Jen’s lips quivered. “I don’t do it often; I’m sure I don’t! It makes me feel quite horrible.”

“Don’t start again!” Selma begged. “I know now how Joan felt, when she came in and found me crying. She said, ‘It hurts *me*.’ That’s how I feel about you. Please, Jen! It’s all right, really.”

“Sure? Sure and certain? Righto!” Jen brushed her hand across her eyes. “I won’t howl any more. But I’ve always thought people who hurt other people were the absolute limit, and now I’ve been and done it myself. I feel such an infantile object.”

“You didn’t mean to do it.” Selma managed to edge in a word. “You didn’t know I’d care. I suppose I was daft to mind so much.”

“Oh no, you weren’t daft. I ought to have known. And to do it without meaning it is almost worse than meaning it, I think.”

“Oh *no!*” Selma cried, shocked. “It’s much worse to do it on purpose. You didn’t do that!”

“People ought to think how other people will feel and not go dashing about upsetting them. I *will* be more careful! But I didn’t know you’d mind. You are glad to be here, aren’t you?”

“I am so!” Selma said fervently. “And Joan’s made me see how hard it was for Angus to ask them and how brave he was to do it.”

“He was awfully decent,” Jen said thoughtfully. “But then he cares such a lot about you.”

Selma coloured. “I’m no’ worth it. I’m no’ good enough for him.”

“Oh, I don’t know! He’ll be jolly lucky, if he gets you.”

“How do you mean ‘if’?” Selma demanded. “He belongs to me and I belong to him.”

“Oh, right! Jolly for you both. Are you *sure* it’s all right—about me, you know? For I’m jolly sleepy. I’ve cried an awful lot, and I don’t often do it.”

“We’ll both go to bed now. Yes, it is all right, and Joan says so too. She told me to tell you.”

“Good! That was nice of her. She didn’t want me to worry all night.”

“Go to sleep!” Selma commanded, and crept away and left her.

CHAPTER 22

A PROGRAMME FOR ANGUS

Both girls were tired and heavy-eyed when they came down next morning. Joy glanced at them, and having heard the story from Joan, she saw how they were feeling. Without comment, she announced that she wanted to run in to Wycombe to buy some music, and she might as well go at once and take them to school in the car.

“If I’m not there to pick you up at four, you can come home by train,” she said. “But it’s getting too dark for the woods after school. We shall have to begin sending Billy in the old car to fetch you. A good thing we haven’t sold her yet!”

“Billy’s a jolly fine driver. Thanks a million, Joy!” But though Jen was deeply grateful she sounded subdued; and finding her still in the same mood at tea-time, Joan seized a chance of a private word.

“Selma isn’t worrying over last night, Jen. Can’t you forget it? You aren’t yourself at all.”

“I’m worrying,” Jen said candidly. “If you really want to know, I’m sick to death of myself for being such an infant.”

“Oh, you needn’t feel like that! I don’t think you were an infant.”

“You do, you know,” Jen assured her. “You’ve been incredibly nice about it, and so has Selma, but it was my fault, for chattering like a kid without thinking. It’s been a bad shock to me. I feel a perfect worm.”

Joan stifled a laugh. “Don’t let it cloud your life! I don’t care for you like this.”

“I don’t care for myself. I don’t mind telling you it has upset me a lot.”

“I can see that,” Joan agreed. “Do cheer up! There’s no harm done. You’ve really helped Selma, for she appreciates Angus better than she did.”

“She cares a jolly lot about him. I shouldn’t wonder if she’s really and truly in love with him,” Jen said thoughtfully.

“Never mind that. Forget the whole business, and be Jenny-Wren again! How is she getting on at school?”

“Jolly well, so far as I can make out. The Head told her to go into the Fifth and see if she could manage the work, so Aileen took charge of her, and they think she’s not too bad. They like her, and they say the way she speaks is so pretty. It is, of course; I’ve thought so all along. We’re used to it, but it’s new to the girls and they rave about it. Her French isn’t up to the Fifth, so she’s coming to us for that. She’ll be all right, Joan. We had dancing in the dinner hour, and I made her join in. She points her toes; she says they always do. But she picks up things quickly; she’ll soon get into our way of dancing, and she’s good at remembering figures.”

“Give her all the practice you can. Then we’ll have a dance evening, and she’ll look a picture in the yellow frock. Now cheer up and don’t worry any more!”

“All the same, I hate people who dash about saying unkind things, and I’m one of them. I hoped I wasn’t.”

“You aren’t,” Joan said promptly. “This wasn’t unkind. It was merely thoughtless.”

“But that’s always unkind,” and Jen sighed deeply. “D’you remember the time I made Susie Spindle cry herself into measles? But that wasn’t thoughtless; I meant it!”

“I sympathised with you. It was Susie who had been thoughtless; but she didn’t understand.”

“It was me this time.” And Jen sighed again.

“Selma is writing to Angus. I expect she wants to tell him that they have no secret between them now,” Joan said.

“Angus will love to come for his birthday,” and Selma came to Joan one morning, a few days later, her face radiant. “He can make it all right in Glasgow, and he says you’re the kindest folk he has ever known.”

“I wonder if he’ll think you’ve changed?” Joan looked at her thoughtfully. “I believe you have. I wonder what Angus will say!”

“I’ve changed a lot,” Selma said abruptly. “I’m a different person.”

“In some ways perhaps you are. But you’re still Angus’s Selma. And prettier than ever!” Joan added, but very strictly to herself. “You’re getting on all right at school, aren’t you? Angus will want to hear about it. Do you like the girls?”

“Oh, aye!—I mean, yes, they’re nice. But there’s one thing I don’t like,” and Selma’s eyes danced.

“What’s that?”

“They will call me ‘Selmar’; some of them always do it, though you never do, or Jen. I don’t like to be called Selmarandersson.”

Joan laughed. “They don’t know they’re doing it. But it’s a pity to have your pretty name spoiled; I sympathise with you! Selmarandersson is rather dreadful, isn’t it?”

“We’ll take the car to Wycombe to meet Angus,” Joy said, when it was time for him to come. “He’s changed trains in London often enough; he doesn’t need help there. But we’ll go as far as Wycombe.”

Selma’s excitement grew, as the day drew near. She went about with shining eyes and a lovely eager colour in her cheeks, and Joan suspected that her feeling for Angus was deeper than she had admitted.

“Just look at Selma’s face!” Jen whispered. “Is it because Angus is coming?”

“Don’t say anything,” Joan murmured in reply. “She wants to see him terribly much.”

“She doesn’t talk about him. If I try, she shuts me up by changing the subject.”

“Leave her alone. Don’t tease her!”

“All right. I’ll be tactful.”

And Jen, mindful of other indiscretions, left Angus out of their conversation.

“Look at Selma Andersson! I’d no idea she was so pretty!” Nesta, the reigning Queen, said to her maid-of-honour Beatrice, or Beetle.

“Jolly pretty kid,” Beetle agreed. “Wish we could have her in the procession.”

“If she’s still here by May, you could have her for your maid.”

“You don’t know that I’ll be chosen,” Beatrice protested.

“As a matter of fact, I do,” Nesta assured her. “If only because there’s nobody else.”

“There’s Jen. Lots of them would like her for Queen.”

“After you’ve had your turn,” Nesta said firmly. “You’ve been here centuries longer than Jen; three years, at least. I’ll bet anything you like Jen will be Queen after you; but you’ll have your reign first. Selma would make a jolly maid for you.”

“She’d make me look littler and rounder than ever. I wish I could look like that,” Beatrice said mournfully. “I’m such a dump! And I’m not chosen yet, so do stop choosing my maid!”

“You will be chosen,” Nesta said again. “Oh, by the way, Jen’s teasing me to have a party for the Club on the last Saturday in November. It’s time we had one, and she wants Selma to have a party, now that she can dance a little.”

“She’s always on her toes,” Beatrice said severely.

“Jen says that’s what they do in Scotland. But Selma’s better than she was; she tries awfully hard to come down off her toes. Her feet are terribly pretty when she’s dancing! We’d better have the party. I asked Jen why it had to be that special day and she said we could pretend it was a St. Andrew’s Day dance.”

“What’s that got to do with it? Why St. Andrew?”

“He’s the saint for Scotland, like St. George for England, and Selma comes from Scotland. And Jen says they’ve a friend coming for that week-end and he’d like to see a party in a barn.”

“Is it that man who played tunes to us last summer when we danced at the Hall? Reels, they were called.”

“I don’t know; we’ll ask Jen. We’ll go to Darley’s Barn; it’s much jollier than a school party.”

“Oh, rather! Darley’s will have us. We all like going there.”

“I’ll arrange it, then,” said the Queen.

“Quite a jolly programme for Angus!” Jen said, when she heard about the party. “On Saturday morning Joy’s going to take us all to Oxford in the car. The party at Darley’s Barn at night, and he’ll see Selma dance in her new frock. Sunday, quiet, of course. If he can stay over Monday, Selma must take a day off from school and give him a good tramp on the hills, and in the woods. The colours are just wonderful now.”

“I know I will go wrong in the dances,” Selma said anxiously.

“Oh no, you won’t! I’ll take care of you. And if you do, what does it matter? Angus won’t know, and none of us will care. But don’t look flustered and show everybody you were wrong. Keep calm and pretend that’s the way you like to do the dance.”

“Oh, Jen!” Joan laughed. “Is that what you do?”

“Always! If I get left out of a ring, I look quite happy, as if I’d never meant to go into it and would much rather stand out all alone, on my own.”

“No wonder people say you’re a good dancer!” Joy mocked. “Outsiders, I mean. Insiders might call it cheating.”

“It’s much the best way,” Jen said haughtily.

CHAPTER 23

THE COMING OF ANGUS

“No, Jen. You and I are going to stay at home this time,” Joan decreed, as Selma ran upstairs to fetch her coat and Jen would have followed her.

“Oh, Joan, why? I like going to meet people!” Jen protested. “You let me go to meet Selma, and Rykie! Why can’t I go to meet Angus?”

“Because that’s Selma’s job. Don’t you understand? They won’t want you there.”

Jen gave her a quick look. “Oh! I see. But I wouldn’t be in the way! I’d sit with Joy and let them have the back seat all to themselves.”

“Better not. Let Selma be the only one to go.”

Jen gave in reluctantly. “I suppose I’ll have to be tactful! Will they want to sit in corners together all the time?”

“I’m sure they won’t! But we must let them be alone now and then.”

“You’re sure we’ll all go to Oxford to-morrow?”

“Oh yes! I’m coming too.”

Jen grinned. “So that they can pair off and Selma can show him the places she likes best, while I stay with you and Joy! Oh, well, if that’s what she wants!”

“Not coming?” Selma stared at Jen. “Oh, but why?”

“I’m going to get on with Monday’s prep., while I have the chance,” Jen retorted. “I shan’t want to work when we’ve a visitor. Joy will take care of you.”

Much astonished by this sudden devotion to duty, Selma took the front seat by Joy and they drove off. It was only later that the truth dawned on her, and she coloured and laughed.

“What’s up?” Joy demanded.

“Jen. She’s funny sometimes.”

“You must look after Angus on the way back,” Joy said. “I shall put you both in behind, so that I can concentrate on the road. Night driving’s tricky.”

Selma grinned, for she knew Joy for an excellent and unafraid driver. “You’re all quite sure I want to be left alone with Angus.”

“I’m absolutely certain I don’t want to tip Angus into a ditch. Or you either, so don’t chatter.”

Selma subsided, her mind reaching out eagerly to the meeting before her.

“You go and fetch him.” Joy, having been prompted by Joan, was also tactful, and she sat resolutely still when they reached the station. “I’m going to take care of the car. Ask which platform it is for the London train. You’ll need a platform ticket; have you a penny ready? Off you go, then!”

Thrilled and happy, Selma carried out the instructions correctly and was by Angus's side when he jumped from the train. "Oh, Angus! It's good to see you again!"

"Selma! My lassie, how well you look!" His eyes filled with delight at sight of her. "You've grown," he said.

"Give me your bag. You carry the fiddle; I'm glad you've brought it. Come on! Joy's waiting in the car."

"Fling your stuff in here by me. The fiddle? Oh, good! We'll have musical evenings. You two take the back seat," Joy commanded.

"Selma told me of your music at night," Angus began.

"Yes, I'm glad to see the fiddle. In you get! And don't talk to me. I have to take you safely home."

"Did you have a nice journey?" Selma asked politely, as she settled down in the back of the car.

"Oh, aye! Not too bad. The train wasn't crowded."

"Prim and proper!" Joy said to herself, driving warily through the traffic.

But presently she knew that silence had fallen between her passengers. Angus was devouring Selma with eager eyes and finding her changed; glowing with dark, happy beauty and with a new poise and assurance.

Then Joy knew they were talking earnestly, but quietly. She smiled, relieved that the first moments of tension were over, and gave her attention to the road.

"You're gey bonny, Selma lass," Angus murmured.

"That's my new coat, that you gave me. Joan said the big collar suited me. I feel I'm wearing all your clothes."

"I could never buy any clothes for myself that I'd like as well as I like that green coat, when it's on you."

Selma laughed under her breath. "Where did you learn to make pretty speeches?"

"It was wanting you so much that taught me. And then to see you again—I could eat you, my girl."

"You'll please no' to do that! But I forgot; it's with seeing you. Please don't eat me, Angus!"

"How do you get on with the talking?" he asked anxiously. "I'm thinking you speak prettily, lassie."

Selma made a grimace. "Sometimes I remember. But they don't mind at home; I have to be careful at school. Angus, aren't they kind? It was their idea that you should come."

"Aye, it's very kind, and understanding forbye," said Angus.

"Tell me about home! Did you go to see Mollie, as I asked you to do?"

"I did that, and she sent her love."

“And are the hills still there? And the steamers? We’ve nothing like that here, but there are other things.”

“I’ll take you on a boat again some day. We’ll sail past your Dunselma and go up the lochs.”

“Here we are!” Joy called briskly, some time later. “You two are talking so hard—about old times, I suppose—that you never saw the village.”

Jen was tugging at the door of the car. “Come on in! Isn’t it fun to have you staying here, Angus? Did Selma take care of you nicely? I thought you’d rather have her to yourself, so I stayed at home and did French.”

“Oh, Jen!” Selma cried, laughing. “You said it was because of your prep!”

“It wasn’t, really,” Jen said, unabashed. “Joan said you wouldn’t want me. Did you have a nice ride?”

Angus looked at Selma. “The nicest drive I ever had. Thank you, Miss Jen!”

“Oh, you mustn’t do that!” Jen said, shocked. “I’m not ‘Miss’ anybody. I’m younger than Selma!”

“Bring them in, Jen. Don’t stand chattering out there,” Joan cried from the doorway.

“Well, Joan, he called me ‘Miss Jen.’ I don’t like it!”

Joan laughed across at Angus. “I think you must give up being polite so far as Jen is concerned. She really isn’t important enough for any sort of title. Remember she is only a schoolgirl and call her Jen, or Jenny-Wren.”

“I can be important when I like.” Jen drew herself up haughtily. “But I don’t often like. And never at home. Can’t Angus have some supper? I’m sure he’s starving.”

All through that evening, with its supper, talk, and music, Joan knew that Angus followed Selma’s every movement with wondering, gratified eyes. He was, indeed, astounded by the results of his great idea. She was so completely at home in this big house, talking easily with these wonderful people, moving gracefully and with assurance among them; it was exactly what he had hoped for, but he would never have believed it could happen so soon. Perhaps girls were like that; able to adapt themselves quickly and to pick up things from other folk. Beside her, he felt awkward and shy, but that did not really matter. Selma had learned the ways of cultured people, and he was proud of her. And she was so pretty! She was wearing the pale green frock of softly draped material, a green ribbon in her dark hair. Angus watched her wistfully and wondered if he could ever be good enough for her.

“I’ll make good!” he vowed, as he opened the case and took out his violin, at Joy’s urgent request. “I’ll play as no man ever played before. I’ll make her proud of me!”

“Gracious! You have improved!” Joy exclaimed, her hands dropping from the piano. “McAlistair has helped you a lot! Don’t you feel it yourself?”

“Aye, I do that . . . I mean, I really think so, Miss Joy.” Angus coloured in confusion, as he caught Selma’s laughing eyes upon him.

“I’m sure Selma’s very proud of you,” Joan put in.

“I am so!”

And then Jen giggled and it was time for Selma to grow red.

“Never mind, you two. Play something more to us, Angus!” Joy commanded.

CHAPTER 24

A PARTY FOR SELMA

All through the trip to Oxford and the evening in Darley's Barn, Angus continued to watch Selma with that proud incredulous look.

In Oxford Joan saw to it that the party separated, and Selma took him to the places which had fascinated her in her lonely exploring, while the others prowled round the shops. They only met again when it was time to go home, and Angus, marvelling afresh at his "lassie," told where they had been.

"Selma knows all about those fine places," he said proudly.

"Selma's an explorer. She did the thing properly, with maps and guide-books," Joy said. "Come and sit in front with me and leave all those girls to chatter in behind! I'll show you more of the river; we'll go home by Wallingford. And on Monday, if you like, I'll run you down to Marlow and Maidenhead; Selma hasn't been there yet."

"I know I'll go wrong in the dances." Selma was nervous as they crowded into the car and set out for the barn at night.

"It doesn't matter, if you do," Joan said cheerfully. "Everybody knows you're new."

"I'll take care of you," Jen promised. "You can talk to Angus when we have the difficult ones."

It seemed to Angus that his "lassie" knew a great deal, and if she pointed her toes he did not notice it. His eyes had taken on that proud surprised look again, when he saw her in the pale yellow frock, and he watched with delight as she skipped her way through "Flowers of Edinburgh," for which Jen had begged, so that he could see the English dance to the Scottish tune. Jen was taking care of Selma; he could see that; she put her firmly into place after each swing and change, with obvious orders, "Now do just what I do. I'm your man, so I have to do it first."

Mrs. Shirley had come to watch the dancing, tucked into the car between Joan and Selma, while Jen had a small seat facing them and Angus sat with Joy.

He turned to Mrs. Shirley, as they sat together looking on.

"She—little Miss Jen—is helping Selma all the time. She tells her what to do."

"Jen is a beautiful dancer, and an unselfish one. She loves to help beginners."

"Aye, but does it no' spoil the dance for herself? Selma would no' want that."

"Jen will have her turn later on. Here they come, to ask how you liked it."

Jen came racing to them. "You played that tune to us last summer. Do you like our dance for it? Isn't Selma getting on? She's going to be jolly good; she's so light. She knows some of our other tunes; she says 'Galopede' ought to be called 'Petronella'—it's almost the same. Oh, 'Newcastle'! She can't do that. I must find a partner!" and she was gone.

“Great excitement!” Mrs. Shirley smiled. “Come and sit with us, Selma dear. You look hot.”

Selma dropped into a chair. “I want to watch. Isn’t it fun? It’s the first time I’ve seen one of their parties, Angus. Aren’t the colours pretty?”

“Your frock’s as bonny as any of them.” He looked what he felt, as he gazed at her glowing face.

“I made it myself. But Joan helped,” Selma added.

As the sets formed for “Newcastle,” Queen Nesta nudged Maid Beetle. “Look at that man’s face! Do you think he wants to marry Selma?”

“He oughtn’t to look at her like that, if he doesn’t,” Beatrice said severely.

“Goodness! But she’s only a kid at school!”

“She’s pretending to be. I shouldn’t wonder if she’s quite grown-up at home.”

Presently, by special request of the Club, Angus produced the fiddle Joy had ordered him to bring, and played reels and Scottish songs, and the barn rang with applause, and then with the sound of voices, as the girls broke into “Annie Laurie” and “Loch Lomond.” Angus laughed and played several beautiful tunes which they did not know, and then more music for reels and strathspeys. Some of the girls would have liked to try the Scottish dances, but the President had decided against it, so they had to be content to be English, as usual.

“Last dance! Have ‘Haste to the Wedding’ with me, Selma!” and Jen ran up, having come safely through “Mage on a Cree.” “You’re more likely to have a wedding than any of the rest of us.”

“You’ll need to have one, before you can have those ten children,” Selma retorted, going to take her place in the line.

She sighed with pure happiness as they drove home. “Thank you all so very much! It was a lovely party. I hope I’ll go to lots more. Please, did I point my toes too badly?”

Jen’s dancing eyes gave her answer. But Joy said promptly, “We couldn’t see your feet, in that crowd. So don’t worry!”

“How kind of you!” Selma cried.

During the supper of sandwiches and cocoa which awaited them, Angus managed to draw Selma away to a small table in a corner.

“Talking over the party. We’ll leave them alone,” Joan said.

There was something else on Angus’s mind, however.

“Selma, lass, to-morrow’s the Sabbath,” he began.

She gave him a quick look. “I was going to speak about that, but I’ve no’ had the chance. I’m thinking we’ll need to go to the church with them. They all go, always. Will you come?”

“We could no’ go for a walk in those woods, I suppose? They’re all gold and red and brown. I’d like to see them.”

“We could, in the afternoon. But we’d better go to the kirk in the morning. I’ll tell you what to do; the service is odd, but I’m used to it now and I rather like it. And the very old church, and

the singing—you'll like it too."

"I'd rather have been just with you. But I will come. I—I've gone to the English church—the 'Piscopal, you know—once or twice, since I had your letter saying what it was like. I wanted to be doing the same as you," he confessed.

"Oh, Angus, how nice of you!" Selma exclaimed.

"I wanted to have things the same for both of us. I liked it quite a lot. I didn't want to go in the country without you."

"Not with anybody else?" Selma's look was partly anxious but chiefly mischievous.

"Not with anybody else in the world," he told her firmly. "I'll come with you to-morrow. I know the sort of things they do. But if I forget you can tell me."

"And we'll have a tramp in the woods in the afternoon," Selma promised. "I'm glad you'll come. I'll love to have you there."

CHAPTER 25

ANGUS PAYS HIS DEBT

Joy sat up in bed, listening. Then she crept to the window, and looked, and listened again.

As mistress of the house, she used the big bedroom over the great drawing-room. From the windows below she could see a gleam of light. Someone was in the drawing-room, using a torch.

Joy silently pulled on slippers, pullover and big coat, for the night was chilly. Wild thoughts were whirling in her mind. Jehane's jewels were there, in the cabinet. Angus——? Could he ——? Impossible! But she could not quite forget last July.

But Angus had not been in the drawing-room. He probably thought the jewels were still in the Abbey. They had been too busy, out-of-doors, or round the piano, or in the dining-room, to have time for the seldom-used drawing-room. And Joan and she had decided before he came that there should be no reference to the jewels, or to the Abbey, as that might be too painful for him. So he had not been taken to see them in their new resting-place. He could not know they were in the house, unless—Selma?

For one crazy moment, Joy wondered if it had all been arranged; if Selma had been introduced into the household, and had forced her way into friendship, as part of a deeply-laid scheme to find out where the jewels were kept and to get hold of them. After all, they were worth a fortune!

Then she thought of Selma and Angus, and knew it was not so. Selma was honest; and so, now, was Angus.

Then who was down there? For there was certainly somebody in the lower room.

She took her torch and the special stick she kept for tramps on the hills, and opened her door. All was quiet; no one else seemed to have heard.

Then Joy caught her breath, for Angus's door was open. She looked in, flashing her torch about; the room was empty.

Suspicion swept over her again. In flaming anger, she turned to go down and confront him.

“Joy! What's up?”

Joy swung round, to find Jen following her.

“Did you hear something?” Joy hissed, her face scarlet with wrath.

Jen pulled her into her own room. “Don't wake Selma. I heard a door open, so I looked out.” And she nodded at the empty room.

“Angus. He's downstairs after the jewels. I expect Selma's there too.”

Jen stared at her. “No,” she said. “Oh, no, Joy! I don't know what it is, but it's not that. Angus never would; not again! And Selma couldn't possibly. We'd better go down; perhaps there are burglars and Angus went to see. We must help him. But he's not the burglar this time.”

“I’m not so sure of it,” Joy retorted.

“Well, I am. I may have to jump on somebody again, to save the jewels, but the somebody won’t be Angus. Come on, Joy! He’s all alone with the burglars. Shall I call Joan? It’s mean to leave her out.”

“Joan and you left me out last time. No, don’t call anybody—yet. We’ll see what’s up.”

“Joy still isn’t sure. It’s awfully like her!” Jen said to herself, as they crept down the great staircase.

The drawing-room door stood open. A hoarse voice from within growled, “Shut that door! Who opened it?”

“Angus opened it,” Jen whispered, shivering. “Oh, Joy, he’s in there with them all alone! He went to save the jewels!”

“Got them?” asked another voice, as they crept to the door.

Then from the shadows a slight figure launched itself upon the speakers, as Angus leapt towards the man stooping over the cabinet. “Come awa’ frae there, ye dirty thief!” There was no mistaking the Scottish voice.

The second man sprang upon the two of them as they struggled on the floor. “Leave go, you young ass!” muttered one. “Leave hold, or I’ll break your arm!”

“I’ll no’ let him go!” Angus gasped.

A shrill cry broke from him, as the girls rushed in, both brandishing sticks, and Joy switched on the lights.

In a moment all was confusion. The men dashed for the open window, one of them giving a vicious kick at Angus as he lay fainting. How many assailants there were they did not stop to find out; the alarm was given and their chance was lost. They were through the window and racing across the lawn in a flash.

“I’ll phone the police,” Joy gasped, and she ran to the telephone, bumping into Joan as she went.

“Men—after the jewels—Angus saved them—he’s hurt. Police!” she jerked, and raced on.

Joan ran into the room to join Jen, who knelt by Angus, tears raining down her cheeks. “No, he’s not dead. But they knocked him down and kicked him, the brutes. And—and—they said they’d break his arm, if he didn’t let go, and he hung on. And I think they did it. Oh, Joan, his right arm! He won’t be able to play any more!”

“Nonsense!” Joan said briskly. “Arms will mend. But that was very brave.” She bent over Angus. “He’s fainted. We must have the doctor. Run to Joy and ask her to ring him.”

Joy met Jen at the door. “Line’s dead,” she said in disgust. “They’ve cut the wire. I’ll put on some things and get out the car and race to the station in the village.”

Joan kept her head. “The phone in the Abbey will be quicker. We must have the doctor for Angus. Jen, you run best. Sprint to the Abbey and ring up the doctor.”

“I’ll do it,” Joy insisted. “I must get on to the police,” and she rushed to the window and sprang through, on to the terrace.

“Joy! The keys!” Joan cried. “Fetch them, Jen!”

Jen ran for the keys and thrust them into Joy’s hand. “Be quick! Get the doctor first. Angus—oh, Joy! Fetch the doctor quickly! But don’t fall over the Curate! We don’t want any more broken arms.”

“Here, Jen!” Joan called urgently.

Jen ran to her. “What can I do? Oh, Joan, he’s not dead, is he?”

“Is who dead?” a terrified voice cried from the doorway. “What’s happened? I heard noises. Oh, Angus! Angus, what’s the matter? Oh, he’s dead! He’s dead!”

“He’s not dead,” Joan said sharply. “Jen, bring water; he cut his head when he fell. Then run up to Mother’s room and tell her all about it; she must have been wakened by the row. Tell her gently, with no nonsense about anyone being dead. Nobody’s dead, nor going to be. But first fetch water, and bandages; you know where I keep them. Selma! Go with Jen and bring the things when she finds them. Then you shall help me with Angus.”

“Come on!” Selma turned to Jen and they ran like the wind.

“Here you are!” Selma’s voice was steady when she returned. “I’d like to help; I’m not afraid. I’ve done First Aid—just a little. Tell me what to do!”

Joan gave her a swift smile. “Bathe his head gently. Don’t touch that arm. The doctor will be here soon.”

“His arm?” Selma whispered. “Did he break it when he fell? Oh, Joan, it’s his right arm! Will he—will it get better?”

“Oh yes, I’m sure it will. But he won’t be able to use it for some time. Now don’t cry! That’s the first way to help; keep quiet and don’t make things harder for us.”

“I’ll try.” Selma’s lips were trembling. “What happened, please?”

“I don’t know exactly. I think Angus has been very brave. I heard sounds and came down, and then Angus called out, and Joy dashed past me to the phone, saying there had been burglars and she must ring for the police. Jen told me that the men threatened to break Angus’s arm, if he didn’t let them go, and that he hung on. It sounds as if he had saved the jewels. I’m afraid to do anything to his arm till the doctor comes, but we can see to this cut. He must have hit his head when he fell.”

Selma was crying, but very quietly, her head bent. “He’d do anything for you,” she whispered. “If he heard men in here he’d come down to try to stop them.”

“That’s what must have happened,” Joan agreed. “But he should have called us, and not have tried to do it all alone.”

“He’d no’ want to bring you into it; or me. Will he no’ wake up soon?”

“He probably has slight concussion. It’s not dangerous, Selma; it will soon pass off. You poor kid, it’s very hard on you! Try to be proud of Angus and remember how brave he must have been! You must be brave too.”

“Should we no’ cover him with something, to keep him warm? He’s only got his coat over his pyjamas,” Selma half sobbed.

“Yes, find something quickly. I forgot that,” Joan said in dismay.

“At classes they keep on saying, ‘Protect from shock.’ It seemed to me this was the right time.” Selma brought a rug and ran to find another.

“Yes, well done! I was an idiot to forget that. It’s very important.” Joan covered Angus gently.

“Be careful not to touch his arm; we don’t know how bad it is.”

“I wish he’d wake up,” Selma said unsteadily.

“It may be better not, until after the doctor has taken him up to bed and set his arm. It will be easier for Angus, if he’s still like this.”

The startled maids were crowding round the door. Joan waved them off. “Don’t come in; you can’t do anything here. Have lots of hot water ready; Mr. Reekie has had an accident. The doctor may want help from some of you presently. Wait in the kitchen till we call you, and have kettles boiling. You might fill bottles and take them up to his bed. That can’t be wrong and it will keep them busy,” she whispered to Selma, as the girls vanished.

Jen crept in. “How is he? Just the same? Aunty Shirley’s all right, Joan. She’d wakened up, so she was glad to see me. She knows what’s happened, and she’s promised to stay in bed and not be frightened, but she wants you to go and tell her about Angus as soon as you can.”

“Thanks for going to her, Jen. We can’t do any more now till the doctor comes.”

Jen glanced at her. Then she went to Selma and crouched beside her and held her hand.

Joan nodded. To comfort Selma was the only thing anyone could do at the moment. It was like Jen to have seen that and acted on it.

Selma sat, very white and quiet, and gazed at Angus’s still face.

CHAPTER 26

A HORRIBLE NIGHT

Joy came in by the window. “Doc. will come at once. The police are on the job; they’ll be here later to ask questions, but as we never saw the men we can’t tell them much.”

“Angus saw the men,” Jen said.

“They want to question him—when he can talk,” Joy added, with a glance at Angus. “It won’t be for a little while, poor chap! But he can’t tell them a lot; it was almost dark—only a torch, till I switched on the lights. I told the police he was a visitor, who only arrived late on Friday night. He couldn’t possibly know the wretches.”

Joan looked up quickly. “Do you think it was somebody from the village?”

“Must have been,” Joy said definitely. “It was somebody who knew about the jewels and could go straight to them. The house hasn’t been ransacked. They knew where to find the stones. Somebody has been talking.”

Joan looked at Jen and nodded.

“I told you that,” Jen said. “I said people in the village knew you’d brought the jewels to the house.”

“Susie, perhaps. She isn’t always very sensible,” Joan began.

“Maybe. But Ann Watson’s in floods of tears.”

“Ann!” Joan and Jen stared at Joy.

“I had to tell her why I wanted the Abbey phone at midnight. I just said, ‘Burglars, after the jewels,’ and she stared as if I’d hit her and then collapsed. I bet you she’s the culprit.”

“She’d go telling people she was so glad she hadn’t to worry over them any longer,” Jen exclaimed.

“Very natural,” Joan agreed. “She wouldn’t mean any harm. I know she was glad when we took the stones away.”

“And somebody heard and saw his chance,” Jen added.

“I’m afraid Ann will have to see the police,” Joan said. “Someone from the village has found an accomplice. How many men were there?”

“Two. And Angus was all alone, but he went for them. He was a hero!”

“He was jolly plucky.” Joy’s face was grave, as she stood looking down at Angus.

Jen glanced up at her quickly, about to speak. She held back the words, but patted Selma’s hand gently, as if to reassure her.

“I may as well own up!” Joy exclaimed. “Jen knows, but she won’t give me away. Decent kid, Jen! Joan, I thought at first it was Angus who was after the stones; then I knew it couldn’t be”—at a sharp, hurt cry from Selma—“and then when I found he wasn’t in his room I was

sure it *was*. Jen was mad and said he never would, but I wasn't sure. We came racing down and were just in time to see him leap out of the dark on to the chap with the torch. The other fellow told him to clear out or he'd break his arm, but Angus hung on." She gazed at them with wide brown eyes full of horror. "I feel a worm. I'd like to tell him so. Joan, do you think they really did it—broke his arm, I mean? Won't he be able to play? Oh, Joan, his career! He'd made such a good start! Is it ruined, just for our wretched jewels? And I thought—I can't bear it!"

"Joy, pull yourself together!" Joan said sharply. "The doctor will set the arm. It will take some time to get strong, but unless there's anything odd or unusual about it, it will be all right. Don't panic, when there's no need. You're terrifying Selma. Do keep your head!"

Selma was staring at Joy, white and tense. She looked at Joan. "He will get better, won't he?"

"Of course he'll get better. Don't mind Joy! She's very silly sometimes."

"I'm an idiot," Joy said abjectly. "Of course he'll get better! What's a broken arm? We'll take care of him till he's all right again, kid. There's a car; it will be Doc. I'll let him in," and she ran to unlock the front door.

"We can't have doctors coming in by windows," Joan said cheerfully. "It will be all right now, Selma. We'll soon have Angus comfortable in bed, and then you shall sit beside him."

The doctor hurried in. "What have you young people been up to? An accident?"

"A burglar alarm; they were after those jewels." Joan rose to meet him. "Mr. Reekie is staying with us, and he very bravely went to the rescue. But I'm afraid his arm is broken, and they knocked him down and kicked him as he lay on the ground. Can we help you, Doctor?"

Dr. Brown knelt by Angus and ran practised hands over his body. "A broken rib here. Kicked him, you say? Brutes! Now the arm. Yes, a bad fracture. I'll see to his head; he struck it when he fell. Out of the way, all you youngsters! Miss Joan may stay to help me. Miss Joy, take those two away."

Selma stood, her eyes wide with fear. "He won't die?"

The doctor glanced at her, wondering why this girl should be in such a panic. "Die? Certainly not! Why should he die? Out of the way, my dear. You're keeping me from the patient."

Jen took Selma's arm. "Come along! I've had an idea. Come on, Joy!"

"Call us, if there's anything we can do," Joy said, as she followed the younger girls. "Good old Joan is more use at this sort of thing than all the rest of us put together." She looked at Selma. "I say, you're not going to faint, are you?"

"No, she's going to have some strong tea. That was my idea," Jen said vigorously. "Hi, Susie! Susie Spindle! Ask Cook to make a pot of tea; we all need it. I'll carry a cup up to Mrs. Shirley. You'll be all right, Selma! There, squat on the stairs till you feel better. It's been a horrible night for all of us. Joy, couldn't you go up to Aunty Shirley and tell her the doctor's here? Tell her about Mrs. Watson too; she'll have to know. And say there are tea and biscuits coming in two minutes."

Joy ran off upstairs, and Jen sat by Selma and slipped an arm round her. "I hope she won't say anything silly, but you never know with Joy. Aunty Shirley will be glad to see she's all right;

she fusses over Joy.”

“Will Angus get better?” Selma half sobbed.

“Of course he will. We keep on telling you so. There’s nothing very deadly the matter with him.”

“Will he be able to play again?”

“I’m quite certain he will. You care about him a jolly lot, don’t you?”

“He’s mine.” Selma quivered. “I didn’t know how much I cared till I thought he was dead. I thought I’d die too.”

“Well, he cares an awful lot about you, so that’s all right, and very nice too,” Jen said briskly. “Are you better? Can you walk? Then let’s park ourselves in the library and have the tea there. We’re rather in the way here; sort of holding up the traffic. Doc. will want to put Angus to bed.”

“How will he do it? Could I no’ be any use?”

“Annie will help Dr. Brown to carry him. She’s a big hefty girl; it won’t hurt her. Then you’ll sit and hold his hand and look at him, and you’ll know he’s begun to get better.”

Selma allowed herself to be led to the library without protest. She dropped into a chair and laid her head on her arms on the big table, and was silent.

Jen glanced at her, but left her alone. The tea was brought, and she busied herself with the tray for Mrs. Shirley and carried it upstairs, with an extra cup for Joy. Then she went back to Selma and poked her gently. “Here you are! I’ve put a lot of sugar in; it’s good for you. There! Feel better now?”

Selma sat up and pushed back her hair from her face. “Ever so much! You are nice, Jen! You look after people beautifully.”

“I love doing it,” Jen admitted. “But I don’t very often get the chance.”

“Please take care of Angus and me.” Selma gave her a shaky smile.

Joy came in presently, fully dressed. “No use my going to bed! The police may be here any time and I’ll have to see them. They may want you too, Jen; you saw as much as I did. Selma came down after it was all over, so she can go back to bed.”

Selma looked at her incredulously. “But Joan promised I should be with Angus.”

“Of course you’re going to be with Angus!” Jen exclaimed. “That’s Selma’s job, Joy. You can see to the bobbies, and if they want me I’ll be delighted to have a chat with them. We’ll leave Angus to Joan and Selma. Joy, will you go on keeping those wretched jewels in the house?”

“I haven’t had time to think about them. We’ll see what Joan says.”

“I should bury them in the garden.”

“Oh, Jen! They’re too beautiful,” Selma wailed.

“It’s quite a good idea, but I hope we can think of something better than that,” Joy said. “They’ve been unlucky for us. But they’d have been safe enough here, if Ann Watson hadn’t been such an ass.”

She opened the door and then closed it quickly. “They’re carrying Angus upstairs; Annie is helping Dr. Brown. No, you can’t go, Selma. Wait here till they’ve put him safely to bed. Joan!” and she opened the door again and called gently. “Joan, come in here! They don’t need you now. Come and have some tea!”

Joan came wearily. “Tea? What a good plan! Your idea, Jenny-Wren?”

Jen nodded. “I always give you cups of tea at night, don’t I? Aunty Shirley has had some, and she’s quite all right; Joy has been talking to her.”

“What about Angus?” Selma demanded.

Joan glanced at her. “He’ll be better soon. Don’t break your heart, my dear.”

“But what does the doctor say?” Selma pleaded.

“He has slight concussion and a broken rib and a badly bruised side. All things that will mend in time. As for his arm”—she paused, and they gazed at her in breathless anxiety—“it’s a very bad break; but it will mend.”

“He’ll be able to use it?” Joy cried.

Selma just looked at Joan, her eyes wide with fear.

“Go *on*, Joan!” Jen urged. “He’ll be able to fiddle, won’t he?”

“We hope so.” Joan chose her words carefully. “It’s early to say; Dr. Brown won’t promise too much. He’ll be able to use his arm for ordinary things, and it may get completely strong again. We’ll do everything possible for him. He may have to go to hospital for treatment as soon as he can be moved.”

“Oh, rot! We’ll nurse him here,” Joy exclaimed.

“Not if the hospital would be better for him,” Joan said firmly. “His complete recovery is the thing we want. We’ll do everything to ensure that.”

“But you think perhaps he won’t be able to play?” Selma’s voice broke in a sob.

Joan went to her quickly and took her in her arms. “The doctor won’t promise, my dear, but I’m quite sure he will,” she said, gently but with great and comforting conviction.

CHAPTER 27

ANNOUNCING AN ENGAGEMENT

The house was very quiet. The girls sat together, waiting for the doctor to appear.

He came into the lighted library at last. "All's well. Is that tea? Good! Give me a cup."

"We'll make some fresh for you," Joan began.

"No, it will do. Bad for me, no doubt, but I'll risk it, if it's hot. Where's your phone? I'll send in a nurse for a day or two, till we see how things are going. But I think it will mean hospital for a time."

"Let him stay here, if you can," Joan pleaded.

"The phone's no use," Joy said. "They cut the wire. But——"

"But you phoned me?"

"Yes, from the Abbey. I'll take you there. Joan, if the police come before I'm back you can keep them amused. You'd better get dressed."

"I was going to sit with Angus."

"Let Selma do that. She wants to be with him."

"Oh yes, please! I must be with him."

"Selma?" The doctor looked questioningly at her.

"Selma is staying with us. Mr. Reekie and she are friends," Joan explained.

Dr. Brown's eyes asked a question. Selma, standing eager and frightened, was so very pretty, with dark curls tumbled wildly and falling on her red gown, but so very young.

"We're going to be married—some day," she said with a gasp.

Joy gave a grunt of amusement. "Odd time to announce your engagement!"

"Of course they'll be married, when Selma's old enough!" Jen cried.

Joan's arm slipped round Selma. "It's understood, isn't it, Selma? But it had better not be a real engagement until you are seventeen."

Dr. Brown gave an exclamation. "Not seventeen yet, young lady? You've plenty of time. Get the boy well again and then you can think about it. He's a lucky fellow to have such a pretty girl waiting for him. You must nurse him carefully. Swedish, eh?"

"My father was, but not my mother. I—we—come from Scotland."

"Swedish-Scottish! A good mixture, I should say. Well, take care of that lad. If he wakes, don't let him talk. Show me your second phone, Miss Joy. A good thing you had it put in the Abbey."

They went off together, and Joan took command in the library. "Jen and Selma, go and sit with Angus till I come. There's nothing to do, but someone should be there. If he seems to be

waking, call me. I must speak to Mother and then dress. I'll send Annie to bed, and the others too."

Jen and Selma, delighted, ran quietly upstairs and sat close together, gazing at Angus.

His head and arm were bandaged, and he lay still and white.

"He looks as if he's dead," Selma whispered, trembling.

"Oh, but he isn't!" Jen put her arm round her. "He'll wake up soon. You did mean what you said, didn't you? I'd like you to be married to Angus. You'd take care of him so beautifully."

"I didn't know—I didn't understand—till I thought he was dead," Selma sobbed. "I want him to belong to me in earnest. Aye, I'll be married to him as soon as he's better. I could no' live without him; I know that now."

"When's your birthday? Will you be seventeen soon? Joan seemed to think you ought to be seventeen."

"In February."

"Oh, good! He'll be better by then, and he can give you a ring and you'll be properly engaged."

"And if he's no' able to fiddle, we'll do some other job, the two of us."

"Rather! Of course you will. But I'm sure he'll be able to play."

Selma shivered. Jen patted her hand gently and they sat quietly, waiting.

Joan came in after a while. "Mother's all right, and she's going to sleep. Selma and I will stay here till the nurse comes. Jen dear, I'd like you to go to bed."

Jen looked mutinous. "But what if the police want to interview me? I may be able to give them important information."

"I shouldn't think you can."

Joy came racing silently upstairs and into the room. "Is he all right?"

"Just the same. What have you got there?" Joan whispered.

"Jehane's jewels." Joy had swept the stones from the cabinet into a big silk duster and now showed them glittering in the light. "You silly lot forgot all about them. We can't leave them there; those brutes might come back."

"I'm quite sure they won't do that," Joan said. "What are you going to do with the stones?"

"Sleep on them, for to-night. We'll have to decide where to keep them. That cabinet isn't safe."

"Bury them in the garden," Jen said again. "They tempt people, if they can see them."

"Oh no, Jen! Surely we can do better than that. We could take them to the bank," Joan began.

"That would be burying them!" Jen protested. "You might as well put them in a hole in the ground."

“We can’t decide anything to-night.” Joy swept the discussion aside. “I’ll take them to my room. Here come the police!” as a car raced up the avenue. “I’ll go down.”

She led the police sergeant to the drawing-room to see the scene of the crime, and told what she could. Jen, to her great satisfaction, was questioned also, but could add little to Joy’s story. There had been one tall man and one short one, who might have been a boy; Angus had been a hero—so said Jen—and had tackled them both, and had refused to let the man go, even when he threatened to break his arm. “And he’s a fiddler and going to be famous. His career depends on his right arm. But he wouldn’t let him go,” she said.

“Can he see us?” asked the sergeant.

“You can see him, if you like, but it won’t do any good,” Joy said. “He hit his head when he fell, and he’s not conscious yet.”

“We’ll see him later, then. Now, Miss Shirley, can you give us any other clue?”

Joy hesitated. “It was someone who had heard about the jewels and knew they were in the house, not in the Abbey, as they used to be. They came straight to this window; they knew where the stones were.”

“And how could they know that?”

“That’s for you to find out,” Joy retorted.

“Local people, and somebody has been talking. I must question your staff.”

Joy gave in. “Well, you needn’t; it was no one in the house. I didn’t want to tell you, but I suppose you’ll find out. You know Mrs. Watson, our caretaker in the Abbey? She’s jolly good at her job, but she’s a silly old thing in other ways. She says it’s her fault. She talked about how glad she was that the jewels had been taken away from the Abbey.”

“That’s what caused the trouble,” the sergeant agreed. “I’ll see her. The stones used to be in her care?”

“In the Abbey—yes. But we—well, we felt a bit nervous about them and we thought they would be safer here.”

The sergeant did not miss the sudden gleam in Jen’s eyes. “Yes, Miss——?” He looked at his notes.

“Jen Robins. The jewels were safe in the Abbey,” Jen said defiantly, “but Ann—Mrs. Watson—went all frightened about them when she heard what a lot they were worth, and so Joan and Joy brought them here. But they still don’t seem to be safe. What do you think we should do with them?”

“Put them in the bank,” the sergeant said curtly, and did not persist in his inquiries as to what the schoolgirl’s look had meant. “Well, Miss Shirley, if that is all you can tell me, I will see this woman, who has chattered to her friends in the village, I suppose. To-morrow I will have a talk with this Mr.—Reekie, is it?—odd name! If he is able to see me, that is.”

“Poor old Ann!” Jen said, as they went upstairs. “She won’t enjoy talking to him. But she really is an idiot! I suppose you had to give her away?”

“There was no help for it. Why did you look at me like that? I thought you were going to tell him about Angus and Rykie last summer.”

“I was going to say we’d had a fright about the stones and that we thought a boy had been after them.”

“A jolly good thing you managed to side-track him! He’d have wanted to know who the boy was. That story must be buried for ever,” Joy said. “Poor old Angus! He’s washed it out, if anybody ever did.”

“He was awfully brave to-night,” Jen agreed. “I say, Joy, what price Selma?”

Joy grinned. “She took Dr. Brown’s breath away. She doesn’t look a day more than fourteen, with her hair flopping down like that.”

“D’you think she meant it?”

“About Angus? Of course she did. She wakened up to how much she cares when she saw him lying hurt. She’d marry him to-morrow, if he asked her.”

“Yes, that’s what she says. It’s a real, proper love story!” Jen said, in great satisfaction. “It’s the first time I’ve had anything to do with one! Jandy Mac was engaged, but we had nothing to do with it. This about Selma and Angus is quite different.”

“I hope it ends happily,” Joy said gravely. “Now hop off to bed, infant! I’m going myself. We must leave Angus to Joan and Selma. I expect we shall all sleep in, as Selma says.”

“She’d say, ‘We will all sleep in’,” and Jen took one peep into the quiet room, where Angus lay white and still, and Selma sat gazing at him with Joan’s arm round her.

“Poor kid!” Jen said to herself. “But she’s got Joan. She’s all right,” and she gave a comforting nod to Selma and a reassuring one to Joan, and crept away to her own room.

CHAPTER 28

A NEW ANGUS

Even when the nurse took charge, Selma refused to leave Angus. "He'll wake soon and he'll be wanting me," she said. "I'll bide here till he speaks to me. I'll no' leave him."

The nurse raised her brows and looked at Joan.

"I'll go to bed. There may be more to do to-morrow. Selma can stay here," Joan said, and had a private word with the nurse out in the corridor. "Let her sit by him, Nurse. She won't disturb him. They are very close friends."

The nurse looked disapproving. "She is only a child, surely?"

"Nearly seventeen. They aren't officially engaged, but they will be soon," and Joan went wearily off to bed.

When she looked in some hours later, the nurse, alone now, nodded. "I sent the girl to bed. She was right; he woke and asked for her. He said something, 'My lassie'? I think it was, and she said, 'I'm here, Angus. You'll get well now, won't you?' He said, 'Aye! Are the stones safe?' She said, 'You saved them. You were wonderful; just terribly brave.' He smiled and fell asleep, and I told her he would sleep for hours and she must do the same. So she went off; she was worn out. Surely she's very young for that sort of thing?"

"Very young, but it's the real thing, in her case. She has admired him and been very fond of him for some time. Last night she had a bad fright about him and she realised how much she cared. She has known his feeling for her, and has taken it for granted they would be married one day; but her own part in the story was rather vague. Everything is very much clearer in her mind since last night."

"She seemed to be thinking very deeply, while she sat by him."

"I expect she was. She had been through a good deal. I'm glad you persuaded her to go to bed."

"I sent her," the nurse said grimly. "She was too exhausted to fight me about it."

Selma, like Joy and Jen, "slept in" that morning. Jen had gone reluctantly off to school, with a note of explanation to Miss Macey, before Selma woke. When, dressed and with her hair neatly bound by its ribbon, she slipped into the room and took her place by Angus again, the nurse admitted to herself that the girl was older and more responsible than she had thought.

A police officer from Wycombe came during the morning and had a talk with Joy.

"Your caretaker has relations in the village, her late husband's people, and she seems to have talked to them about her relief in having the jewels taken out of her care. There is a lad called Frank——"

"Frankie Watson! He's not quite right," Joy interrupted.

"So I understand. He seems to be rather a simpleton. He says he met a friend in a pub somewhere—not here; he insists on that, but he won't say where it was. He repeated what

Mrs. Watson had said, and they made their plans. But I don't see yet how they knew exactly where to find the jewels."

"Frankie," Joy explained. "He has helped our gardener at times. If Ann Watson said the stones were in the big drawing-room, Frankie would know where to go."

"That seems clear. Perhaps the boy is not so simple, after all. I understand the young fellow who was hurt is only staying with you?"

"He arrived on Friday night. Yes, I see what you mean; Frankie told his pal there was no man in the house?"

"Only girls and ladies. The pal promised Frank some of the 'shiny stones' for himself, and Frank isn't too simple to know they are worth a lot of money. No one but Frank saw the man; they took good care of that. We've no description of him, except that he is tall; he wore no gloves, and there are fingerprints all over the place, many of them Frank's, of course. The other man seems to have been rather an amateur at the job, but he knew enough to cut your wire and to force the window without disturbing anybody. And he didn't know you had a visitor. Perhaps Mr. Reekie will be able to tell us more about him, when he is stronger."

"There wasn't much time for him to see anything. Well, we can't prosecute Frankie Watson! Everyone knows he's not all there."

"I'm afraid that is so. But we may catch the other chap, who is the real criminal."

"The real criminal is Ann Watson," Joy said grimly. "But you can't prosecute her for talking carelessly. Joan would never allow it."

"She seems very much distressed and talks as if she expected to lose her job over the business."

"Joan must tell her not to be an idiot. I suppose you'll go on looking for the other fellow?"

"We certainly shall. Watson says he came from London and would go back there; we shall make inquiries, but it is likely enough he went in the opposite direction. I distrust these simple people. They're sometimes less foolish than they want you to believe."

Joy agreed. "I'm afraid we can't help you much. We'll let you know when Mr. Reekie is ready to be questioned."

"Angus wants to know things about last night," Selma reported, when she came down to lunch. "He's been awake and wanting to talk. I couldn't tell him anything, but perhaps, next time he wakes, somebody else could come."

"We can't tell him a great deal," Joy said. "We're hoping he'll be able to tell us something."

"I don't think he knows anything. He's bothered about McAlister and the dance band, but I told him you had wired to the addresses I gave you, and that you were going to write and tell McAlister all about it."

"Tell him not to worry. We'll see to it," Joan said.

"Aye, that's what I said to him. I needn't go to school, need I?" Selma looked at Joan and Mrs. Shirley, eyes wide with anxiety. "I couldn't do any work. I can help the nurse; she says I can fetch and carry things for her, and when Angus wakes I'll be there."

“Angus is more your job than school just now,” Joan assented. “If Nurse can find things for you to do, you had better stay and help her.”

“She gives me jobs. She’s nice,” Selma said gratefully.

“What I want to know,” Joy began, “is whether Angus realised he was risking his arm for us? Had he time to think? Did he hear what the man said? Or was it all a complete muddle?”

“That’s most likely,” Joan observed. “Perhaps some day he’ll be able to tell us, but we certainly can’t ask him at present.”

Both doctor and nurse forbade talking, though they were satisfied on the whole with their patient’s progress. But Angus was so uneasy and restless that by the next day the nurse relented and said Joan might come for a few minutes.

Selma rose from her seat by the bed, smiled at Joan, and slipped away.

“Go into the garden!” Nurse commanded. “You haven’t been out all day.”

“I’ll go to the Abbey,” Selma said. “I think I’d like that.”

“Ask Joy for the key of the gate,” Joan called after her, as she sat down by the bed. “Well, Angus, how are things going?”

“Better, Miss Joan.” He gave her a small smile. “But I was wanting a word with you gey badly.”

“Not many words,” Joan warned him. “You mustn’t talk much. What’s the trouble?”

“Yon chap who tried to take the stones. Did you have the police?”

“Oh yes! They’re searching for him. Can you tell us anything about him?”

“They’ve no’ got him yet?”

“Not yet. But they will, you know. It’s not so easy to escape. We know all about the boy who helped; he belongs to the village and is known to everybody as being rather simple. He probably didn’t understand quite how serious the thing was that he was doing.”

“But the other one, who was going to take the stones! Miss Joan, it might have been me,” Angus cried, his voice breaking in distress. “Don’t send him to jail, Miss Joan! I was just as bad, and you let me off.”

Dumb with surprise, Joan gazed down at him. This was a new Angus and an unsuspected one.

“I’ve been thinking,” he whispered. “It’s what I tried to do. You stopped me in time, and I’ve been glad and thankful ever since. I stopped this chap; he only tried—he didn’t take anything. If you send him to jail, I shall always feel it ought to be me.”

“But we can’t let him off, to go burgling other houses!” Joan exclaimed. “It wouldn’t be right, Angus!”

“Maybe he’ll no’ do it again. He’ll have had a fright and he may go straight now.”

“But he hurt you! He hurt you quite badly!”

“Aye,” Angus whispered, and a quiver of pain passed over his face. “But it was because I tried to stop him. I ken how he felt about that too. He thought he’d got the stones, and I rushed in

on him and it made him mad. Miss Joan, don't send him to jail!"

"I don't know that we can help it," Joan said doubtfully. "The police won't like it."

"Have they anything else against him? He did no' take anything," Angus pleaded.

"He broke into our house, intending to steal, and he injured you. That's quite enough to get him into prison, and it might be the best thing for him."

"It might make him worse when he came out. I've heard o' that with chaps."

"So have I," Joan admitted. "I'll talk to Mother and Joy, if you really are sure you want us to let him off, but I don't know what they'll think. I'm fairly sure what Joy will say!"

"Ask her to be kind," Angus whispered. "You've been so kind to Selma and me. Tell her it might have been me!"

Joan bent over him and pushed back the fair hair from his hot face.

"I'll tell her. We'll talk it over. Now, Angus, you mustn't worry any more. You'll keep yourself from getting well, and we want you to be well. You will stop thinking, won't you?"

"I'll try," he murmured. "I'm tired. But I keep on remembering yon chap and the police being after him."

"Try to stop worrying. We'll see what we can do. If we knew he was sorry for what he had done, we might try to let him off. But we've no reason to think he's at all sorry. He may be trying to do the same thing somewhere else."

"If they catch him they'll maybe find he's sorry. I keep thinking it's just like me, last summer," Angus said unsteadily.

"You were sorry, right at once, and you said so. It made all the difference to us. Now that you've told me what has been troubling you, you'll go to sleep, won't you?"

"I'll try," Angus whispered. "I did no' ken it was the jewels they were after," he added. "I just thought it was something of yours and I must stop them. I had no' heard the stones were there. But the light shone on them and they twinkled, like—like yon other time—and I knew it was the jewels that Rykie and I——"

"And you couldn't let them be stolen," Joan agreed. "Of course you couldn't. We do appreciate your help and your courage. Perhaps you owed us a little thing because of that trouble last summer, but you've certainly paid your debt in full. Now go to sleep, Angus!"

She found the nurse, as she went out. "Could you give him something to quiet him? He's told me what has been worrying him, and I hope he'll sleep now. But perhaps you can help?"

"I'll see to that. He ought not to have anything on his mind just now," the nurse said anxiously.

CHAPTER 29

SANCTUARY IN THE ABBEY

“Oh, rot!” Joy exploded, when she heard the news that evening. She had been to Wycombe to fetch some things the nurse wanted, so Joan had waited till after tea to tell her story. “Tell Angus not to be a silly ass! We couldn’t do that. The bobby from Wycombe would never stand for it.”

Jen looked up from her home-work. “But how simply awfully surprising!” she said. “And how super decent of Angus! Who would have believed he’d think of it?”

“He’s very much in earnest,” Joan said. “I don’t say he’s right, but the idea has taken hold of his mind, and he’s ill and he can’t reason about it. He feels he might so easily be in this man’s place, hunted by the police and in terror of prison.”

“He’s right there. He most certainly might be in the same hole.” Joy frowned. “If you hadn’t been so firm last summer I’d have sent for the police and handed him over to them.”

“Aren’t you glad you didn’t?” Jen stared at her, her chin resting in her hands, her plaits hanging on each side of her sober face.

“I am, of course,” Joy admitted. “But it’s different. Angus isn’t really that sort.”

“Prison would certainly have done him harm. It might have made a criminal of him,” Joan observed.

“Do you want to call off the police and let this chap go free?” Joy demanded.

“No. And Mother thinks it wouldn’t be either possible or wise. She doesn’t believe the police would consent, and I’m sure she’s right. But she thinks we might be able to do something about it when they catch him. They may disapprove of us, but they can’t force us to prosecute him. If we see what he is like, and if we think—yes, Susie? What is it?”

“Oh, Miss Joan, Mrs. Watson’s on the phone, from the Abbey. She wants you to go there quick. She’s upset about something. All of a dither, she is, in a regular state, miss.”

“I’ll go.” Joan rose quickly. “What can be the matter with Ann now?”

“I’ll come too,” Joy said. “You’re not going to wander about the garden alone. You’ll get yourself murdered.”

“Joy, don’t be an idiot! It’s only across the lawn.”

“And down that dark shrubby path, and there may be criminals lurking about. Besides, I want to know what Ann’s been up to.”

“You’re not going to leave me out!” Jen’s books went flying. “Of course I’m coming! It’s not a bit of use saying anything. I wouldn’t miss it for pounds! We’ll take torches and our big coats; I’ll fetch yours, Joan. The whole mob of us will go. Shall we go through the tunnels?”

“Don’t tell Selma!” Joan called after her. “Three’s plenty. I must warn Mother we are going to see Ann.”

“Right! Selma only wants to sit and look at Angus.”

They crept out quietly into the night, and met no lurking thieves or murderers in the shrubbery. The Abbey was silent and the garth was peaceful, but light was streaming from Ann Watson’s door.

“*Don’t* fall over the Curate!” Jen hissed. “He’s sure to be on the prowl!”

Joan’s light swept round the garth. “He’s not here. You seem worried about people falling over the Curate!”

“Well, Joan, I’ve done it, and I banged myself most frightfully hard. The Curate ought to wear a light in his tail. Now for it!” Jen whispered, in joyful excitement. “Has Ann caught a burglar or killed somebody?”

“Or has something frightened her?” Joan added.

Ann came running to meet them. “Oh, Miss Joan! Miss Joy! Miss Jen! Oh, Miss Joan, it’s ’im!”

Under her breath Jen quoted softly: “‘Heedless of grammar, they all cried—‘That’s him!’” *Who*, I wonder?”

Ann’s English, carefully studied while she had been a children’s nurse in London, deserted her in moments of excitement. “It’s ’im, Miss Joan! ’Im as led our poor Frankie astray, what don’t know no better.”

“Dear, dear! Ann is all worked up!” Joy murmured.

“Who is it, Ann?” Joan went quickly towards the small rooms in the wall.

“In my parlour, Miss Joan.”

Joan stood at the door of the sitting-room and gazed at the man who sat slumped in a chair by the table. The Mother Superior looked up sleepily from her basket, surprised by this late visit; Timmy slept on undisturbed. Ann did not really care for cats, but she tolerated these two, for Joan’s sake.

But to-night Joan had no time for cats. She stared at the stranger, and at sight of her he groaned and hid his face in his arms.

“Bin cryin’ like a babby he has,” Ann said severely. “And no more’n he’d oughter!”

The man’s face was dirty and tear-stained, and his shoulders shook as the girls gazed at him silently. He was young, no older than Angus, and in pitiable condition; he had been out on the hills, in hiding, for the greater part of two days and two nights, and he was wet and cold and hungry, and obviously terrified.

“Well, you’re a poor specimen!” Joy said bluntly.

“He’s feeling awfully bad, Joy,” Jen protested.

“As Ann says—though she put it differently—so he should.”

Joan went to the tall lad and touched his shoulder. “It was you who came to our house two nights ago?”

“Yes, miss. Is he dead?”

“Is who dead?” Jen cried.

“The young guy I knocked down.”

“Angus,” Joan said. “No, luckily for you he isn’t dead. Things are bad enough for you, but they’d be a lot worse if you had killed him. But he’s quite badly injured, thanks to you. Why have you come here?”

“I hadn’t nowhere to go. The cops are after me and they’ll sure get me. And—and young Frankie he said you was kind to folks, and—and I didn’t take nothing, so I thought maybe you’d call off the cops.” The explanation was broken by sobs. Evidently, finding himself hunted, he had completely lost his nerve. “And I wanted to know about the young guy I knocked down.”

A more demoralised criminal it would have been hard to find. Joan went on relentlessly with her questions.

“What is your name? Where do you come from?”

“I’m Alf Watson, miss. I been in America with my dad. I come home——”

“Watson?” The girls all spoke together. “Any relation to Frankie? Same family?”

“Yes, miss. Frank’s my cousin.”

“I haven’t never seen him before,” Ann Watson said dourly. “I heard there was a cousin and he was comin’ back, but he’s been across seas all the time I’ve been here. Went with his dad when he was a young boy.”

“And he came back and fell in with his cousin Frankie, as he was on his way to the village, and Frankie had a story which he had heard from Ann, of jewels in a big house with only women and girls in it,” Joan said. “You thought you were on to a good thing, I suppose, Alf. Really, you are very silly!”

“Not much better than Frankie,” Joy remarked. “You must have known the police would be after you.”

“Frank said the stones was worth a fortune,” Alf muttered. “I thought I’d go to S’thampton and get on another ship and go to France, or back to N’York. But I couldn’t get past the cops; I knew they’d get me. And—and I’d hit that young guy that tried to stop me, and I was sure scared.”

“You might well be scared,” Jen said severely. “You might have murdered him easily.”

“I think we have the whole story now,” Joan interposed. “We’ll ring up the police. Yes, of course, Alf; they must know you are here. They’ll come, but we’ll do our best for you and perhaps they won’t be hard on you. We can’t let them go on searching for you! And you can’t stay here. But for to-night—yes, I think you must stay. Ann, could you feed him? Have you enough food in? Good! Then give him a meal and send him to bed in my little room, where old Boniface slept last year. You can lock him in, if you like, but you’ve no need to be afraid. He won’t murder you! Alf, why did you come to the Abbey and not to the Hall?”

“Something Frankie said,” Alf mumbled. “I met him on the hills, and he said the cops was after me. I said, what could I do? And he said, go to the Abbey. He said you was always kind to folks in this place, and that there’d been an old man, and a girl, and you’d helped them. He

said perhaps you'd help me too. And I was scared to go to the big house. I came and asked her"—with a nod towards Ann—"what I'd do. And she said you'd know what was best."

A look flashed from Jen to Joan. But Jen waited till they were crossing the garth before breaking out eagerly, "Joan! Oh, Joan! He came to the Abbey to be helped! You couldn't let him down—or the Abbey. He came to be safe. Oh, Joan!"

"For sanctuary," Joan agreed. "Frankie seems to have had a queer glimmer of understanding. It does feel as if Alf was the criminal fleeing from justice and claiming sanctuary here. We'll do what we can, Jen."

"You always do," Jen said happily. "I wonder what Selma will say? Angus will be surprised to hear about Alf!"

Mrs. Shirley was awaiting them anxiously. "What was the matter with Ann?"

"I'll call Selma and we'll tell you all about it," Joan said.

Jen planted herself in front of Mrs. Shirley. "Ann Watson has caught the burglar, Aunty Shirley. What do you think of that?"

"Jen, my dear! What are you saying?"

"Just that. She's giving him supper and she's going to put him to bed. He's the most miserable object you can imagine."

"The man who hurt Angus? And so he ought to be!" Selma cried from the doorway.

"Come here, and we will listen to the story together. Joan shall tell us properly what has happened." Mrs. Shirley held out her hand.

Selma crouched on a stool by her side. "I could do horrible things to that man!" she whispered.

Mrs. Shirley stroked her hair gently and looked at Joan.

"Yes, you tell them properly," Jen grinned.

Joan told the story. "We must phone the police. But he's all right where he is till the morning. We know what Angus wants us to do!"

"Do you think Alf should be let off, Selma?" Jen demanded.

"Me?" Selma looked at her. "I think he should be hanged, or beheaded, or put in prison for life."

Joy gave a shout of laughter. "Well done, Viking Daughter! But you'll never make Joan and Jen see it. He came to the Abbey, you know."

"I don't see that it matters. He hurt Angus." To Selma that ended the problem. "I know what Angus wants, for he told me," she added. "But he's daft. He's been lying there thinking, and making himself all hot and worried. I told him he was silly. That man ought to be punished. I hate him!"

"But if Angus is willing to forgive him, my dear?" Mrs. Shirley protested gently.

Selma's head was buried in her lap. "He hurt Angus," she sobbed, breaking down suddenly. "And if—if he can no' play his fiddle, what'll he do?"

“Oh, but he will be able to play!” Jen ran to her side, all sympathy in a moment. “His arm was hurt because he saved our jewels. It will get well; it must! God isn’t as cruel as that.”

Selma raised tear-filled eyes and stared at her. “D’you think God cares about Angus’s arm?”

“Of course He does! Angus was splendidly brave. I know God will take care of him. But don’t you go hating people, even Alf Watson. That won’t help.”

“I should hand him over to the police,” Selma sobbed, and hid her face again.

“Jen, go back to your work!” Joan commanded. “Joy, you might ring up the police; you’ll do it best. But ask them to leave Alf where he is till the morning; he won’t run away again. Tell them how exhausted he is.”

“I’ll say he’s safe and I’ll come early to-morrow and talk it over with them. I’ll run you down to school, Jen, and Selma, too, if she feels like going.”

“I want to stop with Angus, please.”

“So you shall,” Joan promised, and joined her mother in her efforts to comfort her.

“I’ve an odd feeling,” Joan said later, when Selma had gone upstairs again, “that Angus has grown up at last. He has seemed so very young and silly; not at all like his real age.”

“Positively infantile,” Joy agreed. “He certainly seems more—well——”

“More mature,” Joan finished for her.

“Is it being ill that has done it?”

“I believe it’s his love for Selma. He has learned, from her, to care for somebody else more than for himself. Until now, he has thought only of getting on, for his own sake; now he’s thinking more for other people.”

“It’s going to make him much jollier.” Jen was listening, with thoughtful eyes.

“It’s only natural.” Joan was thinking aloud. “His mother died, and although his father was married again, to Mother’s sister, she had her own two girls, and Angus may have felt a bit out of things. His father was not sympathetic, as we heard from Rykie, and as Angus grew up he was evidently restless, with his music all unused and not understood.”

“Boiling in him,” Joy nodded. “I know all about that. Of course he had to strike out and do something about it. Can’t blame him for that!”

“It would make him think only about himself,” Jen agreed. “It’s a good thing he’s found Selma.”

“And we’ve helped him to bring out his music,” Joan added. “It has all tended to make him grow more balanced and all-round. He seems much older now.”

“And very much nicer. But we won’t say that to Selma,” Jen announced.

CHAPTER 30

A TASK FOR AMBROSE

“He doesn’t like us one bit,” Joy reported, after her trip to town to interview the police. “He admits he can’t force us to prosecute Alf Watson, but he’s very wrathful at the thought of letting him off. He’s coming to argue with you, Joan, and he wants to talk to Angus too, so prepare your arguments. He must see Alf, of course, even if he only cautions him. But he says a spell of prison would be the best thing for him.”

“I’m not sure of that,” Joan said. “It’s what you said about Angus last July, but we all feel now what a horrible mistake it would have been.”

“Angus was different. He was sorry he’d been an ass. This chap’s only sorry he was found out.”

“If we give him another chance he may be as sorry as Angus is.”

“Well, tell Angus to be careful what he says. He doesn’t want the story of his own crime to come out, and that’s his real reason for wanting Alf to be let off.”

“Do you think I ought to tell them—about Rykie and me, last summer?” Angus asked anxiously, when Joan broke the news that he would have to see the Inspector. He looked white and tired, and unfit for any ordeal, and Joan was determined the interview should be short.

“No, Angus, I don’t,” she said urgently. “You mustn’t say anything about last summer; you *must not!* It would worry us all; and there’s not the slightest need. Just say you don’t want to get Alf into trouble.”

“They’ll no’ understand. That was the reason.”

“We know that; we understand. But none of that matters to the police. Say as little as you can; they won’t stay long. Anybody can see you ought not to talk much yet.”

Angus was so evidently in pain, and the nurse was so anxious that he should not be worried, that the Inspector had perforce to cut short his questioning.

“Mr. Reekie is being very generous to Watson,” he said to Joan afterwards. “He is determined we shall not proceed against the fellow, and yet he is obviously suffering and it is Watson’s doing. I feel as if there must be something more than we have heard, to account for his attitude.”

Joan made up her mind. “Well, there is. Mr. Reekie was once nearly in trouble himself, so he can feel for Watson. He has been quite frank about it to us; it was some time ago, and he is still young—younger than his age, in many ways. It is best forgotten now; but you can understand that he feels for another silly lad who is in much the same sort of mess!”

“I see. That certainly sounds more natural. I could not understand his surprising generosity. That is all I am to hear of this earlier story, I suppose?”

“Absolutely every single word.” Joan smiled at him calmly.

“Ah, well! It is nothing to do with us. He comes from Scotland, of course; his voice betrays him with every word. And the girl who refused to go away and sat and held his hand? She looked at me like a tigress.”

“Poor Selma!” Joan laughed. “She thought you would make him talk too much.”

“His sister? She is not like him in looks.”

“Oh, no! Something much more thrilling than a sister! They will be married some day.”

“I’ll wish them luck. Well, I suppose I shall have to be content to caution Watson and assure him we shall keep an eye on him in future.”

“Please! That is what we all wish, except Selma, who would like to see him hanged, drawn and quartered, whatever that means.”

The Inspector laughed. “Something very unpleasant, I believe. I’ll talk severely to Watson. Don’t leave those jewels lying about, Miss Shirley. It is putting temptation in people’s way. Put them out of sight somewhere.”

“We’ll certainly do that,” Joan promised.

She raised the subject that evening. “We must decide what to do with Jehane’s jewels. They’re being only a trouble to us and other folks.”

“I’ve told you what to do.” Jen pored over her atlas. “Where’s the Indus? Oh, got him—good! Bury them, Joan, and don’t tell anybody where you’ve put them.”

“The bank would be better than that.”

“I’ll have a small safe put in the wall of my bedroom and keep them there, and no one but Joan and I will know the secret letters that open it,” Joy said.

“That’s better,” Joan agreed. “But thieves sometimes force safes, and you can’t be in your room all the time.”

“They do it when the family is at dinner.” Jen looked up again. “I’ve read about that in the papers. And a safe’s so obvious, especially a new one. Anybody would guess you’d had it put there because you had something precious to keep in it.”

“That’s true,” Joan admitted. “But I don’t like your idea of burying them, Jenny-Wren. It seems such horrible waste.”

Jen pushed away her books. “Give them back to Ambrose. Perhaps we oughtn’t to have taken them away from him. They’ve been jolly unlucky to us.”

“Give them to Ambrose? How could we do that?”

“Put them back where they were, in the crypt, and stick down the big stone hard on top of them. You and I dug them up; I think we ought to put them back. Ambrose will take care of them for us.”

Joan and Joy looked at one another. “It’s an idea,” Joan began. “We could fetch them, if we really wanted them.”

“But people go down into the crypt all the time,” Joy objected.

“They wouldn’t know,” Jen explained. “Not even Ann Watson would know; she mustn’t know on any account, or she’ll have fits about burglars. Nobody would know but us three; we’d bury the casket darkly at dead of night, ‘The sods with our bayonets turning’; but it’s a huge block of stone, not sods! No one would dream there were jewels buried near the tomb of old Abbot Michael. It’s only because people know where they are that there’s any danger; if it’s a secret, they’d be perfectly safe.”

“Yes, of course.” Joan sat thinking over the problem.

“Or you could divide them and each take care of your own share,” Jen added. “Then if one lot was pinched, you’d still have some of Jehane’s jewels to show, to prove the story is true.”

“Or we could have them made up into chains and rings and bracelets, and wear them,” Joy suggested, a gleam in her eyes. “If they’re not to be on show they might as well be used.”

“I liked to have them in the refectory,” Joan said wistfully. “Perhaps we could leave two or three little ones, as specimens, and keep the valuable ones hidden.”

“That bobby would say it was putting temptation in people’s way. You don’t want to do that,” Joy remonstrated.

Jen bent over her atlas again. “Where’s the Karakoram Range? What ghastly names these people have! Joy, our tourists and Americans aren’t the sort who steal jewels. Nor the nice old ladies and school kids who come to see the Abbey.”

“No, but they might go away and talk about them,” Joy argued.

“And somebody who heard might come as a tourist!” Jen’s imagination seized on the situation joyfully. “He’d have an accomplice, who would take up Ann’s attention at the critical moment, and then the thief would bag the jewels and walk out with them in his pockets, looking as innocent as the Mother Superior, and Ann would only find they were gone next time she went up with a party, and by then the thieves might be selling the jewels in London.”

“Dear me!” Joan began to laugh. “You make it sound the easiest thing in the world! I wonder somebody hasn’t tried it before now.”

“Somebody did; Rykie and Angus,” Joy pointed out.

“Yes, but from inside; Rykie stole the keys. You said that story was to be forgotten.” Jen looked reproachful. “Joan, I do think you’ll be tempting people, if you leave the jewels in the refectory. And Ann Watson will hate it. Bury them, or wear them, or give them away; but don’t keep them on show in a glass case!”

“Even in an Abbey which is closed at night? You know nobody can get in!”

“Jen’s thinking of somebody playing a trick on Ann by day,” Joy said. “I believe she’s right. Suppose we choose a few little ones to keep for ourselves, and bury the big ones. We can always fetch them, if we want them. We might—er—marry and want to go into Society and wear tiaras and ear-rings and things. The jewels might be very useful.”

“I can’t see myself in a tiara,” Joan retorted. “But if you want one you must certainly have Jehane’s jewels. I want one little ruby for use now.”

“Right! I’ll have a little emerald. What will you do with yours? You know you can’t wear rubies!”

“Have it put in a ring for Selma. The poor kid’s had a rotten time here, in some ways; when she goes away with Angus, I’d like her to have something as a keepsake. It won’t be an engagement ring; Angus must give her that. But an Abbey ring. What are you grinning at?”

“That’s what I want my emerald for,” Joy said blandly. “To put into a ring for Selma.”

“Oh, Joy! Really? Did we both think of it? How lovely!”

Jen sat staring at them, her eyes glowing, rivers and mountain ranges forgotten. “How super perfect! You both want the same thing! Oh, I wish the stones were mine! I’d give her a sapphire; then she’d remember us all!”

“She won’t forget you,” Joan remarked. “If we gave you a little sapphire, to use as you like, would you really give it to Selma?”

“I would so!—as she would say. I must be catching it. Oh, Joan—Joy! Would you? It would make a lovely ring—the ruby in the middle, and a green stone on one side and a blue one on the other! It would be most original!”

“Come up to my room and choose Selma’s stones,” Joy suggested.

They ran quietly upstairs. Joy locked the door and spread the jewels on the bed. “I’ll be glad to get rid of the things. You’ve made me nervous about them. I expect to be murdered in my bed any night. That’s my emerald—for Selma!”

“Match it in size,” Joan said to Jen; and they chose the sapphire and the ruby carefully.

“We’ll have the ring made up; I’ll see to it,” Joy said. “What about the rest?”

Jen looked at Joan. “Give them to Ambrose. They’ll be safe with him.”

“Yes,” Joan said. “We’ll give them back to Ambrose. And it will be a secret, just for us three. No one else in the world must know.”

“Oh, glory!” Jen whispered gleefully. “I’ll never tell a soul!”

CHAPTER 31

A SECRET BADGE

Late at night a small procession crossed the entrance hall and slipped through a panel in the wall and disappeared. By torchlight they made their way along the old passage and up the steps, then along another passage under the chapter-house, and so down into the crypt. Centuries ago, the monks had dug and paved these tunnels; an inquisitive schoolboy and his sister had discovered them, and Dick had nearly died when he fell into the hermit's well and lay there injured all through one long dreadful night.

Joan set candles on the richly ornamented tomb of the first Abbot, Michael, and the crypt was brightly lit; the well, the tomb, the gaping hole in the corner which was the way to Ambrose's grave and to the gate-house entrance, and the inscription on the wall, cut by Ambrose so long ago, when he had buried his lady's treasures—"Jehane III."

"That rather gives away the hiding-place," Jen said.

"Doesn't matter. Everybody knows there's nothing there now," Joy reminded her. "At least, everybody *thinks* there's nothing there!"

Jen grinned joyfully. "But we know the stones have come back! We know, but nobody else does."

"I told Mother what we were going to do," Joan observed. "She thinks it's sensible, and she's glad."

Jen gave a smothered scream. "Something ran at my legs! Is it those rats I was so terrified about once? There is something prowling round, Joan!"

Joan laughed. "Not a rat, I think. Somebody much more friendly!" and she lifted the slim black Curate and set him on the old Abbot's tomb. "He wants to know what we're doing here, at this time of night."

"Oh, Curate! How like you!" Jen said indignantly.

The Curate curled his tail neatly round his legs and settled down to watch the strange antics of his friends.

Joan stroked his smooth round head. "Good lad! Now can we lift that stone?"

"Easy!" Jen had come armed with pick and shovel from the gardener's shed. "Heave, Joy! It's heavy, but it's quite loose. We can do it. Yo heave ho!"

They heaved together and one end of the stone rose slowly. "You drop the casket in, Joan," Joy said. "The hole's shallow; it won't hurt."

Joan had wrapped the casket in the silk duster which had held the jewels. She knelt and slipped the treasure into the space Ambrose had dug so long ago, while Joy and Jen held the stone raised.

"There! That's safe!" Joan stepped back. "I was afraid you two would let that thing fall on my hands."

They lowered the stone carefully into position, and all stood gazing down at it.

“Sure we haven’t buried the Curate? It would be just like him to have sneaked into the hole,” Jen said.

“You won’t get rid of him as easily as that,” Joy observed.

Jen looked at the Curate, sitting upright among the rich stone decorations of the tomb, his eyes gleaming like emeralds in the candle-light. “Doesn’t he look superior?”

The Curate closed his eyes and opened his mouth and gave a wide pink yawn.

“So that’s how you feel about our midnight doings!” Joan laughed.

“That stone looks exactly as it did five minutes ago,” Joy remarked.

“Yes, no one will suspect. Ann must never know,” Joan said. “If we change our minds or want the jewels we can fetch them easily. It’s much better than a hole in the garden.”

Jen stood looking down at the stone. “Take care of them for us, dear Ambrose! We’ve brought them back to the place you chose for them. They’ve had adventures, but we’ve saved them, and now they’ve come back to you again.”

“We kept out a few little ones,” Joan explained. “Joy and I think we can use them.”

Jen nodded. “There’s no need to bury those you can use. You ought to wear some of them, even if you aren’t going into Society. Are you going to have tiaras?”

“No, not tiaras,” Joan laughed. “Now come home! It’s bed-time, Jenny-Wren.”

“It’s past bed-time. That’s part of the fun.” Jen chuckled happily. “Shall we leave the Curate here?”

“He’ll find his way out. He’s going to sleep. Good-night, boy!”

“I am so glad you thought of the ring for Selma,” Jen said, as they went through the tunnels. “I wish she could know about it at once. She’s utterly in the dumps about Angus going to hospital.”

“But it’s only for X-ray examination!” Joan protested. “The doctors must see that his arm is properly set. It’s so desperately important for him that it should be all right.”

“She thinks they’ll say it’s too badly broken ever to be quite right.”

“We must hope, and pray, that won’t happen,” Joan said, very gravely. “It would be too heavy a price to pay for the jewels.”

“Yes, but Angus knew and he risked it. I do think he was a brick!”

“Hear, hear, Jenny-Wren!” Joy exclaimed. “But we won’t tell Selma about the ring till it’s ready. I’ll see about it at once.”

The next few days were filled with acute anxiety for everybody and with an agony of fear for Selma. Angus, very nervous, went off in an ambulance with the nurse, and Selma was left behind, looking white and frightened, and not greatly comforted by a promise that she should see him every day.

Joan, balanced and sensible as usual, advised her to go back to school. But Selma protested that she could not work, so she was allowed to stay at home. She helped Joan in household tasks, went tramping with Joy, and had long intimate talks with Mrs. Shirley.

The doctor's first report was cautious. The arm was very badly broken; everything possible would be done, and there was great hope that for ordinary life he would be able to use it, though it would need care for some time. But whether it would ever be flexible and strong enough for the violin—the doctor shook his head and said that for that they would have to wait.

Selma's fear deepened, and except when she was with Angus she lived in the depths of misery. No efforts to cheer her were any use. She saw, in her imagination, Angus with no career before him, cut off from the music he loved, with no great audiences to applaud, no big orchestra for his background. Everything was over; he would have to find some other job—go into a shop, perhaps, or work in an office.

"I've brought the ring," Joy said one day, after a trip to town, "but I sha'n't say anything about it. It would take more than a ring to cheer Selma up just now."

"It would be more likely to enrage her," Jen said gloomily. "She'd hate the sight of the thing; the stones would remind her. Is it pretty?"

"Lovely. Any girl in her right mind would cry with joy, but Selma isn't, at present."

"She's heartbroken." Joan agreed with Joy's decision. "If only we could hear that he'll be all right some day! We won't mind if he has to wait, if there's hope for the future."

McAlistair, in Glasgow, was kept informed of Angus's progress, and wrote in frantic distress. "You must get that arm well! The boy has a great future before him. Have doctors from London, anything! Are you sure everything is being done to help him?"

"Goodness! McAlistair thinks a lot of Angus!" Joy exclaimed. "He's off his head with worry."

"I shall let Dr. Brown see the letter, so that he'll understand," Joan said, with decision. "We've told him it's important, but he may not realise quite how urgent it is. I'm sure he is doing all he can, but he might be able to think of something more."

Dr. Brown read the letter and handed it back to her. "We are doing everything possible. Pity it ever happened! I hope he'll be able to play again. It's a case of waiting, and keeping him cheerful."

Joy called Jen into her room one evening, as the end of term drew near. Joan was already there, sitting by the fire, and nursing the Curate.

Jen looked at her in surprise. "Is it a family conference? I say, there's not bad news of Angus, is there? Are you going to break it to me gently?"

"No news at all. He's coming back to us to-morrow. It's something quite different. Look!" Joy handed her a tiny box.

"Selma's ring? Oh, Joy, she ought to show it to us herself!"

"Not Selma's ring. Look!" Joy said again.

Jen opened the box curiously, and gave an exclamation of delight. "How pretty! Oh, lovely, Joy!"

A narrow bar brooch of silver lay there and in the middle were three small stones, an emerald and a sapphire, with a ruby in the centre.

"The stones we chose for Selma! Is it instead of the ring? Do you think she'll like it better?"

"It's not for Selma. It's for you."

"For me?" Jen stared at her. "But why? Oh, is it three of Jehane's jewels, to remind me of her?"

"Three of those we didn't bury," Joy assented. "But it's more than that. Joan and I each have one, just the same as yours. They're the badge of a secret society."

Jen's eyes danced. "Oh, Joy! Joan, are they the badge of the Secret Buryers?"

"Is there such a word? How do you spell it? The Secret Diggers by Night," Joan laughed. "A sign of the secret we share. As long as you wear that brooch, Jen Robins, nobody must know what happened in the crypt that evening."

Jen laughed delightedly. "What a marvellous idea! Who thought of it? I'll use mine to pin down my tie, and I'll wear it always; much more useful than a ring, for I couldn't wear that at school!"

"That's what we thought. We're going to wear ours in our ties too. It was Joy's idea that we should have a secret badge."

"It sounds like Joy. How clever! Has Auntie Shirley got one too?"

"We offered her one, but she told us not to bother. She has plenty of brooches."

"Well, has the Curate got one? For he helped to bury the stones. I'm sure he ought to have a badge!"

"Where would he wear it? We didn't keep enough jewels for the Curate. But he certainly gave his approval to our proceedings."

"Perhaps he wouldn't care about it. I am proud of my badge! If Nesta or Beetle asks where I stole it, I shall say you gave it to me and it has a secret meaning."

"Don't add that bit," Joan advised. "It will make them tease you."

"Wild horses wouldn't drag it out of me! I won't even tell Selma or Angus."

"Oh, you mustn't tell either of them!"

"No, I won't. Is he really better?"

"He's getting on quickly, so they're sending him home, but he'll have to report at hospital regularly."

"You'll keep him here, won't you?" Jen asked anxiously. "You won't let him go back to Glasgow?"

"What do you think, Jenny-Wren?"

“Of course you won’t. He’ll have to stay here for Christmas; jolly for him and Selma! I’d love to be here too, but——”

“But you’d rather be with your mother and father.”

“Yes,” Jen acknowledged. “I must be at home for Christmas. But I shall think about you all a lot. You’ll tell me if there’s any news about his arm?”

“You shall hear at once, if there’s anything to tell. But it’s going to take a long time.”

“It’ll be next term, before they’ll say anything, I expect. You’ll make Selma go back to school, won’t you?” Jen asked, in sudden alarm.

“I don’t know that we can. All this has made her grow up quickly. You want to come back to us in January, don’t you?”

“You know I do. I mean, I do so, Joan dear!” Jen said fervently.

“We’ll see what we can do about it,” Joan said, laughing.

CHAPTER 32

A PEBBLE RING

“Angus! Angus, can I be engaged to you properly and have the ring you said you’d get for me?” Selma raced to the bedroom and stood staring wildly at Angus, who was sitting by the fire.

Joan had been talking to him. She looked up in surprise. “What’s the matter, Selma?”

“What’s up?” Angus cried. “Have you gone daft, lassie?”

“No! It’s this letter. It’s just come. It’s from Sweden, from somebody who says he’s my uncle. Oh, Angus, I won’t go! They want me to go and get to know them. I’ll no’ go away from you! If I’m engaged to you they can’t make me go!”

“Selma, dear, what are you saying?” Joan cried.

“My father’s brother.” Selma thrust the letter towards her. “I want to be engaged to Angus, and then—then it will be my duty to stay with him!”

“But how did your uncle hear about you, lassie? I did no’ ken you had an uncle!”

“I didn’t, either.” Selma was on her knees by his chair. “But d’you mind I told you once about a man who came into the shop and heard Mollie call me Selma?”

“Aye, I mind that. He asked if you came from Sweden.”

“And he said he had friends called Andersson, and they might be related to me. He said there were lots of Anderssons, but the ones he knew had a brother who had been lost at sea and who used to sail to Scotland. They didn’t know about me until he told them, but they wrote to people at Inverkip and found it was true—you know, birth certificates and that kind of thing. They say they really are my family, and they’d like to know me, and—and they’ll show me Sweden and all sorts of wonderful places. But I don’t want to go away from you, Angus.”

Angus put his left arm round her as she knelt. “Do you think it’s all right, Miss Joan?”

“I’m sure it is. It’s a kind friendly letter. You want to see new countries, Selma! Why not go and meet your relations?”

“No! Not unless Angus can come too.”

“Angus certainly can’t go at present,” Joan remarked.

“I will write.” Selma raised her head and spoke with great decision. “I’ll thank them and say perhaps I will go some day, but as I’ve just got engaged to Angus and he’s no’ well enough to travel. I can’t leave him just now. Can I be engaged to you, Angus?”

“You ken fine what I want,” Angus said.

He rose shakily, and, while Joan watched curiously and Selma still knelt gazing at him, he went to his suitcase and took out a ring-box. “It’s for you, lassie, as soon as you want it. I brought it from Glasgow, just in case you were ready for it. It’s a wee thing and no’ worth a great deal, but it’s bought with money I earned, no’ what Terry sent.”

Selma gave a gasp of joy. “Pebbles! Pebbles from our shore at home! Cornelian and amethyst and topaz! I’ve always wanted some! Oh, Angus, is it truly for me?”

“It’s for you, with all my love and all my heart, lassie,” said Angus, as Joan slipped out and closed the door.

“I thought that was where I withdrew,” she said to Joy. “Mother, they may be engaged, mayn’t they? It will be such a comfort to Selma.”

“She is not quite a child now, although she is so young. I have been talking to her,” Mrs. Shirley said. “She won’t change her mind. She will grow steadily into a deeper feeling for him. Yes, if there is any chance of her going so far from Angus, it is better they should be engaged.”

“She’s doing it so that she won’t have to go. It’s as serious as being married, to Selma, and she feels she can say she must stay with him now.”

“She ought to go to Sweden,” Joy said. “It’s a wonderful chance. I don’t see how she can resist it. I’d like to go with her.”

“She won’t leave Angus till we’ve heard about his arm. I’m sure Dr. Brown is more hopeful, but he won’t promise anything yet.”

“Joan! Joy! Look, isn’t it bonny? Oh, Mrs. Shirley dear, have you heard?”

Selma ran into the room, flushed and with shining eyes, to show her ring. “It’s stones from the shores of Clyde. You can find them, if you know where to look. See the lovely amethyst, and the bit of crystal, and the cornelians and the topaz! And that’s a wee agate.”

“A most original ring and very fascinating!” Joan exclaimed. “Aren’t you proud of it?”

“I am that! I’d far rather have our pebbles than your precious stones that people want to steal.”

“Oh, but——” Joy began.

“That’s very sensible,” Joan said hurriedly. “And it fits you beautifully, Selma.”

“Oh, aye! Angus has a friend who works in a jeweller’s shop, and one day he showed us a card with holes in it, and Angus made a bit of fun about it and told me to put my wedding finger in the holes and find which was my size. I made out it was a joke too, but we both knew it wasn’t really. When I came away he went back to the shop and told them to make a Scottish ring for me.”

“For a Scottish lassie,” Joan said. “Angus has planned it for you beautifully and it’s a lovely ring. We hope you’ll be very, very happy.”

“We can’t give her another ring, Joy,” Joan said firmly, when Selma, after being kissed by everybody, had gone back to Angus.

Joy had been silent and thoughtful for some minutes. “I guessed what you meant. No, I don’t think we can. Ours is a much better ring than this one; it wouldn’t be fair to Angus.”

“It’s more valuable, but Selma would never love it as she’ll love his stones from the beach. The shop must change it. Selma must have a brooch, like ours.”

Joy assented. "They'll do it. But we'll give her a different design. An oval brooch, with the stones in the centre; it will look more important than our simple bars. We must write and tell Jen."

"And Selma must write and tell her she is really properly engaged," Joan agreed.

"I won't go away from Angus now," Selma said defiantly, that evening.

"Oh, but you'd like to see Sweden, Viking Daughter!" Joy protested.

"Only if Angus can come too." Selma was resolute.

"Write and thank the relations and say you'd like to meet them, but as your engagement is so very new you can't go at present," Joan suggested. "I know you're too anxious about Angus to go so far from him, but once we have good news from the doctors and you know it is only a matter of time till he is strong again, you can go and visit your new family for a month or so, and then come back and see how he is getting on."

"Aye, I could do that, but I'm no' wanting it. He wants to talk to you about things."

Joan went to Angus presently. "What's the matter, Angus? You ought to be very happy. Selma's a good girl, and she'll stick to you through thick and thin."

"I ken that fine, Miss Joan. She's the only girl in the world for me. That's no' what's bothering me."

"What's the trouble, then?"

"I'll be going back to Glasgow," Angus said restlessly. "You'll no' be wanting me here. I can go to the hospital there. But will I leave Selma with you? Could she stay a while longer, Miss Joan?"

Joan looked at him with kindly eyes. "Do you think it has done her good to be here? Has it done what you hoped for her?"

"It has that!" he said fervently. "She's a different lassie. She's more like you folks than I'd have thought possible in this wee time. But if she comes to Glasgow, what'll she do? The shop's no' good enough for her now."

Joan laid a hand on his knee. "No, she mustn't go back to the shop. Angus, do you really think we would let you go back to Glasgow, to live in rooms alone, with nothing to do and not able to work?"

His eyes met hers shyly. "You could no' keep me here."

"Wouldn't you like to stay?"

"Would I no'? You're all so kind. But it's no' fit——"

"Now don't be silly," Joan scolded. "You were hurt saving things that are very precious to us. It's for our sake your training has been interrupted. You'll stay here till you are able to work, and Selma will stay too, unless she decides to go to Sweden. We must leave that to her. When you are fit to go back to Glasgow you must decide what's best for her; you'll probably want to have her near you. But that's in the future. Jen is hoping very much that she will find you both still here when she comes for the spring term. So don't worry any more. We mean to take care of you till you are well again."

“It’s mighty good of you, Miss Joan.”

“Not a bit of it! It was jolly brave of you to remember you were the only man in the house and rush to the rescue of our treasures.”

“Will they be safe now? Selma says you’ve put them somewhere.”

“They’re put away safely and burglars will never find them,” Joan said cheerfully. “And Alf Watson has gone back to his dad in New York. He feels he wasn’t a success in the Old Country.”

“Poor chap!” Angus gave a rueful laugh. “He’ll no’ trouble you again.”

“Will you tell me something? We’ve been wanting to ask you.”

“I will that, if I can, Miss Joan.”

“Did you know Alf would break your arm? Had you time to think?”

His face darkened. “Aye, I heard him say it. It was all over in a second; I could no’ say I really thought about what he would do. But I remembered my fiddle, all in a sort o’ flash, and—and I saw what it might mean. But I could no’ let him get away wi’ the stones.”

“It was wonderfully brave of you,” Joan said quietly. “We do appreciate what you did, every one of us, and we’re sorry it has meant so much suffering for you. We all thank you very warmly.” And she went to tell Joy, leaving Angus greatly comforted.

CHAPTER 33

GOOD NEWS FOR EVERYBODY

“This is your Christmas present, from Joy and me, Selma,” and Joan produced the silver brooch.

“To remind you of us, when you go to Sweden,” Joy added.

“It’s gey bonny! Is it some of the stones from the Abbey?”

“Just that; three little Abbey jewels. Joy and I have brooches too,” and Joan showed the jewelled bar in her tie. “We thought it was time to use some of the stones. Jen has one just the same.”

“So you’ll feel you are one of the family,” Joy remarked. “Ruby, sapphire, and emerald for everybody.”

“It’s a lovely present! Thank you a thousand times! I must show it to Angus,” and Selma raced off to his room.

“Angus comes first in every thought,” Joan laughed. “It’s very satisfying!”

Angus’s gift was a cheque. “Now don’t be silly and proud!” he was told, when he protested. “Put it away carefully; you’ll need it presently. We didn’t know what to give you, so this seemed the best way.”

The Scottish guests were a little stunned to find Christmas a day of high festival; a total holiday, and a day for church and gifts and feasting; while New Year’s Day was passed over with mere good wishes and no other recognition. “Happy New Year, everybody! Very happy New Year, Angus and Selma!” Joy’s shout echoed through the house. But that was all, and Selma, much astonished, explained that things were the other way round at home.

“You must put up with our queer customs,” Joan laughed. “I wonder what a Swedish Christmas would have been like!”

A few days later Selma came to her, her face one blaze of excitement. “A letter from Sweden; a marvellous letter! They really are the kindest people—after you folks here! They say I must come to see them and Angus must go too. They say they want to see him! Oh, Joan, tell us what to do!”

“Here’s a use for that cheque!” Joan cried in delight. “Do? Go, of course, as soon as Dr. Brown will allow it. Angus will take care of you, and you’ll help him and wait on him. You’re doing all sorts of things for him already.”

“Cutting up his meat at dinner,” Selma agreed. “What fun it would be to go together!”

“You’re going to have fun all your lives doing things together. You may as well begin. Does Angus like the idea? Good! Then we’ll talk to Dr. Brown, and Joy shall see about passports and boat trips. It’s just the sort of job she’ll love—making inquiries and planning journeys. Some day she’s going to be a traveller.”

“How you’ll enjoy sailing across the ocean in a real ship, Viking Daughter!” Joy said with enthusiasm. “It will be your first big adventure.”

“No, that was when I came here,” Selma told her.

“Were you terrified?”

“I was a wee bittie feart. It was all so new.”

“You won’t be afraid any more, for you’ll always have Angus with you now,” Joan said.

Dr. Brown made a careful examination and then gave permission for the journey. “The lad is well, except for the arm,” he said to Joan. “The trip will be excellent for him; he needs new interests to cheer him up.”

“And the arm? Couldn’t you give him some hope, to take away with him?”

“Oh yes! I’ve told him there is every hope of a complete cure. With care, his arm will be as strong as ever. But he must be careful on this visit to Sweden. No skating or ski-ing! The girl may do them all, but he must be content to look on. Tell him to ask for massage for his arm. It’s ready for that now, and Swedish massage is famous. You’d better go to the lassie; she’s in tears of joy.”

Joan held herself in with difficulty as she thanked him and saw him to his car. Then she went racing to find Selma.

“Oh, my dear, I am so glad! We told you it would be all right, but isn’t it wonderful to be sure! Angus, most hearty congrats! You’ll soon be playing again, and better than ever, because of this long rest. Selma, you silly girl, there’s nothing to cry about!”

“I’m no’ greeting!” Selma sobbed.

“If ‘greeting’ is crying, I’m afraid you are. Well, I’ll forgive you; it’s a great relief. Angus, you will be most fearfully careful, won’t you? You don’t want any setbacks now.”

“I will that!” Angus was near to tears himself, in his vast relief and happiness.

“I’ll go and tell Mother and Joy. But I had to say how glad I was.” And Joan left them to plan for a happy future.

“I told Angus he’d play better than ever,” Joan said, when she had told the news.

“And you spoke a true word,” Joy agreed. “His appreciation of good music has deepened enormously in these last weeks. Haven’t you seen his face when I’ve been playing at night? No one had played piano sonatas to him before; he’s had Beethoven—so far as I can play them! I don’t pretend to do justice to them—and Mozart and Schubert and Bach. I’ve done my best for him.”

“It’s been a real musical education. He’ll always be grateful to you.”

“His own good taste made him love the best. Do you remember how he played to us last July? But he hadn’t the faintest idea of the treasures that were before him. He knows a little more about his job now. These weeks haven’t been wasted.”

“I’m sure they’ve been invaluable. You’ve done big things for him.”

“I’ve taught him to love Beethoven. That’s almost worth having an illness for,” Joy agreed.

There followed a fortnight of eager preparation, and then the two were gone, taken as far as the London docks by Joy, who was thrilled to see their ship.

Jen arrived for the new term three days later, and her lamentations were loud because they had gone before her return.

“You’ll see them again,” Joan assured her. “They have left things here that they didn’t need, and they’ve promised faithfully to come straight to us and tell us all about it, before they make any plans for the future. So you needn’t moan so loudly! We want you to spend this week-end with us, and when the travellers return we’ll beg for you again, so that you can hear all their stories. It’s really better for you to live at school during these winter months, you know. And now, as that’s settled, would you like to hear some news?”

“News? What’s happened? Is anybody else engaged?”

“Not unless you are,” Joan laughed. “But Jandy Mac’s a mother.”

“*What?* Joan, say it again! What do you mean?”

“Jandy has a daughter, born just before Christmas. We’ve had a long letter, telling us all about the baby.”

“Oh, but how wonderful!” Jen shouted. “The first baby in the family! Oh, Joan, what is she like? Does Jandy tell?”

“She’s like Jandy,” Joan said solemnly. “So very like Jandy that her father says she is a little Jan, and Jandy’s afraid the name will stick to her for life.”

“But she was to be called Joan, for you! And your first little girl is to be called Janice, for Jandy.”

“Never mind my first little girl! The baby’s name is Joan Fraser, but her father never calls her anything but little Jan. Here’s the letter; read all about it for yourself.”

“Well, I am surprised! But I’m pleased,” Jen said graciously. “I hope Jandy’ll have lots more. It’s very nice for her to have a little girl.”

“A little Jan,” Joan corrected her. “Yes, Jandy’s very happy. And I’m a godmother, though when I shall see my godchild I don’t know.”

Jen grinned. “I shall be very polite to you now that you’re a godmother. You can send the little Joan a postcard on her birthday. I wonder if I’ll ever have a godchild?”

“I shouldn’t wonder. You’d make quite a good godmother,” Joan said, laughing.

CHAPTER 34

JAN JOSEF

Jen went flying across the school hall. "Oh, Joan! Have they come back? Have you come to fetch me?"

"Right! We didn't expect them for another week, but we've had an excited telegram from London, saying they have news for us and they're coming at once."

"What do you suppose the news is? You don't think they've got married, do you?"

"I hope not," Joan said fervently. "It would be a great mistake. Selma is only just seventeen. Fetch anything you want; I'm going to take you home right now."

"Oh, good! I won't be long. I say, Joan, we've been choosing the new Queen. You can give her congrats. It's Beetle, as I said it would be. We're all glad."

Joan went to find Beatrice and give her good wishes. But she had not time to talk, for Jen was back almost at once.

"I left things at the Hall. I needn't take much. When will they come?"

"Joy's gone to town to meet them; you and I have to be content with Billy and the little car. Hop in! It's a question whether they or we will arrive first."

"They've won!" Jen cried, at sight of Joy's car at the door of the Hall. "Oh, do you think they'll have told all the news?"

"I think they'll have waited for us. Angus! How well you look! Is that arm quite strong now? Did you have the massage? And it helped? Good! Selma! Oh, my dear, you're prettier than ever! Sweden has suited you!"

"What a lovely coat!" Jen shouted, for Selma was dressed in furs, with a little cap to match.

"Auntie gave it to me. She said my winter coat was no' warm enough for Stockholm. They've been so very kind. But it feels like home to come back here," and Selma's eyes went happily round the entrance hall.

"You look quite grown-up!" Joan assured her.

"But what's your exciting news?" Jen demanded. "Come on, tell us! You've come home in a hurry; what's up? You aren't married, are you? You haven't got a wedding-ring, Selma. I want to see your other ring, but it can wait; it looks pretty. What's happened?"

Selma looked at Angus. "You tell!"

Angus was radiant. He looked at Joy. "You've heard tell of Jan Josef?"

"You must call him Yan Yosef," Joy scolded. "Those people in Eastern countries have a funny way of saying 'Yan' instead of 'Jan.'"

"Aye, McAlistair said it like that, but I forgot."

"You'll need to remember now," Selma cried.

“I will that. You know about him, Miss Joy?”

“The world-famous Polish violinist? Of course we’ve heard of him. I’d like to hear him play, if he ever comes to London.”

“He’ll no’ likely do that now,” and Angus broke into an eager story. “I had a letter from Terry Van Toll, in Hollywood. Jan—Yan Yosef!—has gone to live there for his wife’s health, and there was a car crash; Josef’s car ran into a wall and went on fire. Terry and Belle were just behind in their car, and Terry rushed to help. He got Josef out, and then went back and pulled the lady out too. He was a little burnt on his hands, but not badly; he was so very quick. Josef thanked him again and again, and got very excited and cried, and said Terry had saved both their lives. And he said—what could he do? Could he play anywhere for Terry? Or could he teach him to play the violin, or any friend of his?” He paused for breath, his eyes glowing.

“And Terry—good chap that he is!—thought of you?” Joy cried, her face lighting up.

“Aye, just that. He told Josef about me, and said he’d write to McAlistair and ask if I was worth it—good enough, you know. And McAlistair said I was well worth it!” he ended triumphantly. “My fortune’s maybe made! If only I can make good and please Josef! It’s the biggest chance anybody could have, to be known as his pupil. Anyone is listened to who has been taught by Josef. It’s the biggest honour and the best introduction a chap could have. If only he’s pleased wi’ me!”

“Oh, Angus! How splendid! Of course you’ll satisfy him!” Joan exclaimed.

“You’ll make good,” Joy said. “McAlistair wouldn’t recommend you unless he was sure. After all, you’ve been his pupil; he knows you won’t let him down. I agree with you; your fortune’s made, if only you work hard and keep your head, and don’t get carried away by the wonderful chance.”

Angus coloured. “I’ll no’ do that. I’ll work with all that’s in me to please Jan Josef.”

“I think it’s simply marvellous,” Jen announced solemnly. “And Terry’s a perfect dear. You’ll be playing in the Albert Hall in no time.”

“No’ as soon as a’ that,” Angus said. “But some day I will. I know I will!”

“We’ll come to hear you,” Joy promised. “McAlistair wants you to go, I suppose?”

“Oh, aye, he says I must go. We came home by Glasgow and we went to see him. He’s sorry to lose me,” Angus said simply. “But he says I must go.”

“And do him credit,” Joan added. “You will, of course. It’s the best possible news, Angus. We’re all very, very glad.”

“There’s just one thing about it I don’t like,” Jen announced.

Selma had gone to Mrs. Shirley and was sitting at her feet, clasping her hand. She looked at Jen and smiled. “I know what it’ll be. How nice of you, Jen!”

Jen looked at Angus. “I suppose you’ll go to Hollywood?”

“Terry’s coming to London. We’ll go back with him.”

“And you’ll take Selma with you?”

“I will that! Belle wants her to go.”

“That’s what I don’t like. I want her to stay here.”

“And have an ocean and a continent between her and Angus? How can you be so unkind?” Joan protested.

“Don’t you want her here, Joan?”

“Of course I do. But she won’t stay.”

“People come to stay with us and then they go away,” Jen complained. “There was Rykie, and before that Vinny Miles and dear old Boniface Browning, and of course Jandy Mac. Nobody ever stays with us.”

“We should be overcrowded, if they all stayed,” Joan laughed. “People have to go; they’d never get on in the world if they stayed in this quiet place. But some of them will come back. Angus will play in London and Selma will come with him, and we shall see them both.”

“So you’re going to cross the Atlantic and see America, Viking Daughter!” Joy exclaimed. “I envy you the chance!”

“But don’t get married too soon,” Joan warned her.

Selma laughed and nodded, and looked up at Mrs. Shirley.

“Terry will take you to Belle and they will look after you. I hope you will be very happy, my dear. I am sure you will,” Mrs. Shirley said.

“Oh, we will be happy!” Selma said joyfully. “But we’ll never forget you folks here.”

“Don’t forget the Abbey,” Jen said.

A shadow fell on Angus’s face. “I’ll no’ forget the Abbey,” he assured them sombrely.

“Oh, don’t be an ass!” Joy cried.

“There are some things about the Abbey we want to forget,” Joan said gently.

“*Rather!*” Jen put in. “But there are lots of jolly things to remember.”

Angus looked at Joan. “I’ll no’ forget. But there’s one thing, Miss Joan. Yon money you gave for my training with McAlistair, when you sold the ruby; it’s no’ been used, not much of it. I suppose the lawyer’s got it? Will he no’ give it back to you now?”

“That’s really very nice of you, Angus!” Joan exclaimed. “But you’ll need it. You can’t go penniless to Terry and Hollywood.”

“Oh, keep it!” Joy decided. “You’ll both need outfits, and Terry mustn’t pay everything for you. Will Josef take anything for teaching you?”

“Terry says he’ll no’ take a penny, Miss Joy.”

“I didn’t really think he would. After all, his life and his wife’s must be worth something to him, and he feels he owes them to Terry. All the same, you’d better have the money. It will give you a good start in the new country.”

“Our gift to help in your new life. I feel the same,” Joan said heartily. “So don’t say any more about it. We’ll write to the lawyer and arrange it. We gave the money for you; we can’t take it

back or give it to anybody else.”

“You could use it for some other chap who’s wanting training,” Angus suggested doubtfully.

“We don’t know any other chap,” Joy told him. “If one comes along, we’ll sell another ruby.”

“You’ll stay with us till Terry comes, of course.” Joan swept the subject of money aside. “We want to hear all about your trip. Do you speak any Swedish, Selma?”

“Only two-three words,” Selma smiled. “We brought a lot of bonny wee things for you; figures and bowls and jugs, all carved in wood and in the loveliest colours, mostly scarlet! They love bright colours in Sweden. We thought you might like to put them in that cabinet; you know?”

“Instead of Jehane’s jewels! What a jolly idea!” Jen cried.

“I’d like you to have one or two, to take to your home.” Selma glanced at her. “And if Aileen Carter could have something, as a keepsake from me, I’d like that, for she was so good to me at school.”

“How very kind!” Joan exclaimed. “Jen shall choose her own and Aileen’s.”

“Oh, angel!” Jen cried. “Selma, I mean! I’ll love to have a keepsake from Sweden, and so will Aileen!”

“We’ll put the rest together in the cabinet and call them the Swedish collection,” Joan went on, “and we’ll think of you when we show them proudly to friends. The President has curios from Ceylon; we’ll show her ours from Sweden! It will link that cabinet with you in a very happy way. Then you really liked Sweden?”

“Oh, aye, and we saw a lot. Everybody spoke beautiful English—much better than mine! They laughed at the way we said things.”

“That’s your accent. I think it’s pretty,” Jen said. “Don’t go and lose it in Hollywood and come back talking all American!”

“I’m thinking we’ll no’ do that.”

“No, I don’t believe Selma will lose her accent, though it may tone down a little,” Joan said. “It’s born in her; I think people will always know she is a Scot. And why not? She’s proud of it.”

“I am that!” the Scot assured them.

“Selma told me what you said about changing my name, Miss Joy,” Angus said abruptly.

“It was rather cheek, perhaps,” Joy acknowledged. “But I can’t quite see—‘Soloist, Angus Reekie’—on a programme. It seems hardly good enough.”

“Maybe it’s no’. Would it be better if I took Selma’s name? She’d like that. Would Angus Andersson sound all right?”

“Oh, I like that!” Joan exclaimed.

“Jolly good!” Jen cried.

“Much better,” Joy agreed. “But don’t spell it as Selma does, for that would make people think you are Swedish, and as soon as you open your mouth everybody will know you aren’t.

Be a Scottish Anderson, Angus!”

“Angus Anderson. Aye, that would do.”

“Ask Jan Josef what he thinks,” Joy advised. “I believe he’ll agree, and you’ll go before the public as Angus Anderson.”

“And Selma will change from being Miss Andersson to Mrs. Anderson,” Jen grinned at Selma.

“I will so!” Selma said happily.

CHAPTER 35

THANKS TO TERRY

Joan and Joy went to school for the crowning of Queen Beatrice, looking radiant. “News for you, Jenny-Wren! When Queen Bee is safely enthroned you shall hear all about it.”

“We always call her Queen Beetle. Oh, Joan, tell me! What has happened?”

“Later. Oh, there’s the striped robe! I don’t think I like it very much.”

“What you’d call gaudy,” Joy agreed, comfortably conscious of her own simple green train and Joan’s rich but plain violet.

“The stripes are to make Beetle look tall, because she’s such a dumpy little thing. But she’s a jolly nice little dump! We all like her, and she’ll be a lovely Queen.”

“She needn’t have had scarlet and yellow and green,” Joan said. “I could choose soft-coloured stripes that would look quite pretty. They clash horribly with Nesta’s purple and silver, and yet Beatrice will always be next to her in the procession. Well, well! We shall have to put up with it, I suppose.”

“Call her Beetle, Joan! Everybody does. She says her stripes are to brighten up the procession.”

“They certainly do it. And I will not call her Queen Beetle.”

“They match her striped tulips,” Jen pointed out. “She has a lovely bunch of red and yellow tulips. Joan, what are you going to tell me?”

Joan shook her head and turned to greet the new Queen. “Well, Queen Bee! You’re a spot of colour, aren’t you?”

“The procession needs some bright colours,” and Beetle complacently stroked her vivid train. “You people have been so sober lately; plain blue and violet and green. Nesta’s silver shows up better, with its honesty-purple. But everybody will pass over the rest of you and look at *me*.”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” Joan agreed. “You certainly cheer up the landscape. Who is your maid?”

“Young Barbara. She’s a jolly kid; she’ll be Queen some day.”

“The first Queen’s little sister? Oh, that’s nice. What a good idea! Yes, I hope she’ll be Queen in time.”

Not till the crowning ceremonies were over could Jen induce Joan to speak. But at last, as the Club danced around the maypole, Joan bent to her maid, sitting patiently at her feet.

“Jen! Want to hear the news?”

“Oh, Joan, please! I’m aching to know! Is it news from Angus?”

“From Selma. He’s working hard; I expect she’ll have to do the letter-writing. She writes a very good letter, as we found when she wrote from Sweden. She sent it by air; she knew we’d

want to hear about Jan Josef.”

“Yes? Oh, Joan, will he take Angus as a pupil?”

“He will. He says Angus shows real promise, and he believes he can make a great performer of him. He says Angus is a musician and only needs the right training.”

“Oh, cheers! Couldn’t be better! Isn’t Selma pleased?”

“She’s very happy, and she says Angus is happier than she has ever known him.”

“I’m sure he is! Terry Van Toll will be pleased too, for it’s all thanks to him, isn’t it? They aren’t married yet?”

“Oh, no! Belle is being very motherly and taking care of Selma properly, and she insists on no wedding until Selma is nineteen.”

“That’s a long engagement! Belle was only nineteen when she got married herself, and she can’t have been engaged for more than a week or two,” Jen urged.

“It’s much better they should wait; Selma quite agrees. Angus will have to work very hard.”

“What about Rykie? Is she there?”

“Oh yes! She’s working hard too; at school, and at special classes to prepare for her stage career. Belle seems to be dealing with her very sensibly.”

“Then it’s all jolly good news! I’m glad Jan Josef likes Angus. And I’m as certain as I can be about anything that one day Angus will be a famous violinist and will play at big concerts in London.”

“I’m sure of it too,” Joan agreed. “And Selma will come with him, so we shall see them both again.”

“Oh, yes! If they come to this country they’re sure to stay at the Abbey,” Jen said happily. “You’ll send for me when they come, won’t you?”

“We will, Jenny-Wren. That’s a promise. Now go and dance! Don’t sit here talking any more!”

“I’ll have a dance of joy, because everything’s all right for Angus and Selma!” and Jen raced off to find a partner for “Haste to the Wedding.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *Selma at the Abbey* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]