



# Schooldays At The Abbey



ELSIE J. OXENHAM

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Janice swung round with a little incredulous gasp.

# SCHOOLDAYS AT THE ABBEY

A NEW STORY OF THE ABBEY GIRLS

*by*  
**ELSIE J. OXENHAM**



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## CHAPTER I THE ABBEY GIRLS

"It's the Abbey you want." The pleasant hotel-maid smiled down at the girl who had asked a question.

She was interested in these visitors. Their luggage had strange overseas labels, and it was understood that they came from Australia.

"I knew a young chap who went to your part of the world, miss," the girl went on. "Sydney, he said."

Janice Macdonald nodded. "I'll tell you about Sydney later on, but first I want to hear about this Abbey. I think it's the place we've come here to see."

She was seventeen, with dark curly hair cut short and waving naturally. Her dark eyes were full of interest as she sat in the window-seat and looked up at the English girl.

"Somebody in Australia told me about England, and said it was lovely in the spring," she said. "He knew this part, and he spoke of some old ruins, where monks used to live, and said you could see their bedroom and dining-room, and the place where they did their work during the day. I don't remember all he told me, but I know it was near Wycombe."

The maid nodded. "That'll be Gracedieu Abbey. I haven't been there, but I know a girl whose sister is in service at the Hall. The Abbey is in the grounds of the Hall."

"We want to see the Abbey. Is it far from here?"

"You can walk across the hills, but it's a good step; some miles it'll be. Or you can go by train and walk up through the village."

"That would be best. My aunt doesn't want to walk far. I'd like to go by the hills, but she couldn't manage it. Thanks very much! We'll be allowed to go into the ruins, won't we?"

"Oh, yes, they're open to the public. If you're keen on old things, you ought to see the May Queen business at the school here," the maid suggested. "Perhaps they'd let you in, if you said you'd come from Australia just to see it."

Janice laughed, her face alight.

"As I've only just heard of it, I can't say that!" she protested. "But perhaps I could manage to get in somehow. I've read about English maypoles and queens, and I was thrilled! Tell me about it; have you time? Or am I being a bother? I'd like to hear some more."

The girl laughed; she was only too ready to gossip.

"It's at the big school, down at the other end of the town—Wycombe Moor. They choose a queen every May day and crown her, and they dance the old dances and have a procession of queens. I haven't seen it, but they say it's very pretty; there are pictures in the papers of the dancing and the queen and the crowning. The coronation is to-night."

Janice sprang up. "Then I haven't any time to spare. I'm going to wangle a ticket somehow. Thank you ever so much for telling me about it!"

"The girls from Gracedieu go to the school," the maid remarked. "One of them was last year's queen, so you'll see her in the procession. Red hair, she has, and her cousin too."

Janice paused. "Who are they? Do they live at the Abbey?"

"It belongs to them, and so does the Hall. One has the Hall and one has the Abbey."

"How very odd! I'd choose the Abbey; how marvellous to feel it's your very own!"

"They call them the Abbey Girls," said the maid, taking up her carpet-sweeper and duster.

Janice hurried to her aunt's room. Miss Fraser was still resting, for they had arrived late the evening before.

"Aunty, dear, I'm going out; I'm going to call on a headmistress! I'm scared stiff, but it has to be done. Don't you want to come with me and hold my hand?"

"Jandy, dear! What is it all about? I didn't mean to go out this morning, and I've never known you scared about anything yet."

"I'm scared this time; or at least, very shy! But it's such a wonderful chance; I can't miss it through funk! Aunty, just think!" And Janice dropped on the bed and spoke eagerly. "The Abbey isn't far away; we can go by train, so it isn't in the depths of the country, as Uncle Tony made me think. We'll go to see it to-morrow. It belongs now to a girl—a girl with red hair. And the big house beside it, called the Hall, belongs to another girl; they're cousins, and people call them the Abbey Girls. And—oh, aunty!—just think; what a bit of luck! The school here has a May Queen and does old English dances, and the crowning is to happen to-night! That's why I'm going to call on the headmistress; we simply must see it! I'm going to beg and pray for an invitation. I'll go down on my knees to soften her hard heart!"

"But—Jandy! Won't it be a private affair?"

"I don't know. Perhaps friends are admitted. Anyway, I'm going to be invited! If it's a girls' affair, no decent Head would refuse to let a girl see it, when she had come all the way across the world!"

"I ought to go with you," Miss Fraser began.

"No, dear, you're going to rest," Janice said firmly. "As we're going out to an evening party you must take things quietly to-day. We had rather a racketty time in London, didn't we?"

"You seem quite sure we shall be invited for to-night," her aunt protested.

"Oh, I am! If I have to go disguised as a French mistress or something, I'm going!"

"Don't go as a French mistress," her aunt advised, with a laugh.

"I'll think of a better disguise, if I find I need one. Shall I wear my best hat for the headmistress? I'd better find out her name before I go. No, I think my cap will do; I want to look like a school kid who's keen on school shows, not an aged person who has left school and is travelling to broaden her mind, in the care of the kindest of aunts!"

The kindest of aunts laughed a little doubtfully. "I don't feel too sure about the last bit of that. I sometimes think it's Miss Macdonald who leads the party and takes care of Miss Fraser!"

"Oh, Aunty! I don't bully you, do I?" Janice cried, turning from the mirror at which she was criticising the angle of her green cap.

"Oh, no! You just rush me about and hustle me round."

"You shall have a lovely rest when we go to Scotland," Janice promised. "Those old people in the Highlands won't like me, but they'll love you, and I shall be very meek and quiet. How I'm longing to see the lochs and mountains, and the village and the castle, and all the places you've told me about!"

"Your dear mother loved it all. She'd be glad to think you were going back to it, Jandy."

"I think, perhaps, she knows, Aunty, dear. I'm thrilled about seeing her old home. But there are thrills in this place too. We'll see that old Abbey tomorrow; I know you don't care as much as I do, but Uncle Tony told me all about it and it was his old home. It would have belonged to him, if he hadn't died; at least, I suppose it would, wouldn't it?"

"You don't know that, my dear. His father had quarrelled with him; he might not have inherited the property."

"Oh, well, all that doesn't matter now! Do I look respectable? I want to make a good impression," Janice said solemnly, "because I guess this May Queen business will be one of the biggest thrills of the whole trip."

"You look tidy; and quite pretty enough, Jandy."

Janice laughed, as she kissed her aunt. "I'll come back in triumph, after that. You'll see, Aunty! I feel this headmistress is going to like me."

"What's puzzling me," she said to herself, as she set out, valiant enough in appearance but quaking inwardly, "is—who are these Abbey Girls, and

why does it all belong to them? Uncle Tony left home twenty-five years ago, after a bad flare-up with his father; he wrote, but his father never answered. I believe there was a sister, who died soon after Uncle Tony left. We heard last autumn that the old father had died; somehow or other these girls have got hold of his house and the Abbey. Could I ask that girl at the hotel? I mustn't gossip too much; and she might not know. It doesn't sound as if they belonged to Uncle Tony's family; there was no red about his hair! The girl said I'd see one of them in the procession this evening. I'll grovel to that headmistress! I simply must have an invitation. I can't believe that anybody would be so brutal as to refuse!"

## CHAPTER II

### THE NEW LITTLE BOARDER

“Are you making friends, Jen?” asked the headmistress, looking down at the little new boarder with a smile. “Is somebody looking after you?”

Jen Robins pushed back her long yellow plaits, and met Miss Macey’s keen eyes bravely. She was only thirteen and she had just had her first night away from home.

“I’m going to make lots of friends very soon, I’m sure. Thank you very much; I’ve been looked after in the most topping way.”

Miss Macey laughed. “What does that mean?”

“Oh, somebody’s been most awfully kind! I don’t know her, but she’s quite old—quite big, anyway. I don’t know why she fagged to look after a kid like me. She saw I was new, and she took charge of me and showed me everything, and told me people’s names, and introduced me to Nesta and Molly, in my form. It was simply ripping of her to take so much trouble!”

“Don’t you know her name?”

“Somebody called her Joan. She had long red hair, tied back but not in a plait.”

“And she wore a silver medal pinned on her tunic,” said Miss Macey.

Jen eyed her eagerly. “Yes, I saw it. Is she some kind of a captain? I was going to ask Nesta.”

“She was Joan Shirley, our new May Queen. You’ll see her crowned to-night. One of her duties is to look after new girls.”

“She does it jolly well,” Jen said fervently. “She’ll be a ripping queen. I’m looking forward most frightfully to the show to-night.”

“Perhaps when you have been with us for a little while we shall be able to persuade you not to use quite so many rippings and toppings,” Miss Macey said, laughing. “No, I’m not scolding; it’s just a suggestion. I know you are the only girl in a family of brothers, and we must expect a certain amount of slang. But there are other words besides ‘most frightfully.’ Now run along to Molly and Nesta! . . . Yes, Gertrude?” to a maid, who was looking for her.

“A young lady, wishing to speak to you, ma’am. She says it’s very urgent.”

Miss Macey knit her brows. Her time was fully mapped out, and this was a busy day, with one of the biggest functions of the school year coming in the evening. “Did she say what she wanted?”

"To speak to you about the crowning to-night, she said. She's quite a young lady," Gertrude ventured.

"I'll see her for one moment. Take her to my study. Does 'quite a young lady' mean just a girl, I wonder?" Miss Macey followed Jen Robins, who had gone off along the corridor, but turned into her own room, conscious of curiosity about her very young visitor. Her curiosity deepened at sight of the eagerness in the dark eyes of the girl who was presently shown into the study.

"Oh, Miss Macey! Please forgive me for bothering you; I'm sure you're rushed off your feet!" the words fairly tumbled out in her haste. "But I had to come. I'm staying at a hotel in the town, and I heard this morning about the May Queen business, and I've never seen anything of the sort. We only came from Sydney three days ago, and we've been seeing London; I've lived all my life in Australia. I've longed and longed to see England and English girls, and the country in the spring—I've heard so much about it. It's all even more marvellous than I expected! And a May day crowning, with a queen, and old dances—it's a chance I never dreamed of. Oh, Miss Macey! You'll let me in to watch, won't you?"

"That's an appeal it would be hard to resist," the headmistress said, laughing. "Tell me a little more. How many are there in your party? We expect a big crowd, but we can always squeeze in a few more."

"We're only two people," Janice pleaded. "My aunt, Miss Fraser, is resting this morning; she found London rather tiring. I'm afraid I tried to see it all in three days! I'm Janice Macdonald, but the girls at school used to call me Jandy Mac."

Miss Macey laughed again. "Janice Macdonald is much nicer! We will make room for you, Janice, and I know you will enjoy the May-day festival. I'll write out a ticket for you."

She sat down at her desk, and drew a pile of tickets towards her. "So it's your first visit to England?"

"Oh, yes! My mother died when I was two, and my father before I was born. I've lived with my aunts, and we've always planned to come home as soon as I'd done with school."

Miss Macey shot a smiling glance at her. "And have you? How old are you? I should hardly have thought——?"

"I'm seventeen," Janice confessed. "Perhaps I don't look it, but I really am. Something happened two years ago, to make the trip home much easier than we'd expected. Somebody died, and he left his money to me; he wasn't a real relation, but he'd adopted me and he thought of me as his own. He—well, he was going to marry my mother, when I was two years old, but she took influenza and in two days it was pneumonia and she died, a week

before they were to have been married. So he was never really related to me, but he hadn't anybody else, and though he left me with my aunts he always said I belonged to him, and he left everything to me."

"That's a sad story," Miss Macey said gravely. "And you wanted to see England?"

"His old home was down this way; he'd told me about it, and I was just crazy to see it. I did two years more at school, but then I couldn't wait any longer, so I persuaded Aunty to come home with me. We've seen a little bit of London, and now we're having a look at the country, and then we're going up to Scotland to see the old folks, my grandparents, in a tiny village by a loch somewhere."

"So you are really a Scot, and not English at all!"

"I guess Macdonald and Fraser aren't very English. But he—I called him Uncle Tony—he was English, and he'd told me about may and daffodils and buttercup fields and apple-blossom, and I wanted to see them just about as much as I wanted to visit London."

"How does England satisfy you so far?"

"Oh, I love it! I shouldn't want to live here always; I miss our sunshine. Australia's home, and I want to go back. I'd like to live in the South Seas, on a coral reef, where it's blazing hot all the time! But I'm very happy to be seeing England," Janice exclaimed. "It's all just as beautiful as he said."

"You'll enjoy the country-dancing to-night," Miss Macey commented.

"It's a chance I never dreamed of! I want to see the girls, too." There was a wistful note in Janice's voice. "I've never spoken to any English girls; I like the look of them. There was a jolly kiddy in the passage as I came along; she looked such a nice friendly sort, and she had two long yellow plaits and very blue eyes. I'd have liked to speak to her. Shall I see her to-night?"

"That would be Janet Robins, our new little boarder. She's still rather lonely; she only came to us yesterday, so she has hardly settled down yet. But she'll soon find her place; she's a friendly little soul. No, I don't suppose you'll see her, unless we send for her. She'll be in the gallery with the rest of her form."

"I hoped she'd be in the dancing. My mother was called Janet, but she changed her name a little when she gave it to me. Aunty says my father had planned it should be Janice for me; but he never saw me. I'd like to see your little Janet again."

"She wants us to call her Jen," Miss Macey said, smiling. "She's the only girl in a family of brothers, and they call her Jen at home. She won't be dancing; you need to learn the dances, and Jen is so very new. But I shouldn't wonder if she becomes a dancer quite soon; she's made for it, and

she's light on her feet. Perhaps cricket will claim her, however; it's too soon to say. We don't encourage girls to do both in earnest; they usually have to choose. I could arrange for you to have a word with Jen after the crowning, if you would like it."

"That would be very good of you!" Janice's face lit up. "We're namesakes; I'd like to speak to an English Janet!"

"I hope you'll enjoy this evening. I'm sure you will." Miss Macey handed her the ticket. "I'm glad you came to see me. Was it a very great ordeal?"

Janice coloured and laughed. "I was frightened, but I needn't have been. You've been most frightfully kind."

Miss Macey's eyes twinkled as she remembered her rebuke to Jen Robins. "I'm glad you had the courage to come. I'll see that you have good seats this evening."

"I'm jolly glad I didn't funk," said Janice.

As she hurried away to tell the good news to her aunt she remembered the headmistress's laughing look. "I ought to have been more careful; I quite forgot she was a school person. She didn't like 'funk' and 'frightfully'; I wonder what else I said? It doesn't sound very grown-up! Perhaps she was thinking I'd left school too soon. I shall be frightfully particular what I say, if I see her to-night!" And, dreaming about the evening's festival, and May Queens and country dances, Janice went to tell her aunt.

Miss Macey had little time that day to think, but when her morning visitor recurred to her mind it was not on Janice's conversation that she dwelt. It was easy to reconstruct the little family history: the Scottish girl, Janet Fraser, in Australia with her sisters; her marriage to a fellow-Scot named Macdonald; their plans for the first baby; his death before his little girl was born. Then, after something more than two years, the coming of a new friendship, and the young widow's plans for a second marriage; her swift passing, a week before the wedding was to take place; "Uncle Tony's" adoption of the orphan Janice, and, later, his death, leaving her to be his heiress.

"He didn't ask her to take his name, evidently! It was a tragedy for him, poor fellow! But he was very good to Jandy Mac!"

## CHAPTER III

### THE OTHER ABBEY GIRL

"We must thank Miss Macey for these excellent seats," said Miss Fraser. She had rested during the day, and was feeling much more fit for the enjoyment of the evening.

Janice was radiant. The big school hall had a tense atmosphere of expectation which she had felt the moment she entered, and her dark eyes were shining with eagerness and anticipation. Miss Macey had smiled at sight of her glowing face, and had noted with amused appreciation the evening frock of softest coral pink and the smooth dark-brown curls, while she was greeting the quiet Scottish aunt and welcoming her to England.

The centre of the hall was empty and so was the dais, but seats were arranged round the walls, raised in tiers, and chairs had been reserved in the back row for Miss Fraser and Janice. From their position they not only looked over those in front but were close to the platform and had a clear view of every corner of the hall. The walls were lined with visitors, and there was not an empty seat to be seen. The galleries were crowded with schoolgirls, wearing white frocks and all talking at once.

Janice, searching eagerly, caught sight of little Jen Robins, leaning excitedly over the railing, one of her yellow plaits drooping, her blue eyes watching every movement of the scene below. Presently, during an interval, Jandy saw her deep in conversation with a girl of her own age, whose black hair was short and smooth.

"The kiddy's making friends. Miss Macey said she would," she thought.

A girl in a white frock, standing just below the platform, struck up a gay tune on a violin. From every doorway girls came running, till the floor of the hall seemed full; girls in loose, swinging frocks of every colour, brightest red and blue, vivid gold and green and violet, all with white stockings and black dancing shoes. Some were bare-headed and carried ribbons which streamed behind them as they ran, and contrasted in colour with their frocks; others had no ribbons but wore little white caps on their hair.

For one moment the hall was a moving mass of colour. Then, at an imperative chord, the dancers formed into sets of several couples, girls with ribbons facing girls wearing caps. Another merry little tune began; the ribbons were caught by the partners, and began to pass over and under in arches, and then the lines separated, the ribbons flying again, and all seemed confusion. In a moment the lines appeared once more, the arches were

formed, and the leading couple swung down under the ribbons to the bottom.

“It’s called the Ribbon Dance,” Janice cried softly, glancing at her programme. “Oh, isn’t it pretty? Oh, Aunty, how I’d love to dance like that! This is real dancing! Aren’t they all *alive*!”

“It’s delightful,” Miss Fraser agreed. “We shall enjoy this, Jandy.”

“I’m going to love every minute of it. I never saw anything so pretty before! Oh, look! What are they doing? Oh—how clever!”

The final arches brought the dance to a close and the “women” bobbed to their “men,” who bowed and then ran to throw down their ribbons at the fiddler’s feet. She changed her tune, and in a moment the hall was filled with rings, which swung gaily clockwise and back again.

“‘Gathering Peascods.’ Isn’t that fun?” Janice cried, as first the “men” and then the “women” clapped in the middle of their rings.

The next dance—“Hey, Boys”—was much quieter, in little groups of four. Then the girls, with scarcely a pause, formed in two long sets, facing their partners, reaching right down the hall, and “Haste to the Wedding” began.

“I’m glad we have programmes,” said Miss Fraser. “It’s nice to know the names of the dances.”

“I love the names! The next one’s called ‘We won’t go home till morning,’ ” Janice said, laughing.

The dance had hardly begun when a girl near the bottom of the hall raised a shout, which was taken up by everybody—“The Queen! The Queen!” In a moment the two sets had become one, leaving a wide aisle between two lines of cheering girls, who dropped, each on one knee, and clapped as a procession came slowly up the hall.

Janice gripped her aunt’s arm. “Aunty, look! The first one—the leader—with the lovely red hair! She must be one of the Abbey Girls. The maid said one of them was last year’s Queen. Oh, isn’t she pretty? But why did they let her wear that faded old crown? The flowers are almost dead!”

The leader of the procession was a bright-faced girl of sixteen, with long bronze hair hanging over her shoulders under a wreath of faded white narcissi. Like all the queens who followed her, she wore a white dress reaching to the ground and carried flowers in her hands; but her train, hanging from her shoulders and held by a fair girl in white, was of vivid green. After her came the queen who had reigned before her, a dark girl whose train was of strawberry pink; then came a tall brown-haired girl, who carried herself well and wore her golden robe and crown of yellow flowers with great dignity; and last came the White Queen, yellow-haired, with forget-me-nots painted on the border of her train. Each was received with a

fresh outburst of cheering, which rose into a roar as the queens took their places on the platform.

The Strawberry Queen lifted the faded wreath from the reigning queen's bronze hair and replaced it with a thick crown of forget-me-nots, which a small girl had carried on a white cushion; and the dancers sprang to their feet and cheered and shouted and waved hands and caps. The Green Queen stood alone, while her companions took their seats; she bowed and laughed, and made an appealing gesture.

Silence fell, and Janice wondered breathlessly if the Abbey Girl would make a speech.

"Thanks just awfully much, everybody. I've loved being Queen," she said.

There was a shout of laughter and approval, and then more cheering, as she came down the steps, followed by her maid. The girls sprang hurriedly into their lines again, and she went slowly down the room and disappeared.

When she came back after a moment's absence she was followed by a small child in white, carrying a violet cushion on which lay a starry white crown of flowers. Behind her came the new Queen, her train of rich violet carried by a tall dark girl, whose white frock had touches of violet embroidery and a girdle to match. At sight of the Violet Queen a murmur ran round the hall, and the girls in the gallery watched the visitors' faces expectantly, and then laughed to one another at their astonishment.

"She's the Green Queen's double!" Janice whispered. "Aunty, there are two of them, just alike! They might be twins! It must be the other Abbey Girl; nobody told us she was the new Queen!"

"They're very much alike," Miss Fraser agreed, gazing as every one else was doing at the second red-haired girl, who, bare-headed and carrying white flowers, was following the abdicating Queen slowly up the hall.

"They're only cousins," Janice murmured. "The maid said they were cousins. Odd that they should look like twins! They're just the same age, so far as I can see."

A lady sitting in front took pity on her bewilderment and looked round at her. "Joan is a month older than Joy. Their fathers were twins and were very much alike, and the girls take after them. They're sixteen now. My girl, Muriel—Muriel Bayne—is Joan's maid-of-honour and carries her train; so I have heard a good deal about them."

"Oh, thank you so much! But we must watch; I know something's going to happen. Just one more thing, *please!* Which is Joan and which is Joy?"

"Joan is the new Queen. Joy is just going to crown her."

The Violet Queen was kneeling before the group of former queens, who had risen to receive her. Queen Joy took the crown from its cushion and laid

it on her cousin's hair, taking very great care that it should be straight and firm; and again the girls in the gallery laughed. Then the ex-Queen bent and kissed her successor, took her hand and raised her.

Queen Joan faced the crowded hall and bowed, over and over again, as the girls and visitors cheered. She turned to the four queens into whose company she had entered, and curtseyed to the golden girl and then to the rest. They welcomed her with laughing greetings, and she flushed at the warmth of their words. She turned again to face the crowd, and bowed and curtseyed, then shook her head vehemently in response to a shout of "Speech!" With a quick gesture she took her seat on the centre throne, with Joy on her right hand and the Golden Queen on her left.

On Joy's right sat the White Queen, and now she rose and sang two verses of a little song with a merry dance time; a welcome to the new queen, it seemed to be.

"What a jolly voice!" Janice whispered. "Oh, Aunty, look! I wondered if they wouldn't have a maypole! Oh, that makes it perfect! I'd have been just a little bit disappointed if they'd left that out!"

Several men were setting up a maypole in the centre of the hall. The dancers came running to seize the ribbons, which were violet and green, gold and white.

"They couldn't put pink among those," Janice murmured, watching the dance with fascinated eyes. "They've put the Pink Queen as far as possible from all that red hair! Don't they make a lovely show, with their maids-of-honour and flowers and crowns?"

"A very pretty group," her aunt agreed. "I like the new queen's face."

"Oh, so do I! But I like them all. I wonder if the girls choose the queen themselves?"

"Certainly they do," said Mrs. Bayne, speaking from the row in front again. "Muriel told me there was no doubt or discussion this year. Every one was determined to have Joan for Queen, so there was no voting—or rather, there was a unanimous vote. It doesn't always happen."

"How marvellous for her to know that!" Janice exclaimed, her eyes on the Abbey Girls, who were talking under cover of the music while they watched the maypole dance critically, with anxious sympathy.

"They're afraid somebody will make a mistake," Mrs. Bayne said, laughing. "But it's safely plaited. Very pretty, isn't it?"

"I've always longed to see it," Janice said, in a burst of confidence. "We've just come from Australia. There may be schools there who do the maypole, but I've never happened to see it. I'm glad I waited for this; it seems so much the real thing, here in this country place."

"It is very much the real thing," Mrs. Bayne agreed. "The Hamlet Club may be run by schoolgirls, but they have caught the spirit of May and of country dancing."

"The Hamlet Club?"

"The Hamlet Club chooses and crowns the queen and teaches the dancing. The Gold Queen is the president; she started the club, and she and the White Queen do most of the teaching of the dances."

"Thank you for telling me. I don't know a thing about it." Janice gazed at the Gold Queen, understanding now her critical gaze as she watched the dancers. "She must be glad she started all this," she said to herself, as the dancers dropped the ribbons and formed up for another longways set.

## CHAPTER IV

### JANICE TALKS TO JEN

A small figure passed down the aisle between the seats, a pile of programmes in her hand. She found the headmistress, and delivered her message.

"Miss Anskell thought you might be short, so she sent these, Miss Macey."

"Thank her for me, Jen. We'll be glad of them. Did you enjoy the crowning?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Macey! Doesn't Joan look simply topping?"

Miss Macey laughed. "She looks very dignified—and, of course, very pretty. The girls have chosen well. One moment, Jen! Somebody would like to speak to you."

"To me?" Jen's blue eyes widened and she pushed back her yellow plaits, looking puzzled. "But I don't know anybody here, Miss Macey!"

Miss Macey was looking round for her Australian guests. "No. They don't know you. It's because of your name. Come up here, Jen."

Janice slipped out of her place, as the headmistress came up the steps to the doorway beside her seat.

"How fearfully kind of you to remember! I'm here, Miss Macey. May I talk to her?"

Miss Macey smiled and nodded, and went to speak to another of her guests.

"Because of my name?" Jen was saying, in a startled tone.

"That's the idea. You're called Janet, aren't you?"

The blue eyes flashed a laughing look at her. "Not if I can help it!"

"No, but it's your name. My mother was Janet, but they changed me into Janice, or Jandy for short!"

"Oh, that's pretty! The boys at home call me just Jen. But why does it matter about my name?"

"It doesn't matter; it was only an idea. I saw you this morning, when I asked Miss Macey to let me come to-night, and she said you were called Janet, and I thought——"

"But I'm *not!* I'm never called Janet!"

Janice laughed. "I thought I'd like a Janet—or a Jen, if you like!—to be the first English schoolgirl I spoke to. You girls all look so jolly, but I've never had a chance to speak to one before."

Jen's eyes were wide. "Where have you been?"

"In Australia, all my life. I've only been in England for three days."

"Oh!—I say! How simply topping for you to see Joan crowned! Wasn't it thrilling?"

"How lovely of you to understand!" Janice exclaimed, deeply impressed by the sympathy from somebody so young. "It's the very most English thing I could have seen, I suppose."

"That's what I mean. Country dances, and a May Queen and a maypole; isn't it all marvellous?"

"It's a tremendous bit of luck for us to come in for it. I saw you hanging over the gallery."

"I loved it. I'm going to join the club and learn to dance. Nesta and Molly have been telling me all about it. I ought to go back; they'll be thinking I'm lost. I'll wave my hand to you, shall I? Where do you sit? Is your mother here too?"

"I haven't a mother; or a father. But I've a very jolly aunt, and she's sitting just along here."

"Oh!" Jen's bright face sobered. "I'm sorry you haven't—I've got everything, you see, except sisters. I'll have to adopt some of the girls!"

"I should begin with the last two queens."

"I'd love to, but I'm afraid they're too old. I'm only thirteen; it will have to be somebody in my own form. There must be the right person somewhere! But they've all got their chums, of course. I'm new; did Miss Macey tell you? I'm not a real proper English schoolgirl yet; I only came yesterday."

"You're the first I've spoken to, all the same. I hope you'll soon find the right person. Wave to me and I'll wave back," Janice promised.

Jen raced away, with flying pig tails, and Janice laughed and returned to her place.

"Such a jolly kiddy, Aunty! But what's happening? What are they going to do now?"

The character of the dances had changed, and the floor was no longer filled with a moving crowd of every colour, at one moment in rings or stars, the next in long lines or swinging in couples, skipping or running or slipping round in circles. Many of the girls were sitting on the floor, panting and fanning themselves; the few dancers left were in groups of six; they waved white handkerchiefs as they danced, and on their white legs were bands of little bells, which jingled as they leapt.

"This is something new," Janice murmured, fascinated.

"Or very old," said Mrs. Bayne, laughing. "It's a morris dance. The others were country or maypole dances."

"It looks very hard work," said Miss Fraser, as "Laudnum Bunches" ended in a ring and a wild shout. "I wonder they have any breath left."

"They're going to do a stick dance now," Mrs. Bayne remarked, as the dancers threw their handkerchiefs to friends resting near them on the floor, and took small white sticks which some girls were holding ready for them.

"It's called 'Hunting the Squirrel,'" Janice said, looking at her programme. "Oh, how pretty! I like the way they bow to their partners!"

"All the queens are dancers, of course," Mrs. Bayne said. "At an ordinary meeting of the club they and their maids would be taking part; on State occasions like this, the club's best dancers are sitting on the platform. You ought to see Joan and Joy Shirley do their minuet, or Miriam Honor and Cicely Hobart—those are the white and gold queens—dance 'Princess Royal.' But they couldn't do morris jigs in their trains and crowns!" And she laughed.

"I wish they'd take them off for ten minutes, and dance to us!" Janice said fervently.

"They won't do that to-night. These morris dances are strenuous; they'll go back to country dances presently. But first those who have been sitting out are going to sing."

When the morris dancers dropped on the floor to rest, after "Trunkles" and "The Blue-Eyed Stranger" and "Bean Setting" had tired them out for the moment, the rest of the club began to sing, sitting where they were, led by the violin. The folk-songs were new to the guests from overseas, but the tunes had a haunting quality, a strange note which had been in many of the dances also, and Janice found herself tormented all next day by half-finished phrases and curious little bits of airs which did not seem to end. The girls sang "William Taylor" and "Lord Rendal" and "Whistle, daughter, whistle!" and then "Come, Lasses and Lads" as a lively finish.

The country-dancing began again, and Janice, after watching enthralled the movements of "Goddesses," remembered to look up into the gallery for her small friend. She waved her hand and received an excited greeting in reply, as Jen hung over the railing, clapping enthusiastically, her plaits bobbing as she turned to ask questions of her companion.

"Janet-Jen has had a marvellous time, and so have we!" Janice sighed, as the last dance began, the dancers in several big rings all centred around the maypole. "Oh, I do like this! What a topping way to end! That's one of the very best of the whole lot!"

Reluctantly she helped Miss Fraser into her coat and pulled on her own. The hall was full of excited girls; those from the gallery had come racing down during the last figure of "Sellenger's Round," and were now on the

floor, crowding up to the dais among the dancers, giving three last cheers for the queens.

"We ought to thank Miss Macey for her kindness, but she is far too busy. I'll write a note in the morning," said Miss Fraser, and she turned to thank Mrs. Bayne for her help and information.

Janice stood watching the scene. The queens were coming down at last, to talk to their friends, and each was the centre of an excited crowd. A great longing woke in Jandy's heart.

"I'm sorry I've left school. I'd have liked a little while longer. I wish I could have been part of all this, just for a term or two!"

Miss Macey had not forgotten them. She was at the door as they made their way out. No need to ask if Janice had enjoyed the evening! Her shining eyes told their story. Miss Macey noted the wistful look, as she bade them good-night, cutting short Miss Fraser's shy thanks.

"I would have liked to introduce our queens to you. But you see how it is!" she said, with a laughing glance at the uproarious crowd that filled the hall. "It would be difficult to extricate them at present. I'm so glad you were able to be with us! You won't forget our May Festival when you go home, will you?"

"I'll never forget it—never! Thank you more than I can say," Janice burst out impetuously. "I shall dream of those dances, and the songs, and the tunes."

## CHAPTER V

### JANICE SEES THE ABBEY

"I hope you've rested, Aunty. You know what we're going to do to-day, don't you?" Janice was bright-eyed and eager as she greeted her aunt next morning. "You feel up to it, I hope? I couldn't possibly wait another day."

"You're going to drag me out into the country, to see ruins," her aunt agreed. "Have you been dreaming about the dancing and the Queens?"

"I've been thinking about them," Janice admitted. "I want to see the Abbey, where those two girls live. You want to see it, too, don't you, Aunty? We can go nearly all the way by train."

"I want to see it, certainly. But we won't start too early; you want to make a day of it and have some lunch in the village, don't you?"

"A picnic would be splendid, if you're sure you don't mind," Janice said gratefully.

"This is great sport!" she cried, as soon after twelve o'clock they crossed a village green, selected a very white cottage, and asked for tea and bread-and-butter and fresh eggs. "Much more fun than proper lunch in the hotel! And we're on the spot; we can go right along to the Abbey as soon as we're ready. Up this lane, the woman said."

The sun was shining and the garden, full of daffodils and forget-me-nots, was sheltered. At Jandy's enthusiastic suggestion lunch was spread on a small table out of doors, and she threw crumbs to the chaffinches and robins, and made friends with a sleepy black cat.

"Now for the ruins! I feel ready for any amount of ancient history!" she cried exuberantly. "I hope you won't be bored, Aunty, dear. I mean to see every corner of the old place."

"I'm eager to see it too," Miss Fraser retorted. "I haven't heard as much as you have, of course. Mr. Abinger didn't tell *me* stories of his old home! But I've heard enough——"

"Oh, call him Uncle Tony, Aunty! 'Mr. Abinger' sounds so stuffy! I've asked you, over and over again." They were walking up a lane under great arching trees which were still bare, though their branches were crimson with leaf-buds and looked almost purple in the sunshine.

"He wasn't your uncle, Jandy." Miss Fraser was gently obstinate on the point. "You may call him what you wish. I prefer to use his name."

Janice sighed. "Aunty, dear, there's a good old Scottish word that Aunt Jean used to use, which just describes you, and that's 'thrawn!' You're a

thrawn woman, and as determined as you can be. All right, call him what you like. I warn you that when I'm of age I shall probably take his name, as he wished me to do, and be Jandy Abinger. I know you don't want me to do it, but he meant far more to me than my real father."

Miss Fraser frowned. "I'm not the only thrawn woman, Jandy, dear. I don't want you to give up your father's name."

"Then I'll be Macdonald-Abinger, or Abinger-Macdonald. Doesn't it sound clumsy? . . . Oh, look, Aunty! Never mind my future name! Look, this is what he told me about!"

She leaned on a white fence and gazed at a pile of old buildings in a meadow, among big trees. Not much could be seen from the lane; just a wall with an arched doorway in it. But above the wall were other walls and windows, and farther up the lane a big gate led past a carriage-drive to a high arched gateway.

"We must go in that way. I want to go inside," Janice murmured. "Come on, Aunty, dear! Through that lovely arch, and along the road to the little door! There's a lot to see behind that wall."

"I don't see anything that looks like the ruins of a church," Miss Fraser said, as they went towards the Abbey gate.

"There isn't any church. It was pulled down by Henry the Eighth; Uncle Tony told me that. The ruins are the places where the monks lived and worked and slept; they were used for farm buildings for centuries, and then his father inherited the place and cleaned it up and made it as it used to be, except for the parts that are broken down. It was jolly fine of him! His house was next door—among those trees, I suppose. Now it belongs to one of those queen-girls; I can't imagine why."

"They must be related to Sir Antony Abinger in some way," said Miss Fraser, pausing in the dark tunnel of the gateway to look up at the vaulted roof.

"Oh, sure! But I want to know how. He ought to have left it to Uncle Tony; after all, Uncle Tony was his only son!"

"If he had, and if Mr. Abinger had lived longer than his father, I suppose it would all have been yours," her aunt remarked.

Janice gave her a startled look. "I suppose it would. What a staggering idea, Aunty! Mine! He left everything to me. If it had been his—yes, it might have come to me. I say, I'm rather glad it isn't mine! I'd have felt a little crushed, I think."

"You'd have grown used to it, Jandy, dear."

"I suppose so. I'm glad you put the idea into my head. I shall look at it quite differently now. Just suppose it had been my own! I wonder how these other girls feel about it?"

"I expect they are used to it now. But they can't have had it for so very long; only a few months."

"How do you make that out? You sound very sure of it," Janice asked curiously.

"Jandy, dear! Think! Your 'Uncle Tony,' as you call him, died two years ago. His father was alive then. You'll remember that we heard of his death last autumn, through the lawyers. If he had died first, Mr. Abinger would have been Sir Antony, and the lawyers would have had to find him. That was why they were asking about his death last October, when your lawyer told you inquiries had been made. Whether the property was left to him or not, the title would have had to come to him."

"That's so," Janice agreed. "And as he died before his father, old Sir Antony couldn't leave the place to him. I see that. Then these girls only have it because Uncle Tony was dead."

"That seems likely. I wonder who they are?"

"Could we ask the caretaker? I suppose there will be a guide or somebody."

"I'm sure there will; but don't ask too many questions. You mustn't gossip, Jandy."

"I'll be careful, dear. We'll see what sort of person comes to show us round." They left the great gate behind, and crossed a stream by a little bridge on their way to the low door in the wall. Janice peered through the bars that closed the entrance.

"A lawn, Aunty—beautifully green—and the prettiest little windows, with thin pillars, on each side of a dear old grey arch. Shall I ring this bell? Oh, what a clang and clatter! It disturbs all the peace. Now for the caretaker!"

Light footsteps sounded on the stones within, and a gleam of bright bronze hair lit up the gloom of the cloisters. A girl in a green overall unlocked the gate and held it open for them to enter.

"If you'll wait one moment I'll call somebody."

Dumb with surprise and joy, Janice flashed a look at her aunt, as the girl disappeared.

"One of the queens," Miss Fraser murmured. "You can't ask questions while she's here, Jandy. Do be careful!"

"Which of them is it? I never dared to hope we'd see either of them! I shall tell her we were at the coronation."

"She won't come back. She's gone to send the caretaker."

"I shall ask if we can see her. We've a good excuse; we want to say how much we enjoyed last night."

"If you will come out on to the garth, I'll describe the Abbey buildings to you." A sweet low voice came from behind them.

Janice swung round, with a little incredulous gasp. In a low doorway, leading to a room in the wall, stood the second Abbey Girl, wearing a blue overall, her hair tied back from her face, a fluffy grey kitten in her arms.

For one moment Janice stood and stared, completely taken aback. The girl flushed under her gaze, and went in front of her out to the green lawn, putting down the kitten on the grass. It skipped away to join an elderly black cat who was sprawling in the sunshine, tapped her on the head, and danced about her. She flicked her tail sleepily, and rolled round and spread out her paws, and he dropped suddenly beside her and curled up in a little mouse-grey ball.

There was a gleam of laughter in the Abbey Girl's eyes as she turned to her guests.

"Don't they look pretty together—the black and grey? He isn't really her son; he's only an adopted child; her own babies are generally as black as she is. He was given to me when he was a few weeks old, and she's such a good mother that she adopted him at once."

"He doesn't look like her baby," Janice agreed.

"Just a foster-child! But they're great friends. This is the cloister garth, where the monks were buried. You have just come through what is left of the cloisters; if you look back you'll see them. They once went right round the garth, of course; you can see where the beams fitted into the walls. On the south side is the great refectory, the most perfect part of the Abbey that is left. This is the chapter-house, where meetings were held, and the windows above are those of the monks' dormitory. Below is the 'parlour,' the little room in which they were allowed to talk; they were silent monks, you know. That gap leads to where the church stood, and this was the Abbot's seat, looking across the garth; but it would be inside the cloisters, of course. Shall we go up into the refectory?"

Janice had heard the general description of the Abbey only very vaguely; but she had had time to recover from her astonishment, and now followed the Abbey Girl with a sufficiently composed and interested face.

The big beautiful hall, up a winding stone stair, was such a surprise as to draw a cry of delight from her. "Oh, how marvellous! I thought it would be dark and poky! What a lovely room! And it's so light, with those big windows!"

The Abbey Girl's tone had been polite but formal as she gave her information; that stare in the doorway had disconcerted her, and she had withdrawn a little into herself. Under the warmth of Miss Fraser's

appreciation and the rapture in Jandy's face, she thawed and forgot herself, and became friendly, though she still had a touch of dignity.

"I'm sure she's the new Queen—Joan, that lady said," Janice thought. "She's as dignified as she was last night, when she came up the hall to be crowned. Even if she was really the caretaker nobody could be rude to her!"

The Abbey Girl was talking of barrel-vaulting and angel-corbels, and showing the reader's pulpit and the picture tiles with their coats-of-arms.

"They belonged to families who had given gifts to the Abbey," she explained. "You'll see some more, on the site of the old refectory, presently."

As they went down the stair to the garth again, Janice gathered up her courage and asked persuasively, "Will you tell me something? May I ask a question?"

"Oh, please do! I want to tell you all about the Abbey." Their guide turned to her quickly. "What have I left out?"

"It's not about the Abbey. It's about you. Are you the new queen or the old one?"

The Abbey Girl flushed. "Oh, is that it? I wondered why——"

"Why I stared? I'm frightfully sorry, but I was so much surprised. We'd been expecting a caretaker, and your cousin let us in, and then you came. We saw you—or her—crowned last night; Miss Macey was kind enough to invite us. Which are you? You don't mind my asking, do you?"

"I'm Joan. Joy, my cousin, had to crown me. I thought perhaps you had been there, and that was why you looked like that. You don't live near here, do you? Most people seem to know us; people have heard about the Abbey, of course."

"We've just come from Australia. This is Miss Fraser, my aunt. I'm Jandy Mac."

Joan looked at her with a hint of a smile in her brown eyes. "Jandy Mac? What's the rest of it?"

"Janice Macdonald. We've come to see England, and we happened to hear about your May Queen festival, so I begged for tickets. I'd never seen anything like it."

"I hope you enjoyed it."

"Every second. I wished it had been twice as long."

Joan laughed. "We didn't. It was an ordeal, and it was quite long enough. We were very nervous about the maypole; we had some juniors taking part, and we were afraid they'd tangle the ribbons. But it went quite well; Cicely and Miriam were very much relieved when it was over. They'd taught the girls; they were our two first queens."

"We thought the dancing was beautiful," Miss Fraser said. "The girls seemed to enjoy it so much, and they were so full of life. It was all so spring-like."

Joan gave her a quick look of appreciation. "I'm so glad you felt that. They are spring dances, you know. They belong to May! But I must show you the Abbey. You didn't come here to chatter about last night. If you will come down this dark little passage I'll show you the kitchen, under the refectory, and the store-rooms, and the cells where the monks went for punishment or to do penance. Look at this strange little bit of stone carving above your heads! It's the only piece we've found; nobody knows what it's meant to be. These are the big chimneys; here was the oven."

"She's showing it all beautifully," Janice said to herself, as Joan led the way into the day-room, where the monks had worked. "She knows every single thing about it. But she's as interesting as the Abbey. We may not have come on purpose to talk to her, but it's extremely thrilling to have the chance to do it, and I mean to hear more about her before I go!"

## CHAPTER VI

### THE STORY OF THE ABBEY GIRLS

The Abbey Girl had shown the position of the old refectory, with its ancient tiles covered by loose soil to preserve them from the weather; the chapter-house, with its lovely vaulted roof; the dormitory, with its rows of windows, one to each sleeping-place, the door which had led to the night-stair down to the church, and the skew door from which the monks had watched the light burning before the altar. She had led her guests round to the sacristy, to show the rose window, and to the site of the great church, where white violets grew in the grass around the bases of the old pillars.

"I wish we had even a little of the church left," she said regretfully, as they returned to the garth. "It must have been beautiful."

"You've a great deal left, though," Miss Fraser said. "It's most interesting; one can picture the everyday life of the monks so exactly."

Joan gave her a quick smile. "I often see them moving silently about, in their white robes and black hoods. Not ghosts; just mind-pictures. They are great friends of mine. I wish we had the records; I'd have liked to know their names! If we had even one story of the Abbey in the old days it would make it all seem more real. Oh, yes, we're very lucky to have their living-rooms in such good condition. Some of the Abbeys which have beautiful remains of their churches left have almost nothing of the places where the monks lived; just heaps of ruins where the refectory was, or only the foundations and the walls of the cellars. I believe it's like that at Glastonbury, where the church arches are so fine; they have the kitchen there, but nothing else but the outlines of the garth and the refectory. We're very rich, in one way. We owe it to Sir Antony Abinger, the late owner of the Abbey. He restored the buildings and now they are almost as they must have been in the old days."

"I suppose," Janice said wistfully, "it would be dreadfully rude to ask questions? But everybody here must know; it's only because we're strangers that we feel so much in the dark."

"What do you want to know?" Joan asked gravely. "We have been talked about a good deal lately, I suppose. Didn't you ask questions from anybody before you came?"

"Aunty said I mustn't gossip. Is it rude of me to be interested? But how could I help it?"

Joan laughed. "I don't mind telling you anything that everybody knows. Miss Macey would have told you, if you had asked her. I supposed you

knew all about us."

"We hardly know anything. Is it true—somebody did tell me this—that the Abbey belongs to you?"

Joan's face lit up, and her eyes swept across the garth to the high refectory windows, the beautiful ruined cloisters, and the chapter-house door, with its pillared window on each side. "Even now I can hardly believe it. Yes, it's mine—my own. And I love every stone and every arch."

"We can see that." Miss Fraser looked at her bright face in ready sympathy.

"Oh, you do love it!" Janice cried. "And you know it so well! Every single thing about it, don't you?"

"It was given to me because I loved it so much. I had to know it well; I was the caretaker for two years."

"What?" Janice and Miss Fraser turned to her in amazement.

"The real caretaker; yes, I mean it. A nice woman looks after it now, as I've gone back to school; I've taught her all I know about it. She was very anxious to be down in the village this afternoon, so I said I'd carry on. But for two years my mother was the caretaker and I did the work, as she found the steps troubled her. You hadn't heard that story? Everybody knows; any one could have told you."

"But how? Why? How did it happen?"

"Just one moment," Joan went to the cloisters and disappeared through a door in the wall. She returned almost at once, bringing a chair for Miss Fraser and a couple of cushions, which she placed on the stones of the broken wall. She set the chair beside them and turned to her visitors in invitation.

"Won't you sit down? I'm sure you'd like a cushion!" to Janice.

She seated herself opposite to Jandy in one of the empty window-gaps, and leaned back against the wall, her eyes wandering over the garth to the chapter-house again.

"It isn't much of a story; everybody knows all about it. My cousin Joy, the Green Queen, who crowned me last night, is the granddaughter of Sir Antony Abinger, of whom I told you. I'm no relation to his family, of course; her mother was his only daughter."

Her eyes caught the look that passed from Janice to her aunt, at this answer to their question. "Were you wondering who we were? It's puzzling, perhaps, as our name is Shirley, not Abinger. Our fathers were John and Jim Shirley, and they were twins; as you can guess, we are like them and not like our mothers at all. Joy's mother died when she was a baby; she lost her father four years ago; and she was brought up with me, as if we'd been sisters. Sir Antony never forgave his daughter—Joyce Abinger, she was—

for running away with Uncle Jim, and he wouldn't see Joy, or have anything to do with her. Mother and father were very good to her, but when my father died, mother found things difficult, with two of us to look after. At last she wrote to Sir Antony's solicitors, and asked them to do something about Joy, as she felt she'd done all she could. Joy wasn't too well in London, and mother wanted to get her into the country.

"Sir Antony offered mother the job of caretaker of the Abbey, with rooms in the walls here; I fetched the cushions from what used to be Joy's bedroom. Mother accepted, hoping it would be just for a little while. A man who comes to inspect the Abbey regularly told her all about it—and I listened, because I'd fallen in love with the whole place. We lived here for two years, and loved it, but we never saw Sir Antony. Then at last we got to know him, just a few weeks before he died; he saw us dancing a minuet on the garth, and he liked it, and made us go and do it for him at the Hall. He went once to school, and saw Joy being Queen, and watched the club dancing; then he was taken ill, and it was only after his death that we heard that he'd been Joy's grandfather. Even then we didn't know for some time that she was to be his heiress, for he'd had a son, who had gone away years ago, after a quarrel. I'm afraid Sir Antony quarrelled with everybody; it was dreadfully sad for him to be so much alone at the end. Joy was sent for, and mother was there; but his son had died—we heard that later—and there was no one but Joy to have everything. So he left her the Hall and its grounds, but he left the Abbey to me—because of my love for it. He put that in his will."

"That was a very happy thought on his part," said Miss Fraser. She had been watching Janice closely while Joan was telling her story, but now she looked at the Abbey Girl with understanding and appreciation.

Jandy's eyes were on the arches across the garth, and on the glimpse of green country seen through the chapter-house door, where there was no outer wall to block the view. She seemed to be in a dream, but her aunt felt it was for her to speak or to keep silent on the subject of her "Uncle Tony."

"Oh, he was wonderfully kind!" Joan exclaimed. "I still don't quite believe it has really happened and that the Abbey is mine."

"What does your cousin feel about the dividing of the property?"

"Joy? She's delighted." Joan laughed. "She's glad not to have to take care of the Abbey. I'm responsible for its being kept in good condition; she's glad not to be bothered with it."

"Where has she gone? We'd have liked to see her too." Janice turned back to Joan.

"She went home through the garden. She was going for a tramp, to work off the excitement of last night; Joy's full of music, and anything like the

crowning ceremony works her up enormously. She was still bubbling over with it this morning. She's a great wanderer, as her father was; she'll walk ten miles and come home quite calmed down."

Janice sprang up, as the Abbey bell clanged. "We ought to go. You've been frightfully kind, telling us all this, and we've had marvellous luck to have you and the whole place to ourselves for so long. May I put the chair away, while you go and be a guide again?" She was hurriedly picking up the cushions.

Joan laughed, as she started towards the gate. "Thank you very much—in there. Wander about again by yourselves, if you wish. I don't usually allow people to do it, but I'll look the other way, if you want to go round again."

"That's awfully understanding of you. I say, Joan!" Janice had thrust chair and cushions into the little room, and went racing after Joan. "There's a thing I'd like to do, but I won't do it without your leave. Let the sightseers wait one second! Would you mind if Aunty and I crept through the gate into your garden and peeped at the house? I've never seen a real English country house yet. We wouldn't go close, or speak to anybody."

Joan nodded, as she opened the gate to a party of ladies. "All right. You won't do any harm. But don't stay long or go where you would be seen. It would worry mother; she wouldn't understand, and she isn't strong."

"We'll be very careful! Thanks, a thousand times!" Janice ran back to her aunt. "Come along, Aunty! We'll be in the way here."

As they crossed the garth they heard one of the visitors remark, "Have you recovered from last night's excitement, Miss Joan? We saw you on your throne. You made a very pretty Queen."

Joan, flushing, thanked her courteously, and began to describe the Abbey.

Janice and her aunt disappeared down the dark tunnel Joan had called the tresaunt, leading to the Abbot's little garden, gay with wallflowers and daffodils, while the black cat, disturbed by the new arrivals, walked sedately in front of them, and the adopted grey son danced about and patted his foster-mother and ended by jumping on her back. She flicked her tail angrily and dashed away among the bushes, and he leapt after her in great delight at having tempted her into a game.

"Dear little people!" Janice said, laughing. "They do look pretty together! Now for the house, Aunty!"

## CHAPTER VII THE WORST THING OF ALL

At the end of a narrow shrubbery path Janice and Miss Fraser gazed at the Hall. The beautiful old house stood on a terrace with a stone balustrade, above smooth lawns bordered by flowering trees. The chestnuts, red hawthorns, and laburnums were not yet showing their colours, but the beds below the terrace were ablaze with tulips.

“Pretty! Oh, lovely!” Janice murmured.

“I say, it’s rather cheek, you know!” a voice said sharply.

The strangers wheeled round, to face the second Abbey Girl. Her overall was gone, and she wore a green knitted coat and cap and was carrying a stick, and a satchel was slung over her shoulder. Her brown eyes were indignant as she looked them up and down.

“Sorry, but it isn’t cheek!” Janice said. “We asked if we might come, and your cousin gave us leave.”

“Oh—sorry!” Joy said in her turn. “I thought you were scouting around on your own. If Joan said it was all right, of course it *is*. Like the house?” The pride of ownership was in her voice.

“It’s lovely,” Janice said again.

“You must be very proud of it, my dear,” Miss Fraser said gently.

Joy’s eyes gleamed. “I am rather keen on it,” she admitted. “It doesn’t seem quite real yet. I suppose in time it will stop feeling like a fairy tale.”

“How long——?” asked Miss Fraser.

“We’ve been living here since just before Christmas.”

“We saw you crown your cousin last night.” And Janice repeated the explanation she had given to Joan. “I wanted so much to see an English Manor House. Thank you for letting us look!”

“I’m glad mine should be your first. Is it up to what you thought?”

“Much more beautiful,” Janice said promptly.

“Good for you! But it’s not the Manor. There is a Manor House—Marchwood Manor—next door to us, but a good long way off across a park. It’s shut up; the people live somewhere else, and don’t often come down. It’s been empty as long as we’ve been here. There’s a topping lake in the grounds.” And Joy’s eyes gleamed again. “A lake, with an island, and an old punt. Would you like just to peep into the house? The great hall is rather jolly. Aunty’s lying down, so you won’t disturb any one.”

“We’d love it,” Janice cried.

"That is very kind of you," Miss Fraser exclaimed.

Joy led them across the lawn and up on to the terrace and in by the big door. Within was a square hall with a wide staircase leading to a gallery; the windows were filled with coloured glass, and the sun streamed through and cast blue and red and green gleams on the floor. The walls had valuable oil-paintings; there were daffodils in bowls on every window-seat and on the old oak tables. The hall, furnished with wooden settles and huge chairs, had an atmosphere of peace and rest and quietness, which the strangers felt at once.

"Oh *how* beautiful!" Janice whispered. "How you must love it!"

"Aunty loves this place." Joy's tone was of mingled pride in her house and love for her aunt. "She's been so good to me. I'm so glad for her to have—all this—after all the years of work and worry. You should go the other way along the path from the Abbey, and have a look at the orchard; it's full of daffodils," she said, when they stood on the terrace again. "Well, goodbye! I'm going up on to the hills. Last night was such a thrill; I can't sit down and work to-day. Didn't Joan look ripping? I was very proud of her. She's going to be a jolly good queen; much better than I've been. I'm glad you were able to come, and I hope you'll like England."

"Scotland!" Janice said. "We're going on to Scotland next week."

"You won't have seen the whole of England by that time!" Joy mocked. "What about Devonshire? And Stratford-on-Avon? And the cathedrals? Don't spend all your time in Scotland! If Joan's busy with tourists, you needn't go back to the Abbey. Go down to the road by my beech avenue; it's worth seeing. Along that little path and through a wicket gate into the avenue. But the Abbey's quicker, if you want to get back to the village."

She went off, swinging her stick and whistling.

"You're tired, Aunty. We'll go back the quickest way," Janice said. "But I'd like just to look at the avenue. Would you rest for five minutes on this log, dear? Sit on my mac; I won't be long."

She raced away down the path, and was back in less than five minutes. "Most marvellous trees; hundreds of years old, with fat grey trunks; two rows of them on each side of a wide drive. And a park; I startled some rabbits. Now I must see that orchard!" And she ran up the path in the other direction.

"Glorious, Aunty!" She came back joyfully in a moment or two. "Sheets of gold under bare apple trees! It's a picture; it went to my head. I wanted to shout and sing and dance. It's a lovely place! Let's go away; I might wish it had been mine if I stayed too long!"

"I noticed you didn't say anything——" Miss Fraser began.

"We won't talk about it here," Janice said quickly. "We'll go back to the Abbey, so that Joan will know we're safely off the premises, and if she's got rid of the tourists we'll thank her again." She took a long wistful look round the green garth and the grey arches as they passed through the Abbey gate. "Dear old place! I'm glad to have seen it. I don't wonder Uncle Tony loved it. I say, Aunty! Abbey Girl Number Two knows all about the Manor grounds next door! She's been in that punt on the lake and on that island, or my name's not Jandy Mac!"

"I thought that, too. Didn't her cousin say she wandered all over the country? I don't suppose she minds trespassing a little, since the house is closed."

"I'm sure she doesn't. She's a jolly kid. And she's so fond of it all already."

"She's very proud of her house," Miss Fraser remarked.

She waited for Janice to raise the subject of her connection with Tony Abinger, who ought to have been the owner of the Hall and the Abbey.

Janice said nothing until they were walking down through the beechwoods beyond the village, to the train. She sighed at last.

"So Uncle Tony's sister is the explanation of our mystery! I believe he mentioned her name once, but I'd forgotten it; his little sister Joyce. She ran away from home, too; and she married, and he never knew. I couldn't tell them, Aunty. I'd have liked Joan to know that I might have been related to her; I do like her! Just a week! If mother had lived until she'd married Uncle Tony, I should have been their step-cousin."

"Joy's cousin," Miss Fraser amended. "It wouldn't have been a real relationship with Joan, you know."

"Oh, but they feel like sisters! But if I'd been connected with them, Uncle Tony would have left everything to me, for he knew nothing about Joy. Aunty, don't you see how I felt? They might have thought I was hinting that I wished it had all been mine."

"It would be no wonder if you did wish it. It's a beautiful old place. If Mr. Abinger had ever owned it, and had left it to you, it would have been a wonderful thing for you, Jandy."

"Oh, marvellous, of course! But it was never his to hand on to anybody. And these girls love it so much; I'm glad they should have it. Even if in some strange way it was possible for me to claim the property, I'd hate to take the Abbey away from Joan now!"

"It would be a tragedy for her," Miss Fraser assented. "And for little Joy too; she loves her house so much."

"Why 'little Joy'?" Janice asked, laughing. "She's only a month younger than Joan, isn't she? But I know what you mean; she seems much younger.

Perhaps Joan has been more with her mother, and they've taken care of Joy and treated her as the baby of the family."

"Don't you think Joy might have been interested to hear about her uncle?"

Janice knit her brows. "I don't know; she never knew him, so she can't care much. I couldn't tell them, Aunty! I felt they might think I was envying them, and perhaps even grudging the chance that made me lose it all; for it was just a chance. It's almost an accident that it belongs to them, and they've no idea of it. I was afraid they might be a scrap uncomfortable, if they knew; and I wouldn't have that happen for the world. They're so happy and thrilled about it all. But if you think they'd like to know, we could tell them the story later. I'm quite sure I shall want to come back here before we go home, and I'd rather they didn't know. They might not be quite so friendly. Aunty! Do you ever have any doubts about Uncle Tony's death?"

Miss Fraser gave her a startled look of amazement. "Jandy! What are you talking about? The ship went down with every one on board."

"I know. But they never found him, and queer things happen sometimes. Just suppose—oh, it's a mad idea! But it's taken hold of me once or twice."

Miss Fraser stared at her curiously. "But there was never any doubt raised, Jandy. The remains of the ship were found on the reef, and there were signs that some one had been living on the island. But it was searched thoroughly—and it was very small, just a coral reef itself—and nobody was found. That was a year after the wreck. No one could have lived on that island for so long."

"I know," Janice said again. "But people had been there, and no bodies were found. They might have got away on a raft, or something."

"The other islands anywhere near were searched, and no traces were found. My dear, I didn't know you were still thinking about him. You ought not to keep any hope. There isn't the slightest chance that he lived. It's two years, Jandy!"

"I haven't any hope," Janice said gravely. "I know he's gone. But now and then the story comes back, and I wish we had heard the end. He just disappeared in the wreck."

"The lawyers were satisfied," Miss Fraser argued.

"I'm satisfied too, really. I suppose it was seeing his old home that made me think about him to-day," Janice sighed. "I know he can never come back. But if some miracle happened, and he did, all this place would belong to him."

"It would be a strange position for our Abbey Girl friends."

"Oh, he'd leave it to them, of course. They'd have it some day; they'd only need to wait."

"Yes, he wouldn't give it to you, Jandy, while any of his family were living. Joy would still be the heiress. But we needn't talk about that."

"I know. But I'm glad he didn't live for a month or two longer than his father!" Janice said with energy. "For he might have left everything to me, without knowing that old Sir Antony had gone and that he had inherited the house. And that would have been dreadful—simply awful—the worst thing of all! It would have been mine, and yet I'd have known he hadn't meant it. The lawyers would have said I had to take it, and the Abbey Girls would have hated me, and I'd have wanted to give it back to them, and that would have made them uncomfortable. They'd never have felt it was really theirs; they wouldn't have liked having to take it from me. Do you see how horrible it would have been, Aunty?"

"I do, Jandy, dear. Every one would have been distressed and unhappy. We can be very glad it didn't happen."

"I'm jolly glad!" Janice said fervently. "And I shan't tell the Abbey Girls that I knew their uncle, and that he was very nearly my father. They might begin thinking of all these horrors, and they'd be worried. It's much better to leave them in peace. Perhaps after we're home, at the other side of the world, I'll write a long letter, telling them the whole story!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### JANDY MAC'S REQUEST

Miss Macey laid down the letter which had come by the afternoon post, and sat considering it. Then she put it aside, and turned to the other papers on her desk.

"Impossible, I'm afraid. I don't see how we could fit the child in. I shall consult Mrs. Shirley and Joan, but there doesn't seem to be a corner to spare. I'm sorry; I'd have liked to give Jandy Mac this pleasure. She doesn't understand, of course; she hasn't heard of the blow that has fallen on us."

She laughed, as she called in her secretary to tackle her correspondence. "The girls don't look on it as a blow! It's no tragedy to them; they're in clover, thanks to the kindness of our May Queens and Mrs. Shirley. But not even the kindest friends can go on taking in girls indefinitely; even Joy Shirley's house isn't elastic! I won't refuse Janice until I have consulted our hostess, but to me the Hall seems packed to overflowing with girls already."

When her afternoon's work was over she drove off in her little car, out into the country, up on to the hills, where the air was stronger and sweeter than in the valleys, and at last down a steep, winding road through beech woods, to the Hall and the Abbey among the trees at the foot of the chalk downs.

Three days after the crowning of Joan a disaster had fallen on the school. A case of diphtheria among the boarders had meant a thorough overhaul of the drains, and it had been necessary to find other quarters for the girls or to close the school. This alternative was very undesirable, in view of the summer matric and other exams, and in the emergency a cordial invitation had come from Joy that the twenty boarders should be transferred to the Hall, and the day-girls should come to join them by train or cycle.

"We don't use nearly the whole house," Joy had urged. "There's stacks of room. We're still more or less camping out in one corner; there seems such a lot of it! Do come, Miss Macey! It would be great sport to have the school on the premises! Much jollier for Joan and me than fagging down to town on our bikes every day! I know Aunty would be pleased."

Joan had seconded the invitation on her mother's behalf, and the school had been transported to the Hall, to the delight of all the girls, particularly of the boarders. The day-girls had begged their parents to let them be boarders for the summer term, but the Hall was already filled to overflowing, and they had to be content with their cycle rides through the country morning

and evening. It was now four weeks since the May day festival; four weeks which Janice had spent in Scotland with her mother's old parents and her Scottish aunts and cousins.

Mrs. Shirley was out when Miss Macey reached the Hall. The big old-fashioned carriage and horses which Sir Antony had used had not yet been given up, although Joy was craving for this; Mrs. Shirley enjoyed the quiet movement of the horses, and had been unwilling to part with them. At Joy's urgent request, however, a small Morris had been installed, and one of the younger stablemen had learned to drive and was already an efficient chauffeur.

"I want you, Joan," Miss Macey said, when her car was stowed away beside the Morris. "I want to consult your mother, but as she is not in, I will tell you what has happened, and you can report to her."

"No more cases of dip, surely, Miss Macey?" The May Queen looked anxious.

"Oh, no! That's all over now. I had a letter to-day from an Australian girl, who is staying in Scotland. She came to see me a month ago, and begged for a ticket for your coronation evening."

"Not Jandy Mac?" Joan asked, laughing.

"Why, how do you know her? Janice Macdonald; but she called herself Jandy Mac, I remember."

"She came to see the Abbey the day after the festival. I was showing people round, as Ann Watson wanted to be in the village with her mother; the stepfather was ill, and Ann went to help. I showed the Abbey to Jandy Mac and her aunt, and they came here to have a peep at the house and met Joy in the garden. We liked them. Isn't Jandy pretty?"

"Herself? Or her name?" Miss Macey smiled.

"Both. But I meant herself."

"Both—I agree. She has been in Scotland for a month, with relations. Now her aunt is planning a trip to Montreal, to see a married brother; a quick journey of two months or so, before they return to Sydney. Janice has written to me very urgently, begging me to let her come to us for the two months, as she does not wish to go to Canada. She would much prefer to spend the time in England."

Joan's eyes had widened. "Rather sensible of her! She's seeing too much; she'll get it all mixed up. But what a queer idea! Does she want to come to school?"

"That's just it. She'd like to have a term, or as much of it as is left, in an English school, and she seems to have been fascinated by our girls on that dance evening. She says she can't bear the thought of any more travelling, and she doesn't know the people in Canada, and the thing that would make

her really happy would be to be allowed to be a schoolgirl again. I understand what she feels, and I should like to help her; but I don't see how we can squeeze in even one more, do you?"

Joan knit her brows. "It seems a dreadful pity to have to refuse, just for that reason. Couldn't we squash the girls a little more tightly?"

Miss Macey laughed. "I feel we have already filled your house to bursting point; Joy's house, I should say! I will not write to Janice until tomorrow, and if you can think of any corner to squeeze her into you can let me know."

"I'll talk to mother and Joy," Joan said thoughtfully. "I'll be sorry if we have to refuse."

She turned to the door, and then came back again quickly. "I can think of one way already, Miss Macey. Although we're so crowded, Joy and I have our own rooms, and it doesn't seem quite fair, when the others are so packed in together. I wouldn't like to ask Joy to give up her room or to have me in with her; but I'd love to give up my room for Jandy Mac! It's small, of course; we had to leave the bigger rooms for the girls; but it's cosy. Might she come, if she could have my room?"

"Would you sleep with your mother?"

"I don't want to suggest that," Joan said. "Of course I'd love it; I slept with her when we lived in the Abbey. Joy has always had her own room, and I know she likes to be alone. I like being with mother, but she isn't sleeping well at present, and I'm afraid it would disturb her to have me in the room."

"It isn't our being here that has caused the sleeplessness, I hope?" Miss Macey asked. "I should be very sorry if we had upset her; I know she is not strong."

"Oh, I don't think it's that. But things haven't been exactly peaceful this term," Joan said, laughing.

"That was not our fault," Miss Macey protested.

"No, it wasn't. Mother has these times when she can't sleep, and I know that lately she has been reading rather than lying in the dark and thinking. She wouldn't put on the light if I were there, and she'd be restless."

"I understand that. But if you give up your room for Janice, where will you go?"

"To the Abbey," Joan said promptly. "If you'll give permission, there's nothing I'd like better. I'll sleep in the little room that used to be Joy's bedroom; it's still furnished just as it was, and I often go in there to hide if tourists come and Ann has to show them round. I'd be here for breakfast and school every morning. If you wouldn't mind my going to the Abbey after supper each night, I'd love to sleep there again, and Jandy Mac could have my room."

"It's a very generous offer," Miss Macey began.

"I'm afraid it isn't," Joan cried, laughing. "If you knew how I feel about the Abbey, and how sorry I was to leave it, you'd know I'm not being a scrap generous!"

Miss Macey laughed also. "I understand; I know something of your feeling for your Abbey. Suppose you discuss the plan with your mother and Joy, and let me know to-morrow how they feel about it."

"They won't mind. Mother knows I'd be safe in the Abbey, and Joy will say, 'You're mad about that old place. I should stop in it altogether, if I were you!' Aren't we queer mixtures?" Joan said thoughtfully. "Joy loves to wander about alone; Cicely Hobart calls her 'The Cat that Walked by Himself on His Wild Lone,' or 'Traveller's Joy.' And yet she loves to be one of a crowd, and to have the girls here. She says the house will be terribly dull when you all go away!"

"And you're a very friendly person, but you're craving to get away into your Abbey and be by yourself," Miss Macey added. "There are two sides—probably more—to each of us; and each of them wants to be satisfied, you know."

"I suppose that's it. That's true, anyway," Joan agreed, and went to tell the news to Joy.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE TEDDY-BEAR ARRIVES

"Jandy Mac seems to be jolly fond of us," Joy said, raising her eyebrows, when she heard the news.

"This was her first real bit of England, except London. Perhaps she feels as we did about our first country dance: that it would always be special and a little bit different from all the rest," Joan said. "You know how Jenny-Wren talks about 'The Mary and Dorothy': she calls it 'my dance,' because it was her first."

"It's because she had it with you, at her first dance evening. Jenny-Wren would kiss your toe gladly at any time."

"Ass!" said Joan. "I say, Joy, we'll ask if we may meet Jandy Mac with the car and bring her here, shall we? Somebody will have to go, and it's your job, as she's coming to your house. I'd like to come too."

"It's your job. You'll be her queen," Joy retorted. "You'll have to look after her, as she'll be a new girl. You'd better take her in hand from the first."

"I didn't expect to have to mother new girls who had left school. But I'd like to make Jandy feel at home."

"You're starting in fine style by giving her your room. She'll be moved to tears when she finds out."

"Then don't tell her! *I* think her tears will be of envy, because I'm having the Abbey all to myself. Jandy Mac would have liked to be sent to sleep in the Abbey, I believe."

Joy laughed. "You wouldn't let anybody else have the chance! Right, Your Majesty! We'll take the car to the station to meet the teddy-bear."

"Why the teddy-bear?" Joan demanded.

"Sounds much nicer than the kangaroo. Isn't Australia the place where they have real live teddy-bears? I've read about them; koalas, they're called."

"It's better than kangaroo," Joan agreed.

"Is Jandy Mac coming all the way from Scotland alone?"

"She's travelling as far as London with friends. She'll stay one night in town with them, and they'll put her in the train for Wycombe."

"And she'll descend on us during the morning. Don't let the Head tell her she's coming here!" Joy pleaded. "Ask her just to say she'll be glad to

have a teddy-bear in the school; the more the merrier. Let it be a glorious surprise when she finds herself here instead of in town."

Joan laughed. "I'll ask Miss Macey, 'Traveller's Joy.' It's a very Joy-ish idea."

"A very joyous idea for Jandy Mac! Don't tell the girls either. Let's present her to them as a shock."

Janice was in a very contented mood as she travelled out from London. She had won her point, and was having her own way in spite of the opposition of her relations, which was naturally very soothing and pleasant; they had wished her to go to Montreal, but she had resisted the idea stoutly, saying she could not bear to visit another continent. Time enough for Canada and New York later on! She would much prefer to see more of England, and particularly of the English countryside, during the summer months. Miss Macey's consent had been the deciding factor in the argument, and Jandy had come south joyfully, to be a schoolgirl once more and to renew her friendship with the Abbey Girls.

Her eyes were on the fields and woods as the train carried her beyond the last outskirts of London. The country had changed; in Scotland there had still been may flower on the bushes, but here it was gone; and the hedges were powdered with the pink and white of wild roses, and with a heavy creamy flower whose name she did not know. The trees were no longer bare, but were a marvellous delicate green, and many of the fields had a thin green covering.

"I'm going to like this!" Janice said exuberantly, as the train ran into Wycombe station. "I wish the school wasn't right in the town, but I guess I'll manage to get out into the country sometimes! They said somebody would meet me; one of the mistresses, I suppose. I'll have to be very polite and proper."

"Glad to see you, Jandy Mac! Are you going to learn to dance?" Joan ran up with a cheery greeting, as Janice sprang down to the platform.

"Or are you going to wander round the country with me? Come and find your luggage!" cried the second red-haired girl.

Janice gasped, and laughed. "Are you meeting me? Oh, how marvellous of you! Lovely of Miss Macey to send you!"

"We can manage Mackums—to a certain extent," Joy informed her. "We're careful not to go too far, but she's under a deep obligation to us at the moment, and she's being quite sensible about it. She shows her gratitude by giving us everything we want—but only up to a certain point. Beyond that we have to be jolly careful."

"Don't be an ass, Joy! Are these your trunks? And the suitcase? Billy will put them in the car." And Joan called to the young chauffeur. "Come

and tuck yourself in. It will be a tight fit; we aren't fairy-like babes, and neither are you. But we'll manage it."

"Did Miss Macey send her own car?" Janice marvelled, as she was stowed in the middle place of the back seat, with an Abbey Girl on each side of her, and her suitcase beside Billy in front.

"No, she's mine," said Joy. "Quite our newest treasure; small, of course, but we'll have a bigger one later on. Like her?"

"Rather! Do you come to school in her every day?"

Joy laughed. "No, we bike. But to-day is rather special. Don't ask questions, Teddy! You'll soon see."

"Teddy?" Janice stared at her. "Why Teddy? Isn't Jandy good enough?"

"I think so," Joan agreed. "I'm going to call you Jandy Mac."

"Teddy-bear. Don't you have them in Australia?"

"Oh! Yes, of course we do. They're rather darlings."

"Then it's a compliment," said Joy.

"Thanks!" Janice said, laughing. "Oh, where are we going? The school's down that way; we're going right away from it!"

Joan nodded. "You wait five minutes, Jandy Mac! You don't know what's happened to us."

"Or what's going to happen to you," Joy added.

"Five minutes!" Janice looked at her watch. "I'll do it; five minutes, and then you'll tell me."

Her eyes widened, as the car swept towards the hills and began to climb. She turned and stared at Joan and then at Joy, but asked no questions till the time was up. The girls laughed, but did not explain.

"Now!" Janice fairly exploded. "Where are we going? We're right up on the hills, miles away from the school. Have you kidnapped me? Are you taking me to the Abbey?"

Joy's laugh rang out. "Right first shot, Teddy-bear!"

"Yes! No!" said Joan. "We're going to the Abbey, but you've not been kidnapped. The whole school is living there. Isn't it sport?"

"In the Abbey?" Janice gave a shout.

"Well, at the Hall. They've moved out, on Joy's invitation, for the whole term."

"It was either that or a stodgy boarding-house or hotel," Joy explained. "We had room for them, and poor Mackums was so distraught that I said, 'Come along,' and they came."

"Mackums is Miss Macey, Jandy Mac. There was a case of diphtheria, two days after you saw us, and all the drains had to come up. Miss Macey had to close the school, and we invited them to come to us."

"Then am I going to live in your ripping house? Really and truly?" Janice asked incredulously. "Oh, what marvellous luck! That lovely place! I hoped I'd see it again, but to live in it—I can't believe it!"

"It is rather luck for you," Joy agreed. "That's not conceit—I don't mean because it's my house. But it's much more fun to be at school here than at school in town."

"It's simply wonderful! I'd have been off my head with joy all the way from Scotland if I'd had the slightest idea! Miss Macey didn't tell me a word about it."

"We asked her to let us tell you," Joan said. "Don't upset us in your excitement."

"Good thing we're tightly wedged." Joy grinned. "The Teddy-bear would have us all in the road if she had room to jump about."

"Well, it *is* thrilling," Janice protested. "I wanted to see the country, but I never dreamt of living in it. I was hoping for a half-day out now and then, or an occasional walk."

Joan laughed. "You'll see plenty of the country. If we have a lot of rain you'll want to escape and go back to town."

"I'll show you the country," Joy promised. "I know every track and path for miles."

Janice turned to her quickly. "Do you know the Monks' Path?"

"The Monks' Path?" The girls stared at her.

"Never heard of it," said Joy.

"You don't mean the underground passage to the hills?" Joan began doubtfully. "But how could you know about that? We've only discovered it during the last few weeks. We didn't know it existed when you were here before."

"I don't think it's underground. Somebody who knew this place years ago, when he was quite young"—Janice chose her words carefully—"told me that if I ever came here and saw the Abbey I was to look out for the Monks' Path."

"Gracious!" Joy cried. "Who was he? And why have we never heard about it?"

"I don't think people know," Janice said thoughtfully. "He told me—it was a very long while ago—I think he said he was sure it was the Monks' Path, but nobody else had thought of it. It led to the Abbey, he said."

Joan's eyes blazed with eagerness. "We must find it! It would be another bit to add to the Abbey! Oh, anyway, Jandy Mac, the Abbey's twice as big as it was when I showed it to you!"

## CHAPTER X

### THE STORY OF THE ABBEY

"Tell me!" Janice cried. "What have you done to it? Stretched it? Added a top flat?"

"No, found the basement!" Joy chuckled. "Joan's off her head with joy. I don't believe she slept for a week. We've adopted two hooligans who were rampaging about in the Abbey, and by chance they stumbled on a door no one had ever known about, and it turned out to be a passage leading to the Hall."

"Underground; and another tunnel led up to the hills, to be a way of escape," Joan took up the story, a quiver of excitement in her voice. "Two kiddies, Janice, a girl and a boy—Della and Dick—were staying in the village with Mrs. Watson's mother and stepfather; Ann Watson is the caretaker, you know. These little wretches insisted on playing in the Abbey, and Ann was soft and couldn't stop them; I didn't know, of course. They found the old door, and we discovered them, and then we found the passages. And in a cave-place off one of the tunnels we found the Abbey books and the church plate; glorious things! You'll see them at the Abbey. And then—it was thrilling beyond all words! The small boy went exploring on his own, and when we found him he'd fallen down a well, right underground, below even the tunnels. And what do you think the well was? And where do you think it was?" She looked in triumph at Janice, her eyes like stars.

"It was something and somewhere that pleased you enormously." Janice looked at her curiously. "What and where was it, besides being an underground well?"

"It was the hermit's well, the holy well round which the Abbey was built. And it was in the crypt of the great church; the old church, underneath the big one that has disappeared—a most lovely little place." Joan's tone was full of reverent joy. "Real Saxon pillars—very early work, Jandy Mac, and most beautiful. The old well is in one corner of it, and also the tomb of the first Abbot, Michael, who built the Abbey. It's the greatest possible treasure; it has doubled the interest and the beauty of the Abbey."

"Don't forget the jewels, and the story of my ancestress," said Joy.

"Jenny-Wren shall tell her about Lady Jehane. That was her discovery. We've had some thrilling weeks while you've been in Scotland, Jandy Mac!"

"Seems as if you had! Who is Jenny-Wren? Not the new little boarder? I spoke to her at your crowning evening."

"Jen Robins, but we call her Jenny-Wren. She helped in the discoveries, and she made one of the biggest all by herself. She'll love to tell you about it."

"I shall ask Jenny-Wren! I liked that kid."

"She's been rather a sport," Joy said. "She and her chum, Jacky-boy, were playing they were a married couple, and they've gone and adopted a family and are trying to bring it up nicely. But they're finding they have their hands full."

"Miss Macey insisted on the hooligans, as Joy calls them, coming into the school, as their parents were abroad," Joan explained. "Then Dick broke his leg, when he fell into the well, so he's safely parked in bed and being no trouble to us. Jack and Jen adopted Della, and she sleeps in their room, and they're trying to train her. She needs it; it's jolly decent of the kids, for they're no older than she is."

"Oh—look!" A cry from Janice interrupted her. "How perfectly marvellous! Why didn't you warn me?"

The car had reached the edge of the hills, and the view spread below seemed to stretch to the end of the world. The flat country ended in distant blue mist; the slope of the hills was clothed with dense woods, and the road dipped and went winding down through them.

"What trees are they?" Janice pleaded. "I saw lots of them from the train. They're such a lovely green."

"Beech," Joy said promptly. "You should see the woods in autumn!"

"And what's the white flowery thing in the hedges? There! We just passed some. Did I smell it?"

"I expect you did," Joan said, laughing. "It's elder; elderberry, you know."

"You can make wine from the berries, but it isn't very nice," Joy added. "I'll show you my flower when you go out with me 'Traveller's Joy,' running all over the hedges."

"Haven't you a nickname, too?" Janice looked at Joan.

"Only 'Joan-Violet,' after my May day colour. Some people still call me 'Abbey-Girl,' because I was, when they knew me first. Here we are! The lane runs along the side of our garden, between us and the Manor grounds."

"There's the pond." Janice turned to Joy. "When you told us about it, we were sure you'd trespassed and gone over to that island."

"Nobody else is using it. The place has been shut up for ages," Joy protested. "It doesn't hurt it to be looked at! If they care about it they should come and live here. I wouldn't go, if there was any one living in the house."

"I hope you wouldn't," Joan remarked. "Now we turn into the road, and here's our gate, Jandy Mac!"

"And we'll go up that lovely avenue," Janice murmured happily. "To think that I'm going to live here! It's worth a dozen trips to Canada!"

"Has your aunt gone alone?" Joan asked. "Won't she be lonely?"

"One of the others has gone with her; there's a big family of them. I met some jolly cousins. Aunty has gone to see a brother whom I don't know. It wouldn't have been very thrilling for me."

"But you'd have gone to see Niagara! Everybody goes to see Niagara!" Joy argued.

"Niagara will still be there next time I come home. I'll go to Canada then. I'm just frightfully thankful I didn't miss this!" Janice said fervently, as the turn in the drive brought the Hall into view. "Oh, how beautiful it is now!"

The garden was a blaze of colour. The tulips had gone, but the beds were gay with great clumps of lupin, holding up masses of blue and yellow spikes, while peonies made splashes of crimson beside groups of pale blue and yellow iris. The trees round the lawn were in full flower, and pink and white chestnuts, red and white hawthorn, and white and purple lilac were making carpets of their petals on the grass, while the laburnums hung in sheets of palest gold.

"It's a bit gaudy"—Joy grinned, to hide her pride—"but it only lasts like this for a week or two. It's in full dress for your benefit, Teddy-bear. D'you want dark glasses to drown the colours?"

"We shall have the roses in a week or so," Joan said. "Jandy Mac will see your ramblers, 'Traveller's Joy.' "

"I love it all!" Janice said fervently.

As the car drew up at the door a small figure rushed down the steps, with flying yellow plaits and green girdle, short blue tunic and long black legs.

"Joan-Queen! I say, Joan, Dick's gone, so you won't need to go and live in the Abbey, after all!"

"Gone?" Joan cried, leaping out. "Gone where? Gone how? He's got a broken leg! He can't go anywhere!"

"His aunt came in a big car, and they carried him out and put him in it, lying down. He didn't want to go, but Miss Macey had told her about his accident, and she said she must have him to look after him. Fancy anybody wanting Dicky!"

"Dicky's the worst of the two hooligans," Joy explained to Janice. "He didn't like being kept in a girls' school, and he doesn't like his aunt. Where did he want to go?"

"Back to the cottage, to be nursed by Mrs. Clarke, Della says. But the Head jolly well wouldn't have that, after what happened before."

"Mrs. Clarke is Ann Watson's mother." Joan turned to Janice. "She's married again, to a man living in our village; she comes from the north. So we're rid of Dicky! It's quite good news. What does Della say about it, Jenny-Wren? Hasn't she gone, too?"

"She cried pints, so they let her stay," Jen said simply. "She wasn't crying about Dicky, though. She didn't want to go away from me and Jack."

"I can understand that," Joan said, laughing. "But I wonder that her aunt gave in."

"Oh, my dear girl!" said Joy. "The aunt can put up with Dicky, as he'll be stuck in bed for weeks, but she didn't want Della about the house. Only too pleased to have her off her hands, I expect. Mackums will shunt Della on to them when the hols. come."

"So you won't need to go away, Joan-Queen," Jen cried again. "The new girl can have Dick's bed."

"I don't know about that!" Joan said vigorously. "Here's a friend of yours, Jenny-Wren."

"Glad to see you again, Janet," called Janice, from the car, where she was disentangling herself.

"Oh! Who are you?" Jen cried, staring at her. "I've seen you before, but you look different, somehow. Where were you?"

"At the coronation, in a pink frock. I expect I do look different," Janice admitted.

"The nice girl I talked to? And you've come to school—oh, what sport! But I thought you were grown-up—nearly!"

"Not quite," Janice said, laughing. "I've ungrown myself and come back to school. Are you going to teach me to dance?"

Jen's eyes gleamed. "I don't know very much myself yet, but Joan says my setting isn't too bad. I'll teach you that, if you like—and siding."

"Right! You shall teach me setting and siding, whatever they are! When will you start?"

## CHAPTER XI

### JANICE COMES TO SCHOOL

"We thought you would like to have a room of your own," Joan said, as she opened the door. "This is a little place, but you'll have it to yourself. The house is packed in every corner, of course."

"I didn't understand, when I asked if I could come." Janice looked round with great satisfaction. "What a pretty little room! How have you managed to let me have it all to myself? I do prefer it; you were quite right. But haven't I turned somebody out?"

"That's all right. I hope you'll be comfortable. It's a jolly nice bed, and the window looks over the garden towards the Abbey, but you can't see much except in winter, when the trees are bare."

Janice whirled round on her. "It's your room! You've moved out, to give it to me! Haven't you?"

Joan laughed. "I want you to have it; I want you to be comfortable. I didn't mean you to know. Why did you guess?"

"I can't take your room!" Janice cried. "Isn't there anywhere else you could put me? And where are you going?"

"I shall be all right! I'm going to enjoy myself."

"That Jen kid said something about the Abbey. Are you having to turn out of the house for me?"

Joan sat on the edge of the bed and gazed at her. "I'm going back to the Abbey. I'm thrilled to the limit to have such a good excuse. So you needn't worry. I shan't be lonely; I have friends living in the Abbey!"

"Do you mean the monks? You said you saw them sometimes."

"I do; they are friends, of course. But I meant the Mother Superior and the Curate and Timmy. Timmy is the grey Persian infant you saw before; he's supposed to live in the Abbey, but half the time he's here in the house with us."

Janice laughed. "Is the Mother Superior the round black lady who adopted him?"

"Rather! The Curate is her last son, a year old now; black, with a white spot under his chin. They're great friends of mine, and they'll love having me in the Abbey again."

"I hate turning you out!" Janice exclaimed. "It's frightfully good of you, but I don't like doing it. The kiddy said there was another room, now that

the small boy has gone. Couldn't I be put there, and then you could keep your room?"

"Dick's room was just a cupboard, right up at the top in the attics. It was the only place we could spare for him. We shouldn't think of letting you go up there. And I don't want to! Miss Macey has said I may go to the Abbey, and I mean to keep her to it!"

"What about wet nights, when it's raining hard?"

Joan laughed. "Then I go by underground, as Joy says—through the tunnels we've just discovered. We must show you all our new finds! The passage leads to the chapter-house; I'd only have to rush across the garth to the cloisters."

"I know you'll love being there; I'd like it myself," Janice confessed. "But will you be comfortable enough?"

"Oh, rather! I've seen to that. I've been furnishing ever since Miss Macey agreed to the plan. The Mother Superior is frightfully intrigued to find my bed made up again, and the Curate spends his life on my down-quilt. Timmy is everywhere, all at once, of course. You'd better see my room; then you'll be satisfied. But you must be in the house with the rest. You want to feel you're really back at school."

Janice laughed. "That's true. I want to get to know your girls."

"Oh, it wouldn't do for you to be a hermit in a cell—or a nun living in cloisters! The Abbey's my home."

"But you're the Queen! Shouldn't you be with the girls, in case you want to boss them?"

Joan's laugh rang out. "I'm not a bossy person! They'll have enough of me during the day; I shall be here before breakfast and until after supper; I'm not really going to be a hermit. Are you going to do the thing properly and wear a tunic and school colours, as we all do?"

"Oh, sure! Miss Macey said I'd get the things when I arrived. I'm not grown-up! I'm going to be fifteen again. Haven't you girls as old as I am?"

"Plenty. You'll meet them presently. Leave your hat and coat, and we'll interview Matron. She came with Miss Macey and the boarders, of course, and she brought some of the maids from the school; ours couldn't do all the extra work. When we've turned you into a regular schoolgirl we'll go and look for the others. Clever of you to come on a Saturday morning! There's dancing in the hall to-night. You've timed it very well."

Janice agreed with her by the time evening came. Her Saturday arrival had been a good plan, and had given her a chance to make friends and to feel at home. During the morning she met the boarders, who numbered only twenty-six, including herself, Joan and Joy, and Della Jessop, the "girl-hooligan" from the Abbey, who had been taken into the school and adopted

by Jen and her chum Jacqueline. In the afternoon almost all the day-girls turned up, to watch or to play in a cricket match in the big field set aside for their use, and Janice went with Joan to be introduced to Carry Carter, Joy's maid-of-honour, to Muriel Bayne, Joan's own maid, to Nell Branscombe, who led the musical girls of the school, to Edna Gilks, who was a keen country dancer, to Nora Black, the cricket captain, and many others among the seniors.

"Are you keen on cricket?" Nora looked at the stranger's tall straight figure. "An Australian ought to be a help. Do you play?"

"A bit," Janice admitted. "But you've got your team. And I want to learn those dances."

"That's what young Jen Robins said. She's played with her brothers, and she ought to be in the junior team," Nora grumbled. "But she's a violent Hamlet Club person, and we can't have her. I feel she ought to play for the school."

"But, as Jandy Mac says, you've got your team, Nora," Joan remarked. "They're jolly good, so you needn't worry Jenny-Wren."

As she walked with Janice to the field, Joan added, "I don't want Jen interfered with at present. The dancing is doing her good; she's developing in all sorts of ways, and already she isn't as slangy in her talk as she was. She loves anything beautiful quite passionately, and the dances and the music *are* beautiful. It's all very good for her."

"She's going to teach me to set and turn single," Janice said, laughing.

"She's going to be very good. You'll learn nothing wrong from Jenny-Wren. She grasped things at once, and she's wonderfully keen."

"Your team's good, too," Janice said, after she had watched for a while. "Their fielding's very smart, and your bowling's first class."

"We've only the one bowler, though. That's our trouble. Irene can't be kept on for ever, and we've no one really good to put on when she's tired. You'll see presently."

Janice's keen eyes did see, and she pursed her lips. The captain took the ball for a time, but the visiting team played happily with her bowling, and soon Irene was in her place again.

"She isn't doing so well. She's lost pace," Janice exclaimed.

"She's tired. She'll do her best, but she can't bowl all through the innings. Nora will try Doreen or Elsie, but they aren't up to much."

"And the rest of you aren't available because of the dancing?"

"Hamlet Club people can't be in the team. With exam work it makes too much."

"That's so," Janice agreed. "But I don't need to work; it doesn't matter for me. Would they let me do both? I'm mad to learn those dances, but I

could help that team, you know.”

Joan glanced at her quickly. “You’re a bowler?”

“I bowl a bit.”

Joan nodded, understanding what this meant. “Nora will ask you to try, when they’re at the nets one day. Then we’ll consult Miss Macey—oh, good! Irene’s got that wicket!”

“Yes, middle stump. She’s a jolly fine bowler.”

“Nell Branscombe could play, if she would,” Joan said soberly. “She isn’t in the Hamlet Club. She leads the Musical Society and gets up concerts; she’s always bothering Joy to play for her, or to write songs for one of the rest to sing. But she isn’t a scrap interested in cricket, so she’s no use. She plays a little tennis. I suppose you’re good at that too?”

“I’ve played a bit,” Janice said again, her eyes twinkling. “Well, you don’t expect me to say, ‘Yes, jolly good. Hot stuff; first class!’ Do you?”

Joan laughed. “We’ll judge for ourselves. We’ve very decent courts.”

“I saw them. They looked ripping. What I’d like,” Janice confessed, “would be to have all the fun of being at school, but not to trouble about the work! I want to learn your English dances and songs, and bowl for your cricket team, and play tennis, and not waste time on bookwork. I’m supposed to have had enough to go on with! But your work here will be on new lines to me, and not too easy, I expect. I’d rather just enjoy myself, but it doesn’t seem like playing the game towards Miss Macey.”

“I don’t suppose she’ll expect you to swot as we have to do. Several of us are going for matric. or leaving certificate exams in a few weeks, and we have to stick at our work; we must try to get through for the credit of the school! If you could do just enough——!” Joan hinted.

“To keep up appearances, so that the rest of you won’t be too envious,” Janice agreed, laughing. “I think perhaps I can manage that, Abbey-Queen.”

## CHAPTER XII

### JANICE LEARNS TO DANCE

Janice, watching with a half-grown-up eye, decided during her first day that Joan Shirley was a success as May Queen. Her authority was vaguely defined, and was supposed to be more a matter of influence than of action; she did not appear to use it at all, but she was watchful, and she had an intuitive understanding sympathy with the younger girls which told her when to help and how to do it.

Her comments on Nora's difficulties as captain, on Nell's absorption in her music, on little Jen's love of beauty and her development under the pressure of the new forms in which it had reached her, were all justified, Janice saw; she noted, too, how Joan watched carefully lest Jen and her chum Jacqueline should be too heavily burdened by their self-imposed task of taking care of Della Jessop.

Della, a child of thirteen with a mane of brown hair, had been taken into the school by the headmistress as a result of her escapades with her brother in the Abbey. Jen and Jack had adopted her out of sympathy, and were trying to train her in the way she should go. Joan approved, but was quietly determined that the youthful foster-parents should not be imposed upon.

"We're not both her mothers," Jen explained to Janice, as they went to the hall shortly before the evening dancing was to begin. "Jacky-boy's her daddy. I'm the mother of the family."

Janice glanced out to where Jack was racing towards the cricket nets; with her cropped black hair and long legs she was obviously the father of the adopted family. "Doesn't Jacky-boy dance, too? I was afraid I'd be stealing your partner."

"Oh, no, she's all out for cricket. She's in the junior eleven; she won't fag to learn the dances. I haven't a regular partner; Nesta takes me, or Molly, or anybody. I'll take you for to-night and look after you."

"That's awfully good of you," Janice said, with sincere gratitude. "I don't know the first thing about it."

"I think you do know the first thing," Jen said shrewdly. "Being frightfully keen is the first thing; you can't do much without that. You know that much, don't you?"

"Sure I do." Janice looked down at her small partner with appreciation. "I'm very keen. Is that the point you started from?"

"Rather! Come into a corner and practise setting, and I'll show you what we mean by siding and arming. You'll find them easier when the music starts; they fit so marvellously."

"Who plays for you?"

"You should say 'for us,'" Jen reproved her. "Mostly it's Joy Shirley. If Cicely Hobart comes, or Miriam Honor—the first two queens, you know—they take turns, and whenever we can get her we like to have Miss Lane and her fiddle. But Joy's really the best; she plays anything at sight, and her music's jolly nice to dance to. When she wants to dance, or to learn something new, we have to put up with somebody from the Musical, but it's not the same. They don't dance themselves, and it seems to make a difference. I hope Joy will play to-night."

"Does your adopted daughter dance or play cricket?"

"Jack's making her take up cricket; she's never done very much. We thought it would be best for her. Now look! This is set and turn single; you count eight."

Janice watched the slim, light little figure with the bobbing yellow plaits, in delight. "I shall never do it like that; I'm far too hefty! But I'd like to try. Show me what you did, Jenny-Wren."

"Having a lesson, Jandy Mac?" Joan passed their corner and called a greeting. "I knew you were in good hands."

"She'll be quite all right, Joan. She's keen, and she understands awfully quickly," the small teacher cried.

"If she understands awfully quickly she'll find it awfully easy and she'll learn awfully well," Joan mocked.

"Oh! It sounds just awfully silly when you say it," Jen said ruefully. "All right, Your Majesty! I'll try to remember."

Joan flashed a laughing look at Janice, and passed on to speak to some new arrivals, old girls of the club who had not come to the afternoon match.

"Glad to see you, Dorothy! Cicely has worked out the jolliest new dance from the book. It's called 'Oaken Leaves,' and it sounds as if we'd all love it. Joy says the tune makes her think of buttercups."

"Buttercups? Why?" asked Dorothy Darley, a senior who had left school a year ago.

"Buttercups and daisies in a field. It's so springy—in both senses of the word," Joy said, and went to the piano.

"We'll start with something easy," Joan remarked. "We've a visitor from Australia, who doesn't know very much. We'll give her a dance or two, before we try anything new. Jandy Mac! Come and meet some of our old members."

"That's an odd name," said Georgie Gilks, Edna's elder sister, and one of the original dancers of the club.

"Janice Macdonald, and she doesn't know a single thing except what she's learned from Jenny-Wren in the last ten minutes."

Janice, in her new blue tunic and green girdle, came forward. "I saw Joan being crowned a month ago, and I recognise ever so many of you who were in the procession that night. Joan-Queen calls me Jandy Mac for short."

Joy at the piano struck up "Bonnets so Blue." Joan caught Janice by the hand, and led her to the top of a line that formed at the first chord. "Oh, yes, you can! There's nothing in it; I'll tell you as we go along. You must join in the easy ones."

"But I was going to dance with Jenny-Wren!"

"The next one. The newest member has the first dance with the Queen," Joan explained. "You're an adopted member. Give your right hand to Edna, and when I say 'Change!' give the left instead. After that I'll look after you."

"Oh, I like it!" Janice cried softly, after a few turns, when she had at last accomplished the 'cast' safely and met her partner for the swing on the correct beat of the music.

Joan laughed. "You'll like it more, the more you do, Jandy Mac. We'll have 'Rufty Tufty,' and you can practise your setting and siding. I'll hand you over to Jen, and she'll tell you off if you aren't good enough."

"Like it, Teddy-bear?" Joy looked up from the piano, as Janice presently leaned upon it to rest, while the girls formed into rings of eight to learn the new dance.

"I love it, 'Traveller's Joy.' It's great fun."

Joy nodded, and played the A music over softly. "Isn't it a jolly little tune?"

"Jandy Mac, we want you! One more person needed to make up a set," Joan called. "Oh, yes, you can! Don't funk! We don't know anything about it yet; you can learn it with the rest of us."

"It really isn't a hard one," the President, Cicely, turned to the stranger with a smile. "If you don't come I shall have to dance as well as teach, and I can't see what all the sets are doing. They'll take care of you. Peggy Gilks hasn't a partner."

Peggy, a cousin of Edna and Georgie and one of the maids in the May day procession, was already coming, her hand outstretched. "I'll pull you through. Never mind if you make mistakes; we all do at first."

"If the first figure bothers you, don't worry; the others are easier," Cicely said. "Don't be fourth couple, Peg; there's a quick change for them. Be any

other place; yes, third's easier. Now, girls!"

"Oh, don't you have to think hard!" Janice groaned, when at last they were allowed to rest, before going right through the dance. "I can never remember all that! You'll remind me, won't you, partner?"

"You were jolly good!" Peggy exclaimed. "Is it really your first time? I made a frightful mess of things when I started."

"I feel like apologising to the rest of our set."

"They feel like thanking you for making up our numbers. It was awfully plucky!" Peggy said warmly.

"Jandy Mac, I want you to speak to mother." Joan came up to Janice when the dance was over, chasing away Grey Timmy, who had appeared in the doorway and seemed to be looking for a partner. "Shoo! You'll get trodden on and killed, Tim! No room in sets for baby cats! Go and find the Curate, and dance your own kind of dances with him. We all know you can skip and run! Clear out! I say, Jandy Mac, you're going to be a real help! You picked that up like magic."

Janice turned to her with shining dark eyes. "It's the best fun I've ever had in my life! I felt an awful ass, but I did love it."

"Oh, you needn't! Everybody thinks you're marvellous for a new person. The next is harder, so we'll let you sit out and watch."

"I want to rest. I'm nearly dead. I'm not used to it, please remember! What is the next one?"

"'The Boatman'; we're only learning it. Such a jolly tune!"

"You talk to Aunty, Teddy-bear," said Joy from the piano, as they passed her.

"I saw her, in the middle of all that hectic mess. Does she always watch the dancing?"

"She loves it. It wasn't a hectic mess," Joan scolded. "Mother, dear, this is Janice, from Australia."

Janice had seen the little quiet lady come down the big staircase and take a chair near the piano. Mrs. Shirley was dark and small; there was no likeness between her and Joan.

"There couldn't be, of course," Janice had said to herself, as she waited for her turn in the dance. "Joan's like her father, and Joy's like *her* father. They're both Shirleys; there isn't a scrap of her mother in Joan—to look at—nor of Uncle Tony in Joy. Queer to think I might have been Joy's half-cousin! I can't quite forget it."

Mrs. Shirley smiled up at her. "Sit down, my dear; you look hot! What is it Joan calls you—Jandy? Are you enjoying the dancing?"

"I never felt so stupid in my life," Janice assured her gravely. "They all know so much about it."

"I thought you must know a little, by the way you learned that new one."

"I only know what I learned in five minutes from young Jen, just before we started. She must be a good teacher."

"Oh, Jenny-Wren! Did she give you a lesson? We are very fond of little Jen," Mrs. Shirley said. "She is almost one of the family. We had her here for a week, before the rest of the school came, so she seems like one of us. She's a very good dancer already."

"She is!" Janice agreed warmly. "And isn't she keen? She's such a kind little soul, too. I saw her looking at me while we were learning that dance; she wasn't in our set, but she kept looking round to see how I was getting on, as if she wanted to encourage me."

Mrs. Shirley laughed. "I expect she feels responsible for you. Jen is always ready to take care of people."

At the end of "The Boatman," Jen came racing up, her plaits flying. "Oh, Jandy Mac, you were topping! Fancy doing a new dance your very first night! Mrs. Shirley, isn't she a sport? I nearly died when I saw Peggy hauling her in. I wanted to go and hold her hand."

"I thought you did," Janice said, laughing. "I was stiff with fright."

"You didn't look scared. Were they nice to you in that set? I wished you'd come into ours." Jen was squatting on the floor, fanning herself.

"Jen, dear, you're too hot. You really must miss the next one," Mrs. Shirley remonstrated.

Jen leaned against her knee. "I'm dead! I couldn't do the next one; it's 'Argeers.' I tried to get into a set, but Joan yanked me out and shooshed me away, just as she did Timmy a few minutes ago." She gave Janice a friendly grin. "I don't really know many dances yet. I've only been at it for a month."

"I'll never dance as you do, no matter how many months I give to it."

Jen's eyes widened. "Oh, that's *rot*! What d'you mean? You can do it just as well as I can, every bit!"

Janice laughed. "All right, kid. But I know what I mean, all the same."

"It's true, isn't it?" She looked up at Mrs. Shirley, when Jen had run off eagerly to make up a set for "The Old Mole." "Isn't there something very good about the kiddy's dancing? I don't know much about it, but she looks so jolly—so much jollier than lots of them. Even I can see that."

"Joan thinks she's going to be very good indeed," Mrs. Shirley agreed. "She and Joy say Jen's movement is so good already. They hope for great things from her. You must see her doing the morris jig, 'Bacca Pipes.' Joan taught her that, during the week she was alone with us here, while we were waiting for the school to come. Her spring, as she dances over the pipes, is delightful. We all feel she's going to be a credit to the Hamlet Club."

"I'm sure she is!" Janice exclaimed, as she watched Jen's quick lithe figure in the skipping heys of "The Old Mole." "It's a treat just to watch her!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### JANICE MAKES FRIENDS

The evening's dancing with the Hamlet Club was Jandy's real introduction to the school. She found herself accepted, and she very soon made friends.

She woke in her little bedroom on Sunday morning to find herself stiff with the unusual exercise. She laughed and lay gazing at the sunlight.

"It's that dancing, of course. It *was* fun! I hope I'll do heaps more. But the dances are all mixed up in my mind. I must entice Jenny-Wren into a corner and make her tell me which was which. It *is* a pretty little room! I hope Joan has been warm enough in the Abbey, with her cats. Talking of cats!" and Janice sat up and listened.

Then she sprang out of bed, with a groan for her tired muscles, and opened the door. The slim black Curate with the white collar under his chin was rubbing himself against the door.

"I heard you cry, young man. What do you want?" Janice asked severely.

He squirmed and rubbed against her legs, and then suddenly skipped away to a door farther down the corridor, and gave his pleading little cry again.

"He's found I'm not Joan! Is that Joy's room, I wonder?"

The door was thrown open, and Joy stood there in green pyjamas, her hair hanging about her in a waving red mane. "So you've come home, Curate. You are a bad boy! Oh, Jandy Mac! Did he wake you?"

"He did," Janice agreed. "And it's only six o'clock. Was he looking for Joan? I'm afraid I was a bitter disappointment."

"I can't have him waking Aunty," and Joy pulled the Curate into her room. "He was out all night, and he's come to tell us he's safely home. He always does it. He's supposed to sleep in the kitchen; his mother and Timmy live in the Abbey mostly, but this boy is allowed to sleep in the house, as we're threatened with mice and he's a great hunter. Some nights he won't come in; I think he goes down to the village to meet girls. If he has a night out he always comes rushing up to our rooms first thing to tell us he's all right."

"How topping of him!" Janice said, laughing.

"I'll keep him quiet. Go back to bed, Jandy Mac. Are your knees sore?"

"I'm lame," Janice assured her. "Would you like me to take the Curate?"

"No, I don't mind him, though I'm not as catty as Joan."

"I shouldn't have called the Queen catty!" Janice protested.

"You know what I mean—a cat-worshipper. Joan loves every cat she sees," and Joy closed her door again.

"Were you comfortable, Joan-Queen?" Janice demanded, as Joan came in from the garden just as the bell rang for breakfast. "I feel so bad about having turned you out."

Joan laughed. "Jandy Mac, I've been up for hours, enjoying my Abbey quietly on my own. It was lovely to have it all to myself again! The sun shone right through the chapter-house and into the cloisters and woke me. I had a perfect night. What about you?"

"I was wakened early too, by a black boy wanting to come into my room."

"Curate doing his rounds," said Joy. "He was out last night, and as usual he had to announce his safe arrival home."

"Oh, that was too bad! He's a very naughty boy," Joan exclaimed.

"I thought it was ripping of him to come to call," Janice assured her. "Was his mother on your bed?"

"Oh, rather—all night; Grey Timmy, too. They were frightfully thrilled to find me there."

"What a lovely surprise for them!" Janice said, laughing.

In the afternoon Joan led her through the newly-discovered passage to the Abbey. As she pressed the knob in the panelling and showed the entrance from the big hall, the Queen called softly, "Jenny-Wren! I want you!"

Jen, sitting reading on the terrace with Jack and Della, came running in eagerly. "Yes, Joan-Queen? Oh, are you going to show the old church to Jandy Mac? Oh, Joan, may I come? I do love going down there!"

"Quietly, then. We can't take all your crowd. We don't want young Della."

"No, Dee doesn't understand how we feel. Even Jacky-boy thinks I'm a bit touched," Jen grinned. "But you don't, Your Majesty. You're as daft about it as I am."

"If you're silly over the Abbey crypt, so am I," Joan agreed. "Be careful on those steps, Jandy Mac!"

Deeply thrilled, Janice followed Joan and Jen through the tunnel. She saw the way up to the chapter-house door, and the long passage which led on and on, and up and up, till it came out among the gorse bushes on the hill; and she peered into the opening in its wall in which the treasures of the Abbey had been found; the parchments, the books, and the church dishes and plate.

Then Joan led the way deeper still, and they stood in the beautiful crypt, with its low-vaulted roof and Saxon pillars, its hermit's well, and the tomb of the first Abbot.

"Oh, wonderful—lovely—marvellous!" Janice murmured. "Oh, I wish I'd helped to find it! How thrilled you must have been!"

Jen pointed to some letters carved roughly on the wall. "Those told us where the jewels were," she said, in a reverent whisper. "The hole was just here."

"Jewels? I haven't heard about any jewels?"

"Jen's going to tell you the story." Joan, like Jen, spoke almost in a whisper. "I left it for you, Jenny-Wren."

Jen's face blazed in delight, but even now she did not raise her voice. "How topping of you, Joan! I'll love to tell her. But not down here; I make a row when I get excited."

The elder girls exchanged a laughing look. "Better not, perhaps," Joan agreed. "You shall tell her presently."

The reverence which Joan and Jen shared for the little old church was very plain to Janice, and she understood why Jack and Della had not been invited to come. She guessed that not even Joy felt as deeply as these two did about this newly-found precious addition to the Abbey they loved; it was a secret between them, which not many people understood or appreciated.

"This is the way I came last night," Joan said, laughing, as they went up the old steps to the hall once more.

"You're quite sure you were warm and comfortable? I loved my room, but I was worried about you."

"I loved *my* room! It felt like being at home again."

"I'd love to sleep in the Abbey," Jen said wistfully. "You've said I shall some day, Joan; don't forget!"

"I won't forget, Jenny-Wren. Take Jandy out to the terrace, and tell her about Lady Jehane and her jewels."

"No more work for us!" growled Jack, throwing down her writing-pad. "How can we stick to letters, if Jen's going to yarn about lay brothers and lovely ladies?"

Joan sat on the window-sill just inside. "Get on with it, Mrs. Wren! And then I want to hear what Jandy Mac did in Scotland."

"You shall hear my adventures," Janice said graciously. "I've been in the presence of the English aristocracy."

"No—really?" Joan said, laughing. "Which part of it?"

"Oh, it's a fact! My grandpa Fraser is old now, but he was the factor for the Earl of Kentisbury."

Joy had come up and was standing behind her cousin in the window.

"Wait a sec!" she interrupted. "What's a factor?"

"It means postman in French," said Della Jessop.

"Does it? I didn't know. In Scotland it means steward or land-agent. There's a white castle near the loch, among lovely trees; not a very big place, but terribly castle-ish! All turrets and towers and narrow slits of windows; and there are beautiful gardens, and a big yacht on the loch, and small boats and a tiny pier."

"But Lord Kentisbury is English," Joan objected. "I read about his son in the paper the other day; he does a lot of flying. Isn't Kentisbury Castle in Sussex?"

"I believe so, but they have this place in Scotland. It came to them through an ancestor. Grandfather told me about them."

"Did you go to tea with the Earl?" Jen sat on a cushion on the terrace and pushed back her plaits and gazed up at Janice. "Is he nice?"

"I only saw him out driving," Janice confessed, laughing. "But I saw Lord Verriton—he's the airman son—and his babies and Lady Verriton; they did a lot of boating, and we used to see them nearly every day. There's a dear little girl about two, with dark curly hair; and a fat fair baby boy, who is the heir to the title after Lord Verriton. Their nurse brought them to our house one day, for Granny to see them—Granny's an invalid and can't go out."

"What are they called?" asked Jack. "Lord and Lady Baby, I suppose?"

"I thought so. But the nurse said they were the Honourable Rhoda and the Honourable Geoff," Janice said seriously. "Nice kids; I played with them while Granny talked to the nurse."

"Did you meet any other wildly thrilling people?" Jack demanded.

Janice laughed. "Not wildly thrilling, but very jolly! We had the great luck to find a sailor cousin at home; it was just a chance that our visit fitted in with his leave. He's been appointed to a line of ships trading between Sydney and Fiji, so I may see something of him when I go home. I hadn't met any of the family, except the two aunts I've lived with. He had a jolly sister called Isobel, and we were great friends. Perhaps she'll come out and live with us some day, to be near him."

"What was his name?" Jen asked.

"Alec, Alec Fraser. Now, Jenny-Wren, what about your yarn? I've done my share," and Janice changed the subject.

Jen plunged eagerly into her story. "I found a little book, among the Abbey parchments and things, and it was all about a girl who used to live here, called Jehane; that's the same as Joan or Jane. Joy's descended from her, and she——"

"Not quite, Mrs. Wren!" Joy protested. "So far as we know, Lady Jehane may never have been married. But she was one of the family."

"I meant she was one of your ancestors!" And Jen told the story of Jehane and her lover Ambrose, the lay brother in the Abbey, and of how he had buried her jewels and they had been found by Joan and Jen. "It was one of the most thrilling moments of my life!" she said, gazing round-eyed up at Janice.

"I'm sure it was." Jandy looked down at the eager little face in ready sympathy. "Well done, Jenny-Wren and Joan! That was something like a discovery!"

While Jen talked, Joan on the window-sill above had been gazing at Janice curiously. There had been something strange in the Australian girl's tone as she spoke of the cousins in Scotland, and especially when she gave their names. Jen and Jack and Della had not noticed, and Joy had wandered away into the garden; but Joan was older, and to her the note in Jandy Mac's voice had been significant.

"After all, she's seventeen and supposed to have left school; and she has travelled. She'd be thinking of herself as a grown-up person, if she hadn't wanted so much to come back to school. Perhaps, some day, if she meets her Fraser cousin again——!"

When Jen's story was told and she had gone back to her book, and Jack, with a grunt of relief, had taken up her pad and ordered Della to finish the letter she was writing to her mother, Janice sat dreaming and gazing at the lupins below the terrace. Joan in the window looked down at her and wondered; were Jandy's thoughts at home in Sydney, or in the past with Ambrose and Jehane? Or were they with somebody much nearer?

Janice looked round and found the Queen's eyes upon her. "Take me for a walk round the garden, Abbey-Girl!" she suggested.

"Delighted!" Joan sprang up. "We've half an hour before tea. Come this way!" and she led Jandy to a narrow path through laurel bushes.

## CHAPTER XIV

### JANICE TELLS HER STORY

"It's like the way to the Abbey, but it goes in the opposite direction," Janice remarked, as they went.

"We'll trespass in the grounds next door. We'll go and look at the pond; there are water-lilies," Joan said. "There's nobody there. It wouldn't do if the kiddies began running about in there, but you and I won't do any harm, and we'll get right away from everybody."

"Unless Joy is trespassing this afternoon, too!"

"I don't think we'll meet her. We like having the school, you know, but sometimes there do seem to be girls in every corner!"

Janice laughed. "There do! I quite agree; I'd been feeling that already. I wanted to talk to you—if you had time and didn't mind—but I felt we'd be sure to tumble over somebody wherever we went."

"It's jolly of you. I've time to-day; to-morrow we'll be busy with work again. I had to leave school when we left London, and I've lost two years. I'm keen to have my matric. certificate, but it means real hard work."

"But you don't need certificates—now."

"No, but I'd like to have it. Joy's going in for junior, chiefly to please Miss Macey; she's a good deal behind, but she gives so much time to music. She doesn't care whether she gets through or not, for her own sake; but she knows Mother would be pleased if she passed, so she really is trying hard now."

Joan led the way across the road from the hills by which they had come the day before, and opened a wicket-gate which led into the open parkland. "This path will take us to the lake; it's quite pretty. I don't believe the Marchwood people, who own it, would mind our coming in to look at the water-lilies."

They sat on the bank, looking out over the lily-leaves to the island, and Janice, in spite of her wish to talk, drifted off again into a dream. Joan waited, wondering if, after all, her new friend would draw back from the confidence that had seemed to be coming. They were still very new friends, and Jandy evidently found it difficult to speak. Suddenly Janice looked up. "Abbey-Queen, what do you think about falling in love?"

Joan gasped a little in surprise. "Jandy Mac, what a question!"

"Have you ever thought about it?" Janice persisted.

"For other people—yes, of course, I have. It must be a wonderful thing. I don't suppose it will ever happen to me, but it must be the happiest thing in the world. I can't somehow imagine either Joy or me as married, and the mother of a family; but I know people do fall in love. What are you thinking about, Jandy Mac? Why did you ask me?"

"Because"—Janice paused and reddened.

"I think," Joan said definitely, "you don't know anything about it, or you wouldn't talk about it."

"That's true," Janice clasped her knees and gazed down at the lake. "But I want to speak to somebody, and my aunt is on her way to Canada. I feel a bit—alone."

Joan's hand shot out and grasped her wrist. "Won't you tell me? Mother would be better, but if it's just that you want to talk it over, perhaps I'd do?"

"That's all I want," Janice said gratefully. "Of course, I'm not going to care for anybody—in that way, you know—for years and years, but—well \_\_\_\_\_"

"You think it may happen sometime, and you know who the other person will be," Joan said shrewdly.

Jandy's colour rose. "I haven't any home, except with my aunts; my mother died when I was two. I'd like to feel I've some place, and some person, of my own."

Joan nodded. "A girl who has always had a home and a mother can't quite understand. If you found the right person, it would be marvellous for you."

"Alec says he's the right person!" Janice cried, with a breathless laugh.

"Oh, Jandy Mac! He said so? He asked you?"

"Oh, rather! I laughed at him, but he was frightfully much in earnest, Joan."

Joan gazed at her thoughtfully. "I don't blame him. You're jolly pretty."

"Rot! But he did mean it. I told him to ask me again later on," Janice confessed. "Do you think that was sensible? I didn't promise anything."

"You aren't ready to promise. But you will be, when the time comes. Oh, Jandy, I'm so glad! You'll be so happy!" Joan cried impulsively.

Janice coloured again. "It's lovely of you to care. I've thought about it a lot, Joan."

"It? Or him?"

"About him," Janice admitted. "He left before I did; he's on his way to Sydney. He said he'd write."

"I'm sure he'll write. You can give Jacky-boy the stamps. She collects them feverishly."

"She shall have them. And I'll send some when I get home. You know, Joan, I believe—I could——" she paused and gazed at the island, her chin resting on her hand.

"Could care for him in the proper way? Was he nice, Jandy Mac?"

"Very!" A laugh flickered in Jandy's dark eyes.

"Tell me about him!"

"Oh, I can't!" Janice protested. "He was jolly good fun, until he began looking—and saying—things in earnest. It was the night before he left, and he said he knew it was too soon, but he couldn't go across the world without telling me. We went out fishing on the loch in Grandfather's boat, and those Verriton people were out too, so we kept away from them. He said I'd lived with Frasers for so long that he was sure I'd like my name to be Jandy Fraser."

"And would you?" Joan asked, laughing.

"Perhaps! I'd like to live in Fiji or Honolulu or Samoa. Samoa, I think; I've always wanted to see the islands. I'd love to be a South Sea Islander."

"We shall never see you again, if you marry Cousin Alec and go and live in Samoa! I hoped you'd be home often for trips and come to look us up every time. The Abbey will still be here, and I suppose we shall."

"How terribly kind of you!" Janice cried, deeply touched. "You've known me for such a very little while, and you've so many friends, that I didn't think you'd care if you never saw me again. I supposed you'd forget all about me."

"I don't suppose I shall," Joan assured her, laughing. "You must come back from your island and remind us of your existence, even if you are Mrs. Fraser."

Janice grew scarlet. "Sounds odd!" she said. "Perhaps you'll be Mrs. Somebody too, and we'll both have armies of kids. We'll introduce our families to one another."

"You're going ahead rather fast for seventeen!"

The smile glimmered in Jandy's eyes again. "I told Miss Macey I was seventeen, when I asked her to let me see you crowned. It was true, but she didn't ask when my birthday was."

"Are you eighteen now?" Joan demanded. "Well, all I can say is, you don't look it. In your tunic yesterday you didn't look a day more than fifteen. But, of course, if you're going to get engaged——!"

"I'm not," Janice said hurriedly. "Not for years; three years, at least."

"Cousin Alec Fraser won't wait three years. Eighteen! You are an ancient person!" Joan mocked. "I feel it's a tremendous compliment to be consulted by somebody so old! I hope my words of wisdom have been helpful. I don't seem to remember having said many."

"It's been helpful to have a sympathetic listener," Janice retorted. "That was what I needed. As Queen, it's your duty to listen to the troubles of your subjects, isn't it?"

"Oh, but this isn't going to be a trouble!" Joan sprang up and held out her hand. "Come along back to tea. This is going to turn into a fairy-tale!"

Janice laughed. "Perhaps. I'll let you know if it does."

"Send me a bit of the wedding-cake!" Joan tucked Jandy's hand under her arm, and led her through the shrubbery to the house.

## CHAPTER XV

### JANICE IN TROUBLE

"Jandy Mac seems to be settling down all right, but she doesn't do much work," Joy remarked a few days later, with a pointed look at Janice.

Joan laughed. "She hasn't come here to work. She's enjoying every minute, and she's very keen on dancing. I'm expecting some fun this afternoon, after what we saw of her tennis yesterday."

"Why this afternoon? I know she slashed Nora's balls all over the place."

"Oh, no, she didn't! She kept them just inside the court, but she put them every time where Nora couldn't reach them. Nora had a shock; they were too swift for her. She asked Jandy Mac to come to the nets to-day for a practice; I'm going to see the fun. Australian cricket should be good."

Janice, in her blue school tunic, was lying on the floor of the big hall, playing with the grey kitten. She looked up and laughed. "Don't mind the Teddy-bear! Discuss her as if she was made of yellow plush. Perhaps her cricket will be dud."

"I don't believe it will. You've made the tennis people sit up, anyway."

"I played a lot at home." Janice chased away the kitten. "I do like this hall of yours, 'Traveller's Joy'! I've seen it looking peaceful and silent and dignified, and I've seen it full of girls dancing, and I've seen it full of girls' heads, and that's the only time it doesn't appeal to me."

"Full of girls' heads, you idiot?" Joy asked, laughing.

"Bent over books, all hard at work; when you put up the long tables and turn it into a schoolroom. It doesn't make a good classroom, with the portraits of your ancestors, and the coats-of-arms in the windows. I always want to run up into the gallery and drop peas on the heads; the sun makes red and blue spots on them. When a red spot comes on your head or Joan's, the result is enough to give any one a shock."

"Oh, go and find something to do, Jandy Mac!" Joan protested, laughing. "Joy and I are trying to work."

"Go and write letters!" said Joy. "You write bags of letters. It's about the only thing you do concentrate on, except country-dancing."

"All my friends want letters from England, to say nothing of aunts and grannies," Janice retorted, going to the staircase.



## Nora dramatically fell on her neck.

“And cousins!” Joan flung after her.

“A few cousins as well,” Janice agreed, running upstairs to her room.

The afternoon practice justified Joan’s expectations and Nora’s hopes. The first ball Janice sent down was so straight and swift that the crowd gasped and then gave a cheer.

“Was it a fluke?” Nora asked anxiously. “Can you do that again?”

Janice laughed and obligingly gave a demonstration to show that she could do it as often as she wished.

Nora dramatically fell on her neck. “Saved! The school is saved! We’ve found a demon bowler! You’ll play in the next match, if I have to stand down myself, Jandy Mac!”

“Oh, I’ll stand down!” Doreen cried. “I’ll sprain my wrist, if you like! You only put me in to make up the team. If the Teddy-bear will take my place, that match is ours.”

“Oh, but you’ve got Irene! She bowled jolly well last time,” Janice exclaimed.

Irene, used to being the school’s only bowler, had been looking a little blank. But she said quickly, “I can’t bowl all the time, and my balls are nothing like yours. I’m going to learn a lot from watching you.”

“We need your balls, too, though,” Janice remarked. “Mine will be a change from yours. We’ll diddle the visiting team between us!”

“I suppose the Head will let you play as well as dance?” Jen pushed out of the crowd and spoke wistfully. “She wouldn’t let me do both. But then you aren’t in earnest about lessons, are you?”

The seniors grinned, as Janice shook her fist at her.

“Blunt, but true, Mrs. Wren,” said Joy. “That’s what we all feel about Jandy Mac. Oh, Mackums will let the Teddy-bear be a cricketer as well as a dancer! You’re in luck, Nora. This term’s matches are safe!”

“Show me how you get that twist, Jandy?” Irene begged.

“I’ll show you all I can, but it’s practice, you know.”

“I’ll practise, you bet! I’d rather bowl your balls than pass matric.”

“Don’t let Miss Macey hear you!” Joan advised, laughing.

Janice, not merely accepted but acclaimed as an asset to the school, was thoroughly content, and her first few weeks were very happy. She learned country-dances and Morris jigs from Joan, explored the field paths and woods with Joy on Sunday afternoons, and stood over Irene as she practised, helping and criticising. She made a big score and took six wickets in her

first school match, and the captain of the visiting team came up to Nora in consternation when the game was over.

"What's this you've been playing against us? Who's the demon bowler?"

"Only a teddy-bear; an Australian who is spending the term with us. Come and speak to her; she's rather a treasure. And her tennis is just as good."

"I say, couldn't you lend her to us?"

Nora laughed. "Jandy Mac, they want to borrow you."

"Sorry! I've signed on for this term!" Janice came to be introduced. "I shall scoot back to Sydney before the winter, for I'm not much good at hockey. It was a topping game."

"Rather a gloomy one for us!" the visiting girl said ruefully.

"Post's in, Jandy Mac!" Joy called, coming from the house. "More foreign stamps for Jacqueline! India this time, I think."

"Thanks, 'Traveller's Joy'!" and Janice made an excuse to the two captains and raced away through the garden.

Joan laughed to herself. "She likes those foreign letters! It must be odd to feel as she does; for she is beginning to be in earnest, in spite of the cricket. She's always extra jolly after one of those letters has come. She'll be in great form for the team tea."

It was a real disappointment, not only to Joan but to the teams as well, to find that Janice was not coming down to tea. She had gone up to her room, one of the maids explained, saying she was very tired and must rest.

The girls looked at one another blankly. "Oh, what a blow! We wanted to talk to your Australian! Was the game too much for her? Isn't she very fit?" the visiting captain asked. "She looked all right."

"She's as fit and full of beans as you are!" Joy cried. "What do you suppose she means?"

"Perhaps she's had a sudden headache. The sun's strong to-day."

"Sun! She's used to sun. She says we don't know what sunshine really means. And she never has headaches," Nora exclaimed.

"There must be something wrong, then. Couldn't you go and see?"

"Joan's gone; she went at once. She just shot upstairs. She'll find out what's up. Shall we start? I'm sure you're ready for your tea."

Joan was tapping on the door of the room she had given up to Janice.

"Jandy! What's the matter? Are you ill?"

"Go away! I'm all right, but I don't want any tea. Leave me alone!"

"I can't do that, you know," Joan argued. "Can't you tell me what's wrong, Jan?"

"Oh, Joan!" Even in trouble Janice could not be rough with Joan Shirley.

She flung open the door, and stood with her back to the light and spoke quickly. "See here, Joan! I had a letter that worried me. I can't come down and fool about and be jolly. You must let me off. Can't you keep the rest away?"

"Of course. You shan't be worried. I'll send you up some tea." Joan spoke in quick sympathy. "Is anybody ill, Jan?"

"Oh, no!" Janice caught her breath. "But Alec's sent me some rather worrying news. It knocked me over for a moment. I can't tell anybody; it's just—family business. Don't tease me, Joan!"

"He hasn't—you haven't—it isn't any sort of trouble between him and you?" Joan hesitated.

Janice laughed unsteadily. "You dear! That's sweet of you. No, we haven't quarrelled, and nobody's ill or dead."

"Then it can't be anything too bad!" Joan said in relief. "Perhaps later on you'll be able to tell me. I'll talk to the girls, and you must take the tea I'll bring you."

"I shan't be able to talk about it, so don't ask me," Janice said. "It isn't anything I can tell. Don't bother about tea for me. You must go down to the crowd."

"Joy and Nora are looking after them." Joan ran downstairs to speak to one of the maids, and then said a quick word to Joy. "Jandy's had bad news of some kind. She won't tell me what it is. She's all right, but of course she doesn't feel like the team tea. Tell Nora to explain."

"Pity it happened to-day," Joy said. "She was looking forward to the team tea. You'll look after her, I suppose?"

"She won't let me do much. She doesn't want to talk."

Joan carried up a tray, and knocked on the door again.

"Jandy! Here's your tea. If you don't take it in I shall go on knocking till you do."

Janice opened the door at once. The few moments of respite had helped her, and she was quieter when she spoke. "Thanks frightfully much, Joan. I do want it, after all. It's good of you to understand. I'm sorry I let you see I was upset, but I just couldn't go down and pretend nothing had happened."

"Of course you couldn't. Isn't there any way we could help?" Joan asked wistfully.

Janice shook her head and pinched her lips, as she set the tray on the table by the window.

"Couldn't you consult Mother?" Joan pleaded. "I know I wouldn't be much good, but Mother—or Miss Macey—might be some help. Miss Macey's very kind and very understanding, Jan, and Mother's very wise, although she's so little and quiet!"

"I'm sure she is. But I couldn't—oh, I couldn't tell *her*!"

It was a cry of such acute distress that Joan looked at her in anxious dismay. "Jandy! What *is* the matter? Why should it be so impossible to tell Mother?"

Janice took her arm and led her gently to the door. "I can't tell anybody. I think I'm not a kid girl any more. Go and leave me to it, Joan, my dear! I have to find my way through this alone. It means a difficult letter, and I want to get it written. See that nobody comes fussing round; that will help me most of all. You've helped, by being so understanding. Now let me get on with my job!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### JANDY'S LETTER

The letter, with its Singapore stamp, was put out of sight in a drawer. Janice, looking white and strained, forced herself to sit by the window and eat and drink some tea. Then, pushing back the table, she sat on the windowsill and leaned against the wall, staring with unseeing eyes at the lawn and the roses, and the great beech tree which shut out the view of the refectory roof.

"I can't! Oh, I can't! To take it from them now! It's cruel. Joy's so proud of it all—and Joan loves it so much—and Mrs. Shirley's so happy. Oh, I couldn't! I couldn't bear it; it couldn't be right. They're so generous with it all, having the school here—and welcoming me, as they did. If I told them—oh, I never will! No one shall ever make me tell them!"

She fetched Alec Fraser's letter, but sat holding it for a time before she read it through again. "If they knew, they'd never feel the same about the place. Even if—if the worst happens, and this dreadful thing is true, I can hand everything over to them as soon as I'm of age, I suppose. I should do that, of course; it could never feel really mine. But that means waiting for three years, and we'd all feel awful all the time. And even if I did, they'd never feel the same. They wouldn't feel it was theirs by right."

She pondered the matter carefully. "They'd always feel it had been a gift from me. I'd love to give it to them! But I'm thinking of their point of view. It wouldn't be the same; it wouldn't mean the same thing to them. They mustn't ever know! There must be some way."

Her face was very unhappy as she unfolded Alec's letter again and turned to the second page.

*And now, Jandy, I've the queerest yarn for you. You're all mixed up in it. It's an extraordinary chance that brought the chap on to our ship. We soon found he had something to tell, and when I heard the name "Abinger," I remembered the story you'd told me and I got the whole thing from him. It seems that about two years ago he was on a schooner that sailed from Sydney for the Islands, and the fellow you call "Uncle Tony" was on board—Mr. Antony Abinger, this chap said. They were wrecked on a reef on one of the islands; you knew all that. But the yarn is that this sailor-fellow and Mr. Abinger got ashore, when all the rest went down, and for*

*about a year they lived on the island. Mr. Abinger was sick a lot of the time, and the chap—his name's Sam Snell—he looked after Mr. Abinger and fished and found food for them both. They didn't know where they were, but they were out of the track of ships, and they never saw a sail. They tried to make some sort of raft, and at last they got something that would float and a stock of grub and water, and they had a shot at getting away. They'd been about a year on the island, he says. They didn't get very far on their raft, but they were picked up by a canoe full of blacks, who carried them off to another island and kept them prisoners; he thought it was an island, but our people say it sounds more like a bit of New Guinea, up in the north somewhere, where there aren't any whites. These blacks took care of them all right, but Mr. Abinger got ill again and this time he was worse. He died about Christmas, so far as Sam Snell could tell; he's certain it was round about the New Year—*

"That's the trouble," Janice said brokenly. "About the New Year! It's no shock to hear Uncle Tony is dead; we thought he died two years ago. But if he only died at Christmas—and his father had died in October—and Uncle Tony's will left everything to me——! Then the lawyers will say this lovely place is mine—and the Abbey too—and it will break the Abbey Girls' hearts. It might kill Mrs. Shirley. Oh, it can't be true! I don't want it. It's beautiful, but I could never enjoy it if I'd taken it from Joan and Joy. What can I do?"

"It's what I said—the worst thing of all, the worst that could happen," she said unsteadily at last, as she took up the letter again, to read it to the end.

Alec told how Sam Snell had at last made his escape, unhampered by the care of a sick man, in a canoe, and had been picked up by a trading vessel, which had carried him to China before putting into any port.

*He hoped he'd get a reward for looking after Mr. Abinger when he was ill and bringing news of his death, so he set out to work his way back to Sydney. He didn't write; I suppose he wouldn't know where to write to; and he didn't tell anybody. He kept his mouth shut and made tracks for home, hoping, as he says, it would be worth a lot to him when he found the right people. Then he had a breakdown and was ill in hospital for weeks; but he started again as soon as he was fit for work and could get a job on a coaster. He'd come as far as Singapore when we put in there,*

*and as luck would have it he heard we were for Sydney and came to ask for a job. Captain hadn't any use for him, but Sam told his story and it happened I heard a bit of it, and I begged Cap. to tell me the rest, saying I knew something about the people concerned. When we'd got it all out of him, Captain agreed to take him on to Sydney, so he's stowed safely on hoard, and I promise you I won't lose sight of him till he's in the lawyers' hands. I say, Jan, I wish we could have a talk about it! Won't it make some difference to you? You told me about the place he used to live in, and that his dad died nine months ago. If Mr. Abinger only died at Christmas, didn't the property belong to him for three months, even if he never knew? And in that case, isn't it yours now? Congrats! I'll see you get your rights; don't worry!*

"But Alec doesn't understand," Janice cried desperately. "If only I could get hold of him! I'd—oh, I'd like to sink Sam Snell in the Indian Ocean! Do we have to believe this story, just on his word? But there's the ring! And it is Uncle Tony's ring; I remember it quite well." She turned to the letter again, to see exactly what Alec had said:

*The yarn must be O.K., for old Sam's got a ring that he's kept hidden all this time, and he says Mr. Abinger gave it to him when he was dying, and asked him to take it to his people in Sydney. It has seven small dark blue stones; sapphires, I suppose. You'll remember it, I expect, if he wore it often. I'll write again when we get to Sydney. Looks as if you were a bigger heiress than you thought, old girl.*

"Seven small sapphires. Uncle Tony always wore it. There's no chance of a mistake," Janice thought unhappily. "I'll be glad to have Uncle Tony's ring, but—oh, I didn't want anything like this to happen! It's going to make terrible trouble for everybody. I'll write and tell Alec how I feel, but it won't do any good. Once the lawyers get hold of that man they'll worry out the whole thing and they won't listen to me. And I won't be able to do anything for three years. It's going to spoil our friendship; Joy will look on me as an enemy, and I can't blame her. And Joan and Mrs. Shirley will be hurt. The rest of the girls will hate me; think of little Jenny-Wren's face, when she hears I'm taking the Abbey away from Joan! I can't bear it; I think I'll go away—but Miss Macey would have to know the reason, and I can't talk about it."

She watched a crowd of team and visitor girls come out and go towards the Abbey, led by Joan.

"Nothing can happen for a few weeks," she said to herself drearily at last. "Perhaps we'll get through the term safely. I shall write very urgently to Alec and the lawyers, telling them to do nothing at all until Aunty and I are back in Sydney. Perhaps I can argue it out and keep them quiet somehow. If I can make them believe I'll never take the property away from these girls, could I persuade them not to say anything until I'm of age? Then I could come back and explain the whole thing to Joan and Joy, and tell them nothing is going to happen. I don't believe the lawyers would agree, but I can try. I'll write the letter to-night; perhaps I'll feel better when I've done something about it. But even then, it isn't going to be the same to the Abbey Girls! They'll never feel the same about the place. Oh, how I wish Sam Snell had stayed with those savages! Why didn't they eat him when they'd got him?"

Her face was very grave as she slipped off her white games' frock and began to dress for the evening. "It isn't going to be easy. The girls won't ask questions, if I say it's a business matter, but Miss Macey may want to know what's wrong. I'd rather not tell her, or anybody. And how can I be as jolly as usual? I'm afraid Joan will be worried; I feel like a lump of lead inside. Well, I'm not going to sink, for anybody! I must pretend, that's all."

## CHAPTER XVII

### SEVEN BLUE STONES

It was not easy to pretend. At supper a small happening gave Janice a shock which nearly broke her resolution.

Joy came to supper wearing a blue frock and a blue sapphire ring. Janice, sitting next to her, went white and stared at it, fascinated.

“Tell Jandy Mac about your ring, Joy.” Joan had seen the look. “She’s interested; let her see it.”

Joy handed over the ring. “Haven’t you seen it before? I don’t wear it very often, but it’s pretty with this frock. Some day I shall wear it always, but Miss Macey doesn’t care for us to have much jewellery, and I’d really rather feel that it was safely put away in its case. It’s seven small sapphires; aren’t they a lovely colour?”

“Where did you get it?” Janice tried to speak naturally, as she examined the ring. From her earliest days she had seen its twin on Tony Abinger’s finger.

“It was my mother’s. Aunty gave it to me when I was fourteen. Mother must have had small hands, for it’s only a little too big for me now.”

“Was it her engagement ring?” Janice asked, but knew the answer even as she said the words. The ring had surely come to Joyce Abinger from her family and not from her husband, since her brother had one just like it.

“We don’t think so; Aunty’s sure it wasn’t. There’s one more ring; she hadn’t much jewellery. I expect she left her family treasures behind, if she ever had any, when she ran away to marry my father. Perhaps she took the little blue ring for some special reason. The other ring is diamonds, and Aunty thinks it was the engagement ring, because it’s just like her own. As my father and Joan’s were twins, perhaps they got engaged and chose the rings about the same time. Anyway, Aunty’s engagement ring is just the same as mother’s diamond one. So this sapphire ring must have been something different.”

“That sounds quite likely.” Janice was looking inside the ring. “‘J.A.’—so she had it before she was married.”

“The setting isn’t the same as in Uncle Tony’s ring,” she said to herself, as she handed it back to Joy. “His looked old, and he told me it was a very old ring, a family heirloom. Joy’s looks much more modern. Perhaps he had a copy made for his sister. I don’t suppose we shall ever know.”

"I don't wear it out-of-doors," Joy said, putting the ring on her finger again. "It would be so easy to lose it in the grass. And I wear green more often than blue, so it doesn't get many chances of coming out."

"She chose that blue frock to have one that matched her ring," Joan said, laughing.

"Thanks for letting me see it." Janice was sober and very thoughtful.

She escaped by herself into the garden after supper, and sat on the bench near the Abbey gate to think. "Joy would like to know about her uncle; she'd care even more about her ring if she knew he had one too. Perhaps hers was a present from him to her mother. But I can't tell half and keep back the rest; and the rest would break their hearts. I'm glad I didn't say anything when I first came! It makes things easier now."

Across the lawn a small figure came racing, and Jen thrust something into her hand. "Joan sent it. I'd love to go with you, but it's time for bed. There'll be a row if I'm late; and it would set a bad example to Della."

Janice looked at the key and then at the messenger. "Is it the key of the Abbey gate?"

"Yes, rather! I know that key! I stole it once, but I didn't mean any harm, you know."

"I'm sure you didn't," Janice agreed. "Why did you steal it?"

"I wanted to show Jack the Abbey. And we got locked in; Dick and Della took the key, and that really was stealing, for they meant to get us into a mess. I'd never thought that it would be better to ask Joan before I took the key. Of course, I never touch it now without asking. Jandy Mac, is there anything wrong?" Jen asked doubtfully. "Why did Joan send you the Abbey key?"

"I don't know, Jenny-Wren. I didn't ask her for it."

"Are you bothered about something?"

"A little," Janice admitted.

"Does Joan know? Then that's why she sent the key. She thinks you'll find the way out if you go into the Abbey. I know if I was in a frightful mess about anything I'd want to go there to puzzle it out. You'll feel better when you've been in the Abbey."

"I hope so." Janice looked down at the anxious little face, framed in its yellow plaits. "It's jolly nice of you to be worried, Jenny-Wren, and it's kind of Joan to think of the key. I believe she's right about the Abbey, and you too. Thank her for me, will you?"

"Rather! I hope you'll find what you want in the Abbey!" and Jen waved her hand and sped away.

"Jolly kid!" Janice murmured, as she turned to unlock the ancient gate. "Perhaps this quiet old place will help."

Thinking deeply, she paced up and down the cloister, as the monks of olden days must have done. Then, tired out, she dropped on a cushion, which Joan had left on the broken wall, and shared it with the matronly Mother Superior, who purred a sleepy welcome but did not offer to move. Stroking the stout comfortable body, Janice felt all thought slip away, as the peace of the grey walls crept over her. For some time she sat passive; then she rose to go back to the house.

"I feel bruised! I had a horrid shock, I suppose. But Joan and little Jen were right; this quiet time has helped. I'll write those letters, and then I must put it away, so far as I can. I can't do anything more, and I mustn't make other people unhappy. Aunty will come back as soon as she can, and we'll go home at once. Till we reach Sydney I don't see that anything can happen. When we get there, I shall make as big a fight as I possibly can, to see that Joy and Joan have their rights. Sooner or later I shall be able to settle the business in the only decent way. Oh, there's Joan coming to bed! It's time I was in the house. Good-bye, old lady! Thank you for your company."

She crossed the garth to the door of the chapter-house, where Joan had appeared from the underground passage. "Abbey-Girl, thank you for the key. I'm sorry I've stayed so long; I was just going back."

Joan gave her a quick look in the twilight.

"All right, Jandy Mac? I hope you'll be able to sleep."

"I'll sleep much better because I've had this hour in this quiet place. Thank you for your Abbey!"

"I'm glad," Joan exclaimed. "I'll come with you to the gate. Give the key to Joy; she knows where I keep it. Good-night, Jan! Sleep well!"

"Nice girl!" Janice said to herself, as she crossed the lawn alone.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ROSES AND FLEURS-DE-LIS

The big hall seemed unusually noisy for Sunday, when Janice came out of her little room next morning. She leaned on the railing of the gallery and looked down.

“I want to speak to Joan, now, this minute!” Jen Robins was demanding.

Janice stared at the small girl, whose face was flushed with excitement. “What can have happened to the kiddy in the night?”

“You can’t. She hasn’t come in from the Abbey yet,” Jen was informed by half-a-dozen voices.

“Well, Joy, then. Where is she?”

“Not down yet. You know what a lazy beggar she is!”

“But I must ask somebody!” Jen’s eager blue eyes swept round the hall, and blazed at sight of Janice looking down at her. “Jandy Mac! You’ll do. Is it true that Joy has a gold ring with blue stones in it, and that she showed it to you at supper last night?”

“Perfectly true.” Janice ran down the wide shallow steps. “What about it, Jenny-Wren? Didn’t you see the ring?”

“Jack and I were having an argument about the match,” Jen explained breathlessly. “She thinks I don’t know anything about cricket, because I’ve joined the Hamlet Club. I’ve played at home with the boys for years, and I know every scrap as much about it as she does.”

“I’m sure you do,” Janice spoke soothingly. “So you didn’t see the ring? Joy will show it to you, if you ask her.”

“I’m dying to see it! Della saw it and heard what you were saying, but she only happened to speak about it this morning. I flung on my frock and came rushing to find Joan and ask if it was true.”

“You look as if you’d flung on your frock!” one of her friends jeered.

Jen tugged impatiently at her blue Sunday dress. “Oh, bother! I must see that ring. Has it seven blue stones?”

“Sapphires, small ones. That’s right, Jenny-Wren.”

“Sapphires; yes, that’s what he called them. You’re sure there were seven?”

“I counted them,” Janice said, suddenly alert. “Who is ‘he’? Who called them sapphires?”

“Ambrose. It’s Lady Jehane’s ring! He made it for her!” Jen gave a triumphant shout. “And it’s turned up after all these years! She was Joy’s

ancestress, you know.”

“I know. But—Jenny-Wren! What makes you think it was her ring?” Janice looked at the small girl doubtfully, that other ring in her mind. She thought: “Joy’s didn’t look old; Uncle Tony’s did. His is much more likely to be an heirloom, handed down for centuries in the family.”

“It was in her book. Oh, Joan!” and Jen hurled herself on the Queen, as Joan stepped through the panel in the wall. “Joan—Joy’s ring, with the seven sapphires! Can I see it? Joan, didn’t you know it was Lady Jehane’s ring? Didn’t you read about it in the book?”

“Go a bit more slowly, please, Jenny-Wren!” Joan pleaded. “What is it all about? Say it again! Joy’s ring? Jehane? Whatever are you talking about?”

“Jen’s potty about Jehane and her book,” said Jack from the background.

“Perhaps; but I want to hear. Tell me, Jen!”

“Jacky-boy doesn’t understand. Joan, didn’t you read the little book?” Jen cried.

“I never did, Jenny-Wren; not the beginning part,” Joan confessed. “You told us the story when you’d read it, and I read the end with you; it was hard to make out, and there’s been so much to do that I’m afraid I took your word for the first half of the story. I’m going to read it for myself later on, when I have more time. Is there—you don’t mean to say that Joy’s blue ring has anything to do with Lady Jehane’s story?”

“It’s *in* the story! I’m sure it’s the same ring!” Jen shouted. “I didn’t see Joy’s ring last night; I’ve only just heard about it from Della. I’m dying to see it for myself! But I’m sure it’s the same. Shall I fetch Lady Jehane’s book and read you what it says?”

“Can’t you tell us? We can read it afterwards.” Joan’s eyes were eager also. “Where is Joy? She’ll be fearfully keen——”

“Keen on what?” Joy called over the balustrade from the gallery. “What’s all the row about?”

“Come down here and find out!” a chorus of shouts invited her.

Joy slid down the banister rail and landed in their midst. “Say on, friends! Noisy crowd you are—on a Sunday morning, too! I wonder Mackums hasn’t sent you all back to bed.”

“Tell us, Jen!” Joan commanded. “Listen, Joy! It’s another big thrill, I believe.”

“It was the way Ambrose met Lady Jehane,” Jen said, breathing quickly in her excitement. “It’s how the book starts. She heard that he’d just come from France to the Abbey and that he was a ‘cunning worker’ in gold and jewels; that’s how he puts it. And she asked him to set some stones in a ring for her. He came to see her about it, and—and she was beautiful, you know

—and he made the ring as pretty as ever he could. And the stones were sapphires, and there were seven of them!”

“My ring!” Joy gave a shout. “It’s been handed down ever since, and now it’s come to me! I say, Joan, how tophole—if it’s true!”

“Let me see the ring, Joy!” Jen pleaded. “You’ve never shown it to me!”

Joy shot up the stair, and came back with the ring on her finger. She handed it to Jen.

“There, Mrs. Wren! Don’t drop it and tramp on it!”

Joan’s eyes were very bright as Jen examined the ring. Anything that added to the story of her Abbey was precious to her. “I must read that little book!” she murmured. “We might never have known about this if Della hadn’t happened—”

“Oh, but this isn’t Lady Jehane’s ring!” Jen gave a wail of dismay.

“Isn’t? Why not?” Joy asked sharply.

“What do you mean, Jen?” Joan cried. “It has seven sapphires, and it’s gold!”

“Yes, but he says he wanted to make it as lovely as he could for her, so he engraved the gold part with roses and flowers; fleurs-de-something-or-other, but ‘fleurs’ must mean flowers. The gold bit of this is quite plain.” Jen’s voice shook with disappointment.

“Fleur-de-lis; the French coat-of-arms in the Middle Ages; he came from France,” Joan said. “I’m afraid that settles the matter, Joy. There are no roses and fleurs-de-lis on your ring. It must be just a chance that yours has seven sapphires; or perhaps it was copied from the old one.”

“That’s a blow,” Joy said gloomily. “I wish you hadn’t raised our hopes, Jen Robins!”

“It was natural!” Janice said quickly. “It was an obvious mistake. Jenny-Wren hadn’t seen your ring, and she had read about the old one. It’s an odd coincidence that they should both have seven stones.”

“It seems more than odd that they should both have seven sapphires,” Joy groaned, bitterly disappointed.

“I’m sorry,” Jen faltered. “I really did think we’d found Jehane’s ring. Oh, Joan, I am so sorry I said it! It’s made you all feel bad!”

“We’re only disappointed that we haven’t the old ring, Jenny-Wren. You have given us something, so don’t be unhappy. It can’t be just chance that Joy’s mother had a ring so very like Lady Jehane’s; Joy’s must have been copied from the old one. You’ve given us a story to the blue ring, after all.”

“If mine’s a copy, then where is the original?” Joy demanded. “Who had mine made, and when? They must have had Jehane’s ring to copy; they didn’t make it from the description Jen has read, for they hadn’t the book; we found that! Somebody must have had the real ring!”

"I don't see how we can ever find out how yours came to be made," Joan remarked. "It makes your ring much more interesting, Joy."

"Oh, I see that. But I wish it had been Jehane's ring!" Joy mourned.

"Somebody must have had the real ring to make the copy from!" Jen wistfully echoed Joy's words. "But they didn't put on the roses and other flowers. Perhaps we'll find Jehane's ring somewhere!"

"Not much hope, I'm afraid, Jenny-Wren." Joan smiled at the downcast little face. "Never mind! We know a lot more about Joy's ring now, thanks to you."

"That's frightfully nice of you, Joan!" Jen said fervently. "For it was a horrid blow to you, too."

"It was!" Joan agreed, laughing. "But it can't be helped, Mrs. Wren."

"What were the other flowers like; the fleurs-de-lis?" Janice asked. She had listened to every word, and watched every change of expression on the faces of the three girls, her own eyes strained and troubled.

"It's supposed to be a lily, so you can say the ring was decorated with roses and lilies, if you like. It always looks to me more like a spearhead," Joan said. "The Kings of France in the old days used to carry a blue shield with golden fleurs-de-lis scattered over it. The Boy Scouts use it as a badge in their button-holes."

"I know what it's like, then. The ring must have been pretty," Janice said quietly.

It was not on a Boy Scout's jacket that she had seen the fleur-de-lis. She left them and wandered to the window that looked across the lawn.

"Some day Joy must have Lady Jehane's ring. What adventures it has had! All that time on the South Sea Island, and then among the New Guinea savages! And it must be five hundred years old, by the dates Joan gave me. Did Uncle Tony have the copy made for his sister? He would keep the original ring, of course, as he would expect to succeed to the title and carry on the family name."

The breakfast gong rang, and she turned to join the rest. "Queer to think that while the whole crowd is talking about Joy's ring, *I* know all about the other one! How mad they'd think me, if I told them! I daren't say a word; but some day that ring shall come home, and I hope Jenny-Wren will be here to see her roses and fleurs-de-lis! I'd like to see her joy when the real ring turns up!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE EXPLORING PARTY

"It's a queer story, isn't it, Jandy Mac?" Joan slipped her arm through Jandy's and went with her out to the terrace after breakfast.

"It's just another; you have so many queer stories mixed up with the Abbey," Janice said soberly.

Joan gave her a quick look. "Didn't you sleep?"

"Not much. I behaved badly, and took advantage of having a room to myself," Janice confessed. "I sat up writing letters; fortunately nobody saw my light. I couldn't sleep till I'd done them. It was mad, of course; to-day would have done just as well."

"But they're written; that's the great thing. Now you won't worry about them any more, will you?"

"No!" Janice exclaimed, with sudden resolution. "No, I jolly well won't, Abbey-Girl! I've done all I can, and I must wait now till I hear more, or till Aunty comes back from Canada. I'm not going to have this marvellous time spoiled. You must help me. Distract my attention! Fill my thoughts with something new!"

"I'll do that. I'll hand you over to Joy. She wants to go hunting for that path you spoke about."

"Oh!" Janice cried. "The Monks' Path? I'd love to help her find it! It must be here somewhere!"

"I don't see how it can be still here," Joy said, early in the afternoon, as a small party set out, armed with sticks and maps and packets of sandwiches and a couple of flasks.

Miss Macey, amused and interested, had given them leave of absence from tea, so long as Joy was the guide for the expedition. "I know Joy has explored every track in the neighbourhood, so you won't get lost," she said. "I don't see how you can find anything that she has overlooked, but I'm willing you should try. I'll be interested to see your path, if you find it."

"The country's so altered and cut up, with new roads and buildings everywhere," Joy explained. "And I've never seen any path that came straight to the Abbey. That road down from the hills is very straight part of the way, but then it goes squiggly; and anyway, it isn't a path."

Joan had asked leave to be one of the explorers and to bring Jen. "If there are any discoveries to be made, we can't leave Jenny-Wren at home!"

"The Wren may come, but not the whole of her crowd."

"No, just Mrs. Wren," Joan agreed. "We don't want a noisy mob who would get excited."

"I should have said Jenny-Wren was very noisy when she gets excited," Joy grumbled.

"And that she gets excited very easily," Janice added, laughing.

"True for you, Teddy-bear! Perhaps we can put up with one shrieker, but we couldn't stand three."

"Anyway, I want Jen to come." Joan ended the matter.

Jen had been listening anxiously. She said nothing, but her face blazed with delight and she seized Joan's hand and rubbed it on her cheek. Then she turned an eager face to Joy. "I'll carry the field-glasses and maps! I'll be the little page who follows the adventuring knights with the luggage!"

"The little donkey who carries the packs," Janice suggested. "Joy, about my path! Mightn't it have turned into a road, but still be a path out in the country?"

Joy stopped and gazed at her. They had come through the Abbey and were passing under the ancient gate, which stood all by itself a little way from the entrance door.

"Say it again, Jandy Mac! I think I see what you mean."

"I believe she's right," Joan exclaimed. "It isn't a path we must look for—not here near the Abbey. And you know yourself that there isn't any path coming straight to the Abbey. The Monks' Path will have been covered by a road; will have grown into a road, in fact. But somewhere in its beginning it might be a path still."

"But how can we explore all the roads till we get to their beginning?" Joy objected. "Jandy Mac, don't you know where your path came from?"

"I've no idea. It led to the Abbey; that's all I know."

"It's your job, Joy. You know the country better than any of us," Joan said.

"I dare say! But there are heaps of roads!"

"But they don't all come to the Abbey!" Jen protested. "Some of them go right past it, a mile or two away. It's only some of the roads we need to think about!"

"What we want is an aeroplane, to let us look down and see which roads might have led this way," Janice remarked.

"Well, what about the hills?" Joy gave a shout. "We can look down and see all the roads; I've done it often. Come on!"

"Where are you going?" Janice cried, as Joy turned to go back into the Abbey.

"Through the garden. It's a short-cut to the hills."

"I thought this was the short-cut!"

“Yes, to the village. We want to go the other way.”

“Oh, very well!” Janice began to laugh. “If the others see us they’ll have something to say.”

“You’ve come back very soon!” Jack was the first to notice the exploring party. “Have you found it?”

“You didn’t go far!” Della jeered.

“You children don’t understand.” Jen’s chin went up. “We’ve changed our route, that’s all.”

Joan smothered a laugh. “We hadn’t thought out our plans, Jacqueline. We’ve really started this time!” and she followed Joy, who had crossed the lawn at top speed, without a glance at the mocking crowd on the terrace.

“Mind you bring the path home with you!” Della shouted.

“They’ll be back again in a minute and a half,” said Jack. “They don’t know their own minds.”

Jen waved her maps and stick, and the explorers disappeared into the shrubbery.

“Don’t go as far as the road.” Joy paused. “We’ll take the steps up the hill. It’s steep, but it cuts off a big corner.”

“Steps? I haven’t seen them,” Janice began.

“Well—look!” Joy went to a wicket-gate and pointed.

Their well-known track through the bushes went on to meet the road from the hills. It was the way Joan had led Janice when they had trespassed beside the Manor lake. But here, coming almost straight down the face of the hill, among the dense woods which clothed it, were wide steps, cut in the cliff and edged with crumbling slats of wood, overgrown with moss.

“It meets the road higher up,” Joy explained. “The road has to make a big sweep round, because the slope is too sudden for cars or horses. This is very steep, but it saves a big corner.”

“I’m ready!” and Janice tackled the climb valiantly. Somewhere in her mind an idea had been born, but it was still vague and she had hardly realised it herself.

The steps were very steep and high, and the hill was long; under the trees there was no air, and the tall grey beech stems made the girls feel shut in. It was a great relief to come out on the road above the trees, and to see the white cart-track stretching before them, winding into the heart of the green chalk downs.

“Glorious wind!” Janice said, turning to let it blow back her hair. “Oh, what a marvellous view!”

“See it better higher up,” said Joy. “The road will be hot, but we’ll have the wind to help.”

"Couldn't we cut off this corner too?" Jen sighed, when presently the road made another bend.

"It has to twist, you know, Jenny-Wren," Joan observed. "If it kept straight, and you came down in Joy's car or on a bike, you'd go a lot too fast."

"You'd get to the bottom in double-quick time," Joy agreed. "Must put up with it, Mrs. Wren."

"I'm not so sure." That little thought was growing in Janice's mind, and it drove her to the side of the road to peer through the hedge. "Joan, come and look! There's a sort of track going straight up the hill. If we could get through this hedge, perhaps we could scramble up, and join the road again later."

"Wouldn't it be harder work than keeping to the road?" Joan asked.

"I'm all for paths, no matter how steep they are! Anything to get out of this dust and heat," Joy cried.

"It is a path!" Jen had struggled into the hedge and now she gave a shout of triumph. "Can we get through? I'll go up the path with you, Joy!"

"Oh, we'll come too!" Janice said, laughing. "Joan isn't an old lady yet, and I'm a teddy-bear! Isn't there a gate? I'd rather not be scratched to bits."

"There's a stile just along here," Joy said. "I've often wondered why, for it seems only to lead out on to the hill."

"An old right-of-way, probably," Joan remarked, as she followed Joy and Janice over the stile.

Jen had been the first to scramble over. "It is a path, between chalky banks. I thought at first it was a ditch. I wonder where it goes to?"

"It seems to come from somewhere, anyway," Joan suggested. "Doesn't it meet the road again on its next curve?"

Janice went back to the stile and stood high on it, gazing up at the path, which came straight down the hill. At first it crossed the turf, but presently it became a deep cutting between chalky banks.

"It's almost like the bed of a stream," she said.

"You don't find streams up here. It's chalk; the rain sinks in," Joy explained.

"It meets the road," Janice announced, from her point of vantage. "But it goes on and up; the road cuts through it. This must be the old way from the hills, much older than the road; the way people came before the road was made."

"The way they came to the Abbey?" In one bound Joan was beside her. "Jandy Mac, have you found the Monks' Path?"

Joy and Jen had started to scramble up the rough track, and had not heard.

Janice pointed. "I've been wondering—look down—and up! Straight down the hill and through the trees to the Abbey; the road uses it at places, and so Joy has never noticed it was a path. Could it be, Joan?"

"It looks jolly like it!" Joan exclaimed. "Oh, Jan, have we really found it? Did my monks come this way? But where were they coming from?"

"Don't say anything to the others yet," Janice proposed, her face eager. "We'll see where the path begins. I hope it doesn't just start out of nowhere, up on the hill! There's a white splash up there—it seems to come from that. Come on, Abbey-Girl! I believe it is our path!"

"But I want to know why it's here and where it comes from!" Joan exclaimed, as they ran after the others and began to struggle up the stony track between banks of chalk and turf.

## CHAPTER XX

### SEVEN WHITE STONES

The path crossed the road again and went on, and ended at last, as Janice had seen, in a great chalk-pit, chopped out of the hillside—ancient, and overgrown with grass and bushes.

Joy was standing on the edge, gazing down over the flat country. “This is the look-out we wanted. We can trace all the roads from here.”

“Show me, ‘Traveller’s Joy’!” Jen pleaded. “Here’s the glass! Do you want the map? This would make a jolly picnic place,” she added. “Shall we have tea here?”

Janice, with a glance at Joan, wandered round the outer side of the pit, keeping well away from the edge.

Joan followed her. “Looking for something, Jandy Mac?”

“Of course. So are you. We want to know if the path comes out of the quarry and goes on, or if that’s really where it starts.”

“Joy will know, but we’ll look for ourselves. I wonder if they used the chalk, and came up here to fetch it, when the Abbey was being built? But they could have found plenty much lower down!”

“Seems a long way to carry it. Perhaps there was something else.”

They went carefully right round the chalk-pit, but found no sign of any path entering it on the higher side. “Looks as if it started here,” Janice said.

As they came back to where Joy and Jen still stood, they heard Jen’s voice. “What I think, ‘Traveller’s Joy,’ ” she exclaimed, “is, that the path we’ve come up is the straightest of the lot! The rest all go bending about. It’s much more likely to be the Monks’ Path than any of the others.”

A laughing look flashed from Joan to Janice, and Joan nodded. “Your discovery, Jandy Mac! Tell her!”

“Do you two think so, too?” Jen whirled round. “What made you think it?”

“And where have you been? Joan! Do you really think we’ve found it?” Joy shouted.

“We’ve been finding out if the path goes on. So far as we can see, it doesn’t. I think we’ve found a path going straight to the Abbey, through roads and across roads; and that’s what we were looking for,” Joan said.

“Careful person!” Janice cried. “I think we’ve found the Monks’ Path!”

Joy turned to gaze down at the long narrow track. “It does look like it,” she acknowledged. “Straight as a ruler, from this quarry to the Abbey

grounds! Couldn't we prove it somehow?"

"Oh, come and explore!" Jen shouted, jumping with excitement. "Explore this chalk place! We may find something that will tell us—that will prove it! Let's make a dump of our luggage, and all scatter and make a thorough search! There must be something, somewhere!"

The elder girls laughed, but they were quite as eager, though much less hopeful.

"I don't see what there could be, Jenny-Wren! It's only a very ordinary chalk-pit. There are plenty of them about," Joan argued.

"But they haven't all got paths leading to our Abbey!"

"That's true," Joan admitted. "But I don't know what you're hoping to find."

"I don't know myself. I haven't the foggiest notion. But surely there must be something!" and Jen threw her knitted coat on the pile of flasks and satchels, and raced after Joy and Janice.

Joan stood at the top of the path and gazed down on the Hall and the Abbey, almost directly below, the wind tossing her red hair about. There was the house, with the green space surrounding it which was the garden; there was a glimpse of the grey refectory roof, and a tiny green square which must be the cloister garth; and there was the Abbey gate, like a little squat model, standing alone. In her mind Joan could see the white-robed monks toiling up the long steep path; for what? She shook her head, and turned to join the search-party.

It was a disappointing business. There was nothing but chalk, and scattered flints, and very ordinary bushes and one clump of heather, which seemed out of place.

Janice remarked on the heather. "I haven't seen much of that here. I saw some in Scotland, but of course it had no flowers. This will be out soon, by the look of it."

"It's early here, and this is the sunny side of the hill," Joy said. "We have a little, in patches, here and there; but there isn't a great deal."

"It's the only thing in the quarry that seems in the least unusual," Joan sighed. "I'm afraid we'll get no help here, Jenny-Wren. Let's have tea!"

"We might feel more brilliant after tea," Janice agreed.

They were sitting looking down at the Abbey or out over the plain, and finishing their last scones, when Jen turned from the view to survey the chalk-pit again. She rolled over on the grass and lay scanning the cliffs with keen eyes.

"Feeling brilliant after your tea, Mrs. Wren?" Joy mocked.

"I feel a lot cheerfuller. It was a jolly good tea. Joan, there is one queer thing, besides Jandy Mac's heather. I didn't think it really was when I was

close under it, but it's clearer from over here."

"What is clearer? Show us, Jen!" Joan commanded, as all three turned to look. "What is 'It'?"

"Those white stones stuck in the cliff near the heather! I saw them when I was close, but they show up more from a distance, just like that Cross you took me to see, before the school came to the Hall."

The elder girls were staring. "White stones?" said Joy.

"I see them!" Janice cried. "In a sort of pattern, just under the heather! They do look odd!"

"I see, too, now that you've pointed them out. I hadn't noticed them." Joan was staring at the stones. "They could hardly have put themselves there by chance; they make a rough kind of design. I say, Joy! Jandy! Could it be \_\_\_\_\_?"

"A sign put there by the monks!" Jen gave a shout. "Oh, Joan! Could it be? Hundreds of years ago?"

"I don't believe it could," Joan said doubtfully. "Would a sign like that last for centuries?"

"It must mean something!" Joy exclaimed. "You said yourself it couldn't be chance!"

Janice sat staring at the stones. "I say, Joy! There are seven of them," she said in a low voice.

"Seven!" The thoughts of all four girls flew to seven blue stones in a gold ring—in two gold rings, one old and one new.

"Seven white stones!" Jen whispered, awe in her voice. "Joy, you've got seven blue stones! It can't be just chance!"

"It must be only a coincidence," Joan exclaimed. "Don't lose your heads, Joy and Jandy. Jen, don't be mad! How could it be anything but chance?"

"Oh, Joan! It couldn't just happen!" Jen wailed.

"It's just what would happen, if somebody wanted to stick in stones for some reason," Joan retorted. "Seven's a very likely number to choose. What possible connection could there be between those stones and Joy's ring?"

"None, I suppose. It was silly to think it, even for a moment," Janice sighed. "But it seemed so odd, when we were talking about that ring only this morning."

"Too odd!" Joan said. "We mustn't imagine things."

"But the old ring—Lady Jehane's ring!" Jen pleaded. "It had seven blue stones too. Suppose Ambrose buried something else up here—the monks must have known of the path, Joan; I'm sure they made it!—wouldn't he put seven stones to mark the place?"

"You find what he buried and we'll believe you, Jenny-Wren," Joy said. "I'm afraid Joan and Jandy Mac are right. It was a mad idea, but just for a moment I felt those white stones must be linked up somehow with my blue ones."

"We all did. I don't believe it was mad at all," Jen urged. "I'm going to have a look."

"What for?"

"What Ambrose buried," Jen said stoutly.

"Where are you going to look?" Joy's tone was sceptical.

Joan shook her head. "Don't get too worked up, kid. I'm afraid there's no hope."

"We'll help her, all the same." Janice sprang up. "Where shall we look, Jenny-Wren? I'm not quite convinced that those stones are chance."

"I'm not a bit convinced! I'm going to make sure, if I can. Come and search, Jandy Mac!"

Jen raced off to the white chalk wall that held the pieces of flint. "We'll poke about in these bushes at the bottom," she said. "We can't pull down the cliff, but we might find something in all this shingle stuff."

"The 'shingle stuff,' as you call it, has fallen from the cliff some time, a long while ago." Joan had followed them.

Jen paused and stared up at the stones in the chalk. "Joan, is it some kind of pattern? What is it meant to be? Three straight up, and two slanting in on each side, to meet at the bottom; and the middle one the tallest! It looks to me like the stalks of three leaves or—or the Prince of Wales's feathers! I knew it reminded me of something!"

"Good shot, Mrs. Wren!" Joy cried. "It is like three feathers!"

"Three skeletons of feathers, or leaves," Janice amended. "It does look like a sign, Jenny-Wren! What do you make of it, Joan?"

"Joan!" Joy shouted. "Do you know what it is?"

The look of amazement which Joy had caught vanished from Joan's face. "I don't know any more than you do," she said hastily. "I can only guess. It is like a leaf with three divisions, as Jen says. It may be only chance."

"I don't believe it! It looks too real," Joy said.

"I don't believe it! It's a planned design, though I don't know what it's meant to be," Janice exclaimed.

"I'm sure it's a sign of something, meant for somebody! Come and dig underneath it!" Jen cried, and rushed to the cliff.

"We'll help, if you really want to dig up the quarry. Pity we haven't spades! Here's a stick, anyway," and Joy prodded the heap of fallen flints and chalk which lay, overgrown with brambles, at the foot of the cliff.

Jen thrust in her stick again and again. "It doesn't go very far," she said, in a disappointed tone.

"No, I'm afraid it's solid. Nothing buried here."

Joy, poking also, gave a shout. "My stick's gone right in! It's hollow just here!"

"Oh—Joy!" There was awe and ecstasy in Jen's voice as they all crowded round.

Joan glanced at her anxiously. "Jen, kid, you don't really expect to find anything, do you? It's just a hole in the chalk."

"We can see, anyway!" Jen pleaded. "Can we pull those bushes away?"

Joy and Janice were already pushing back the brambles with their sticks. "Looks quite a big hole," said Joy. "The blackberry has grown over it."

"It looks to me as if the chalk had fallen and left a space behind at the bottom of the cliff," Janice exclaimed. "Perhaps there's a cave. Can we move these stones?"

"Not without spades," Joan said. "Don't try, Jen! You'll only hurt your hands. Sticks are no use."

"Could we go home and fetch spades?" Jen cried eagerly.

"If we go home Mackums won't let us come back, that's certain," Joy pointed out. "It will be too near supper-time."

"Yes, there's no help for it, so we'd better make up our minds to it," Joan said firmly. "We can't move this stuff without spades, and we haven't time to fetch them and come all the way up again to-day. And if there should be any sort of cave in there we'd need lights. We'll have to wait. We'll come back as soon as we can, and make sure whether there's anything here, but we can't do it to-day."

"Oh, Joan! I can't bear it!" Jen wailed.

"Unpleasant but true, Abbey-Girl!" Janice groaned. "You're right, of course."

"How soon will Mackums let us come?" Joy was almost as much disappointed as Jen. "I can't bear it either! I want to get to the bottom of this!"

"We'll plead with the Head," Joan said. "But you know what a rush it is as soon as Monday morning comes! You can't cut your practising, with your exam so near; and you know how it is with me!"

"Bother the music exam! Bother matric!" Joy growled.

"Cheer up!" Janice said. "Think of all we've discovered! The Monks' Path—I'm certain of it! A mysterious stone sign on the face of the quarry, and a possible cave at the foot! A good day's work, I say!"

"But think how marvellous it would have been if we'd found something to prove the monks had really been here!" Jen sighed, as they turned

reluctantly to go downhill.

## CHAPTER XXI THE FLEUR-DE-LIS AGAIN

Miss Macey listened to the story in amusement and keen interest. "You really think there may be something hidden there, Joan?"

Joan looked at her with puzzled eyes. "Miss Macey, it's all so queer. The stones looked like some sort of mark, but how could it have been put there by the monks, over five hundred years ago? Surely the stones would have loosened and fallen out?"

"Perhaps they have done. Maybe the design was complete at one time, and you have found only the traces that are left."

"It might be that," Joan agreed. "But why should there be a sign put up there? That's what is bothering me. Jen is sure something is buried there, and she won't rest till we've dug up the hillside."

Miss Macey laughed. "She'll have to be patient, I'm afraid. I don't see how you can spare time for the next few days. Have you any theory about it yourself, Joan?"

"I wondered if the monks had perhaps gone up the hill to pray and meditate quite alone," Joan said, a touch of shyness in her tone. "They might have had a chapel for prayer, or just some spot that they felt was extra holy."

Miss Macey nodded. "That's more likely than that they fetched chalk from so high up in the hills. You will certainly have to dig, if only to satisfy Jen! But you can't afford to leave your work, with the exam coming so soon."

"I don't want to spoil matric, even for the sake of easing Jen's mind," Joan admitted.

"Shall I send Bob, the gardener lad who helped to dig up the jewels, to see if he can find anything?" Miss Macey asked, but she knew the answer before she heard it.

"Oh, no, please! Oh, Miss Macey, it would break Jenny-Wren's heart, if she wasn't there!"

Miss Macey laughed. "To say nothing of Joy's and yours. We'll wait till you can all go together, then."

"Jandy Mac's as keen as we are," Joan said.

She was not surprised to find that Janice slipped out and followed her, when she turned to go to the Abbey for the night. "May I come with you a little way, Abbey-Girl?"

"Do, Teddy-bear. We'll go by the garden. Weren't we all discreet during supper?" Joan laughed.

"It's much better not to say anything till we really have something to tell. The other kiddies couldn't get a word out of Jenny-Wren.; I was afraid she wouldn't be able to keep quiet about her seven white stones. Joan, what did they suggest to you?" Janice asked. "I'm sure there was something; I saw your face, and so did Joy, but she forgot. What did that half-pattern make you think of?"

Joan stood just within the Abbey gate and looked at her. "I'll tell you. I didn't tell Miss Macey, because it seemed so mad. The stones looked to me like a design of the fleur-de-lis."

"*Joan!* Like the patterns on the ring?"

"On the ring we haven't found; Lady Jehane's ring."

Janice bit her lip to keep back the words she would have liked to say. "And there were seven stones!" she said. "I say, Joan, it looks like Ambrose, after all!"

"I didn't put the idea into Jen's head, or Joy's. They were thrilled enough without that. Of course, it made me think of Ambrose too."

"Yes, it links up with him at once," Janice agreed. "If you're right, it isn't just the monks; it's that particular young lay-brother. What on earth could he be doing up in that quarry?"

"It's beyond me," Joan confessed. "Burying something more, I should think. But what?"

"And why? How soon can we go?"

"My dear girl, matric is the week after next. Even for Ambrose I can't mess it up now."

"Sure! You must get through. But you'd be far more brilliant if you'd set your mind at ease about that fleur-de-lis!" Janice coaxed.

Joan laughed. "I can't cut classes. Perhaps the Head will let us off one afternoon; we must go all together."

"Oh, rather! Is there any fear of young Jenny-Wren getting ahead of us by creeping away on her own?"

"Not Jen," Joan said definitely. "Some kids might, but it wouldn't appeal to her. She'll be as keen as we are that we should all go together." And Joan said good-night and disappeared into the silent Abbey, chasing the Mother Superior and Grey Timmy in front of her as she went down the tresaunt passage. Jen's eyes were very wistful as they met Joan's next morning, and she managed to whisper, "Any luck, Joan?"

"Not yet, Mrs. Wren."

"You won't go without me?"

"Did you think I would, Jenny-Wren?"

"No, I know you wouldn't. But it would be so dreadful if you did."

Joan laughed. "We'll wait till we can all manage it."

"They've distracted my mind all right, with their mysterious chalk-pit and their possible *fleur-de-lis*," Janice said to herself. "I'm as keen as any of them to know what's behind those stones—if anything! I don't feel at all sure we'll find anything. But I want to know."

She threw herself into her school work in a way she had not done hitherto, in the effort to forget still more completely the trouble in the background. But it was there, and a shadow fell on her face now and then as she looked at the Hall or the Abbey and remembered what might happen.

"Suppose it turns out to be all mine! It would be marvellous, of course, if Joan and Joy weren't mixed up in it. I love the place, but I could never even like it if I'd taken it from them. They'd never be happy again. I can't do it! I never will! I hope they'll never know. I mustn't think about it; I can't hear anything more for weeks."

She thrust her thoughts away, and went to practice at the nets; but she knew that Joan had been watching her, and was not surprised to be tackled by the Queen later in the day.

"You're still worried, Jandy Mac!"

"I'm trying not to think," Janice retorted. "When can we go and dig under your *fleur-de-lis*?"

"The Head says we may cut games to-morrow afternoon, but we must be back for evening prep., buried treasure or not. She says I've worked enough, and a day out on the hills will be good for my mind," Joan said, laughing.

"Good for the Head! I'm sure she's right. To-morrow—oh, cheers!"

"Can't we help? I hate to see you looking gloomy."

"Marvellous of you to care, but nobody can help. There's nothing to do. It's lawyers' business, and the lawyers are in Sydney. To-morrow's digging will help more than any amount of talking."

"To-morrow? Oh, splendid!" Jen cried, when she heard the news. "I do hope we find something! It's frightfully hard not to tell Jacky-boy; she knows we're on to something, and she and Della go on at me all the time."

"Hard lines!" Janice sympathised. "That's what comes of being married and having a family. Nobody teases me!"

"I'm on!" Joy's face lit up. "I dream every night of that chalk-pit. Last night I dreamt we found a body."

"Oh, topping!" Jen shouted.

"Whose was it?" Janice asked with interest.

"It was a skeleton. The bones couldn't tell us; he hadn't a card on him. I expect it was Jehane, coming back to look for her jewels."

"I'm sure Jehane wouldn't go and die in a chalk-pit!" Jen cried.

"Well, Ambrose, then. But we never found out who it was. Perhaps we'll find him to-morrow."

"I hope we don't," said Joan.

## CHAPTER XXII

### NOT AMBROSE, AFTER ALL

"I wish you people wouldn't keep your chalk-pits at the top of your hills!" Janice groaned, as they toiled up the steep path, laden with spades.

"We ought to have brought Bob to carry the tools, and then have made an excuse and sent him down again before we began to dig," said Joy.

"Oh, that would have been mean!" Jen panted.

"We don't want Bob digging up our corpses," Janice agreed.

"Better not to tell Bob anything about it. We're nearly there," Joan encouraged the rest.

As they reached the quarry, Jen and Joy forgot their exhaustion and rushed to the heap of stones and broken bits of chalk. "My stick went in about here," Joy cried. "We'll start here."

Joan and Janice paused at the top of the grass track, and gazed at the seven stones in the opposite cliff.

"It does look a bit like your fleur-de-lis, Abbey-Girl!" Janice murmured.

"As much as one could do with only seven stones. We'd never have thought of it, if we hadn't been talking about that ring," Joan admitted.

"Why didn't they use more stones and make a better thing of it?"

"Because it would have shown too clearly," Joan said at once. "It was to be a sign for the person who made it and for any one he told, but not for everybody. And if it was made by Ambrose, he had seven stones in his mind, because of the ring. Ambrose is our only connection with the fleur-de-lis. But I can't quite believe those stones have been there for five hundred years, Jan. Fifty, perhaps, but not five hundred! The cliff would have crumbled, and they'd have fallen out. It doesn't seem possible."

"Come and dig, you slackers!" Joy tossed back her long red hair, and turned a hot face to them.

"Joan! Jandy Mac! There's quite a big hole in here!" Jen shrieked. "Joy—look! The stones fell in, and it's quite *large*!"

The three elder girls crowded round. "Looks like the mouth of a cave," Janice exclaimed. "Can we make the hole bigger?"

"The stones had fallen down in front of the opening. It *is* a cave!" Joy shouted, seizing her spade again, and hurling chalk fragments aside.

"Be careful, Joy!" Joan cried. "Don't hurt anything that may be there."

"What do you expect to find?" Joy demanded. "There isn't anything to hurt."

“But there is a cave!” Jen danced in triumph. “We’ll have something to tell the others! I may tell Jack now, mayn’t I, Joan?”

The chalk had given way before the assault of four spades, and Joy’s surmise was proved correct. The rubble from the cliff had been concealing the entrance to a small deep cave, and the girls pressed in eagerly.

“Where are those torches?” Joan asked.

“Where’s my body?” Joy chuckled, and flashed on her light.

It was a low round opening, which seemed to go a little way into the cliff, dry and empty.

“No bones here, I’m glad to say,” Janice said, laughing.

“It looks as if my idea might be right. I’d been thinking perhaps the monks, or one special monk, had a private little place up here, where he came to meditate and pray,” Joan explained to the others.

“It would suit all right for that——”

“Joan! Joan! Joy! Oh, *come here!* Oh—*look!*”

At Jen’s wild cry the rest ran to her in the back of the cave, where she had been flashing her light on the walls.

“Joan—*look!*” Jen breathed, in an awed voice, and she held her light steadily on one spot.

In the wall at the back of the cave were seven white stones pressed into the chalk.

“It’s the same as outside!” Jen whispered.

“The same funny three-spoked thing!” Joy cried. “It must mean something, Joan!”

“The *fleur-de-lis!*” Joan and Janice spoke together.

“What? Well, it might be,” Joy agreed. “Is that what you think it’s meant to be?”

“Of course it is!” Jen gasped. “I never thought of it! Oh, Joan, what do you think——?”

“What we all think; that your friend Ambrose has been here. But the question is, what was he doing?” Janice remarked.

“Burying something, as he did in the crypt,” Joy said with conviction. “Spades forward, everybody! I’m going to dig up this floor till I find the treasure. Ambrose always buried things! Wonder what it was this time?” And she began to dig in feverish haste.

“There is something!” Joan gave a cry. She threw away her spade, and knelt beside the hole which Joy and Jen had dug.

Janice dropped on her knees. “Oh, Joan! What is it?”

Jen stopped in a wild war-dance of delight, and threw herself at full length on the ground. “It’s a box! I believe it’s more jewels!”

"Ambrose picked up things like a magpie, and then had to bury them," Joy murmured. "Show us, Joan!"

Reverently Joan turned the box round and tried the lock. "It's in good condition, but of course this place is very dry. But it doesn't look ancient; I should have said it was a very modern box! Odd! It isn't locked. They thought it would never be found, so they didn't lock it."

While the other girls held their breath, she raised the lid to show the treasure within.

A wail of disappointment broke from Jen, and shouts of amazement from Janice and Joy. In the box lay a folded penny exercise-book in a blue paper cover.

"Just like you can buy at the village shop!" Jen groaned. "And we expected jewels!"

Joan sat with the box in her lap and stared at the blue book. "Who on earth would bury that? And why?"

"It wasn't Ambrose, anyway!" Joy and Janice spoke together.

"That explains the sign on the cliff. It isn't five hundred years old, Joan," Janice added. "Extremely modern, in fact! Just as you said about the box!"

"An ordinary scribbling book, with Weights and Measures and Days of the Month and Twice One are Two on the back!" Jen was bitterly disappointed.

"Yes, but——" and Joan took up the book. "It may be interesting. Don't be too much upset till we've looked inside. It wasn't buried here so carefully for nothing."

"Oh, is it written in?" Jen's hopes revived.

"Show us, Joan! It's your find," Joy cried.

"I found the cave!" Jen exclaimed.

"There's 'T.A.' printed on the outside," Joan showed the cover. "And—look, everybody!"

"The fleur-de-lis, drawn under the initials!" Janice whispered. "Properly drawn this time!"

"The funny three-spoked thing again! He was crazy about it," Jen began.

"Used it as a sort of badge," Joy said. "Aren't you going to look inside? You are slow, Joan! Don't go off into a dream!"

"But it's so queer." Joan looked back at her. "You don't see it yet. We understood the sign because we thought Ambrose had made it, and he was French and had used the fleur-de-lis on the ring. But how did this 'T.A.' know about the fleur-de-lis?"

"Perhaps he was a Boy Scout, and it has nothing to do with the ring," Janice remarked. "Have we stumbled on a secret hoard of the Scouts?"

"Odd, if they only buried one note-book!" Joy mocked. "Joan, if you don't look inside that book, I shall!"

Joan laughed and opened the book. "It's a sort of diary. Here's his name—oh! Oh, Joy!"

White and shaking, she thrust the inner cover of the book to Joy, who read aloud what was written there.

"Tony Abinger. The Hermit's Cell. Abinger Hall."

"Uncle Tony!" An incredulous cry from Janice passed unnoticed in the shout from Joy and Jen.

"The man who died in Australia! My uncle—called after his father, old Sir Antony!"

"Who was he?" cried Jen. "Tell me, somebody! Is he real?"

"He died two years ago," Joy said breathlessly. "If he hadn't died, the Hall and the Abbey would have been his. I say, what d'you make of this, everybody? He must have been up here!"

"It was a shock." Joan had pulled herself together. "I was stunned for a moment. Joy, it's a treasure! *Much* more thrilling than Ambrose and jewels!"

"Much more modern, anyway," Joy gave a laugh of wild excitement. "I'll be glad to know something about him; I've wondered what he was like! Did he write the diary? Is there much of it?" She turned over the pages hastily. "It's the same writing. A message from my uncle! I believe you're right, as usual, Joan; it *is* more thrilling than any lay-brother of the Middle Ages!"

"There's nothing else, either in the box or in the hole," Joan said. "Let's take the book outside, and look at it in the sunshine. We can't read it by torchlight."

"Oh, are we going to read it? Oh, tophole!" Jen chuckled.

"I shall die if we don't read it soon!" Joy exploded.

"It hadn't occurred to me not to read it," Joan said. "One doesn't usually read other people's diaries, but when we've found it like this——"

"My dear, he died two years ago!" Joy said ruthlessly. "There's no harm. Anyway, I'm going to read it, *now!*"

"It's for you to say." Joan gave the book to her again. "You're his only living relative, Joy."

"And I've said it. Come outside, and we'll start at once!" Joy cried eagerly.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE STORY OF THE RING

In the excitement Janice had been unnoticed. She was, in the minds of the other girls, more of an outsider in this matter even than Jen. She was glad of it, for she was shaking all over, and she feared her face must show the shock she had received. She followed the rest slowly, making a pretence of looking about the cave before she left it.

"That book ought to be mine!" she thought wildly. "He was more my Uncle Tony than Joy's; she never knew him. She's glad he's dead, because it means she has the estate. A book written by Uncle Tony before he left home! I ought to have it!"

"Come on, Jandy Mac!" Joy called. "We're going to read my Uncle Tony's diary; don't you want to hear what he wrote, years ago, before he went away? There's a date, of twenty-five years ago. Isn't it a thrill?"

"Read on!" Janice threw herself on the grass with her back to the other three. "Yes, I'd like to hear it."

"Are you all right, Jan?" Joan exclaimed. "Did the cave make you feel queer?"

"A bit. Or perhaps it was the climb. I'll be O.K., if I lie still while you're reading. The wind's refreshing. Carry on, 'Traveller's Joy.' "

"You read it, Joan!" Joy suggested.

"No, it's yours." Joan flung an arm round Jen, who had dropped close to her on the turf. "Steady, kid! There's no need to go on like that."

"But it's so wildly thrilling!" Jen pushed the plaits from her burning face and tried to stop her shivers of excitement.

"It is, but you needn't wriggle all the time. We're ready, Joy."

Joy had been glancing at the manuscript. "It isn't exactly a diary. It seems to be the story of what he'd just been doing. Here goes!"

"'Waiting for Joyce, but she won't be here for an hour yet.'—Joan! That must have been mother!"

"Before she was married," Joan agreed. "Oh, Joy, is it going to tell you something about her? Just what you've always wanted!"

Joy nodded and swallowed hurriedly. Her voice was not quite steady as she read on. An unknown uncle was a mere matter of interest, but news of her dead mother moved her deeply.

"'I'm going to prepare a document and bury it in the Hermit's Cell,' " Tony Abinger had written. "Joan, you were right about the cave," Joy

interrupted her own reading.

"There's more in it than I thought, though. But go on now, Joy. Hermits and monks can wait!"

"This is what he says!—'I'm off to-morrow, with Peter Turner, to Sydney. Home has been unbearable for the last few years, and I can't put up with it any longer. Father gets worse and worse. I wouldn't leave Joyce, but she wants me to take this chance, and Peter's set on starting at once. Joyce says she'll be all right; he isn't as bad to her; he's fond of her, in his way, but he's always been down on me. I shouldn't wonder if presently Joyce goes off with that red-haired Shirley chap; he's a good fellow, and he'd take care of her. She'd be better married——'"

The red-haired Shirley girls gasped and looked at one another. Then Joy read on with a breathless laugh:

"'I'm giving her a ring like mine as a keepsake. She always wanted mine, but of course I had to keep it—it goes with the name, and she'll change hers! She had a ring left her by an old aunt the other day, and it had four sapphires in it, so I got a chap in town to match them with three more, and make them up in a ring for her. She'll be no end pleased to have it. He hasn't copied the roses and fleurs-de-lis that are on the old one, but she won't mind that; it's the seven sapphires she's keen on. Nobody sees the decoration when the ring's being worn, but I've always been interested in the patterns. I'd give a lot to know how that old ring came into the family, and why it has the fleur-de-lis! We aren't French, so far as I've ever heard.'"

"Oh—Joy! Just one minute!" Joan cried. "The whole story of the ring! It's more precious than any jewels would have been!"

"But he never knew!" Jen said, wide-eyed. "Isn't it rather sad, Joan? We know where his ring came from—that Ambrose made it for Lady Jehane—but he never found the Abbey books, and so he never knew."

"It was just a family heirloom to him. We have the beginning of the story," Joan agreed.

Joy sat gazing dreamily down at the Abbey. "I wonder if she was pleased? She wore the ring and left it for me, so I suppose she was. And he took the old one away to Australia! I wonder what became of it?"

"Nobody there would know what it was," Joan said. "I wish he'd told somebody before he died, and asked them to send it home."

"Yes, he ought to have done that," Joy said decisively. "No Australian person ought to have it. It would have been jolly to have both, now that we know the connection between them! But I'd rather have mother's ring; I'm glad we've got that."

"But the old one would be more valuable and would have had more story about it!" Joan exclaimed. "I'd rather have had the old one. Still, of

course, she wasn't my mother!"

"Couldn't Joy read the rest?" Janice asked, without looking round. The story of the ring, and the comments of the girls, had been hard to bear, and she was glad no one had had time to think about her.

"Right you are, Jandy Mac! We shall have to go home soon," Joan assented. "Carry on, Joy!"

"I shall bury this book in the Hermit's Cell, and put a fleur-de-lis to mark the place. When Joyce and I leave to-day, I'm going to loosen the chalk with a spade and haul down a lot of it over the mouth of the cave. We've been in here so much, ever since we played here as kiddies; I don't want to think of people messing it up and having picnics in here, and lighting fires and leaving bags and banana skins about! I'm sure in my own mind that it's connected with the Abbey, and was some sort of sacred place, because the path to the Abbey is so straight. I once found an old fellow among the hills who called it the Monks' Path, though every one else seems to have forgotten the name. If I marry and have kiddies out in Sydney—you never know your luck!—I shall tell them to come home and look for the Monks' Path.' "

Janice, in a flash, saw danger and grasped it. She sat up hurriedly and broke in upon the reading.

"He never married, did he?"

"No, Jandy Mac, we were told he died unmarried. Why?"

"Well, don't you see? He must have told somebody about the path, for a friend told me, and I told you." Janice gazed at them steadily.

"That's very interesting!" Joy exclaimed. "I'd forgotten it was you who first told us about the path."

"Yes, but you'd have remembered; or Joan would!" said Janice in her secret mind.

"Who was it told you, Jan?" Joan asked.

"Just a friend. Perhaps Mr. Abinger told that Mr. Turner with whom he went away. But I hadn't heard about a Hermit's Cell, Joan! Why do you think Mr. Abinger called it that?" Janice spoke eagerly, but her anxiety was for a change of subject, and not from interest in the past.

"I don't know, of course, unless Joy's manuscript tells us any more," Joan said thoughtfully, "but I should think that was just a lucky shot on her Uncle Tony's part. It was natural; a cave, at the end of the Monks' Path, might very well suggest a hermit. The Abbey was founded by St. Ethelwyn, who was a hermit, you know."

"But he's the man who lived by the well we found in the old church—St. Ethelwyn's Well!" Jen cried, round-eyed.

"Of course. 'Uncle Tony' probably knew the legend and connected this cave with St. Ethelwyn. He didn't know where the well was, but we've found it, thanks to Dick and Della."

"You think old Ethelwyn lived up here?" Joy asked.

"I think he'd have a hut near the holy well, but he may have come up here to pray. He couldn't live up here; there's no water, for one thing. But he may have been the first to make that path, coming up to the cave to pray in private, away from the pilgrims who would flock to the well; and then the monks may have used it in the same way, and so the path was made."

"Thrilling!" Jen murmured, and gazed down the path with eyes which saw visions of the past.

Janice saw with relief that her ruse had succeeded. Joan and Jen were dreaming of monks and hermits, and Joy's thoughts were with her mother. No more questions would be asked, she hoped, about her mysterious friend's connection with Tony Abinger.

"Is there any more in your book, Joy?" she asked.

Joy roused herself. "Only another paragraph or so. I suppose mother came, and he gave her the ring, and they buried the book and stuck in the stones to mark the place, and then they pulled down the chalk from the cliff and went away. And twenty-five years after, we come along and find it all!"

"Thanks to Jandy Mac," said Joan. "We'd never heard of the Monks' Path. Before they went they made the fleur-de-lis on the cliff, with seven white stones, and nobody noticed anything in all these years until Jenny-Wren's sharp eyes saw that the stones weren't just an accident. It's a good thing we brought you, Mrs. Wren!"

"And a good thing Jandy Mac came to the Abbey," Joy added. "I'm just frightfully bucked to have this story of mother and her brother. It's made him real; he was only a name before. It's almost as if he had been speaking to us."

"And you know about the ring, and where the old one went to," Jen added. "We thought it was lost. Perhaps it will turn up sometime in Australia."

"Couldn't you make some inquiries when you go back, Teddy-bear?" Joy asked. "We ought to have that ring."

"I might try," Janice agreed, her tone carefully schooled to be sufficiently casual. "Would you wear two, if you had it? Two almost alike?"

"One on each hand!" Jen chuckled.

"Oh, no! I should give Jehane's ring to Joan," Joy said, without a moment's hesitation. "It belongs to the Abbey quite as much as to our family."

Joan flushed. "I don't think that would be right, Joy. I can't put into words how much I should value that old ring, if we ever found it; but it ought to stay in your family."

"It belongs to the Abbey," Joy said again.

"You haven't found it yet, and it's almost tea-time. Couldn't you finish the story?" Jen pleaded.

Joy gave a shout of laughter. "Wise young woman! We needn't argue about the ring until we see it; but we shall have to go home to tea! Here's the end of the yarn!"

## CHAPTER XXIV JEHANE—AMBROSE

“Uncle Tony tells one more thing about the old ring.” Joy had glanced at the manuscript. “It had initials inside it—J.A.—so he had mother’s initials put inside hers; we guessed they stood for Joyce Abinger. About the old one he says: ‘The letters are odd; old, of course, but that isn’t the odd thing. They aren’t close together, as initials of a name ought to be; the J is on one side and the A is on the other; the whole width of the ring is between them. Queer! But I don’t see what they could be but initials; some Joyce or Jane Abinger of the past. It’s a woman’s ring, really; I have to wear it on my little finger. Joyce has always tried to get it from me by insisting it was made for a girl, but I can wear it on that finger. I’ve always thought the letters looked odd, separated like that. Here comes Joyce! I can see her on the path. I’ll bury the book and stick in my seven stones; it won’t be a very beautiful fleur-de-lis, but it will do to mark the place. Then I’ll give her the ring, and we’ll say good-bye to the cave, and to-morrow I’m off to see the kangaroos!’ And that’s all. Doesn’t it make them both seem real, Joan?”

“He didn’t know about Australian teddy-bears!” Jen murmured.

Janice had turned away and was gazing down the path, as if she could see Joyce Abinger coming up to receive her ring. She had often heard Tony Abinger wondering about the separated initials inside his ring.

Joan leaned forward. “Joy, we understand about the letters! I wish we could have told him. We know all, or most of, the things that puzzled him.”

“I don’t see that, Joan?” Joy and Jen spoke together.

“The letters didn’t stand for one person, but two, and that’s why they were separated. They didn’t mean Jehane Abinger; they meant Jehane and Ambrose,” Joan said positively.

“I believe you’re right!” Joy cried.

“And as he hardly knew her, but thought she was the most marvellous person in the world, he put his A a long way from her J!” Jen added.

“That’s about it, Jenny-Wren. He’d feel he had the right to put his letter in, as he was the maker of the ring. Now, dear people, we’d better go home. We’ve been up here for simply hours!”

“The Queen speaks,” Janice sat up. “And I’m hungry. Let’s go.”

“Shall we leave the cave as it is?” Joy asked.

“The others will want to see it,” Jen urged. “We may tell them, now that we know all about it, Joan?”

"Know all about it!" Janice said to herself, as she gazed up at the fleur-de-lis on the cliff. "Suppose they did?"

"We'll leave it. It won't do any harm," Joan said. "Ask Joy if you may tell the story, Mrs. Wren. It's her family history."

"Oh, 'Traveller's Joy,' be a sport!"

"Tell anybody you like, Jenny-Wren. You were the one who saw the fleur-de-lis."

"I didn't know what it was," Jen said honestly. "I only said it looked queer."

"The rest of us hadn't noticed it at all. You and Jandy Mac between you helped us to make the find."

"Joan was the one who guessed what the stones were meant to be," Janice remarked, as they went down the path. "We'd never thought of the fleur-de-lis."

"It wasn't a very good one," Joan said, laughing. "All right now, Jandy Mac? What was wrong?"

"I'm all right again, thanks. Perhaps it was the cave."

"Don't you like the way we're gradually filling the Abbey story with people?" Joan took her arm as they reached the road. "First Jehane and Ambrose—that old romance. Then Joy's mother, and now her uncle. St. Ethelwyn is getting much more real too; first his well and now his——"

"Now his cell!" Janice laughed. "It's thrilling, Abbey-Girl!"

"I'm frightfully glad. It feels as if the old places were coming to life. It's what I've always wanted; some stories of the Abbey. I don't suppose we shall ever hear any more about Jehane's ring, but I claim the hermit's cell as a part of the Abbey and a real bit added to it."

"Oh, sure!" Janice agreed. "Think of the old chap climbing all this way to get peace and quietness for his prayers!"

"It would be different when the church was built," Joan mused. "They'd pray in the church then. But Ethelwyn was before the church and long before the Abbey," and she dropped Jandy's arm as they came to the steps through the wood. "Single file here!"

Jen raced ahead as they reached the garden, then pulled herself up. "Do you want to be the first to tell people, Joan? Or Joy?"

"I'd much rather hear you do it," Joan assured her.

"Carry on, Jenny-Wren!" said Joy.

Jen rushed into the entrance-hall, where the girls were gathering for tea, which they would carry out to the garden and take in groups under the trees.

"Jacky-boy! Everybody—such a thrill! We've found a book with Joy's family history—well, part of it, anyway!" as Joy gave a shout of laughter. "And we've found where the monks used to say their prayers, and we know

who copied Joy's ring from the old one, and there's a fleur-de-lis up on the cliff, and a cave, and you can all go and see it, so far as Joy's concerned. But you'll have to arrange it with Miss Macey, of course."

"A very good effort, Jenny-Wren!" Joan laughed. "Joy, we'd better take the book to the Head's study. But Mother must see it first."

"Oh, Aunty first, of course! We'll take it to her now," Joy agreed. "Jandy Mac, will you help Mrs. Wren to explain herself? She sounds a little muddled at present."

"I'm sure the rest feel more than a little muddled," Joan said. "We'll leave it to you, Jandy Mac!" and the cousins went together to carry the book with its story to Mrs. Shirley.

## CHAPTER XXV

### JANICE SPEAKS OUT

"May I speak to you, Miss Macey?" Late in the evening Janice tapped on the study door.

"To be sure you may, my dear. Is anything the matter?" The headmistress looked keenly at her newest pupil's face, as Janice came up to her desk. "I thought at supper you didn't look well. Have the girls tired you with all this excitement and climbing up the hill? You helped in the great discovery, didn't you? Joan has shown me the precious book."

Janice looked at her with suddenly quivering lips. "Miss Macey, I must tell somebody. I can't bear it alone any longer. I've tried to keep it to myself, but I just can't."

Miss Macey rose with an exclamation of dismay. "My dear girl, what is the matter? Why didn't you tell me at once? Have you had bad news? You are so far from all your friends; why didn't you come straight to me?"

Janice quivered again. "Because it will upset you. I don't want to—to cry, Miss Macey! But——"

"Sit down, child!" The Head pulled forward a chair and put her gently into it. "Now, don't hurry. Wait till you are ready to tell me."

Janice sat with bent head for a moment, then spoke without looking up. "I had a letter—from a cousin I met in Scotland. He's travelling to Australia—he wrote from Singapore. He told me something that bothered me frightfully. The trouble is, it will bother everybody else too. I've tried to hide it, but I can't go on. I must have somebody to speak to about it. It feels mean to come and worry you, but there's nobody else."

"But I'm here to be worried, if any girl in the school is in trouble," Miss Macey said gently. "Would you rather go to Mrs. Shirley?"

"No! Oh, not Mrs. Shirley! It would break her heart, and she's such a dear, and so sweet and gentle!"

"I can't see why your trouble should make Mrs. Shirley unhappy." The headmistress looked bewildered.

Janice flung back her head and faced her bravely. "Miss Macey, I kept something back when I asked you to have me in the school. I didn't mean any harm; there just seemed no need to talk of it. I never dreamed of what was going to happen—I couldn't have dreamed anything so dreadful. Miss Macey, please, I'm not crazy! I'm a sort of—almost a cousin—of Joan and

Joy. I missed being their step-cousin by one week. They don't know anything about it."

Miss Macey looked at her steadily. "Can you explain a little more clearly?"

"Only too clearly!" Janice said unsteadily. "I told you of somebody who was going to marry my mother, and how she died a week before the wedding?"

"Somebody who afterwards adopted you and left you a legacy? I remember the story."

"He left me everything he had; and that's partly the trouble. I didn't tell you his name. Miss Macey, he was Antony Abinger. I called him Uncle Tony."

"Abinger?" Miss Macey half-rose in her excitement. She sat down again and spoke more quietly. "Do you really mean that it was Joy's uncle who adopted you?"

"The one who went to Australia twenty-five years ago. The one who wrote that book we found to-day," Janice said brokenly.

"That's an amazing story! You must have felt the book was a message from himself. My dear, what a difficult day you have had! But——"

"It was Uncle Tony speaking to us. Every word sounded just like him. It brought him right back to me. I nearly broke down," Janice almost sobbed. "Joan saw, of course, but she thought I was upset with going in the cave. She couldn't guess."

"But how amazing that you should come here——" And then Miss Macey paused.

"Oh, no! I did it on purpose. He had told me of his old home, and the Abbey, and as soon as I could persuade Aunty to come with me I just rushed to England to see it all. I couldn't spare time for London; we came almost straight to Wycombe. But I didn't know about Joan and Joy. I'd heard that his father was dead, and somebody had inherited the place. He didn't go on writing letters after Joy's mother died; I don't think he knew about Joy—I'm sure he didn't, or he would have left the ring to her."

"The ring?" Miss Macey asked incredulously. "Do you mean the old ring that is lost?"

"It isn't lost. I've seen it often; I knew about the roses and fleurs-de-lis before Jen told us. It's mine now; of course, I shall send it to Joy as soon as I get home."

"That will be a treasure for our girls. And I remember—it was you who told them about the Monks' Path. You had heard of it from him? But, my dear Janice, why didn't you tell us? Joy would have been delighted to hear about her uncle!"

"Perhaps you won't understand," Janice said unsteadily. "Just at first I couldn't tell them; it would have felt like claiming relationship, and I thought they might not like it. They were friendly, because I came from so far away, and because I loved the Abbey and their dancing; I meant to write and tell the story later on. There was another reason, too. Miss Macey, don't you see? If my mother and Uncle Tony had married, and if he had lived longer than his father, this house and the Abbey would have belonged to me. I felt Joy might think I was grudging it to her, or hinting that I wished it had been mine."

"Nobody could blame you for wishing that! It's a beautiful place. But I see how you felt. And you wanted to come into the school, so that you would have more chance to be with your almost-cousins?"

"I wanted to come to school for every possible reason, but that was one of them. I never dreamt of the luck of living in Joy's house."

"That must have been a joyful moment for you. Well, Janice, I begin to see how trying all this business of the ring and the book has been to you; how odd that sounds!" Miss Macey laughed. "But, my dear——"

"But there's something more; the worst thing of all!" Janice cried. "I haven't told you yet. Oh, Miss Macey, I had a letter from Alec, my cousin, on his way to Australia, and they'd found a sailor who says Uncle Tony didn't die two years ago! He was shipwrecked in the South Seas and they never found him, but nobody ever doubted that he was dead. I wondered sometimes, but nobody else did. This man says they were on an island for months, and he took care of Uncle Tony, who was ill, until he died, about last Christmas. Miss Macey, don't you *see*? He left everything to me. If he died two months after his father, instead of two years before, won't the lawyers try to say—oh, don't you see how dreadful it is?"

## CHAPTER XXVI

### MISS MACEY HELPS

Miss Macey sat and gazed at her. "That is very disturbing," she said at last. "It will be a matter for the lawyers. Oh, I do hope—it would be a tragedy for Mrs. Shirley and the girls!" Unconsciously her voice had hardened.

Janice sprang up and turned to the window. She stood staring out into the darkness, while Miss Macey faced the distressing thought that Joan and Joy might lose the Abbey and the Hall; now, after all these happy months.

"The girls haven't guessed anything?" Miss Macey asked at last. There was a new chilly note in her voice.

Janice swung round. "Miss Macey, you can't think I'd take the place away from them, whatever the lawyers say?"

"But if they can prove that it is yours? It is a beautiful place——" Miss Macey began.

"If the very worst happens, and I can't get out of it in any possible way, I shall give it back to Joy and Joan on the day I come of age," Janice said passionately. "I know it's beautiful, and I love it. But could I ever be happy here, if I'd turned the Shirleys out?"

Miss Macey's face softened and her manner thawed. "Suppose we talk it over! Do you mean that you would not accept the legacy of the property?"

"I never could! I should hate the place, if I had taken it from Joy and Joan."

"You are right there," Miss Macey agreed, "though I'm surprised that you are so sure about it, at your age. You would never be happy here."

Janice looked at her with quivering lips. "It's been breaking my heart. I've looked at Joy and Mrs. Shirley and thought—'If you only knew——!' I'm so terribly afraid that the lawyers will be pigs, and I shan't be able to get out of it, and that means waiting till I'm twenty-one. Is there any hope at all that they won't be able to say it's mine?"

"That will be for them to decide. You may be quite sure that Joy's lawyers will insist on absolute proof. Would you care to tell me more of the story? Sit down, my dear. It has been very trying for you."

"Trying!" Janice dropped into a chair. "If you could imagine what it has been like—and still is—to go on laughing and fooling with Joan, not knowing whether I'll have to take her Abbey from her or not! And Joy is so proud of her house!"

"I wish you had come to me before. Tell me the details of the story." Miss Macey's sympathy was rapidly returning as she realised that Janice was as anxious as herself that the Abbey Girls should not lose their inheritance.

Breathlessly Janice poured out the story of Tony Abinger's death, as told by Alec Fraser.

Miss Macey frowned. "Can you rely on this cousin's word?"

Janice's face flamed. "Absolutely, Miss Macey. He's—he's a very great friend. But he wants me to have the property; he doesn't understand. I've written, of course; he'll know I'm in earnest when he has my letter."

The headmistress gave her a searching look. There had been something in the voice that said "a very great friend," which had set her wondering.

Janice saw it, and hurriedly brought her back to the question of the moment. "The sailor must be all right, Miss Macey. He couldn't have known about Uncle Tony unless they had really been on the island together."

"He might have known Mr. Abinger on the ship, before the wreck," Miss Macey began.

"But he has the ring—the ring with the seven sapphires!" Janice wailed. "That was what proved it to me. Uncle Tony would never have parted with that ring. It must be true!"

Miss Macey looked at her thoughtfully. "Yes, but that is not any proof of the date of Mr. Abinger's death, which is the critical point. He may have died at the time of the wreck, as you have always supposed. The man might have found his body, and have taken the ring."

Janice stared at her, wild hope dawning in her eyes. If the headmistress had still wished for proof of her attitude, she had it in the sudden radiance of Jandy's face, as she sprang to her feet. "It's true! Oh, it's true! I was too much upset to think of it, but it is true! He may even have lived for some months on the island; we've no proof whatever of when he died. Oh, Miss Macey you've given me my first gleam of hope!"

"Well, that's one way to look at it!" the headmistress said grimly. "It's a very beautiful inheritance, Janice. Are you quite sure——?"

"But it isn't mine. It was never meant to be mine. Joy's the last of the family; I'm nothing to do with them. Uncle Tony would have willed it to Joy, if he'd known. It would be unjust and cruel, if it came to me. If it did, I should give it back to the girls, of course, but they wouldn't feel it was the same. Oh, Miss Macey, do you think there's any chance it may be theirs by right? That's what I want."

"I'm not a lawyer, but I imagine Joy's solicitors will require definite proof of the date of Mr. Abinger's death," Miss Macey said. "If your man can't produce that—and at present I don't see how he can—I don't believe

any court would uphold your claim. The evidence of one sailor would hardly be held sufficient to upset the possession of an estate like this, I imagine."

"Especially when any judge or court could see that it ought to be Joy's, and that the other way would be horribly unjust," Janice added eagerly. "I'd go to any court and tell them I didn't want any change made, and that if they did it I'd undo it again in a year or two."

Miss Macey laughed. "Your solicitor wouldn't approve of you, if you did that! Don't worry too much, Janice! All this man can prove, so far as I can see, is that he was with Mr. Abinger at some time, probably after the wreck. He is hoping to be rewarded for his care of your adopted uncle, and he would naturally try to make out that he had nursed him for a long period."

Janice drew a deep breath, as if a weight had fallen from her shoulders. "Thank you a thousand times! It was silly of me not to see all that; you saw it at once. But I was so frightened—and I couldn't speak to anybody——"

"You couldn't speak to Mrs. Shirley or the girls, most certainly. But you ought to have come to me, Janice."

"I just couldn't. You're so fond of them; I knew how you'd feel—and you did, Miss Macey. You hated me for a moment or so."

"I'm sorry if I hurt you," Miss Macey apologised. "But I couldn't bear to think of the blow that might fall on the Shirleys. I didn't realise what your attitude would be."

"I can't bear it, either. It won't fall, if I can help it! We needn't say anything to them, need we? You don't think I ought to tell them?" Janice pleaded.

"Much better not, I should say. If they have to know, let it come through the lawyers. But I can't believe any lawyer would say your claim is valid, unless there is more evidence than you have told me."

"I've written to Alec. I hope there isn't any more. There won't be any claim, if I can help it, Miss Macey!"

"I am very glad to hear you say it. The other way would be manifestly unjust. My dear child, what a hard time you have been through!" There was real sympathy in the Head's tone.

"All this business about the ring has made it ten times harder!" Janice exclaimed. "I've promised to make inquiries about the ring when I go back. It won't be hard to do!"

"But they haven't guessed?" Miss Macey asked hastily. "Joan is very quick sometimes."

"They know that some friend of mine had heard of the Monks' Path from Joy's uncle. The same friend might know what had become of the ring after his death."

“You’re treading on thin ice. I should try to keep off the subject entirely. The exams next week and then the end-of-term affairs will help.”

“I’m beginning to think I may enjoy the rest of the term, after all,” Janice said, as she rose to go. “I couldn’t think of anything but that wretched sailor, but you’ve given me hope. I feel different already.”

“Throw yourself into all that is going on, and don’t brood over your secret,” the headmistress advised. “Come and talk to me at any time. I’m very glad you decided to trust me. The burden was too heavy for you to carry alone.”

“A thousand thanks!” Janice exclaimed, as she went off to bed, much comforted and much more hopeful.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### DANCING ON THE LAWN

“No, I’m not going to toil up that hill again! Jenny-Wren can tell you all about it,” Janice said resolutely. “Twice I’ve been up, just to look at a dry little hole, and I’ve had enough of those steps through the wood. I’m going to bowl to Nora.”

Many of the girls were busy with the exams. In the evening all work was rigidly forbidden, and, if the weather allowed, outdoor games or dancing were insisted upon. Even wandering in the Abbey or garden, or climbing the hill to the Hermit’s Cave, was discouraged, because these gave time for brooding over answers that might have been hopelessly wrong or for dreading questions still to come. Miss Macey was resolute that when the candidates came home from town they must leave the exams behind, and she did her best to fill their thoughts with new matters during the evenings, so far as the boarders were concerned.

Janice was much in demand, both at tennis and at the cricket nets; it was good practice to play with her or to stand up to her balls. She realised that her mind needed distraction as much as the exam girls’ did, and, throwing herself into the task of keeping them from worrying, she cured her own troubles at the same time.

By the Head’s advice Joan, as Queen, had called a meeting of the Hamlet Club for the evening after the last ordeal was over, and in brilliant sunshine girls came by train, car, or cycle, in their dancing frocks of vivid colours, to gather on the lawn.

Janice went eagerly with the rest. “I don’t know a frightful lot, but I do know enough to have a good time, and Jenny-Wren’s going to take care of me.”

“Your dress will look gorgeous with Mrs. Wren’s favourite blue,” said Joan.

Janice had given warm approval to the school’s custom of wearing a special frock for full-dress dance evenings, though for practice nights the girls were content with their blue tunics and green girdles. She had ordered a loose frock of glowing gold, which went well with her brown eyes and hair, and Joy had laughed at sight of it.

“Good for you, Jandy Mac! I was afraid you’d choose pink, and then neither Joan nor I could have danced with you.”

"I want to dance with you, and as I'm still the newest member, I can claim the first dance with Joan," Janice retorted. "If you two hadn't been here, I'd probably have worn rose or coral."

"Good thing you didn't! We can never dance with pink people like Queen 'Strawberry.'"

"It isn't that we want to dress up for dancing," Joan explained, when the frocks were being discussed. "It's that we feel more 'dancey' if we change."

Janice agreed warmly. "More like a party, and dancing is a party-ish thing. Besides, it looks so jolly. I'd better have a white bonnet; I'll have to be a woman, as I'm so new; you others will need to lead me through, so I'd better be properly meek and humble. You Queens won't be wearing your robes and crowns, then?"

"No fear! we want to dance," Joy laughed.

"We only dress up for big occasions," Joan added. "The next comes in the autumn, as a rule, but this year it's to be in August, in the holidays. There's a big fête for the hospital, held in the school grounds, and Miss Macey likes us to go as Queens, and the rest do a few dances. It pleases people and helps the show. Some of the girls are away, but we can get enough for two or three sets, and that's all that's needed."

"I suppose Jandy Mac will have gone back to Scotland. If she stayed with us she could dance," Joy remarked.

Jandy's face clouded for a moment. "I expect I'll be off to Sydney," she said. "What's the first dance, Joan? I may have it with you, mayn't I?"

"I hope you will! It's 'The Triumph.' The woman only has to walk about and be led by the man."

"That will suit me!" Janice laughed.

She grinned at Joan as the first arch was formed over her head, and, in her golden frock, she was led up the middle by Joan and Joy, their hands clasped above her, and put into her place by Joan with a courteous movement. Joan was wearing pale grey, with a white collar and cuffs, her dress severely plain, her vivid colouring increased by its simplicity; Joy wore bright green, and Jen, her partner, was in brilliant blue.

"What are you laughing at, Jandy Mac?" Joan demanded, as she led Janice down the middle.

"I was thinking what a picture I must make, between you and 'Traveller's Joy,' in all these colours," Janice retorted. "I'd like a photo, in colours, of us three making that arch! How jolly Miss Lane's music is for dancing! And I like the feeling of the grass. Is your mind being distracted from the exam?"

"Oh—matric! I've forgotten all about it," Joan laughed. "I forget everything when I begin dancing, as the Head knows quite well."

“If all the World were Paper” and “Scotch Cap” followed, and then Janice was sternly ordered to go and talk to Mrs. Shirley, while the club danced “Nonesuch.”

“You may watch this. We can’t have it messed up by new people,” Joy said. “No, Jenny-Wren, you aren’t good enough yet. Go away! Shoo!”

“I never want to sit out any dance,” Jen said mournfully. “I wonder if there’ll ever be a time when I know them *all*?”

Margia Lane stood in the middle of the lawn and fiddled tune after tune. Mrs. Shirley and Miss Macey sat on the terrace, and the dancing went on for a couple of hours. Then the girls crowded into the big hall for supper, and at dusk the procession of cars and cycles set out for home.

“Joan, do come and talk to Jen!” Jack begged, when the last guest had been dismissed. “She’s had a letter from home, and she’s fearfully in the dumps.”

“What’s the matter, Mrs. Wren?” Joan cried, hurrying to where a small blue figure stood disconsolately staring out into the garden. “Is somebody ill? What’s up, kid?”

“They don’t want me to go home at the end of the term. Well, they do, of course,” Jen corrected herself. “Mother’s fearfully upset; it’s my first term, you know. But father has been ill for a week—I knew about that—and the doctor says he must be kept very quiet. So mother thinks I’d better stay with Aunty in Wycombe for a fortnight, but Aunty’s arranged to have painters in, just at that time, and she doesn’t really want me. Besides, it’s dull; there’s nobody there! Just me and Aunty—after all this!”

“It would be rather a flop, after the crowd here,” Joan agreed, looking thoughtful. “I say, Joy! Come here a moment!”

Joy listened to the story, and saw from Jen’s dismal face that the solution which had occurred to Joan had not entered her mind. It was characteristic of Joan that she never invited any one to Joy’s house, but that she instantly turned to Joy and showed what she expected of her.

Joy laughed. “Then you’ll stay here, Mrs. Wren. That’s easy! Or are you tired of us?”

“Oh, *Joy! Joan!*” Jen’s shriek of rapture echoed through the house. “Would you? When the rest go, would you keep me? Aren’t you sick of me?”

“Can’t let you go and get mixed up with the painters,” Joy said. “Better stay and cheer us up. Think how empty the house will seem,” and she walked off, whistling a morris tune.

Jen turned a radiant face to Joan. “*Joan*, would you put up with me? Don’t you feel you can’t bear to see a girl for two months?”

Joan laughed. "It's not as bad as that, Jenny-Wren. Perhaps you'll stay till the fête, and dance for us. After all, you began the term with a week here; you ought to end with another week, just to finish things off neatly."

"Like the two sides of a dance," Jen cried eagerly. "All rounded off in a tidy pattern!"

"Balanced," Joan agreed. "We'll write to your mother and your aunt, and say we'd like to have you. Some day I'll come and stay with you!"

"Oh, I do hope you will! I'd be so proud!" Jen said.

"Topping for you!" Jack said wistfully when she heard the news. "My hat! I wish somebody of mine would need to be kept very quiet!"

"I'm afraid I'm not *very* quiet," Jen admitted. "I'd try to be, but——"

"But you couldn't," Della said. "You'd forget and give one of your fearful yells."

"I hope you'll miss me," Jack remarked.

"Oh, I shall! I shall be a lone lonely widow. But I'll have a perfectly marvellous time, all the same!" and Jen danced up to bed.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A HOTEL FOR STRANDED GIRLS

“What’s the matter, Jandy Mac?” Joan asked.

It was a week before the end of the term, and Janice was reading her letters. Her face had fallen as she studied one from Canada, and Joan’s watchful eyes had seen.

“Aunty has been ill,” Janice said soberly. “She reached Montreal, as she’d planned; and there she collapsed. It isn’t serious; she says I’m not to worry. But she won’t be home as soon as I thought. She thinks I’d better go back to Scotland. I suppose I must, but I’m not keen. The cousins I met before won’t be there, and it won’t be at all cheerful.”

“Oh, stay here with us!” Joy cried, laughing, as Joan’s eyes met hers. “Stay and help us to cope with Jenny-Wren!”

Janice flushed. “Oh, I couldn’t, could I? You must be pining to have the house to yourselves.”

“I wish you would, Jan,” Joan said seriously. “If I know Joy, she’ll go off wandering as soon as Miss Macey isn’t here to keep her in order, and Jenny-Wren will soon get tired of my company. Stay and help to play with us!”

“I won’t! I’d never!” Jen exclaimed. “But it would be marvellous to have Jandy Mac for the holidays,” she added.

Joan laughed. “Consider yourself invited, Jan! Mother likes you; she’ll be glad to have you here.”

“It’s just terribly good of you all!” Janice exclaimed. “I don’t really see why Joy should turn her house into a hotel for stranded girls!”

Joy gave a shout of laughter. “I don’t suppose the house will ever be so full again! I want you to stay, Teddy-bear! You’ll be company for Joan when I go a-roaming.”

“You’ll be able to dance for us at the fête!” Jen shouted. “You’ll be my partner! Our frocks look marvellous together! But you’ll have to be the man, or people will laugh.”

“I shouldn’t be good enough,” Janice urged. “Joan, couldn’t I go and sleep in your little room in the Abbey?”

“You could, of course.” Joan’s eyes danced. “But it would be very unfriendly.”

“Oh, let me sleep in the Abbey!” Jen gave a shriek of excitement.

“You ought to be smothered, Jenny-Wren!” said Joy.

"Nobody's going to sleep in the Abbey," Joan spoke with decision. "Except perhaps for one night, as a very special treat. Jen shall dance at the fête. Jandy Mac shall dance, too, unless she would like a place in the procession, for once. Muriel told me yesterday that she'll be away, so I shan't have any maid to carry my train. She'll lend her frock and violet girdle, if the girl who takes her place is about her size. What about it, Jan? Would you like to be a maid-of-honour?"

"If the train I'm to carry is a violet one, I'll be proud and glad to carry it," Janice said promptly.

Joan jumped up and curtseyed. "What a pretty speech! I can't do this nicely in a tunic, I'm afraid! Thank you, Jandy Mac! I'll be proud and happy to have you for my maid-of-honour."

"Bridesmaid!" said Jen. "I'd like to be a bridesmaid some day."

"You shall be mine," Joan promised solemnly. "I'll ask you to come from Yorkshire to be my bridesmaid."

"I won't let you forget! But I didn't mean a real wedding bridesmaid."

"Then say maid-of-honour, when you're speaking to a Queen," Joan retorted.

A week later Janice, Jen and the Abbey Girls stood waving on the terrace as Miss Macey drove away, following the last of her boarders.

"That's the end of a jolly term!" said Joan.

"It's given you a jolly good start as Queen," Joy agreed. "A bit of luck for you! Everybody will say: 'D'you remember that marvellous term at the Hall, when Joan Shirley was Queen?' Well, I'm off! See you at supper!" and she caught up a stick and went bare-headed out to the hills.

"Now to work, my children!" Joan's tone was ruthless. "Oh, did you think you were going to have holidays, Jen and Jandy? That's where you're wrong. We can't chain Joy down, but the rest of us are going to tackle this poor house and get it decent again. Miss Macey has left her maids to help, I know, but the harder we work and the more people on the job, the sooner it will be done and we'll be able to get rid of them. I'm going to spring-clean, and I expect you two to help."

"We expect to help, too," Janice said, laughing. "I don't see either Jenny-Wren or myself sitting still while you rush round in an overall and dusting-cap. Give us our jobs, and we'll get to work."

"I'm on!" Jen shouted. "What shall I do? Bang books? Scrub floors? Wash curtains?"

"Go and start on that fearful mess in your bedroom," Joan said sternly. "The maids can't turn it out while it's in that state. I looked in just now; you and Jack and Della must have spent all night tearing up paper."

"We had a fight. I suppose there is rather a mess," Jen admitted. "I say, Joan! I wonder if we'll ever see Della again? I think she was rather sorry to say good-bye."

"She ought to have been. You and Jack were jolly decent to her. I shouldn't think you'd meet her again. If she ever comes back to see the Abbey, I'll let you know. Go and see how much difference you can make in that room before dinner-time!"

"Will Joy really not come back till night?" Janice asked.

"Sure she won't. She's been pining for a tramp for weeks. She'll walk fifteen miles and come home running over with high spirits," Joan laughed.

The weeks at the Hall were the best holiday Janice had ever known. There were picnics on the hills, and drives among the villages; there was much wandering in the woods, and a visit to the Cross from which the Hamlet Club had taken its badge; there were quiet mornings in the Abbey, afternoons of cricket practice at the Hall, and evenings of dancing, when the four girls worked at the squares for two couples, while Joy sang the tune, or coaxed Mrs. Shirley to walk through the figures as Joan's partner while she went to the piano.

Sometimes the elder queens, Cicely, Miriam and Marguerite, came to tea, and then sets of six were possible. Cicely, book of directions in hand, called the movements, and was very seldom in doubt as to what she wanted. Janice learned "Althea" and "The Boatman" and "Picking Up Sticks," and revelled in each new and intricate design, which always, as Jen said, "worked out properly and finished off the pattern."

"I should be afraid we were doing it wrongly, if it didn't." The grown-up President smiled down at the very young member of her club. "The dances always balance, don't they? They give me a very satisfied feeling. There's one I'd like to do, with a pretty tune, but I think the book must be wrong, for only the first couple are in their right places at the end. The seconds end up in the third position. I've never known that happen in any other dance, so it seems as if there must be some mistake, though I can't see where it is. It's called 'Maiden Lane.'"

"Can't we do it? I'd like to do one that doesn't end up properly!" Jen pleaded.

"It's better not to learn anything that might be wrong. I don't think we've done much wrong so far," said the President, with the self-confidence which seldom deserted her, and complete unconsciousness of the shock she was to suffer three years later over these same dances.

Thanks to Miss Macey's reassurance, Janice had put away her anxiety, and was almost entirely happy about the future. The shadow recurred to her mind at times, but she stifled it always with one thought.

“At the very worst, they can’t prove the time of Uncle Tony’s death. We have only one man’s word for it. Even if the lawyers insist on putting in a claim for me, against my will, it won’t be allowed. They can’t prove anything!”

## CHAPTER XXIX JOAN'S MAID-OF-HONOUR

As the day of the hospital fête drew near, Janice found her excitement rising almost as high as Jenny-Wren's. Jen was to dance in public for the first time; she was included in most of the sets, and she was thrilled to overflowing by the prospect. Janice, not too confident of her dancing yet, felt she would be safer looking on, and was proud to wear Joan's colours; Muriel's "maid-of-honour" frock had violet embroidery and a violet girdle to match the Queen's robe, and Janice tried on the dress happily, delighted to be in attendance on Joan.

"I'll remember this day with the greatest pride, Abbey-Girl!" she said as she helped Joan to arrange her crown on the morning of the great day.

"I can't have violets in August. Flowers are very unaccommodating things!" The Queen laughed.

"But those white asters make a jolly crown. They do very well," Joy said, coming in with her hands full of letters from the second post. "Stacks for you, Joan! From all your subjects who are away at the seaside, I expect; that's from Muriel, I know. One for Jandy Mac. One for Jenny-Wren."

Janice glanced at her letter, then thrust it into her pocket.

"I think the crown will do now, Joan?"

Joan glanced at her. "It's lovely, Jan. Anything wrong?"

"I hope not. I'll read this upstairs, if you don't mind," and Janice escaped to her little bedroom.

"I do hope it isn't any more wretched business to worry her," Joan said anxiously. "She has been looking forward to this afternoon so much."

"Too bad!" Joy was absorbed in her own letters.

Joan, looking troubled, began to arrange wild flowers in big loose bunches for Joy and herself to carry.

Sitting on the window-sill in the sunshine, Janice read the letter from the old lawyer who had been the one to tell her of her inheritance two and a half years before.

*My dear Miss Janice, Mr. Marshall wrote, I have a strange story to tell you. Your cousin, Mr. Alec Fraser, assures me that you know it already, as he has written to you. However, I will tell you the events as they have come to my own knowledge.*

*Yesterday morning an advertisement appeared in all our leading newspapers, asking that the solicitors of the late Mr. Antony Abinger should communicate with the captain of the "Dumbarton," at present in Sydney Harbour. I at once sent a representative, and before noon the captain, Mr. Fraser, and a sailor named Samuel Snell were in our office. The captain told how Snell had come on board at Singapore, asking if he might work his passage, and telling a strange story. Your cousin, young Mr. Fraser, explained how the name "Abinger" had reminded him of you, and how, when he heard Snell's history, he had begged the captain to bring him to Sydney, so that he might get in touch with the friends of Mr. Abinger. The man himself told a story which, I understand, you have already heard. I must repeat it, however.*

Janice, tight-lipped, glanced hurriedly down the next page or two. It was Mr. Marshall's comments she wanted; there was not likely to be anything new in Sam Snell's story, but the lawyer might see more in it than she, or even Miss Macey, had done.

There was nothing new. Alec had told the whole story. What had Mr. Marshall to say about it?

"This is what I've been waiting for; the next move," Janice thought unhappily as, very anxious, she read on:

*Now, my dear young lady, it is obvious that if this information is reliable, you are the heiress to the English property. You will remember that inquiries were made from England about Mr. Antony Abinger at the time of his father's death last October. If the man Snell can substantiate his statement that Mr. Abinger died at Christmas, then he actually possessed the English estate for two months, although he did not know it; and by the terms of his will it must pass to you.*

Janice gave an impatient sob. All this she knew already.

"Oh, how slow these lawyers are! Always fifty words where one would do! Am I ever going to get to anything?"

*But I must warn you that the date may be difficult to prove. The English firm who act for the present holder of the property will ask for proof that Mr. Abinger's death followed that of his father, and they will not be disposed to accept the unsupported word of this seaman. His possession of the sapphire ring is strong*

*evidence in his favour; it is obvious that he has been in Mr. Abinger's company. But I must regretfully give you my definite opinion that it constitutes no proof of the date of his death, which may very well have occurred at the time of the wreck.*

*Another point which tells against the man is the meagreness of his information. His story is that he was to bring the ring home to Mr. Abinger's family; he did not know your name, nor ours; he had to advertise to get into touch with us. Any claim on our part will, I fear, be met at once with the question why, in so many months of adventure together, Mr. Abinger did not manage to impress some names on the sailor's memory. Snell says, of course, that he had forgotten the names and could remember only the simple message, "Take the ring home to my family." But any one disputing a claim based on this statement would have good grounds for demanding more definite proof.*

*I am sorry to be discouraging, but I must not raise your hopes unduly. You may rest assured that we shall at once set on foot all possible inquiries, and that everything will be done to find out the truth of the matter. A visit to the island, or to the spot where the men were held captive, if we can find it, might yield further evidence. We shall keep in touch with Snell and with your cousin, and will keep you informed of the progress of our inquiries. If we can substantiate your claim to the English inheritance I shall rejoice with you.*

“Oh, no, you won’t!” Janice said bitterly. “Not when I’ve made you see how unjust it is, and how I hate the thought of it, and how it’s the very last thing Uncle Tony would have wanted, if he’d been asked! This doesn’t really take me any further; it just means that Mr. Marshall’s on the job now, and I wish him luck—the worst of luck!—in trying to prove Sam Snell’s story! For that story strikes me more and more as being very thin indeed. Uncle Tony had months, when he was ill and must have known he wasn’t likely ever to get home again; he’d have made sure somehow that Sam knew where to go with the ring! The very fact that they had to advertise ought to be enough for anybody. But, then, how did Sam get hold of the ring? There is something in his story; there must be. He was with Uncle Tony; there’s no getting out of that. But there’s no proof whatever of when Uncle Tony died; that’s perfectly clear. Unless they can prove that date, Mr. Marshall can’t do anything. By now he’ll have my letter telling him how badly I feel about it

all. Perhaps he'll realise it isn't worth while going on trying to prove a thing for a client who doesn't want it to be proved!"

She put the letter away. "I mustn't think about it. On the whole it's satisfactory. Mr. Marshall sees the difficulty, and admits it. I mustn't worry the present holders of the property by being in the dumps to-day!"

"Not bad news, I hope, Jan?" Joan glanced at her anxiously, as she came down the big staircase to the hall.

"Not really, Abbey-Girl; just worrying business. I'm not going to think about it. Shall I fetch you more flowers?"

"Some more leaves, I think. Thanks, Jandy Mac! I'm sorry the letter came to-day."

"Rotten luck!" said Joy. "I loathe lawyers, don't you?"

"Rather! I do!" Janice said fervently.

"You needn't loathe them, Joy. They've been jolly useful to you," Joan remarked.

In spite of her resolve, Janice was grave as she walked across the school playground, holding up Joan's violet train. Her eyes were on the Queen's long red hair spread over her shoulders, hanging from under the crown of starry mauve asters which they had woven together during the morning; behind was Joy, in her bright green robe, and then came the three elder queens, Marguerite in strawberry pink, President Cicely in gold, and Miriam in white. Joan was leading the royal procession for the first time, and Janice was touched and proud to be chosen as the leading maid-of-honour. But, all the same, her position between the "present holders of the property" troubled her, and her secret thoughts were unhappy and were reflected in her sober look.

"If I should have to be the one to break their hearts! I couldn't bear it! How proud Mrs. Shirley looks to-day! Joan makes a perfect Queen. They've been so good to me, and to-day crowns it all. I'll never let them know anything about it, unless I can tell them it's all right. I do hope Mr. Marshall won't write to Joy's lawyers until he has proof; no lawyer could be so wicked and silly as that! Oh, I do hope he has that much sense!"

Burdened by this ugly thought, born of her nervous state, Janice looked very serious as she arranged Joan's train about her throne and then sat on the step of the dais at her Queen's feet to watch the dancing. Jen was there, radiant in her blue frock, dancing happily, if a trifle wildly still.

"Nice kiddy!" Janice said to herself. "She's as light as thistledown. I love to watch her."

Joan kept glancing down at her maid, troubled by the look on her face, and at last she touched her shoulder.

"Go and dance, Jandy Mac! The other maids are going to join in. Carry needs a partner, and she's a good dancer. You'll get on all right; it's only 'Butterfly.' You know it as well as I do."

Janice gave her a startled look. "Am I good enough? With people looking on?"

"You've had two months; Jenny-Wren has only had three. Of course, you're good enough."

"Oh, but Jen's a born dancer! Anybody can see that."

"Go on with you! You can do it quite well," Joan said, laughing. "Carry's waiting—no, Jen's thrown over her partner and is coming to claim you. Carry will take Nesta. You'd like to dance with Mrs. Wren!"

"Jandy Mac, don't be frightened! I'll pull you through, and nobody will know." Jen came leaping across the ground. "You won't like it a bit; this asphalt's beastly to dance on. Come and join on at the end!"

"You seem to be able to dance on it, Mrs. Wren," Janice said, laughing, as she thrust her fears and forebodings into the background.

"I feel like a lump. I can't get off the ground."

"You're off the ground all right. Don't worry!" Janice cried, as the dance began.

Jen grinned at her. "I'm glad Joan made you come. You looked like sour gooseberries. I was pining to haul you in."

"Jolly nice of you!" Janice told her warmly.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE RING COMES HOME

"Mother says I can go home now," Jen called to Janice, as she came down to breakfast one morning, a week after the fête. "There are letters for you, Jandy Mac. Joy's late, as usual, and Joan's giving Mrs. Shirley her breakfast in bed."

"And do you want to go home?" Janice leaned on the stair-rail, not very anxious to see her letters. She was just a little afraid of letters at the moment.

"Mixed!" Jen confessed, laughing. "Oh, I'm dying to go, of course. I haven't seen mother and father for four months. But it has been frightfully nice here. I shall be jolly jealous of you, Jandy Mac!"

"But you have your mother and father to go to, lucky young woman." Janice came slowly to the table, and turned over her letters.

There was one from Alec, one from Mr. Marshall, and a small registered packet.

"Somebody's sent you a present from Australia." Jen hung over the table in eager interest. "I can have the stamps for Jacky-boy, can't I? You've been a perfect godsend to Jack; she said so."

"I wasn't expecting any present." Janice opened the packet, looking puzzled.

The parcel contained a small box. She opened it, and a ring fell out.

Jen's shriek of surprise filled the hall. "Jandy! Seven blue stones in a gold ring! Is it?—Oh, let me look! Oh, Jan—the roses and fleurs-de-lis, just as Ambrose said! He made it five hundred years ago! It's Lady Jehane's ring—the real old one—not a copy, like Joy's! Jandy, where did it come from? Is there a letter? What does it mean? How did it happen? Oh, Jandy, you'll give it to Joan, won't you? Joy said she was to have it. Joy doesn't want two! It belongs to the Abbey. You will give it to Joan, won't you, Jandy Mac?"

Janice, the letters and the ring clutched in her hand, had fled to the staircase. She turned, her face white.

"Jen, you mustn't say a word to anybody till I've read these letters. You mustn't tell a soul. Promise me, Jen! I must read the letters first."

"But you'll tell Joan and Joy?"

"Afterwards. I don't understand it myself yet. Promise, Jen! You must promise!"



## Jen's shriek of surprise filled the hall.

Her voice was so insistent and her face was so white that Jen said hurriedly, "I'll promise. You must tell them yourself. But I'll have to go and hide. I can't keep quiet about that ring, if I see anybody. I'll go and bury myself in the Abbey; Mrs. Watson will give me some breakfast. Come and tell me as soon as you've told them, Jandy Mac! I can't talk to Joan and not tell her I've seen Lady Jehane's ring."

She seized the key of the Abbey gate and fled.

Janice raced up to her room and locked the door. She heard Joy's door open and her laughing voice proclaim, "Late as usual, Joy Shirley! But what does anything matter in the hols? Where's everybody? Is Jenny-Wren late too? And Jandy Mac?"

Janice flung the lawyer's letter aside and dropped on the window-seat, with Alec's envelope and the ring in her lap. If there were any news Alec would have written it to her:

*Dear Jandy—I say, old girl, I'm afraid it's all up. Sorry we raised your hopes, but how could we tell another chap would turn up? Well, I'll give you the whole yarn, just as it happened.*

"I believe it's going to be all right. Oh, what a relief it would be!" Janice cried softly to the white roses round her window.

*The lawyer fellow will have told you about our ad., and about how he answered it and took us all along to his office. Things looked all right for you; when he saw the ring he got quite excited and was awfully bucked, but he said they'd have to prove the date of Mr. Abinger's death before anybody would listen to them. I guess you know all that. Well, next thing was that two days later a chap went to the office and asked for Mr. Marshall, and he told quite a different story of what happened on the island; and now things don't look so good for you—in fact, I'm afraid it's no go, after all. His yarn went like this. His name's John Burton, and he was mate on the "Island Star," the ship that was wrecked, you know. He says Mr. Abinger was taken ill soon after they sailed from Sydney, and he died and was buried at sea before the ship was anywhere near the island. It was all down in the ship's log, but of course that was lost in the wreck.*

*Burton says that when they struck the reef, the captain told him to get ashore with the men, if he could, and said he'd try to follow, but he must stick to the ship as long as he could; so he gave Burton a packet and a letter, which Mr. Abinger had given him, and told him if he ever had the chance to deliver them at Marshall's office in Sydney. The captain went down with the ship, but Burton and Snell reached shore, the only ones to do so, and for months they were there together. One day when they were bored stiff Burton opened the packet to see what it was he was taking care of; and it was the sapphire ring, and unluckily Snell saw it. Snell's idea was that if they ever got away they should sell the ring and share the proceeds; he seems to have been a bad 'un all along. Burton wouldn't have anything to do with that idea. They got away on the raft and were picked up by the blacks and carried to Papua, all as Snell told us; and there Burton went down with fever, and when he came round, Snell had gone—and the ring too. He'd found a chance and had taken it and got away, deserting the man who'd been with him for a year, when he was sick; and he'd pinched the ring. And that was all Burton could tell us about Sam Snell.*

*For himself, one day a ship put in and took him off, and carried him to Port Moresby; there, when he was well enough, he got a job on a trader and went off to the islands. His home is in Hawaii, and he had a wife there, and he hadn't seen her for two years. As to why he didn't come here and deliver the letter—well, you see, he'd lost the ring, and it was his fault; he knew he had no right to open the packet and show the ring to Snell. To them both, the ring seemed the important thing, and Burton was obviously afraid to show up here without it. As to why he didn't post the letter to Marshall & Co.—don't ask me! Of course, he ought to have done. He says he forgot all about the letter; personally I believe he was in a blue funk over having lost the ring—didn't realise the importance of the letter, and wanted not to be mixed up in the business at all, for fear of awkward questions. But he kept the letter; it's safe, and only a bit stained with sea-water, and I've seen it. On the envelope there's a note—"Mr. A. died the day after this was written"—signed by the captain; the writing's very faint, but you can make it out. Burton was in Sydney when he saw our advertisement, asking for Mr. Abinger's solicitors, and evidently he thought somebody was getting busy on the job, and he had better hand over the letter.*

*That's his story. When old Marshall had heard it he sent for the captain and me, and made Burton repeat it before us. Then he sent him away, but told us all to come back next morning.*

*I saw what the mate's story was going to mean to you—about the date of Mr. Abinger's death, you know—and I was keen to hear what they'd say about it. It seemed to me that the letter Burton had handed over was the end of Snell's story and of your chances of that English money, and I wanted to hear what Marshall & Co. would say to Sam Snell. So I turned up all agog for the next act, and, if only it hadn't meant so much to you, I guess I'd have enjoyed myself.*

*Old man Marshall made us sit down, captain and me and the Burton fellow. Then he took the ring out of the safe and laid it on the table.*

*Mate Burton jumped up as if some one had run a pin into him, and yelled, "Where did you get it?"*

*Old Marshall nodded to his clerk, who brought in Sam Snell, and Burton let out another shout, and said something that I can't put in a letter to a lady.*

*Sam didn't stay long. He swore at Burton and all of us, and shot out of that room and out of the place. Burton started after him, but captain stopped him. "No use having murder done," he said. "You won't see any more of that fellow."*

*And that, Jandy, my girl, is the end of your claim to the English property, I'm afraid. We've had your letters now, and I see you say you won't be too much cut up if the thing falls through. I hope that's O.K., and you really meant it, for without Sam there isn't a shadow of a chance, and Sam won't show his face here again.*

*There's no doubt he stole the ring and deserted the mate when he was sick. There's no reason to doubt that Mr. Abinger died before the wreck ever happened, as the captain's note says he did. He believed he was dying when he wrote the letter. Mr. Marshall is sending it to you, and he'll send the ring too. It's had adventures in its time!*

*Now, Jandy, as that's the end of your English prospects, why not come out by the next boat and settle down out here? You know what I want—*

Janice dropped the letter. Alec's wishes could wait until her mind was free to do them justice.

"It's all right! I shan't have to bring that dreadful trouble on the girls. It's all right! I can hardly believe it!"

She sprang to her feet, as if throwing off the burden of the last two months. "Oh, I'm glad! I'm so glad! I'm—I'm going to tell them! I can't bear it alone!"

In a flaming moment of excited resolve, she caught up the ring and her cousin's letter, and dashed out of the room and down the staircase.

"Joy! Joan! It's all right! All's well! The house is really yours, and the Abbey—I haven't got to take it away from you! Oh, if you knew what I've been going through—no, I'm not off my head! It's joy—relief—I've been so frightened! I couldn't tell you, but it's all right now!"

She tossed the ring across the table to Joy, and dropped into a chair and covered her face, and shook with sobbing, all her reserve and caution swept away in the torrent of relief that was surging through her.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### JOY IS FRIGHTENED

“I think you must be off your head!” Joy exclaimed. “‘The house is really mine’—have you only just found that out? And what are you doing with my ring? ‘Got to take it away from you’—what on earth are you going on about, Jandy Mac? Have you gone clean crazy mad?”

Joan had Janice in her arms. “Jan, don’t do it!” she said urgently. “Don’t cry like that! You’ll hurt yourself, and I shall howl too. Jan, what is the matter? Can’t you tell us?”

“Look at the ring!” Janice gasped, without raising her head.

Joy had already snatched it up, and her shout of astonishment almost drowned Jandy’s words.

“It’s not my ring! It’s the old one! Look, Joan—the roses and things are carved all round it! And here’s J on one side and A on the other, just as Uncle Tony said in his diary! Jandy Mac, where did you get it?”

Janice was quite unable to speak. Joan, with one arm still round her, looked at the ring and then at Joy.

“There’s a story here that we haven’t heard, Joy. Your uncle went to Australia—Jandy has sent for that ring from Australia. Perhaps she knew him, and knew who had the ring after his death.”

“Did you know my uncle, Jandy? But you said—what did you mean about the house and the Abbey?” Joy leaned across the table, and spoke with sudden fierce energy. “Janice Macdonald, what did you mean?”

Janice pushed back her tumbled hair, and sat up and faced Joy, her eyes red and her lips still quivering.

“I knew him; I loved him. He was my Uncle Tony too, though he’d only adopted me. I’ve always called him Uncle Tony. He nearly married my mother, but she died a week before the wedding. But for that week, I’d have been a sort of cousin to you.”

“My aunts and uncles!” Joy gasped. “Why on earth didn’t you say so before? But what did you mean?”

Janice looked up at Joan. “He left everything he had to me. He was shipwrecked, and nobody was saved. But since I’ve been here—that letter that upset me so much—it told about a sailor who had turned up. He said they’d both escaped from the wreck and Uncle Tony only died at Christmas—last Christmas. And he had the ring to prove that his story was true.”

Joan's eyes filled with understanding. "Jan! But then—and you kept it all to yourself?"

"But that would mean the Hall belongs to you!" Joy exclaimed, flaming fury in her face. "Oh, but that's rot! You're nothing to do with the family! Uncle Tony wouldn't have done that, if he'd known! No lawyer could say the place had to belong to an outsider! And if you try to take it, because of an accident like that—if you dare—I'll fight you——"

"Joy, *be quiet!* Don't be such an utter idiot!" Joan exclaimed. "Do try to keep your temper and think a little! Jandy told you it was all right. It was the very first thing she said."

Janice had turned white. "That's what I guessed would happen," she said brokenly. "And I liked you both so much—you'd been so jolly nice to me. I didn't say a word until I knew it was all right, Joan."

"By 'all right,' you mean all right for us, and all wrong for you?" Joan's brown eyes were still puzzled, but they were kind as she gazed down and smiled. "Can't you tell us the rest, Jan? Joy lost her head for a moment, but perhaps you can forgive her; you know how she loves her house. She has the Abinger temper, though you may have seen no signs of it. Every now and then it flares up, and we see how like old Sir Antony she can be."

"You haven't a speck of it, have you?" Janice struggled to speak steadily, her eyes on Joy, who was standing with bent head, twirling Lady Jehane's ring in her fingers.

"I'm not an Abinger, just a mere Shirley! But I'm dying of curiosity, Jan."

"There was a letter this morning, with the ring. Uncle Tony—I can call him that now! It has been so hard to keep it in!—died on the ship before the wreck, more than two years ago, so it's quite all right and no lawyers can interfere. Another man turned up, the mate of the ship, and he had a letter Uncle Tony wrote when he was dying—a letter for me. The ring was stolen from him. The first man had stolen it, and he bolted when he saw the mate. His story was all lies; he wanted a reward for looking after Uncle Tony on the island and bringing home the ring. But none of it was true; he'd taken the ring when the mate was ill. The letter proves that Uncle Tony died before the wreck. There's no need for any one to worry. Oh, I am so tired!" Jandy's head dropped on her arms on the table.

"Joy!" There was a note of command in Joan's tone, as she put her arms round Janice. "Joy, you were unkind. It was because you were frightened, but you were unjust. Jandy kept quiet and kept the whole thing to herself while it was doubtful, and she must have been having an awful time, while we've been dancing and fooling about. The minute things were all safe for

you she came and told us. And she sent for the ring and gave it back to you! What about it, Joy?"

Joy looked at Jandy's bent dark head. "You're sure she didn't want—oh, I'm a pig! Jandy Mac, I'm sorry. I know you didn't want it to happen, but I can't believe anybody wouldn't want to have the Hall!" She threw herself on Janice, as Joan moved aside. "Jandy Mac, you didn't want to take it, did you?"

"Not from you, nor the Abbey from Joan," Janice gasped, struggling with choking sobs. "Oh, I'm an ass! I'm sorry to howl like a kid—but it's been killing me—the thought that I might have to do it—that the lawyers wouldn't let me off." She pushed back her hair and looked up at Joy. "At the very worst, if they'd been able to prove it, it would only have been for three years, and I'd never have come to live here and turn you out. I'd have stayed in Australia till I was of age, and then I'd have handed it all over to you, as Uncle Tony would have wished. But it's much better this way."

"Joy wouldn't have liked to take it from you," Joan began.

"I'd have taken it from anybody!" Joy interrupted her.

"But you wouldn't have felt the same. You'd have hated me for butting in. I wrote to the lawyers," Janice said unsteadily. "I said everything I could think of. But you know what lawyers are; if a thing's legal that's the end of it. I've been terribly afraid we'd have to wait three years, and you'd be hating me all that time!" She rested her head on her hands. "I can't believe yet that the load has gone. The worry of it has been pressing on me, holding me down."

"You've been awfully plucky," Joan exclaimed. "Why didn't you tell us, and let us share the anxiety?"

"Why? Well, what about Joy?" Janice asked, without looking up. "You might have been able to bear it, but she couldn't have done."

Joy reddened. "I'd have been horrible, I know. I was bad enough, as it was. You were quite right not to tell me; you couldn't trust me. But you do understand, don't you, Teddy-bear? You know how I love the house. I shan't ever be able to get married, because that would mean going and living somewhere else."

"Nobody has asked you yet," Joan remarked. "But if anybody ever does, I hope you'll turn him down unless you like him better than the house."

"People matter more than houses," Janice said defiantly. "I don't want the Hall. I'm going to marry Alec and live in the South Seas, on an island."

"Good for you, Jan!" Joan said, and laughed at sight of Joy's face.

"But he hasn't asked you! Better see what he thinks about it first," Joy cried.

"He asks me in every letter," Janice retorted. "I'm going to say yes and be engaged, to make up for finding I've no claim to your property."

Joy looked at her wide-eyed. "Is it in earnest? Are you going to be Mrs. Fraser? Does he really want you?"

"Some day," said Janice, rising with a weary sigh, "I shall come back to see you, when we're all middle-aged ladies, and I'll bring my family to see the Abbey. I shall call the girls Joan and Joy and Janet, and the boys Antony and Ambrose and Alec."

Joy gave a peal of laughter. "It's all arranged! Joan, you can call your first daughter Janice! I shan't have any; I shall stay here and enjoy my house."

"In the meantime, I'm going up to make myself decent. I didn't mean to weep," Janice said apologetically. "But the relief was too much. It was like the lifting of a cloud, and the cloud has been over me for two months. I just collapsed and went all to bits."

"You've been frightfully brave," Joan said again. "I don't know how you could bear it all alone for so long."

"I couldn't. It was too much." Janice paused at the foot of the staircase, and rested her head on the rail. "I had to tell somebody, so I went to Miss Macey. She knows; I'd like to ring her up presently, and tell her what's happened. She helped me a lot; she showed me that we had no real proof of the time of Uncle Tony's death. That was my first ray of hope. It was after we'd found the book up in the cave; you were all talking about him, and I couldn't bear it. I knew so much more than you did, and I couldn't say a word. I knew we had the old ring—I'd seen it so often—it was very difficult not to tell you. I'd made up my mind to keep the trouble to myself, but that night I broke down and had to go to Miss Macey. I'll be back in five minutes," and she ran up to her room.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### JANICE IS ADOPTED

The Abbey Girls looked at one another. "She's a dear, Joy, and very brave," Joan said.

"Yes, I was piggish to her. I'll try to show her I don't feel bad any more—or rather, that I feel bad about the way I went on! I say, Joan, I had a ghastly fright!" Joy said soberly. "What if the place hadn't been mine, after all, and we'd had to go back to being the caretakers!"

"It wouldn't have been as bad as that." Joan went across the big hall. "I must tell the story to mother. It would only have meant waiting, as Jandy says, till she came of age. We'd have stayed on here, but you wouldn't have felt it was really yours for three years."

"Quite!" Joy retorted. "But what if Jandy Mac had said the place was hers, and she was going to stick to it?"

Joan paused. "And if they'd been able to prove it! We ought to be very thankful Jandy's what she is, Joy. Things might have been very uncomfortable, and they might even have been too bad to think about."

"That's what I mean. It's a jolly good thing she *is* Jandy Mac!"

"Tell her so, then," said Joan, and went to give Mrs. Shirley an outline of the story.

Joy stood looking at the ring, with its seven small sapphires, and the delicate lines of the tiny roses and fleurs-de-lis which were missing from her own ring. She looked inside at the initials of Jehane and Ambrose, but all the time her thoughts were busy with what might have been. At last she raised her head and took a long slow look round the beautiful hall, with its portraits of her ancestors and the coats-of-arms in the stained-glass windows.

"It is mine! What a nightmare! I feel I've just wakened up and I'm glad it was all a dream. Poor old Jandy Mac! Fancy knowing it might have been hers! It's jolly hard lines!"

"Where's Jen, Joy?" Joan called, as she came back to the hall. "Have you seen her? She'll be thrilled by all this! She isn't usually late."

"I thought I heard her shrieking in here before I came down. But I didn't see her, and then Jandy Mac came bursting in like a rocket and threw her bomb, and I never thought of Jenny-Wren again. She'll want to see this ring; she adores Jehane and Ambrose. You'd better take it, Joan; I don't want two, and this one really belongs to the Abbey. I'd rather have mother's."

"I don't know," Joan began doubtfully. "I'd love to have it, of course, but it ought to stay in your family."

"You can leave it to the family in your will, if there is any family! If I don't get married, there won't be. As the Abbey's gone out of my family into yours, the ring may as well go too."

Joan laughed. "We'll ask Jenny-Wren what she thinks. I wonder where she is? She'd like to see the ring."

"She has seen it." Janice leaned over the gallery railing. "She shrieked with joy. I say, I'm afraid I forgot the poor kid. She's in the Abbey," and she came running down the wide staircase.

"In the Abbey, Teddy-bear? But she's had no breakfast!"

"I know; I'm fearfully sorry. She saw the ring; it fell out when I opened the packet, and Jen saw at once what it was and let out one of her wild yells."

"That would be what I heard," Joy agreed.

"I'm sure you heard! I made her promise not to say a word to anybody till I had read the letters, and she said she'd better bury herself in the Abbey, as she couldn't possibly talk to Joan and not tell her about Lady Jehane's ring. She took the key and rushed out into the garden. She was going to ask Mrs. Watson to give her breakfast."

Joan laughed. "Poor old Jenny-Wren! We'll go to the Abbey and tell her all about it. You don't mind, Joy?"

"Mrs. Wren knows all our secrets," Joy said. "I'll fetch her, shall I?"

"No, we'll go to her. Just wait one sec! Jandy Mac, drink this! You've had a rotten time and no breakfast," and Joan poured out a cup of tea. "I want some too."

Janice, a true Australian, was always ready for tea, and at the moment was needing it badly. She called down blessings on Joan's head as she took the cup.

"I just looked at the other letters," she said. "There's only one important thing. The lawyer just repeats what Alec has told me, using a dozen words instead of one whenever he can."

Joy laughed. "I know. Aren't they awful?"

"All that matters is in Alec's letter. You can read it for yourselves; you needn't bother about the nonsense he puts in for me at the end! Uncle Tony's letter is quite short; he was very ill, but he wanted to say good-bye to me. He wasn't ill when he sailed, you know; we had no idea he wouldn't come back. There's just one message that matters. He says he is sending back the old family ring; he knew nothing about Ambrose and Lady Jehane. And he asks me to see that it is sent home to his father—who was still alive, of course—

as he felt it belonged to the family, like the Abbey. So he wanted it to come home.”

“But you gave it to us before you read his letter!” Joan exclaimed. “You knew what he’d wish.”

“Jolly decent of you! You’ll tell us about him, won’t you, Jandy Mac?” Joy pleaded. “I’ve always wanted to know about mother, but I never thought much about him until lately. That book from the cave made him much more real, and now you tell us you knew him. I want to know more.”

“He was almost like my father,” Janice said quietly. “I never had a real father, and I had to live with my aunts; Uncle Tony couldn’t bring up a girl! But he always said I belonged to him, as much as if he had married my mother. I can tell you heaps of stories about him.”

“We want to hear them,” Joan said. “But at this moment I’m going to the rescue of poor Jenny-Wren, marooned in the Abbey and afraid to come home because she knows she’d give Jandy Mac’s secret away.”

“Oh, we’re coming too!” Janice cried.

“By underground,” Joy said, throwing back the door in the panelling. “Was Aunty upset, Joan?”

“I told her.” Joan looked at Janice, who nodded. “Not now, of course. She would have been if she’d heard before. I’d like to thank you for being so considerate and thoughtful for her, and for all of us, Jandy Mac. Mother isn’t worried, but she wants to talk to you.”

“No sign of Mrs. Wren,” said Joy, as they came out from the chapter-house to the garth.

Joan laughed. “Mrs. Wren is practical. We shall find her having breakfast.”

She opened the door of the caretaker’s little room. Then she drew back and looked at Janice with laughing eyes.

Jen looked up from the egg she was just finishing, her little face very serious between its yellow plaits. Then she sprang up, dropping her spoon with a clatter and startling the black Mother Superior, who was waiting hopefully for tit-bits.

“Jandy Mac! Have you read your letters? Have you given Joan the ring? Is it all right?”

“All much more right than you’ve ever imagined, Jenny-Wren! We’ve made a startling discovery!”

“Jenny-Wren, what do you think?” cried Joy. “Jandy Mac is almost my cousin, but not quite. And she nearly had to take the Hall and the Abbey away from us. Just think how ghastly it would have been for everybody!”

Jen hurled herself round the little table to them. “What—how do you mean? Is it a story? Tell me!”

"Come out to the garth where there's more room," said Joan.

In a few quick words Janice told her story, knowing that Jen's keen eager mind would grasp its meaning at once.

Jen's blue eyes were wide as she listened. "How *awful* for you, Jandy Mac! How ghastly you must have felt! I wonder you didn't die! But you wouldn't ever have taken the Abbey away, would you? You'd have found some other way. Oh, I am so glad you didn't tell us! I couldn't have borne it!"

"That's how we all feel," Joan agreed. "We're very grateful to Jandy Mac. She's carried the burden for us all."

"Didn't you have a fearful shock?" Jen looked at Joy.

Joy reddened. "You can guess I did," she said curtly, and her eyes met Jandy's in appeal.

"I won't tell the kiddy what you said," was in the nod Janice gave in reply. "Is Joan going to have the ring?" she asked.

"Oh, Joan must have it!" Jen cried. "It's Lady Jehane's ring, and she belongs to the Abbey!"

"She belongs to Joy's family," Joan said.

"But we'd never have known about her, if it hadn't been for the Abbey books! Jehane comes out of the Abbey books!" Jen urged.

Joy laughed. She took the ring off her finger and handed it to Joan.

"Yours, old girl! Jenny-Wren's right. Jehane came out of the Abbey—the ring was made in the Abbey by dear old Ambrose! Here you are! It belongs to the Abbey, so you'd better have it."

Joan put the ring on her finger, her eyes very bright. "Thank you, Joy! I'll value it always."

"It's much nicer that you should have one each, and Joy wants to keep her mother's ring," Jen said with great satisfaction. "But what about Jandy Mac? She's the only one left out."

"She has the jolly feeling of having been the one to give everything," Joan suggested.

"There's just one reason why I'm sorry Joy's Uncle Tony didn't quite marry my mother," said Janice. "I don't want to take your house or the Abbey, 'Traveller's Joy,' but I would have liked to be your cousin, even if it was only a cousin-by-marriage. I feel such an outsider, as you said just now."

"Oh, but Joy must adopt you as her uncle did!" Jen exclaimed. "She couldn't let her Uncle Tony down!"

Joan and Janice looked at one another. "Quite right, Jenny-Wren!" said Joan.

"I wish Joy would," Janice said wistfully.

Joy's laugh rang out. "Jandy Mac, will you be my cousin? Here and now, in the Abbey, I adopt you—but not to please Uncle Tony! It's to please Jenny-Wren and Joan, and most of all to please myself."

Janice flushed. "Here and now I accept, 'Traveller's Joy,' and thank you very much. I shall go to the South Seas, as I've told you; but I shall like to feel I'm related to you at home."

"Related to the Abbey. Then that's all nicely settled!" Jen said contentedly.

"But you don't get anything out of this, Mrs. Wren," Janice remarked. "You seem to be left out in the cold."

"Oh, no!" Jen looked up at her seriously. "I have the story of the ring, and I've seen it—Lady Jehane's ring. That means a frightful lot to me."

"I believe it does, Jenny-Wren," Joan agreed. "You're keen to know all about Jehane; as keen as I am to have stories of the Abbey."

"The Abbey!" said Jen. "Of course, it's really the Abbey that has made Joy adopt Jandy Mac, isn't it?"

"How do you make that out?" Joy asked, laughing.

Jen looked at Joan eagerly. "You'll understand. It's something I was thinking while I had my breakfast, in there inside the walls. Grey Timmy patted his mother—his adopted mother; that's the point!—on the head, and she rolled him over and came and rubbed on my legs and asked for some milk. And I thought of how you said she'd adopted him because she was such a good mother. It wasn't that at all. It was the Abbey again."

Janice gave a shout of laughter. "And so Joy had to adopt me? Jenny-Wren, what do you mean?"

Joan looked down at Jen with laughing eyes. "Explain yourself, Jenny-Wren."

"I don't know if I can! Wouldn't people come to the Abbey in the old days to be protected and nursed by the monks? Wasn't it a place where they knew they would be safe?"

"Sanctuary; of course it was. But I still don't see why that should affect the Mother Superior, Mrs. Wren!"

"Oh, but it does! The feeling of the Abbey—you have it, and so has Joy! You adopt people; look how you've taken care of Jandy Mac and me, when we couldn't go home! And how you adopted Miss Macey and all her boarders; and how you brought me home when the school was in quarantine! You took in Dick and Della too." Jen eyed Joan expectantly, sure of her understanding.

"In Della's case, it was you and Jacky-boy who did the adopting," Joy said.

"Well, perhaps it's infected us too. Perhaps any one who lives near the Abbey has to become an adopter."

"And you think the Mother Superior has felt the influence of the Abbey spirit?" Joan's eyes were very gentle in spite of their laughter.

"She's an adopter," Jen said sturdily.

"I still think it's more her own mother nature that has made her accept Timmy. But I like your idea, Jenny-Wren. It's rather beautiful, and I'm grateful for it. I hope the Abbey will always be a place that people will come to and find welcome."

"It will, so long as you're here, Abbey-Girl," Janice remarked. "You lived in it for two years. The tradition of the Abbey has soaked into you."

"There's one person who has been able to withstand the Abbey spirit, although he was born in the cloisters!" said Joy, and raced away to chase the Curate, who was crouching with quivering body and lashing tail to watch a sparrow, busy with Jen's breakfast crumbs.

Joan looked down into Jen's eager face. "You've added a new idea to my Abbey, Jenny-Wren. I'll try to be good enough to carry on the tradition."

"You won't have to try very hard," Janice assured her.

"You don't think it's silly, Joan-Queen?" Jen asked wistfully.

"It's not silly at all. I like it. I hope the Abbey will always be an adopter, to use your useful expression! Thank you for the idea, Mrs. Wren!"

"I'm sure it will. Then that's all right!" Jen said happily, and she picked up the stout Mother Superior and kissed her smooth head. "You're the Abbey cat, and you're Joan's cat—you couldn't help being an adopter, could you, old lady?"

"You're an adopter yourself, Jenny-Wren!" Joan and Janice spoke together, laughing across at one another.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Schooldays at the Abbey* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]