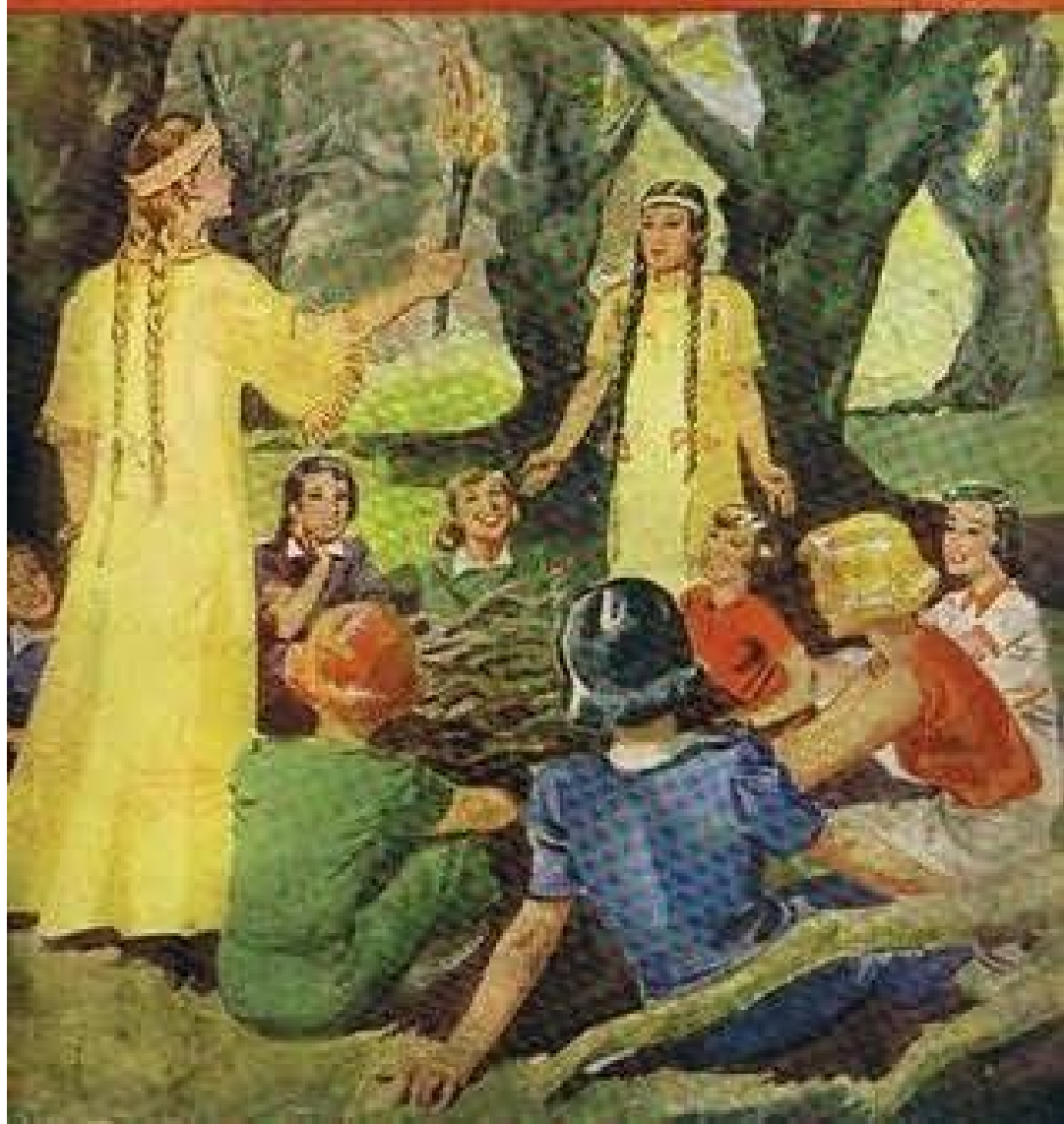


THE ABBEY GIRLS PLAY UP



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Title: The Abbey Girls Play Up

Date of first publication: 1930

Author: Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham) (1880-1960)

Date first posted: Oct. 27, 2019

Date last updated: Oct. 27, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20191057

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

THE ABBEY GIRLS PLAY UP

by
ELSIE J. OXENHAM



COLLINS
LONDON AND GLASGOW

PRINTED AND MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
WM. COLLINS SONS AND CO. LTD.
LONDON AND GLASGOW

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CHAPTER I

SANDY AND THE SILENT POOL

“Then I can’t go to dancing to-night?” Cecily’s voice shook. She hardly ever cried, but this had been an unexpected blow.

“I sh’d say not! Shouldn’t think you’d have the face to go, after last week,” Sarah rejoined.

“I never meant to be rude. Mrs. Raymond didn’t mind; she understood,” Cecily pleaded. “Let me go, Sarah! I’ll—I’ll say I’m sorry!” It was the biggest offer she could make.

“No fear! And her so kind, letting you into the class with all them grown folks. And then you go a-cheeking her right and left! You don’t go back till you’ve learnt how to behave proper, my girl.”

“I didn’t mean to cheek her! The dancing works me up so. I didn’t mean any harm,” Cecily cried desperately.

“Time you give it a holiday, then. Too much for you, that’s what it is. Puts you all in a state every week. You don’t know what you’re doing,” Sarah grumbled. “You’ll not go any more, Cess; not till I’ve told Miss Maribel about last week and asked if she thinks it’s proper for you. Goes to your head, that folk-dancing does.—I can’t do nothing with her, dancing nights!” she muttered, turning back to her work of ironing Cecily’s gym blouse, ready for school next day.

The sobbing exclamation which broke from Cecily as she rushed out of the cottage was in French, and it was just as well Sarah could not understand it. It belonged to the days which Cecily called “my first life,” before Maribel and the Guides had adopted her, brought her to England, and sent her to school, with Sarah’s cottage as her home. That had been two years ago; Cecily was fifteen now, and she often felt those days in France, and her years at the convent school, had been a dream. Sarah, the cottage among the Downs, and the girls in the High School to which she cycled every day, were all so much more real than the convent, or the camp on the shore of Lake Annecy, where she had met her friends the Guides.

She had no clear intention as she ran from Sarah out into the road. She knew only that in half-an-hour the class would begin in the village hut; Mrs. Raymond would drive up in her little car; everybody would be there. The music would begin; they were learning “Newcastle”; and she—Cecily—would be left out. It was more than she could bear.

She dared not see Mrs. Raymond come. She dared not hear the music. She would go out on to the hills, away from everybody.

At the cross-roads by the inn stood a green bus. Cecily's hand went to the pocket of her blazer; yes, her purse was there. She sprang on to the step as the bus began to move, ran up to the top, and sat there in the front seat, her burning face and angry eyes cooled by the wind.

Sarah would never understand. But there was one person who would. Cecily fled from the music that intoxicated her, to pour out her trouble to her friend.

It was true that the music excited her. She did not understand, but she knew that at the country-dance class she was some one new, not at all the hard-working Cecily who was so eager to justify the trust placed in her by the Guides. Life had been so frightening, and the future had looked so terrible, when those jolly girls in uniform had come along, had been kind and helpful, and had transplanted her into the regular life of school and an English village. Cecily could not have explained why the change had been such a relief; but in some way the very quietness of this ordered life—the school routine, the village home—had helped and steadied her. The two years had made an enormous difference in her; she was growing fast in every way. Her one hope was to show the Guides she had been worth helping.

The invitation to the country-dance class had come from Mrs. Raymond herself. The members of the class had danced in the village hall at a meeting of the Women's Institute, in the hope of drawing in recruits; Sarah had gone to watch, though ridiculing the idea that she might dance herself; and had taken Cecily with her. At the end Mrs. Raymond had invited the audience to join in "Galopede," and had watched with amused delight as Cecily, shy but eager, went down the middle with the girl who lived next door, a heavy person, who was swung nearly off her feet.

"Haven't you danced before?" Mrs. Raymond had asked.

"Not myself, but I've watched the Guides. I'd love to try," Cecily had said shyly.

"We must arrange it," and Joan Raymond, saying mysterious things about "rhythm" and "step" and "feeling," had talked to Sarah.

The result had been delirious enjoyment for Cecily. The rest of the class were grown-up; many were what she unkindly termed "old lumps" but under Mrs. Raymond everybody was happy, and Cecily was the happiest of all. Now——!

The bus stopped at the end of a lane, and the conductor appeared. "Duck-pond! Isn't this what you want, missy?"

“Oh—sorry!” Cecily woke from an unhappy dream, and stumbled down the steps.

The bus rattled away along the road. Cecily passed the pond and set off up a lane, leading to the sandy foothills of the Downs.

She had forgotten all about a hat; she had never meant to come so far. She wore her green school blazer over her blue tunic; her coppery hair, cut in a heavy fringe above her dark eyes, blew in the wind.

Mrs. Raymond’s hair was red too, but a darker, rich bronze shade, and she was not shingled, not even bobbed. She always threw aside her hat when she began to teach, and Cecily loved to see the light on her hair. She considered her own too vivid in colour, and did not dream that Mrs. Raymond watched her smooth red head all through the dances and revelled in the response and understanding in her radiant face.

“They say red hair and bad temper go together!” Cecily said to herself, as she went up the lane. “I wonder if Mrs. Raymond ever had a beastly temper? I—I could kill Sarah for spoiling everything! I’d better not go home till I feel better. Why need she go interfering, silly thing? Mrs. Raymond wasn’t mad; she understood I never meant to be rude. It was the way Mrs. Green and Mrs. Clarke talked to Sarah that made the trouble. Not one of them understands how I feel. And they don’t *dance!*” she thought bitterly. “They lump through everything, but they never dance a step. They’re always off the beat. I don’t believe they hear the tune!”

It was a very little house to which she was going, a red bungalow built in the shelter of a sandy hill, but a great privilege was attached to it.

Cecily knocked at the door. “Sandy, can I have the key? And may I go alone? You’d better not come—not at first, anyway.”

“What’s wrong? Is anything the matter, Cecily Brown?” Sandy opened the door.

She was twelve years older than Cecily, but not much taller and very slight; Cecily was in the habit of looking at her protectively, for Sandy would never stand up for herself. Their friendship dated from one evening when the village pianist had been ill, and Mrs. Alexander, teaching music in the village, had been suggested as a substitute. She had never seen the country-dance music, but a few words of explanation from Mrs. Raymond had been enough, and she had taken up her violin and played “The Old Mole” with a lilt which had brought Cecily to her feet with an eager cry, “Oh, can’t we start? How gorgeous! I didn’t know it could sound like that!”

She had danced that night as she had never danced before, and at the end of the class had gone, shy but eager, to Mrs. Raymond. “Couldn’t she play for us always? It’s so much easier to dance to the fiddle!”

“It isn’t only the fiddle,” Joan said, smiling. “It’s little Mrs. Alexander too. But we can’t give up Miss Collinson like that. She’s very good to play so regularly. How would she feel if we asked somebody else?”

“Oh, bother! Does it matter, when this music’s so lovely?”

Mrs. Raymond knew that it did matter, however. Miss Collinson was in her place again the following week, and Cecily’s face showed how she felt.

“Can’t you chuck her? She’s so *heavy!*” she whispered in an agonised tone.

Joan Raymond whispered back, “I know she’s heavy. But we must think of her. I’ll try to help her to play better, and you must try to put up with it, kiddy.”

After that there was a secret understanding between them. Miss Collinson remained at the piano; Mrs. Raymond threw out hints continually—“Play it like music! Phrase it more! Don’t be so particular to accent the beat!”—and Cecily found out her “Fairy Fiddler’s” address, and begged her to play dance tunes—“To let me hear how they ought to sound!”

Sandy was light as well as small, with hair of chestnut brown waving back from her face. She taught music in several villages, accompanied at concerts, and played for dances, whenever she could hear of engagements, cycling all over the countryside to her pupils, but living alone in her bungalow among the sandhills. It was not lonely; there were other houses scattered over the common close at hand; but she preferred to live alone with her music.

She handed a key to Cecily, without waiting for an answer to her question. “Isn’t this your dancing day? Isn’t Mrs. Raymond coming to-night?”

Hot colour swept into Cecily’s face. “Sandy, she’s there now. Sarah wouldn’t let me go. They said I was rude.”

She fled through the bracken, unlocked a gate in a fence, and ran down a winding path and disappeared.

Sandy turned back into her house. “Poor kid! I wonder what happened? Rude to Mrs. Raymond? That’s ridiculous. Cecil worships her. Sarah doesn’t understand Cecily. I wish—oh, *how* I wish I was a millionaire! I’d adopt the kid, and we’d give ourselves up to music. She’s full of music, and nobody sees it but me. Could I do anything through those Guides she talks about? She ought to be trained.”

She went about her house very thoughtfully, washing and drying dishes, for she had been out teaching all day. Then, taking her violin, she followed Cecily.

The path from the gate led through heather and bracken, then wound through a tangle of rhododendron bushes and silver birch trees, till

unexpectedly a dark pool appeared. On the farther side was a hill, crowned by pine trees which were mirrored in the pond. The path ended in a boathouse, where a punt lay moored.

Sandy opened the door and looked in. The hut was merely a platform, with roof and walls, but open on the water-side, and with steps down in one corner. Garden chairs and stools were piled at the inner end.

Cecily, ignoring these, was sitting on the platform above the water, her hands clasped round her knees, her eyes on the quivering reflection of the pines. Her red head was like a lamp in the dark greens and browns of the picture.

She looked up. "Sandy, you're an angel. I feel better. I knew there was just one thing that could help, and I knew you'd understand."

"There's just one other thing," Sandy scolded. "You need to be looked after. Sit on that, silly girl, or you'll be ill," and she threw a cushion on the floor.

Cecily laughed and tucked it beneath her. "Play Sandy. But not dances." Her voice shook.

Sandy put down the violin and drew a chair to the edge, where she could sit beside the water. "I've been teaching all day. I want a rest. I always come here when I'm tired. Isn't it quiet?"

"Your landlord's a brick, to let us use it. Don't you feel as if you owned it, Sandy?"

"Oh, quite! He very seldom comes. I think perhaps I own it more really than he does."

"Sure you do. And you've shared it with me."

Sandy laid a finger on her shoulder, and they both watched while a robin poised on a twig, then fluttered to a stone and drank, and then flew into the shadows.

"Is it the one we saw feeding his babies?"

"I think so. Be very quiet. Perhaps he'll come back."

"It was the quietness I wanted," Cecily confessed. "I was in a real rage, Sandy."

"What happened? I'm glad you came."

"Everybody ought to have a quiet pool to run away to, when things are too awful!" Cecily said vehemently.

"I wish they had. But would they like it? Sarah, for instance?"

"She'd want to brush down those cobwebs. She'd start spring-cleaning!"

"While you and I sit down and worship. It's more use to us than it would be to Sarah. But Sarah's a good sort, Cecily. She has been very good to you."

“I know,” Cecily said at once. “But—fancy *thinking* I could be rude to Mrs. Raymond, Sandy!”

“You couldn’t. You’re too grateful. What made Sarah think it?”

Cecily reddened. “Mrs. Green went to her after last week’s class and told her I’d said things and talked loudly and made a scene. And Sarah wouldn’t let me go to-night. I offered to say I was sorry. She says”—her colour deepened—“she’s going to tell Maribel before she lets me go again.”

“Maribel?”

“The lieutenant of the Guides; the one who was so jolly decent to me. She’s my guardian, though she’s only twenty. Rosalind’s twenty-one. They managed things between them. Some day I’m going to pay them back, of course. Maribel lives in town, near where I go to school; Sarah will write to her. Rosalind’s in London, so I don’t see her so often.”

“And what happened last week, Cecil?”

Cecily coloured again. “I didn’t mean any harm. I’m sure Mrs. Raymond understood. She wasn’t annoyed. I know she didn’t mind.”

“She seemed the understanding sort. I’d have loved to play for her again,” Sandy said wistfully. “Then something did happen, Cecil? What was it?”

“It was in *Mage*,” Cecily confessed. “They would turn the wrong way, backwards, to make the ring, and it’s hideous. I said it ought to be *on*, not *back*; a turn and a half, like you do in ‘Old Mole.’ It’s ugly; it spoils the pattern; and they would do it. Mrs. Raymond kept shouting, ‘Right turn! Back turn!’ but they wouldn’t listen. I was frantic; I was a woman, so I didn’t have to do it. It drove me wild to see them messing it up; and—and I dashed at them and shoved them round the other way, and Mrs. Green says I yelled: ‘*That way, idiots!*’ I’m certain I never did. But they didn’t like it; they were mad. And—and Mrs. Raymond said I’d better leave the teaching to her, as I was so much the youngest in the class. She laughed, when she said it; she wasn’t a scrap upset. But I was all worked up, and I said something back to her. I’m sure I only said: ‘But you can’t do it all. You can’t see four sets at once. And they don’t listen to you!’ I only meant to help. But Mrs. Green and Mrs. Clarke and the others said I’d answered back and told Mrs. Raymond she couldn’t manage the class. She knew I never meant it that way.”

“What did she say?”

“She laughed again, and said: ‘We’ll have another try. Look, this is what I mean.’ And then she came and shoved them through it, just as I’d tried to do. She wasn’t mad with me, Sandy. But Mrs. Green talked to Sarah and made it sound much worse than it had really been. Now”—her voice broke

—“now I want to ask Mrs. Raymond if *she* thought I was rude. I’m sure she didn’t, but they’ve made me feel bad about it, and I want to ask her.”

“You didn’t go and see her at the class before coming here?” Sandy asked.

“Sarah said I mustn’t go.” Cecily turned and looked up at her friend. “Are you wondering why I didn’t go in spite of her?”

“I did wonder,” Sandy admitted. “You were right, of course; but——”

“But you wouldn’t have been much surprised if I’d done it? If it was only Sarah I wouldn’t have cared. I’d have gone straight to Mrs. Raymond and said I was sorry. But behind Sarah there are Maribel and the Guides,” Cecily explained. “They trusted me to stay with Sarah and to do what she said. And they’ve been so awfully decent to me. I’d feel I was going behind them if I went behind Sarah. Don’t you see? I was mad with her; raging angry. But I had to do what she said, because of the Guides. It’s like being on one’s honour.”

“I see that,” Sandy agreed. “You have to be loyal to them. But I could explain to Mrs. Raymond, Cecil. Could you find me her address?”

Cecily’s face lit up. “Sandy! Would you? I want her to know why I wasn’t there to-night.”

“Some one in the village must know where she lives. Try the Women’s Institute Secretary, or the pianist, or the person you pay for the classes. If you send me her address, I’ll write to her, Cecil.”

“You are a brick! I knew you’d help. Play to me now, Sandy! You aren’t really tired, are you?”

“No. I thought it would do you more good to talk.”

Sandy took her violin, and for some minutes Cecily sat in rapt attention, her eyes on the dark water.

“You can play!” she sighed, as Sandy laid the fiddle down and sat beside her again. “You ought not to be wasted just on me. Why aren’t you playing at big concerts in London?”

Sandy flushed. “Because I wasn’t able to finish my training. I’d need more study before I’d be ready for that.”

“Tell me!” Cecily pleaded, thrusting aside her own trouble. “You promised you would, some day. Why do you waste your time teaching in the country?”

“It isn’t waste of time,” Sandy protested. “I’ve some jolly pupils, and I love every one of them.”

“I’m sure they love you! I wish I could be one. But I couldn’t ask Maribel for any more, when she’s done such heaps already. Tell me about you, Sandy!”

“There isn’t much to tell. When my husband died I went to live with my mother and went on studying music. He had been ill before we were married,” she said, in answer to the question in Cecily’s face. “We believed he was cured; the doctors said he might live for twenty years. That was good enough for us, and we were married. I was only twenty-three, but he was five years older. The trouble began to show itself again suddenly, and within a year I had lost him.”

Sandy paused, staring at the trees and water. Cecily’s hand crept into her lap, and she waited, not daring to look at her friend.

“Just for something to do to fill my thoughts, I went on with my music, studying for my L.R.A.M. Then mother was taken ill and was told she must live in the country. We sold out our small investments and bought the bungalow, hoping the fresh air off the hills would make her strong again. It didn’t happen. She went quite soon and I was all alone. I ought to have sold everything and gone back to town. But I couldn’t face it alone; for her and with her, I could take risks, but not alone; and it was a risk. I had already a few pupils and hopes of more; to uproot again and make another start was too big an adventure. I suppose I was a coward, but it was just the need of some one behind me that was too much for me, Cecil. I’d have done it if I’d had her to encourage me. I chose the safe easy way, and settled down here in my little house; more pupils came, and I found I could make a living. It’s all easy and pleasant, and I love my work, and the country is beautiful.”

“And you have your Silent Pool,” Cecily remarked. She sat thinking and gazing at the water. “All the same, Sandy, with somebody to buck you up you’d have gone back to town and made a big name. You are being wasted down here.”

“I hope not. I might not have succeeded, and then where should I have been?”

“It would have been an adventure,” Cecily agreed. “But you’d have come out on top, Sandy.”

“I hadn’t the courage for the adventure. Now it’s too late. I don’t know whether I’m sorry or not.”

“Why is it too late?” Cecily demanded. “You could still have the adventure, Sandy! But then I’d lose you. Oh, don’t go away!”

“Oh, I’m not going now. I couldn’t begin studying again. I’m too old to go to town and live in rooms and work for exams! I’ve found the pupils, although I haven’t certificates.”

“But it would be jollier to feel you’d passed everything. And you wouldn’t go on teaching; you’d become a great musician and play in the Albert Hall.”

Sandy laughed, with a sigh for her dead ambitions. "I've put all those hopes away. Come and have some supper, Cecil, and then I'll take you down to the bus. It will soon be dark. Where will Sarah think you are?"

"I ought to go," Cecily said ruefully. She stood on the edge of the platform, looking up and down the dark pool. "Thank you for letting me come here, Sandy. It always does me good. And thank you for telling me your story. My temper seems silly and kiddish now. You gave up all your hopes to try and save your mother. That was fine! No, I mustn't come in; if I do, I shall sit down and talk, and I ought to go home."

"I'll fetch some biscuits and you can eat them in the bus," said Sandy, and carried her violin indoors.

CHAPTER II

LADY MARCHWOOD'S WHISTLE

"Where was you, Cess?" Sarah demanded.

Cecily started. All the way home she had been thinking of Sandy and her lost chances in life. "She funked the adventure. I'd have jumped at it. But it was like Sandy. She's one of the best, but she never pushes or takes things for herself," had been her conclusion.

"I went to see Mrs. Alexander, on the Common," she said.

"Wasting of a whole evening!" grumbled Sarah. "Best get your lessons done quick."

"Oh—Cess!" The door was flung open an hour later, and Elsie Bailey, the girl who lived next door, stood there. She was seventeen, so was a member of the Institute and was now a regular dancer at Mrs. Raymond's weekly class. "Why didn't you come to-night? We had such fun!"

Cecily bit her lips. "I went to see somebody. Can't be in two places at once! What happened?"

"I didn't think you'd miss dancing for anything! Mrs. Raymond had a friend with her, and she played for some of the dances on a penny whistle!"

Cecily's eyes widened. "Wish I'd been there! But was it loud enough?"

"Oh, plenty! But it was so odd—we heard our feet all the time."

"What was she like? Who was she?"

"Mrs. Raymond called her Lady Marchwood; fancy! She didn't look married, but she was, for I saw her ring. And she spoke about her baby. Her hair was bobbed, and all curls, and yellow; she took off her hat when she danced; she asked if she might join in, and it was lovely to watch her! She was so big—taller than anybody—but so pretty; the way she moved."

"Was she Mrs. Raymond's sister?" Cecily spoke carelessly, to cover her bitter disappointment.

"She didn't look like it. They weren't a bit alike. But she called Mrs. Raymond 'Joan.' I heard her; she said, 'Joan, I want to dance!' And Mrs. Raymond said, 'All right. Go ahead!' Later on she said, 'Lady Marchwood will play for us for the next dance,' and the other one picked up a tin whistle and started on 'Ruffy Tufty.' You should have heard her! We couldn't help dancing; we simply had to."

"Like when Mrs. Alexander played her fiddle for us. I wish I'd been there!"

“We all begged for one more, and then one more, and one more. But Mrs. Raymond laughed and said they had to go, and Lady Marchwood said to Mrs. Green—she’d danced ‘Sellenger’s Round’ with her—that she must go home and put her baby to bed. Then they all buzzed round and asked how old it was, and she said *he* was thirteen months, and there was another one at home! She didn’t look anything but a girl!”

“She’d get married quickly, if she’s as nice as you say. Sorry I missed the fun,” and Cecily turned gloomily to her work again.

Elsie withdrew. “Cecil’s mad that she missed the dancing to-night,” she said to Sarah, as she went through the kitchen.

Sarah gave an angry grunt. “Can’t have her makin’ scenes and upsettin’ everybody! That dancing don’t do her no good. She ain’t never like herself, dancing nights.”

“Wouldn’t you let her come to-night? She never said that was the reason. Said she’d been out,” and Elsie went on her way, her indignation transferred from Cecily to Sarah. “Old cat! It’s the thing Cess cares more about than anything!”

The story of Lady Marchwood’s visit added to Cecily’s distress. Perhaps there would be another chance to hear the whistle next week! She must somehow win permission to be there, either from Sarah or from Mrs. Raymond herself.

Her inquiries for the address brought no immediate result. The secretary had lost Mrs. Raymond’s letter, but Miss Collinson, the pianist, would know the address. Miss Collinson had written it down carefully, but could not lay her hand on it; she would let Cecily know as soon as she came across it.

Cecily, in despair, was wondering if she would have the courage to call on Maribel after school and appeal to her, when Sarah informed her that Miss Maribel was coming on Saturday afternoon—“To hear the rights of this business. I told her as you’d been rude to Mrs. Raymond at the dancing, Cess, and she wants to hear about it.”

Sarah looked at her ward with a touch of anxiety. She had a dim feeling that she had not been quite fair. Would Cecily make another “scene”?

Cecily flushed. “Maribel’s a Guide. She’ll ask me what I have to say. She won’t decide till she’s asked me.”

“She took it quieter than I expected,” Sarah said to herself, in some relief.

In spite of their two years together, she did not understand Cecily, and had never tried to do so. If Cecil was quiet and gave no trouble, all was well, thought Sarah. It mattered nothing to her that all the time till Maribel arrived Cecily’s eyes were dark with smouldering feeling and her expression tense.

To relieve the strain of waiting, she wandered out on to the Downs on Saturday morning, leaving Sarah putting the finishing touches to a grand clean-up of the cottage. Years ago Sarah had been cook in Maribel's home, so whenever she had notice of a visit she set to work and "had a good old spring-clean—As if Maribel cared!" as Cecil had once said derisively to Sandy.

As Cecily sat on the hill, she fingered a tin whistle she had bought in town. The village shop, where she had tried first, had been sold out; half the class had bought whistles since Lady Marchwood's visit.

It had not been hard to pick out tunes, in Cecily's case. Elsie had confessed she could not make anything of her whistle; but Cecily's ear and memory were good, and she had not had much difficulty. In a few minutes she had found the notes of "We won't go home till morning"; "Ruffy Tufty" had followed quickly, and then "Butterfly" and "The Old Mole." Accidentals were too much for her, but quite by chance she found how to reach the second octave, and in her joy over this new expression of music she almost forgot the ordeal before her and the cloud overhanging the future.

Then it swept down on her again. If she were forbidden to go to Mrs. Raymond's class there would be no more tunes. It would be more than she could bear.

From where she sat she saw a little car creeping up the long slope to the farm and the dewpond. Maribel had come round the longer way.

Cecily sprang up. She would run along the top and down the other path and meet the car before it reached the village.

Then she pulled herself up. "No, I won't. I'll let Sarah have first chance. Maribel will be fair. I'll wait till she sends for me."

Lying behind a thorn bush she piped the tunes she knew, her eyes on the car creeping along the road in the valley. As it came nearer, Cecily dropped the whistle and gazed.

"There are two people. Somebody's with Maribel. Oh, it's Rosalind, and they're in uniform! I'm glad. They'll feel more Guidey. Rosalind's as jolly as Maribel. I'm not afraid of what they'll say. They won't hear, so I'll whistle a tune to them."

The hawthorn bush above her was white as snow with blossom, and the heavy scent intoxicated her. She piped tune after tune, with the unconscious rhythm which had caught Mrs. Raymond's notice.

The car stopped when it had passed a little way beyond her, and the girls in the front seat seemed to be talking and looking about them.

Cecily dropped the pipe in the middle of "The Old Mole," scarlet with sudden shyness. "They couldn't have heard me! Away down there—they

couldn't! They're looking at the view. Now they're going on. I'm sure they couldn't hear!"

And presently she went slowly along the turf to the dewpond, and followed the car down the hill to the cottage.

CHAPTER III THE GUIDER GUARDIANS

“What’s the trouble, Bel?” asked Rosalind.

She had arrived by the morning train from town, and she had come in uniform, for the reason of her visit was a big Guide display during the evening.

Maribel, meeting her at the station, was in uniform also. She explained, after her first greetings—“You’re coming with me this afternoon to see Cecily. Sarah’s in trouble about her. As you’re here you may as well back me up. You’re just as much Cecily’s guardian as I am. I hate rowing anybody!”

“But what is it all about?” Rosalind demanded, as they drove away in the little car.

“Something to do with her village dancing class. A Mrs. Raymond—I don’t know anything about her—takes a class once a week, and for some reason she allowed Cecil to join, though it’s a grown-up class. Cecily’s been enjoying it enormously.”

“Wait a sec! Country or jazz?”

“Oh, country! Don’t be an idiot!”

“Wonder if the lady knows much about it?” commented Rosalind, who went to London classes.

“It all seems very sound, from Cecil’s account; good choice of dances, and she makes the class keen. But the music’s rotten, according to Cecily.”

“Who would be a good judge, of course!” Rosalind mocked. “What does the infant know about it?”

“Apparently they once had a violinist, and she was so much easier to dance to. That’s Cecily’s standard; the regular lady isn’t so easy to dance to.”

“I say! Cécile knows a thing or two!” said Rosalind, with more respect.

“Don’t let her hear you call her Cécile.”

“I’ll be careful. But what’s the row, Bel?”

“Sarah says Cecily was rude to Mrs. Raymond last week, and that the kid’s always so worked up after dancing that she ‘can’t do nothing with her.’”

“H’m! What does Cecily say?”

“That’s what we’re going to find out. I gather there was some sort of scene at last week’s class, and Sarah put her foot down and said, ‘Never

again.' But apparently Mrs. Raymond asked last Wednesday where Cecily was, so she hasn't been upset by the fuss. So Sarah thought she'd better write to me."

"I expect she's making more of it than is necessary. But we'd better clear things up," Rosalind agreed. "I want to hear what happened. I can imagine Cecil being rude; no, not rude, but over-excited."

"And forgetting whom she was speaking to, or not knowing what she was saying," Maribel assented. "That's why I feel we must look into it."

"In fact," said Rosalind, "Cécile has peeped out, and Sarah, who doesn't know Cécile, has lost her head."

"That's about it. Cecil's French side has flared up, unfortunately in public. We may feel we have to explain to Mrs. Raymond, if we can get hold of her."

"Have we time to see Cecil, and perhaps explain to Mrs. Raymond?"

"That depends where Mrs. Raymond lives. We've heaps of time for Cecily. Lunch is ready," Maribel explained, as she stopped the car at the door. "We'll race off to Sarah's as soon as we've fed you."

"Cecily hasn't joined the Guides yet?" Rosalind asked, as they set out in the car again an hour later.

"Not yet. She'd like to, but there aren't Guides in her school; Miss Ansell doesn't care about them, in the school. I'm not satisfied with the village Company for Cecil; they're slack. I'm hoping there may be changes there soon. Cecily thinks so much of the Guides, that I'd hate her to join a slack crowd."

"I wish she could join some Company, though. It would be jolly good for her."

"She's working hard, without Guides," Maribel observed. "I fancy she has a struggle to keep up with her form. She'll have to join straight away as a Ranger when she leaves school and begins training."

"Has she any ideas as to her future yet?"

"I can't say she has. I've talked to her. She wants to make things! What do you make of that?"

"What sort of things? Hats? Cakes? Frocks?"

"I don't think so. She says dressmaking wouldn't be bad if you didn't have to sew."

Rosalind laughed. "That's rather a blow! Does she want to begin at the top, and design Paris models?"

"And millinery might be fun, but she thinks she'd soon be tired of it."

"Another blow! I should have thought her Cécile side would be good at millinery."

“I feel rather hopeless about it. She doesn’t want to teach, or to go into an office, or to do anything with figures.”

“Try shorthand. That can be quite amusing, if you look at it in the right light. But she’d need book-keeping. That never strikes me as really a humorous subject, and it certainly has figures in it.”

“Cecily’s book-keeping might be quite humorous,” Maribel remarked. “Isn’t it difficult having a ward, when you’re only twenty yourself? I used to think to be out of one’s teens would seem ancient, but I feel as much a kid as ever I did.”

“Same here. And yet I’m of age! What about training Cecil as a cook? First class, very highest grade, of course. Whatever happens, people will want to eat.”

“Probably. But I can’t quite see Cecily cooking all her life.”

“She could work off her creative instinct on cakes and puddings. That would be ‘making things,’ and jolly good things too,” Rosalind argued.

“You can ask her how she’d like it,” Maribel did not sound hopeful. “She’s only fifteen. We mustn’t hustle her into the wrong thing.”

“Hello! Going all the way round?” Rosalind asked, as the car turned out of the London road.

“I want to leave some bundles of magazines at the hospital. The Guides have been collecting them. It won’t take ten minutes longer to go this way, and it’s a jollier ride.”

When they had passed through the woods and were creeping along the road between open rolling Downs, Maribel stopped the car by Rosalind’s request, and they sat listening to the song of an ecstatic lark.

Rosalind drew a long breath. “Was it really only three hours ago I passed through Clapham Junction? Bel, you lucky child, living here always; you can’t realise how wonderful the silence is.”

“The top of the hill, just up there, is covered with cowslips and white violets,” Maribel remarked. “But I haven’t had time to come out and gather any yet. I work too, remember. Ready to go on?”

“One sec. more! Let’s wait till that little chap drops to his nest—I *say!* Who’s that?”

From the hill above came the thin sweet notes of a pipe. The Guiders looked at one another wide-eyed.

“It’s ‘Rufty’!” Maribel marvelled. “Well played, too!”

“Strong sense of rhythm!” Rosalind murmured. “I want to dance! Shall we explore?”

Maribel looked up at the hill. There were several clumps of hawthorn bushes, laden with flowers.

“He—she—may be behind any of those. ‘Fraid we haven’t time,” she said regretfully. “We’ll ask Cecil. It must be somebody who goes to the class.”

“If they don’t like the pianist, they wouldn’t do so badly with that Pied Piper,” Rosalind remarked.

Maribel started her engine again. “I never expected to hear ‘Rufty’ floating to me over the Downs.”

“It’s beginning ‘The Old Mole,’ ” Rosalind cried. “Bell, let’s wait till the end of the concert! It’s mean to go before the collection!”

Maribel laughed. “I’ll ask Cecil to find the musician for you.”

“Whoever it was, he played jolly well,” said Rosalind, as the car reached the dewpond and the top of the rise, and dropped again between chalk cliffs. “Oh—Chanctonbury! I always want to curtsy!” and she saluted the distant ring of trees.

“Step to the right and honour!” Maribel said laughing. “From any point Chanctonbury is like a queen, and when you come on her suddenly you ought to raise your hat.”

“I’d like to dance ‘Sellenger’s’ round her.”

“My dear child! Some ring! You’d need a thousand couples. Have you any idea how big she is?”

“Yes, ma’am. You’d need a regiment.”

“And you’d fall backwards off the edge,” Maribel said severely. “Now for Sarah and Cecily!”

CHAPTER IV

CECILY'S DOUBLE LIFE

Sarah's front room looked small at all times, and particularly when Cecily was doing her homework, with books spread all over the table. But it looked still smaller when it held two big Guiders in uniform. Maribel, who was fair, was tall; Rosalind, dark-eyed, was smaller, and slight and neat; but they both looked big and imposing and businesslike in navy blue, and they seemed to fill the little room completely.

Sarah, overawed by the uniforms and by Rosalind's brisk questions, told her story, giving a highly-coloured account of the "scene" at the country-dance class.

The Guiders looked at one another. "Doesn't sound so very bad," said Rosalind.

"It's just as we expected. Cecily was all worked up and excited, and she forgot where she was and what she was doing. The question is, is the dancing good for her, if she's carried away like this?" Maribel asked anxiously. "She's an excitable kid, Rose."

"I can't do nothing with her after that dancing, Miss Maribel. And she don't sleep well those nights."

"It can't be good for her. What an awful pity, when she loves it so much!"

"We'll think it over," Rosalind remarked. "I don't feel so sure about it, Bel. Perhaps it's too good for her. I mean, perhaps it somehow fills a want in her. I've heard of tonics that excited people because they were too strong for them; but that was because the patient needed them so badly. Perhaps Cecily needs something like this, and when she finds it, it goes to her head."

"There's something in that." Maribel looked more hopeful. "I'd hate to have to stop her dancing. What about Mrs. Raymond, Rose?"

"I like what we've heard of her. She seems a jolly good sort. But I want to see her about Cecily," Rosalind said, with energy. "I've an idea Mrs. Raymond could tell us whether the dancing is good or bad for the kid. She'll have seen how it acts on Cecily. Let's go and see her, Bel! You said we had time."

"I said it depended where she lived. It's still early. Where can we find Mrs. Raymond, Sarah?"

"Rayley Park, Miss Maribel. The lady what plays for the class; she come in an hour back to tell Cess the address. Cecily she said she was a-going to

write.”

“Um! What was she going to do that for?” Rosalind pondered.

“Rayley Park!” Maribel exclaimed. “We could do it in half-an-hour. But I’ll be shy; it’s a big place. May I hide behind you, Rose? You’ve cheek enough for anything.”

“Half-an-hour! Let’s do it, then! Shy! What does that matter? We must see Cecily through.”

“I know. I’ll take you there and I’ll back you up. But you can take the lead.”

“We ought to see Cecil first, though,” said Rosalind. “She may have something to say. Where is she?”

“I told her as you’d be sure to want her, miss,” Sarah said nervously.

“She’ll be somewhere about,” and Maribel went through the kitchen into the little garden. “Cecily!”

Cecily’s smooth red head appeared among the gooseberry bushes. She wriggled her way out, then stood erect and saluted the uniform.

Maribel returned the salute. “Come and talk to us, Cecil. Rosalind is here too.”

“Oh!” Cecily cried. “Didn’t you think one of you was enough? Is it so awful as all that?”

“Is what so awful? What do you mean?”

“The row. Did you send for Rose because you thought you couldn’t be nasty enough?”

Maribel laughed. “Rose has come for a Guide show in the Pier Pavilion to-night. But when she heard you were in trouble with Sarah, she came to hear about it. We want you to tell us just what happened.”

Cecily’s face was radiant as she followed her guardian. Her trust was justified. There would be no “rowing” until she had explained. Perhaps not then.

She saluted Rosalind also, and stood before the two, fearless and straight, but not defiant.

“I’m sorry if I was rude to Mrs. Raymond. I never meant it. I love her; I couldn’t be rude to her. I’m going to write and tell her so, as soon as I find out her address. But I think perhaps I was rude, without meaning it. I forgot I was speaking to her. I forgot everything. They were spoiling the pattern of the dance, and she’d told and told them, and they wouldn’t listen. They laugh and giggle and don’t pay attention. I’d stood it as long as I could. I knew what was wrong, and I just had to fly at them. I never meant that she couldn’t manage the class. But I didn’t know what I was saying. I was angry and—and——”

“All worked up,” Maribel said, with understanding.

“Clean off her head,” said Sarah.

“With the joy of the dancing and with annoyance at seeing the pattern spoiled,” Rosalind was looking keenly at Cecily. “Cecil, Maribel and I are going to run over in the car to see Mrs. Raymond. Would you like to come too, and apologise to her yourself?”

Cecily looked from one to the other with blazing dark eyes. “Would you? Not really?”

“Fetch your coat, then. Yes, you’ll need it in the car. You’ll have to ride in the dickey, you know.”

Cecily turned at the door. “Must I wear a hat? Oh, please, Rosalind! I love the wind. I went a long way on the bus the other night without a hat.”

“Bring your hat and put it on at the gate,” Maribel suggested.

“Good idea! I won’t be decent by the time we arrive!” and Cecily ran up the narrow stair.

The Guiders went out to start the car. Under cover of the noise of the engine, Rosalind exclaimed, “Bel, this is a revelation! This is a new Cecily. The child’s stirred to her depths by all this. It’s what I guessed. She must have been needing something; some kind of outlet. School hasn’t been enough; she hasn’t had Guides, remember. Country-dancing has somehow filled the want. It’s meant a tremendous lot to her; a really big thing. I’m going to talk to Mrs. Raymond about her. She must have seen the state of thrills Cecily has been in. She’ll tell us whether to encourage her or to make her drop it.”

“I hope she won’t advise that. It would break the kid’s heart. I’ve never seen her so keen on anything before.”

“We’ve failed her; in understanding, you know. We’ve never brought up a girl before! She isn’t quite a kiddy now, and we haven’t realised it. She’s wanted something besides school.”

“I was afraid of giving her too much,” Maribel said, looking troubled. “She had so much background to make up. I wanted her to have time for the hills, and for reading stories. She knew so little of English life.”

“I thought so too; but we’ve been wrong. She’s quicker than we thought. She’s lapped it all up and had time for more. I believe she’d have been better to be a Guide; she was keen enough on it. This dancing has come along and has filled every corner of her. I want advice from Mrs. Raymond, who must have seen her in that excited eager state, week after week.”

“Right you are! I’m sure it’s a wise move,” Maribel agreed.

Cecily came tumbling down the stairs, her school hat in her hand, a big blue coat over her green cotton frock. Sarah had rigidly forbidden her to wear her tunic on Saturdays, holding that it must be “kept decent” for

school. So she had made short blue and green cotton frocks, from material chosen by Maribel.

“It’s a good thing I’ve had Bel to choose my clothes!” Cecily had sometimes thought. “Sarah would have chosen pink!”

She wore the frocks with black or brown strap belts, and long black or brown stockings. Her insistence that stockings and belt and tie and shoes should match had aroused Sarah’s scornful amusement and had been condemned as “Frenchy” and “finicky.” Cecily had refused to “dress odd,” as she put it, however, and to-day she looked very neat in brown tie and belt, and long brown legs below the pale green skirt.

“Ready? Hop up, and I’ll tuck you in,” Rosalind had the dickey seat open.

Cecily, her face alight with joy and excitement, sprang up. Something fell from the pocket of her coat and rattled on the curb.

Rosalind picked up a tin whistle. “Is this yours?—I *say*!”

Cecily went scarlet. She took the whistle and looked from one to the other in embarrassment.

“Cecily Brown, was it you who piped ‘Rufty’ and ‘Old Mole’ at us from behind a thorn bush on the hill?” cried Maribel.

Under her amazed eyes and Rosalind’s steady inquiring gaze, Cecily reddened still more deeply. “I didn’t think you’d hear. It was mad; I was sorry afterwards. I forgot the wind was blowing that way.”

“Play to us again!” Rosalind demanded.

“Not here, Rose!” Maribel remonstrated. “We’d have a crowd in two seconds.”

“We’d pass round the hat,” Rosalind chuckled. “Cecily, explain yourself! This is a great surprise! Who taught you to play the penny whistle?”

“It cost a shilling. It’s a good one, and beautifully in tune,” Cecily cried. “I bought it in town two days ago. Some of them weren’t in tune; I tried ever so many. The shop man was awfully jolly; he wanted me to have a nice one; he helped me. Elsie—she lives next door—she has a celluloid one, but it isn’t in tune. It sounds soft and smooth and sweet, but some of the notes are wrong. She doesn’t mind, but I couldn’t bear it. So I tried them all till I found a good one. Listen!” and she ran up the scale on the pipe.

“It’s all right,” Maribel agreed. “But how did you know? You’ve never had music-lessons, Cecil?”

“I’ve heard Sandy tune her fiddle. I know when it’s wrong.”

“Sandy? Fiddle?” Maribel asked helplessly. “Who is Sandy, Cecil?”

“Have you been leading a double life, Cecily Brown?” Rosalind demanded, in mock indignation. “Who is the gentleman?”

“It’s not! It’s Mrs. Alexander; she teaches music, and one night she fiddled for Mrs. Raymond, and it was gorgeous. She lives on the Common, beyond the hills. I go to see her on the bus sometimes.”

“Without a hat!” Maribel murmured, stunned.

Cecily glanced at her. “That’s where I went. Do you mind? She plays to me. It helps me to calm down. I was in a beast of a rage when Sarah wouldn’t let me go to dancing this week. I had to do something.”

“Or burst,” Rosalind agreed. “So you went to see Mrs. Alexander, who is called Sandy, and she played to you and it soothed you?”

“Yes, but first we talked. By the Silent Pool, you know.”

“It sounds most suitable. We don’t know, but we intend to. Bel, what about it?”

“I’ll take you to see the Silent Pool to-morrow,” Maribel assented. “I don’t know this Silent Pool.”

“It’s private,” Cecily explained. “But Sandy will let you through the gate.”

“Does it belong to Sandy?”

“No, it belongs to the man she bought her bungalow from. He lets her go to the pool.”

“I see. But about the whistle, Cecil? What put it into your head?”

“Mrs. Raymond had a friend with her on Wednesday, who piped for some of the dances. I felt awful that I’d missed it! Elsie said she was going to buy a whistle; Lady Marchwood said they should all try, because it was quite easy. So I did. And it is.”

“It is? Oh, quite easy! Yes, I see. And Lady Marchwood—who is she?”

“Mrs. Raymond’s friend. She danced, too, and Elsie said it was lovely.”

“I’m downright sorry you missed such a treat,” Maribel remarked.

Cecily coloured. “It was my own fault. I did forget everything and flare up. That sort of thing isn’t done.”

“I’m not sorry!” Rosalind exclaimed. “If she hadn’t lost her temper—which was very wrong, no doubt, but very natural!—we’d never have heard about the whistle, or Sandy, or the Silent Pool, or all the rest of Cecily’s double life. As her guardians, it’s high time we were introduced to this new side of her. I’m going to hear that whistle again!”

“What I think,” Maribel put in, “is that we shall not see Mrs. Raymond to-day.”

“Oh, Maribel! Can’t we start?” Cecily wailed.

“Or if we do, the Pier Pavilion won’t see *us*. Rose, we must hurry. We must be there at night.”

“Righto! I’m going to have both Mrs. Raymond and the Pier Pavilion!” Rosalind jumped into the front seat, and slammed the door.

Maribel started her engine again, and they sped away.

CHAPTER V

A NEW SIDE OF CECILY

A chuckle from behind made Rosalind look round. "What's up, Cecily Brown?"

"We passed Elsie at the corner. I'm so glad! I hoped we'd meet somebody who knows me."

Rosalind laughed. "You might take her out now and then, if it's such a great occasion, Bel."

"It isn't the first time Cecily has been perched up there," Maribel took a sharp corner warily.

"It's the first time I've been with two of you in uniform, though," Cecily explained. "Elsie's eyes nearly fell out. I wish we could meet Sandy!"

"So do I. I want to see Sandy. Now we can go ahead!" and they raced off up the London road.

Cecily sat in a blissful dream, the whistle in her hand, her red hair blowing wildly. This free rush through the air made her want to sing and shout. She put the pipe to her lips, but the wind blew the sound away, and she laughed and gave up the attempt to express her feelings.

The Guiders spoke a quick word or two in carefully lowered tones.

"What about it, Bel?"

"I'm stunned. She has sides we've never suspected. The job's too big for us, Rose."

"We've done well enough, so far, but we may need help to see her through. We haven't given her all she needed. Music, for one thing. This dancing has opened new doors in her nature. She ought to have music in earnest, with an ear like that. And Sandy's playing soothes her; but the dance-music stirs her up. She feels it all. We must help her, Bel."

"I feel guilty," Maribel said. "I ought to have tried her with music. It never occurred to me."

"If she likes Sandy's fiddle, she'd like yours."

"I wish I'd thought of it before."

"Couldn't think of everything. It's not too late," Rosalind said practically. "Pull up in a quiet spot, Bel! We must hear that whistle again."

"We ought to hurry," Maribel objected. "But I want to hear it too. Fancy the kid picking out tunes!"

"Yes, she's worth helping. This will do!"

Maribel drew up where a wide stretch of grass bordered the road. "Don't stay long, Rose."

"No. It won't take five minutes. Now, Cecily Brown, hop down and pipe us a tune!"

Cecily eyed her shyly. "I don't do it well yet. I'm only finding out the notes."

"There was no finding out about that 'Old Mole' we heard coming from the hawthorn bush!"

"'Old Mole's' easy! And 'Goddesses' is like coming downstairs."

Maribel laughed. "Cheers! So it is! Pipe away, Cecily!"

Cecily climbed down from her seat. For some reason she did not understand, she was shy and shrank from their interested gaze.

Standing in the road, her eyes on Chanctonbury's distant ring of trees crowning a smooth sweep of down, she piped the tunes she knew.

Rosalind's eyes met Maribel's. Their feet were tapping to her unconscious rhythm.

"Excellent!" Rosalind murmured. "How ever does she do it?"

"She feels it. She must have music-lessons! A tin whistle isn't good enough."

"They learned a new one last week," Cecily broke off. "Elsie said it was called 'If all the World were Paper,' and Mrs. Raymond told them to sing. But Elsie's a hopeless idiot; she couldn't remember the tune. And of course I didn't hear it."

The Guiders looked at one another. Then with one accord they "armed right," singing the words, and finished with a set-and-turn-single.

"Oh, do you know it?" Cecily's face lit up. "Do it once more! Then I'll know the tune!"

They gravely "armed left," and at Maribel's suggestion did the siding also. "I'm afraid that's all we can manage alone. It's for a set of eight."

"Your siding's topping," Cecily had watched wide-eyed. "Our crowd doesn't do it like that. It's a dinky tune." She had been fingering the holes on her whistle, and now she played the air, hesitating once or twice.

The interested lieutenants promptly sang the missing notes when she stumbled; their interest was in her far more than in the music, but of that Cecily was unconscious. She had forgotten everything but the quest of the new tune.

"I've got it!" she cried triumphantly. "Listen!"

"Extremely smart of you!" Rosalind exclaimed.

"Rose, we must go on," Maribel urged.

"I keep forgetting the Pier Pavilion!" Rosalind sighed. "Hop up again, Cecilia! That was a real treat. You shall have more tunes."

Cecily, very bright-faced, sprang up into her back seat. "Every tune I get is one more for my collection!"

"She's 'got,' as she so beautifully puts it, something bigger than a new tune," Maribel murmured, as they set off. "She has a real gift, and she's bagged our interest in it, quite unconsciously. She must be trained, but I don't yet see how, or what will come of it. But with an ear like that, she must be helped."

"I'm with you! We'll see her through somehow. But we may have to hunt for some one else to help. You and I have done about as much as we ought, Bel."

Maribel agreed. "That's what is troubling me. I can't ask Father; Mother's illness has cost a lot, and we have only just enough. And you have your young twins in Switzerland to be educated."

Rosalind's thoughts went to John and Gina, the brother and sister still at school. "We never were millionaires. I can't do much more, Bel, and I don't suppose our Guides can."

"We'll have to think it over. We meant to train Cecil to earn her own living quite soon."

"She must still do that," Rosalind said quickly. "Music can only be an extra. There's no chance of training her musically, Bel. It can't be done."

"It ought to be done," Maribel, musical herself, craved to give her protégée the very best.

"Cecil must be a dressmaker, or a clerk, or a cook, or a shorthand-typist; in her spare time she can be a musician and a folk-dancer. Most of us have to be content with that."

Maribel sighed. "I suppose you're right. She must have music-lessons. From Mrs. Alexander, I suppose?"

"Why don't you teach her yourself? You wouldn't charge yourself much for her lessons!"

"Rose, I see a signpost. Isn't this where we turn off for Rayley Park?"

"It is," Rosalind consulted the map. "And these are private grounds. I begin to feel quaky!"

"Don't for goodness' sake! You promised to see this through. If you funk, I shall take you right home."

"Funk? *Me?*" Rosalind scorned the suggestion. "Not if it were Buckingham Palace or Sandringham!—Mrs. Raymond's nice, isn't she, Cecilia?"

"She's a dear. But what a big house! I saw it through the trees. I can stay in the car while you talk to her, can't I, Rosalind?"

Rosalind sighed. "That doesn't buck me up much! I don't care if it is a big house! Pull yourself together, Bel, and don't disgrace your uniform!"

“The uniform’s rather a help,” Maribel observed, as they sped up a long drive through lawns and flower-beds. “We mustn’t be a pair of shy dithery Guides. What a party one could have on these lawns!”

“We will not dither. We will not be shy,” Rosalind said firmly. “All the same, I feel a wee bit queer! What brings her to our villages teaching country-dancing, when she lives in a place like this?”

“We shall find out. Look—a lake!”

“Call it a pond. But it has water-lilies,” Rosalind admitted. “And ducks! It’s a topping place, Bel!”

“I feel rather like a worm or a maggot,” Maribel murmured. “Shall we back out and go home, Rose?”

“We should look silly! Go on, dear idiot. We’ll pull through somehow,” Rosalind said bracingly.

CHAPTER VI MEETING LADY MARCHWOOD

“Look at that lovely kid!” Maribel, driving slowly, glanced across the lily pond which lay beside the private road.

On the other side was a bank, covered with flowering rhododendron bushes. A small boy, of about two years old, had pushed his way through and stood gazing at the car. He wore a white smock and tiny white socks and knickers, and had a mop of dark red hair curling about his face and neck in tiny rings and twists, and light brown eyes wide with surprise.

“Heavenly infant,” Rosalind agreed. “But he oughtn’t to be there alone. He’s too near the water.”

Apparently giving up the puzzle of the car as too much for him, the child turned and toddled straight down a narrow path and into the pond, towards a big clump of yellow wild iris.

The Guiders leapt from the car.

“Brat!” cried Rosalind. “Who on earth is in charge of him?”

“The little idiot!” cried Maribel, and they ran to the rescue.

At the same moment some one crashed through the bushes in pursuit, plunged down the path, and reaching out a long arm clutched the happy baby, who, in several inches of water already, was wading towards his prize.

“John Raymond! I never did! For one second I look the other way, and you’re off like a rabbit!”

The Guiders hurried up. “Can we help? Is he all right?” cried Rosalind. “We were coming to call—that’s our car—and we saw the little monkey walk right in.”

“Monkey! He’s a young limb. Thanks, he’s all right, but it’s more than he deserves. Now, John Raymond, off with those wet shoes and socks! We must take you to nurse to be dried.”

She was a tall girl, with bobbed yellow curls and blue eyes. She set “John Raymond” on a stump and unbuttoned his shoes. “He’s in the pond, or the stream, or the pool, whenever he has the chance. He might as well go barefoot.”

The Guiders looked for howls from the disappointed John. He looked up at them, however, and broke into an infectious chuckle.

“He thinks we look funny,” Maribel remarked. “Look, John,” and she dangled her whistle before his eyes.

“I expect we do look funny, to him,” Rosalind agreed. “I thought he’d yell because his game had been spoiled.”

The girl on her knees before John looked up and laughed.

“He isn’t used to Guide uniform. He thinks it’s a joke.”

“Ye’ow! Ye’ow!” John stretched out his hands.

“I know the flowers were yellow. But that’s no reason why you should go into the pond after them, and run away when aunty wasn’t looking,” “aunty” said severely. “It’s those iris,” she explained. “John’s crazy for anything yellow. He went into the stream to catch the ducklings yesterday, and yellow chickens simply aren’t safe anywhere near him. If he were mine, I’d dress him all in yellow; then he might be satisfied. Joan’s going to give him a yellow jersey. I’m supposed to be in charge of him, and we were playing picnics up on the bank. But my own young hopeful started eating dirt; he eats everything he sees, and he’s had a shot at twigs and beech-nuts already this afternoon. I was fishing the earth out of him when I found John had disappeared. I knew he’d have made for the lake. John, sit still while aunty fetches Tony!”

John looked up at her with adorable brown eyes, and kicked his bare toes. “John pick ye’ow f’owers,” he said, and scrambled off his stump.

“Aunty” picked him up. “Then you’ll have to come too, you bad boy.”

“Oh, let us mind him!” Maribel cried laughing. “You can’t lug him up the bank, and carry another baby as well. Did you say there was another?”

“Will you really keep an eye on him? I say, thanks awfully! It’s jolly sporting of you. The other one’s mine—Peter Antony Marchwood. He’s going to be just as bad as John in six months’ time,” and “aunty” raced up the bank and disappeared.

The Guiders looked at one another. Maribel’s eyes were dancing.

“I wonder who——” Rosalind began.

But there was no time for idle wondering for anybody who was in charge of John Raymond. He was off his stump and making for the yellow flowers with a determined air.

“Aunty was right. He’s a young limb,” and Rosalind picked up the culprit. “Now, John Raymond, who’s holding you? Are you going to howl?”

John looked doubtful; then he laughed, and began to dance up and down in her arms.

“Mercy! I can hardly hold the creature! He’s terrifically strong for his size.”

John, crowing happily, clutched the badge on the side of her hat and dragged the hat crooked. Rosalind pretended to squeal, and he shouted in delight.

“Who was the nice lady, John?” Maribel demanded. “Not Mrs. Raymond, surely, Rose?”

“No, she was aunty. This gentleman belongs to Mrs. Raymond. I gathered that she was Mrs. Marchwood, though she’s not much older than we are.”

“She must be Lady Marchwood, the one who plays the whistle,” said Cecily, who had followed and had been watching and listening eagerly. “Elsie said Mrs. Raymond’s friend was called Lady Marchwood, and she said she had a baby boy.”

“You said something about her before. Could that be Lady Marchwood?” Rosalind exclaimed. “Bel, undo this creature! He’ll have my hat in pieces. I’m sure I look a sight.”

“You do,” Maribel assured her.

“Would you mind coming round to the top of the lake?” the tall fair-haired girl stood on the bank looking down at them, a baby of a year old in her arms. “I’m afraid John’s being a trouble to you. I’m ever so grateful to you for helping. I can manage two of them when I have them together; I’ve two of my own, you see. But when they’re separated, one up the bank and one down, and both as bad as they can be, what can I do?”

“You have two, did you say?” Rosalind asked incredulously, when they had walked round the lake and met at the end of the shrubbery.

“We’ve left Andrew at home; he’s two and a bit, a little older than John. This is my Tony; look!”

She showed the yellow-haired baby proudly. He was falling asleep, his head nestled against her.

“I must take him to the house. Were you coming to see Joan?—I’m sorry; I mean Mrs. Raymond. Then won’t you come along? If you’ll really carry John for me I’ll be greatly obliged. It isn’t far.”

“Suppose we put John in the car?” Maribel suggested. “He’s rather making a mess of Rose, isn’t he?”

“Pulling me to bits. But he seems to like me,” Rosalind said cheerfully. “I expected howls when I picked him up. He was making for the yellow flowers again, as soon as aunty turned her back.”

“Aunty” laughed. “I ought to have introduced myself. My name is Marchwood, and I’m staying with Mrs. Raymond. That lively infant is her son; she has a girl too, whose godmother I am. Janice is five. So Joan has her hands full.”

“But she makes time to teach country-dancing in our villages among the Downs!”

“Oh, that’s play! She must play sometimes. Have you come to see her about classes?”

“About something arising out of one of her classes. Won’t you jump in with Tony and let Maribel drive you to the house?”

They were standing beside the car. John gave up the idea of tearing the badge out of the hat and reached out for the gleaming metal-work.

“You can’t pick that, John. It isn’t flowers. Hop in, Bel! Can you carry us all? Cecil and I will squeeze into the dickey, and between us we may be able to hold John down.”

“It’s only just round the corner,” Lady Marchwood placed herself cautiously in the front seat, protecting Tony’s little head with care. “Sorry my legs are so long. I always have to tuck into Joan’s own little private Austin Seven in sections. It takes the big car to hold me comfortably. I’ll double myself up; I’ve had lots of practice.”

“All safe up there?” asked Maribel, over her shoulder.

“Tucked in beautifully. It’s a work of art, but we’ve managed it. Fortunately John is just a trifle awed. Hustle on, Bel, before he recovers,” Rosalind pleaded. “If he begins to do his morris jigs up here, something will happen.”

“I *say!*” Lady Marchwood whirled round in the front seat. “Are you a folk-dancer?”

“I go to classes in town every week.”

“Oh, cheers! Who’s teaching? What’s your grade? Do you know any of the crowd we used to know?” The questions shot out in an excited stream.

Rosalind mentioned two or three names. “My morris is very elementary, but I’ve done a good deal of country. Are you keen too?”

“Oh, rather! We used to go to Vacation Schools, but now, of course, with troops of kids—well, each of us has two, and that makes six in the family—we can’t spend weeks at dancing! But we’re still very keen. I am so glad to meet you! We’ll have a jolly chat as soon as we’ve disposed of the infants.”

“How do you make six?” Maribel asked. “Don’t you mean four?”

“My sister-in-law, who is also Lady Marchwood, has twin girls, just three years old. She lost her husband before the twins were born.—There’s Joan! Will you stop, please?—Joan! Come here!”

They had turned a corner, and the house, of gray stone, low and wide-spread, stood before them. On the lawn in one corner, with azalea bushes making walls of salmon-pink and lemon, a tea-table with basket chairs suggested that it was four o’clock.

Joan Raymond looked up from the cups she was arranging. She was tall, but not quite so tall as her friend; she wore a white frock, and her uncovered hair, plaited and twisted round her head, was deep bronze-red.

For a moment she stared at the laden car—the Guide uniforms—her small son perched up behind. Then she came hurrying across the lawn.

Lady Marchwood sat waiting for her. “Don’t wake Tony! But you might take John. He’s been in the lake, as usual.”

“How very kind of you!” and Joan took John from Rosalind’s arms. “Introduce me to your friends, Jenny-Wren.”

Lady Marchwood looked at her friends. Maribel reddened in confusion; Rosalind’s eyes danced.

Before they could speak, Lady Marchwood said airily, “’Fraid I can’t. I forgot to ask their names. It’s you they’ve come to see—on business, about some of your classes.”

“Jenny-Wren!” Joan cried indignantly. “Do you mean to say——”

“But they’ve been perfect bricks, helping me with John, when I had my hands full with Tony. And they’re folk-dancers, and they know heaps of people. What do names matter? I suppose they have names, but I *know* they’re jolly good sports.”

“I do apologise for Lady Marchwood,” Joan Raymond began. “She’s still nothing but a schoolgirl.”

“That’s what makes her such topping fun,” Rosalind said, as she jumped down from the dickey. “Mrs. Raymond, you don’t know us, but I hope you’ll forgive our intrusion. I am Rosalind Firth, and this is Maribel Ritchie. I think you know Cecily Brown.”

Mrs. Raymond’s puzzled face cleared at sight of Cecily, and she grasped the clue hopefully. “Of course I know Cecily! We missed you on Wednesday. I hope you’ll be able to come next week.”

“I came to say I’m sorry I made a fuss the week before,” Cecil’s apology fairly tumbled out. “I never meant to be rude. But I was mad, and I didn’t know what I was saying. I’m awfully sorry. Sarah—I live with her, you know—she heard about it and she wouldn’t let me go this week, because they told her I’d been rude. Rosalind and Maribel are my guardians, and she told them, and they brought me to tell you I was sorry.”

“But that’s all right!” Joan Raymond exclaimed. “I didn’t think you were rude. I knew how you felt. I felt just the same myself, but I couldn’t let myself go. You did, and it was quite a relief. Don’t think any more about it! I’m so sorry you missed a week.”

“Is this the Firework?” Jen Marchwood had uncoiled herself carefully and now stood holding Tony and listening with interest. “I heard the story. I can tell you I sympathised with her! People who won’t listen are the limit. I’ve done some teaching, and I know!”

“It’s quite all right, Cecily,” Mrs. Raymond said again. “They were behaving very badly that night. You’ll let her come next week, won’t you?” and she looked at the Guiders, evidently puzzled. “Did she say you are her guardians?”

“You solve the riddle, Joan. I’ll take the babes to nurse, and then we can have tea in peace,” said Jen. “Come along, John! Run on the grass with bare toes!”

The idea appealed to John, who trotted ahead with gurgles of delight. They disappeared round the side of the house, and Mrs. Raymond turned to her guests again.

“We may give you tea, I hope? Oh, you must stay, when you have come so far! Jen and I will be alone; my husband won’t be in till six, and hers is at home in Oxfordshire. She says she’s having a holiday,” and she laughed. “You really must join us for tea. I want to hear which of our London folk-dance friends you have met.”

“It’s jolly kind of you,” Rosalind said warmly. “Cecil, run after Lady Marchwood with these damp socks and shoes! If you can’t find her, there’ll be some one you can give them to.”

“Oh, never mind the socks!” Joan exclaimed.

“Yes, please let her go. She’d like to be useful.” Then as Cecily hurried away, Rosalind explained. “We really came to ask your advice about the kid, Mrs. Raymond. She’s in our charge, and we’re troubled over the effect folk-dancing has on her. We thought perhaps you could help us. But we can’t talk before her. Will you help us to——”

“To get rid of her without being too obvious about it?” Maribel finished.

Joan looked thoughtful. “I’d like very much to have a talk with you about her. Would she like to have nursery tea? I’ll tell Janice to have a party for her, shall I? Janice is five, and feels very grown-up beside John. Wouldn’t Cecily perhaps be shy with all of us?”

“She wants to sit and look at you. She’s so grateful to you for giving her ‘Ruffy Tufty,’ ” said Rosalind.

Joan laughed, but with sympathy. “I know. I’ve been watching her for weeks. I wasn’t surprised at her outbreak. We won’t banish her during tea, then; she might feel that. We’ll gossip, and exchange experiences of folk-dancing. After tea I’ll ask her to play with Janice while nurse puts John to bed, and we’ll have our talk then.”

“It’s more than good of you!” Maribel said.

“Awfully sporting!” Rosalind exclaimed. “I must tell you one thing! Cecily heard about Lady Marchwood’s whistle last Wednesday, and she went racing into town to buy one. And already it’s the joy of her heart, and she can play several tunes. She picks them up like magic, and her playing is full of just the right feeling; makes you want to dance. It’s really topping!”

Joan looked at them wide-eyed. “But how perfectly splendid! Already? I *am* glad! My class has been worth while, just for that. She must certainly

play to us. But I'm not surprised. Of course, you know the child is an artist to her finger-tips?"

Rosalind and Maribel looked at her, and then at one another.

"An artist?" Rosalind said. "We were going to make her a typist, or a cook, or a clerk."

"Perhaps we can think of something better than that," Joan Raymond exclaimed. "But we won't talk of it before her," as Cecily came up. "Come and help me, Cecily! I'll pour out, and you shall hand the cups round, till Jenny-Wren comes back. You know I mean Lady Marchwood, don't you? I've known her since she was much younger than you, so you'll forgive me if I call her Jenny-Wren? It's her old school name."

"It doesn't fit her," Maribel said laughing. "Jenny-Wren should be tiny and shy."

"She was thirteen when I knew her first. You're fifteen, aren't you, Cecily? I was the May Queen, and my Coronation was her first big school event, and her introduction to folk-dancing. Later, when my Maid of Honour became Queen, I chose Jen in her place; and later—much later!—she was Queen herself. So you won't expect me to speak of her as 'Lady Marchwood.' So you heard about her piping, at last week's class?"

Cecily looked at her shyly. "Elsie told me. I could have cried because I'd missed that day. I—I bought a whistle."

"That was much better than crying! Now which is Elsie?"

"The fat heavy one," Cecily said simply.

Mrs. Raymond laughed. "You have your work cut out to take her down the middle, don't you?"

"She's always off the beat. I can't make her hear it."

"I've seen your struggles with Elsie. But she's improving, Cecily!"

"She isn't as bad as she was," Cecily admitted. "Do you think perhaps Lady Marchwood would"—and then she stopped, flushed and shy.

"Pipe to us after tea? I'm sure she would. I'll ask her, shall I?"

"Oh, thank you awfully much!" and Cecily shrank into shy grateful silence as a maid appeared with tea and Lady Marchwood came across the lawn, humming a morris tune.

"Now for half-an-hour's respite from family cares! All the babes are safely in nurse's hands, so we can breathe," and she dismissed the maid and came to wait on the guests.

CHAPTER VII CECILY'S PAST

That half-hour among the azaleas, with Joan Raymond beside the teapot and Jen Marchwood acting as waitress, took away every feeling of shyness from Cecily and her Guider guardians. Rosalind and Maribel felt thoroughly at home; Cecily lost her awe, though her devotion to Mrs. Raymond only increased. It extended to Lady Marchwood when, at Joan's suggestion, Jen fetched her whistle and gave them tune after tune. She also brought a brown wooden pipe, with two holes in the front and one behind and a note like a silver bird, and walked up and down piping morris tunes, till Rosalind sprang up to practise steps, and Cecily and Maribel cried out for a lesson in morris-dancing.

"Now what about hearing Cecily play?" Jen suggested.

"Oh, not after that!" Cecily shrank in dismay. "You couldn't ask me! It would sound too feeble."

Jen laughed. "Then I shan't play any more. Perhaps later on you'll be brave enough to give us a treat. What I want to know is how you two"—to the Guiders—"come to be guardians of a big girl like Cecily? People don't usually have wards only five years younger than themselves. Is it a story?"

"May I go and play with that kitten?" Cecily jumped to her feet, her face full of pleading.

"Oughtn't I to have asked? I'm sorry——"

"No, it's all right," Rosalind, answered. "You were sure to be curious. But Cecily doesn't like the story; it takes her back to times she wants to forget. I'm sure Mrs. Raymond would like you to play with the kitten, Cecil."

"Take it into the house by that big window," Joan suggested. "Ask the first person you meet to show you the way to nurse and the children. The kitten belongs to Janice; she's five. I'm sure you'd like to play with her."

Cecily fled, and the hostesses looked inquiringly at the Guiders.

"She doesn't like to think about it," Maribel said. "Poor kid, it's better she should forget. We don't know anything about her people, nor even if 'Cecily Brown' is her real name. But it's the only name she could give us."

"Except 'Cécile le Brun,' which she hates," Rosalind took up the story. "She's certainly half-French, but we don't know which half. We picked her up in France; in Haute Savoie, near Annecy."

“How very interesting!” Joan Raymond exclaimed. “Don’t you know her story? I’m certain there’s music in it somehow. I’ve watched her for weeks and music is born in her, there’s no doubt of that. She responds so absolutely, and always perfectly. What you tell me about the whistle just confirms what I had been feeling.”

“We didn’t know,” Maribel confessed. “I shall always regret that an outsider had to discover Cecil’s musical side. I feel we have failed the kid.”

“I don’t!” Rosalind said. “We’ve done well for her, up to this point. She’d had a very broken education; we’ve given her two years of steady solid work, to help her to make up what she’d lost. If we’d known she wanted music, that might have been too much; it might have interfered with the general work. She had to do that first.”

“Yes, she needed her background,” Joan agreed. “Perhaps she could concentrate on music presently.”

Rosalind pursed her lips. “I don’t know. We’ll do what we can, but we aren’t millionaires. And she has no one else.”

“I’m pining for the story,” Jen Marchwood suggested.

Maribel laughed. “And we keep talking round it! Tell how we came to adopt Cécile, Rose.”

“It was at a holiday camp on the shore of Lake Annecy. I was there with my young brother and sister. Maribel and twenty Guides, and their captain, were staying in a small hotel close by, and they spent most of their time in the camp, bathing and boating with us. A gang of very undesirable men were hanging round, trying to get hold of a boy in the camp, whose father was an American millionaire; they were on the track of some invention worth a fortune, and they kidnapped Peter, and my young brother with him. The boys were released and came back safely; but in the struggle the kidnappers dropped a book of notes, in cypher, which seemed to be of great value to them. We found it, and they made several attempts to get it back. One way they tried was to send a small girl into the camp to make friends, hoping she’d find out where the book was hidden, and either steal it or send word to them. We had no suspicions and were jolly to her, and she was soon at home with us. In fact, we were so friendly and jolly that she couldn’t go on with it. She came to us and made a clean breast of the whole thing, and begged us to protect her from the gang——”

“But she grabbed the book,” Maribel put in, her eyes gleaming reminiscently.

“She grabbed the book and flung it into the lake. The gang cleared off and left her on our hands, and of course we had to see her through. The Guides and a few other friends adopted her, and Bel and I were asked to

arrange things for her. She lives in that village with an old servant of Maribel's, and cycles to school every day."

"And you never heard—but did she belong to the gang?" cried Jen.

"Couldn't she tell you about herself?" Joan asked.

"Not very much. She'd been brought up first in England by some old woman she called 'Aunty,' but she didn't know where. She only just remembered it. Then she'd been taken by one of the men, whom she knew merely as 'Monsieur,' to a convent near Paris, and had been there for some years. Very occasionally she had seen 'Monsieur' or 'Madame,' but she didn't know their names, and she was certain they were not related to her. 'Madame' finally took her from the convent and was in charge of her when she visited the camp. She told Cécile, as they called her, that she must do whatever she was told, as nobody else in the whole world cared about her and if they cast her off she would have nowhere to go. Cecily's father had been a friend of 'Monsieur's,' it appears, and for her father's sake he had taken care of her. The kid was only thirteen and very small for her age. She had no idea of doing anything but what they told her. Then, quite suddenly, she revolted, threw them over and flung herself on us for protection."

"Rather topping of her?" Jen remarked. "She must have something in her! She's so striking to look at, too, with that vivid hair cut straight across above the very dark eyes! She's redder than any of our crowd; more showily red, at least! Joan and Joy are more bronze, and Betty McLean is more golden—a red Scot. But Cecily Brown is just plain red. She ought to be Cecily Rufus."

"And you don't know any more about her?" Joan asked.

"Only that she's excitable and has a violent temper, which flares up now and then. And that she's devoted to us, because we rescued her; that she works hard and is keen; and—what you know more about than we do—the new side of her that has developed suddenly, her excitement over folk-dancing, which seems to turn her into a different person. We came to ask you what you thought. Is it good for her? Or is the excitement too much for her?"

"We'd hate to stop her dancing," Maribel said anxiously. "But Sarah says she doesn't sleep after it, and she's difficult to manage—over-excited and unlike herself. Ought she to go on with it? Will it do her harm?"

"You've come suddenly up against her temperament," Joan spoke without hesitation. "It's been smothered before. The dancing has set it free. You can't stifle it again. All you can do—what you must do—is train and guide it and teach her to use it."

"That sounds sense!" Maribel cried. "Can you help us? We feel we need help badly."

“You said she was an artist?” Rosalind suggested.

“I mean in her love for music and her expression of it in dancing. She listens; so few people do! They seem to dance without taking any notice of the music. Cecily isn’t like that; she listens to the music and she dances with it. She loves every tune. Has she had no music except folk-dance tunes?”

“We thought not. I’m ashamed to say we hadn’t given her any,” Maribel said regretfully. “But she has found it for herself. She has made friends with a violinist, who plays to her and soothes her when she’s all worked up, she says.”

Joan nodded. “She’d need to find it for herself. How splendid of her! I’m sure I’m right about her.”

“It’s some one who played once for one of your classes; a fiddler,” Rosalind explained.

“Little Mrs. Alexander! I liked her playing. She had never seen the country-dance music, but she grasped what I wanted at once. Cecily begged me to sack the pianist and have the fiddle always. So she followed up the fiddler and made friends! That was her innate suppressed music driving her on.”

“Then you think it’s all right for her to go on dancing? In spite of the way it stirs her up?”

“Oh, you can’t stop her now! It would be really dangerous. It only excites her because it’s so new and she has unconsciously been needing it so badly. She’ll grow used to it and settle down, and then she’ll be all the better for it. I’m sure it’s what I said,” Joan Raymond urged. “Her musical side was starving, though she didn’t know it, nor did you. Country-dancing fed the music in her and set her free to grow; she went ahead, but of course she found it over-exciting, because it was so sudden. Give her more music and good music, and she’ll grow naturally, and be stronger and more all-round than if this had never happened.”

“I’ve seen it in other cases,” said Jen. “I mean, I’ve seen a starved personality suddenly change and grow under the excitement of folk-dancing. And she never went back; she’s always going on to something new.” Her eyes met Joan’s.

“You mean Mary-Dorothy?” Joan asked. “Yes, Mary Devine always says she owes her books to you and folk-dancing.”

Rosalind sat up. “You don’t mean Mary Dorothy Devine, who writes girls’ stories?”

Jen Marchwood laughed. “I do! You’ve read them, then?”

“My Guides and Rangers love them. Do you know her?”

“I gave Cecily one of her books for Christmas, on Rose’s recommendation,” said Maribel. “She was delighted with it. Tell us what

you mean about her!”

“I’m her godmother,” Jen informed them.

“Her—— But you can’t be that much older than she is! She couldn’t be such a kid!” the Guiders spoke together.

“Oh, my dears, no! She’s heaps older than I am—ten years, to be exact. But I’m her godmother all the same. Haven’t you seen the dedication to me?”

“Oh!” cried Maribel. “Cecily showed me, in the book I gave her. I was struck by the wording: I felt sure there was a story behind it. It said: ‘To my dear fairy godmother, Jen.’ Was that you?”

“That’s me,” said the fairy godmother. “I know it’s bad grammar, but I’m not a literary lady. I found Mary-Dorothy when she was a typist, starving her imagination in rooms in London. I made her dance, and Joy—my sister-in-law—took her away into the country when the may was out, and we let her wander in Joan’s romantic ruined Abbey. Something—the dancing, or the may-blossom, or the Abbey—touched up Mary-Dorothy’s sleeping imagination, and her books are the result.”

“Or the friendship, and the knowledge that somebody had faith in her and believed she could write,” Joan remarked.

“She says it was country-dancing. It was, you know, Joan. For it made her stronger and healthier, and then she had to write. Anyway, I’m her fairy-godmother; she always says so. In return she’s godmother to my first kid, because I’d been godmother to her first book. So it’s her duty to look after young Andrew while I’m away.”

“What a very good thing you made her dance!” Rosalind exclaimed. “Heaps of girls would thank you, if they knew. Her books are really liked.”

“I’ll tell her. But that side of her was asleep, till folk-dancing took hold of her.”

“And you think it’s the same with Cecily?” Maribel asked.

“In a way,” Joan agreed. “I believe the dancing and music have touched her artist side into life. There’s no doubt about her temperament. You have only to watch her dancing to see it.”

“Then I’m glad—I say! Brainy kid!”

“Brave kid!” Jen murmured. “Good for Cecily!”

From behind the clump of azaleas came the notes of the whistle, shy at first, and uncertain, then suddenly clear and strong, as Cecily forgot her unseen audience and was carried away by the joy of her tune. “Rufty Tufty” pealed out, joyous and full of life, then “The Old Mole,” such a perfect dance that Jen and Joan looked at one another incredulously. “The Butterfly,” “We won’t go Home till Morning,” and “If all the World were Paper” followed, and then silence.

Jen sprang to her feet and dashed round the bushes.

“Here, ‘Tom, Tom, the Piper’s Son’! Don’t run away!” she caught Cecily, who looked up at her, scarlet and shy. “Come back and pipe ‘Ruffy,’ while we dance!”

Cecily gazed at her. “You wouldn’t! I wouldn’t be good enough!”

“You can turn your back on us, if you want to. I must have one dance to that whistle. You put the most fascinating little lilt into it. Jump up and dance, you three! The Pied Piper will give us ‘Ruffy Tufty.’ You people must be the men,” to the Guiders. “I shall have to be a humble woman for once. Any one of my size always has to be man. Will you be my man, colonel?” to Rosalind.

“Lieutenant, if you please! With the greatest joy! I wanted to dance the moment I heard Cecil’s pipe; but as we were on the main London and Horsham road, we postponed the pleasure.”

Joan laughed and took her place at Maribel’s right hand. “Ready, Piper!”

A wave of colour swept into Cecily’s face. Eagerness conquered; she put the whistle to her lips and the tune pealed out.

Taken by surprise, the dancers ran forward, laughing, and found time and rhythm perfect.

“It’s topping fun to play while people dance,” Cecily cried, almost before the “honours” were finished.

“You played it toppingly!” Jen exclaimed. “I can give you points, though. Tongue your notes more; you’ll make them crisper. You slur it just a little. Come and I’ll show you! You’re worth a lesson,” and they wandered off together among the azaleas, Cecily’s face glowing with eagerness as she drank in every word, all else forgotten.

“My dears!” said Joan Raymond, dropping into her seat and fanning herself. “What a treasure! And to think you didn’t know! You must train her! She’s a born accompanist; I’d give fortunes to have her to play for my country classes. What I’ve suffered!—and what she must have been suffering, if that’s her standard for dance music! She’ll play for that class next week, or I’ll know the reason why. If Sarah keeps her away, I shall come and fetch her. Now tell me all the difficulties, for it’s really serious. That child’s going to study music; there’s no question of it. Do you mean to say she’s never had a lesson? Tell me just how matters stand!”

CHAPTER VIII

CECILY'S FUTURE

Jen threw herself into her chair. "What a find! I've sent her to look at the lake. Do you suppose she heard us discussing her?"

"She wouldn't listen," Maribel said. "I expect she was shivering with nervousness and trying to screw herself up to make the plunge."

"Yes, she said so. Said her fingers were shaky and she couldn't breathe, but she forgot all that the moment she started a tune. Have you settled her future? I've helped her a lot; she was as keen as mustard to hear all I could tell her. Didn't know how to make accidentals, poor babe!"

"How *do* you make them?" Rosalind asked with interest.

"Cover half a hole," Lady Marchwood said tersely.

"Oh! But doesn't it need a lot of practice?"

"Cecily's practising now. She says she found her second octave quite by accident. It must have been a joyful moment. Well? What are you going to do with her?"

Joan Raymond spoke decisively. "She's a case for Joy; for Joy and Betty. Jenny-Wren, I haven't told them about Joy yet; I waited for you. But don't you think Cecily is a case for Joy? They've done all they can."

"Undoubtedly. Joy will rejoice in her. If they'll only agree, Joy and Betty will love her. But will they give Cecily up to us?"

"We don't understand yet," said Rosalind. "But if it were for Cecily's good, I'd give her to you in a moment. We couldn't give her to any one nicer. We wouldn't hesitate, would we, Bel?"

"No, but I'd like to hear more about it."

Jen leaned forward. "Listen, then. My sister-in-law, Joy—who is also Joan's cousin—married Andrew Marchwood, the explorer, and lost him within a year. It left her lonely, but not heartbroken, because she had twin girls immediately afterwards. They're three years old now. She gives her life to them and to music; she composes, and has published a little already, and it's jolly good stuff. She also had another idea. She'd been a kid who was full of music, but who couldn't afford to develop her gift, and she hadn't forgotten how it felt. She decided to found a school for girls, like herself, who wanted to study music but couldn't afford it; and Betty is the girl who takes charge of the school, a trained musician herself; she has her L.R.A.M. Joy's first student was a French child, sent to her by a friend in France; she had a decent voice and was learning English and doing quite well, when an

uncle died and left her people money, and they wanted her home again and promised to send her to Paris to study. So Louise went back to France, and Joy is looking for another candidate. She has two girls there just now, both only a little older than Cecily, and both doing well and working hard, and she'd take others if they turned up. But it isn't easy to find the right people; she has to wait till she hears of them. It's a gift from one who loves music and has money; to others who have the love, but not the money. You can't put that in an advertisement! Joy prefers to hear of her students privately. She'll welcome Cecily, if you'll let her go to the Abbey Music School."

Rosalind and Maribel look at one another. "It's a gorgeous plan, and more than kind!" Maribel exclaimed. "We'd have to talk it over with the others who have shares in Cecil, but I'm sure they would all agree and be very grateful."

"A ripping chance for the kid!" Rosalind cried. "We won't say a word to her at present, because you'll want to ask—is it Lady Marchwood?"

Jen agreed. "My husband is Andrew's younger brother. We were engaged when Andrew died; it was a blow that the title came to us, but as Joy's twins were both girls there was no help for it. We live next door to her and the twins; they're at the Hall, which is Joy's own home, and we're at the Manor. It isn't far away; at the foot of the Chilterns, in Oxfordshire—quite a short run by car. Couldn't you come over and see Joy, and tell her all about Cecily?"

"We'd love that. But won't you tell her first?"

"I'm going home on Tuesday. Oh yes, old dear, I must!" as Joan protested. "There's a beastly garden-party—well, it is a nuisance!—on Wednesday, and I have to be there. And it will be ten days since I saw my young Andrew, to say nothing of Kenneth himself. Tony will be forgetting his daddy! I must go home; but you may come and stay with us, and bring Janetta and John, if you like. I'll tell Joy Cecily's story, Miss Firth, and she'll fix a day for you to come and see her."

"She'd better write to you, Bel," said Rosalind. "I live in London," she explained. "I'm here for the week-end only."

"And the big Guide Rally she came for is at eight o'clock," Maribel warned them. "We shall have to break the speed limit if we don't start soon; and there won't be time for supper, Rose. I'll buy you a bun as we pass through the town, and you'll have to wait for the rest till ten o'clock."

"It's been worth it, to come here and have such a jolly time, to say nothing of settling Cecil's future! Oh, how I hope it all comes off!" Rosalind sighed. "It would be the making of the kid! And she has had rough luck so far."

“Joy would love to give her a happier time,” Joan said. “She’d keep on at school for some years, of course; that’s necessary. But she’d have the best possible music teachers too, in her own special line. I wonder what she’d choose?”

“There’s just one thing I don’t like about the kid,” Jen began.

“Oh? What’s that?” Both the Guiders turned quickly, anxious, but eager to defend their ward.

“Her name,” Jen said seriously. “We can’t admit another Cecily into our circle. We’ll have to call her Jane.”

“Jen, you infant!” said Joan. “Don’t be a silly child!”

“And me with two of my own, Mrs. Raymond!”—Jen turned to the Guiders. “All our friendships—and our marriages and our children and our homes—everything, began at school, where we had a dancing club, which chose each of us in turn to be May Queen. And the club, the Hamlet Club, was started by a girl called Cicely. She was the president, and she’s still the president, though she’s been married as long as Joan, which is more than two years longer than I have. We date everything from Cicely and the Hamlet Club. Of course, your Cecily isn’t quite the same, but it’s close enough to be awkward.”

“You can call her Cecil,” Maribel suggested. “We often do. Sarah calls her Cess, which is horrid.”

“I shall call her Jane,” Jen said firmly.

“It’s too much like yourself, Jenny-Wren,” Joan pointed out.

“Well then—Tom. Isn’t she ‘Tom, the Piper’s son’? Don’t tell her about the Music School till I’ve talked to Joy, lieutenant.”

The Guiders promised to say nothing. “Though it will be difficult,” Rosalind sighed. “I’m dying to tell Cecilytom her good luck.”

Jen laughed, as they all walked towards the car. “I hope you have time for a meal before your Rally.”

“Bother the Pier Pavilion! I’ve never had a jollier afternoon. If I’d had any idea of what Bel was planning for me, I’d have been even more keen to come.”

“Bel didn’t know herself,” Maribel opened the door of the car. “Bel wishes she had known. She wouldn’t have been so terrified if she’d guessed she was going to call on the kindest folk on earth.”

“Were you nervous?” Jen asked laughing.

“Only a little shy, I’m sure,” Joan Raymond said smiling. “Don’t you feel bold enough to go anywhere or do anything in uniform? I’m sure I should.”

“It helps,” Maribel admitted. “But we were shy. Now where’s Cecily?”

“Did you send her to the lake, Lady Marchwood?”

"I did. I thought the lake would fit the pipe. We'll go and look for her."

"You go. I'll see if Tony and John are in bed," said Joan. "If you see Janice, bring her back, Jen. I saw her racing after the kitten five minutes ago."

Maribel drove slowly down the roadway, hooting to call Cecily's attention. Rosalind sat beside her; Jen Marchwood stood on the footboard, scanning the banks as they drew level with the lake.

"I hear Janetta's voice. Her name's Janice, but I'm sure Joan meant her to be called after me, and I'm really Janet, though I've never been called anything but Jen. So I call Janny Janetta. Yes, I thought so!"

Down a shrubby path among the rhododendrons, Cecily came running, followed by a small girl of five, with a mop of dark red curls. Her tussore smock was earth-stained, and so were her hands and face, but she looked extremely happy.

"Take me too, Cess! In the car with you!"

Cecily caught her hand, and they ran together across the lawn. "Couldn't she come as far as the gate? We've been digging. We made a pit," Cecily panted.

"You both look as if you'd been in a pit!" Rosalind scolded. "Is this Janetta? I say, isn't she like her mother?"

"They both are. You should see the twins at the Abbey! As like Janny as they can be; for Joy—well, wait till you see her! You'll think it's Joan you're meeting. Will you take Janetta and me as far as the gate?"

Janice, with a whoop of joy, flung herself on Cecily. "Lift me up, Cess! Goin' with you in the car!"

Cecily scrambled to her dickey seat, and Jen lifted her small namesake into her lap. She stood on the footboard again, and Maribel drove the car slowly to the gate.

"Now we really must unload and go back. Come, Janny! Mummy's waiting for us," Jen lifted Janice to the ground. "I'll write, Miss Firth, when I've seen Lady Marchwood. Good-bye!"

"But she's Lady Marchwood herself!" said Cecily, round-eyed, as Maribel speeded up and they raced away.

"There's another one; they married brothers, and the elder one died. The other one, the widow, is Mrs. Raymond's cousin, and our Lady Marchwood lives next door to her, in Oxfordshire. Aren't they all nice?"

"A lovely jolly crowd," Maribel agreed. "I'm glad we came."

"It's been topping!" Cecily sighed.

Rosalind glanced up at her. "I thought you brought your hat, so that you could wear it and look decent?"

Cecily's face fell. "Am I a frightful sight? I forgot my hat."

“You look as if you’d been motoring in a wind,” Rosalind admitted. “But they didn’t wear hats, did they?”

“They weren’t too tidy themselves,” Maribel observed. “Lady Marchwood’s curls were fairly wild. They’ll excuse your shaggy condition, Cecil. Did you like Janetta?”

“Oh yes! She was fun. I was practising sharps on the whistle, and she came and said I must dig a hole for her. So we made a ripping pit, and she was awfully pleased. Maribel, I may go to dancing next week, mayn’t I? Will you tell Sarah? I’m sure Mrs. Raymond meant me to go.”

Maribel’s eyes met Rosalind’s. “I rather think she did. Yes, I’ll speak to Sarah.”

“I want to know how you dance to that new tune you taught me. The tune’s only half of it.”

“That’s so. Yes, you must go on Wednesday.”

And thinking of Joan Raymond’s hint about the whistle, and of the wide future in view for Cecily, Rosalind sat silent as they sped back towards the hills.

Chanctonbury’s tree-crowned height beckoned them to the Downs, then towered above them, and then dropped out of sight behind a green shoulder. They raced through villages and past fields dotted with brown lumps, which suddenly became alive and scuttled away, with little white rudders stuck up behind, and disappeared into safety underground. Then up a side road among the Downs, and the car stood throbbing at Sarah’s door.

“Hop out, Cecil!” Maribel cried. “We’ve a big affair to-night, and we’re late. We can’t wait a sec. If we can, we’ll run out to-morrow, and you shall take us to see Mrs. Alexander. We want to thank her for her kindness to you. I’ll speak to Sarah then about Wednesday. Tell her it’s all right and you’re to go. Good-bye!” and they were off, leaving Cecily standing, hat and whistle in hand, by the gate.

CHAPTER IX

SANDY OF THE SANDHILLS

Cecily's eyes were full of dreams all evening. The afternoon had been a new experience to her. She recognised Joan Raymond and Jen Marchwood as "the same jolly sort as Maribel and Rosalind," and a wistfulness which had always been with her for the last two years surged up into a great longing. It had first been stirred to life in the far-away camp on Annecy Lake; till then she had not realised she was dissatisfied. The camp had been her first meeting-place with "people like that," people who were kind and understanding, light-hearted and happy, full of the love of music and the open air, and apparently of love for one another too. The campers had welcomed her generously; the Guides had been kind; and she had responded with every ounce of her nature, and had worshipped Maribel and Rosalind.

It had not, of course, been possible for her to stay with them always. She had understood that. But neither at school nor at Sarah's had she found that intangible something which meant so much. She had missed the atmosphere of generous friendship which had been such a new thing to her in the camp.

This afternoon she had found it again. These new friends were the same sort. She had been received with exactly the same unquestioning comradeship. The common love of music and folk-dancing had bridged all chasms. Lady Marchwood had forgotten that she was Lady Marchwood and that she was talking only to Cecily Brown; they had both loved the tunes and the whistle, and nothing else had mattered.

"If I could only stay with them always!" Cecily lay on a green slope and looked out over the hills. "I don't believe I'd have tempers any more! I wonder if my mother and father were that sort? I feel as if I belonged; I feel at home with them. I never feel like that with Sarah or Elsie or Mrs. Green! —One day," she sat up and spoke with determination, addressing a chaffinch on a gorse bush, "one day I'll be like that. I'll be jolly to everybody, and most of all to people who are starving for it. When I'm grown up I'm going to be like all these jolly people. I'll think about them, till I am like them!"

And she sat, living the happy afternoon over again.

The little car drew up at the gate soon after two on Sunday afternoon. The girls saw Cecily's round red head afar off; she was outside the gate and in the dicky seat almost before the elder girls could speak.

"You didn't keep us waiting!" Rosalind said laughing. "Now, how do we go?"

Cecily gave quick directions. “Why aren’t you in uniform?” she cried, in dire disappointment. “I did want Sandy to see you!”

They laughed, and Maribel scolded, “Uniform isn’t fancy dress, Cecily Brown. We can’t dress up just to show off.”

“But I feel so *proud* to go out with you in uniform!”

“Sorry! It’s jolly nice of you. But it isn’t done,” Rosalind explained. “Did you sleep? Or were you playing the whistle all night?”

“I couldn’t sleep at first. When I did I had heaps of dreams.”

“Over-excitement! Or did you have too much supper?”

“Oh, not nightmares! They were jolly dreams. It was about a house; a new house, and it belonged to me. I was exploring the rooms, and choosing which I’d sleep in and how I’d furnish it. Most of the rooms were empty, but some had rubbish in, and I was going to clear them out. One queer thing—whenever I went into a new room I went straight to the window to look at the view. I’ve a ripping view from my room at Sarah’s, you know; I can see the hills.”

“What were the views from your dream windows?” asked Maribel.

“I can’t remember,” Cecily said regretfully. “I know they were nice views; I could see a long way. But I can’t remember what there was to look at.”

“Hard lines! I never remember my dreams, either,” Rosalind agreed. “I wake up feeling I’ve been reading a thrilling story, or looking at pictures that I’d liked, but what they were about I haven’t the foggiest notion. It’s very irritating!”

“Were you in time for the Rally last night?”

“Only just. Maribel insisted on doing her hair, so we had a rush. We managed to have two bites to eat, though, so I didn’t devour my programme or the District Commissioner.”

“Is this where we leave the road?” Maribel asked.

“Up this lane. It’s very rutty. Will the car mind?”

“She’ll do it all right. She’s very good-tempered. We may bump you a bit up there. Hang on!”

“It’s all pools in wet weather,” Cecily remarked.

“Look at the bluebells!”

“I’m looking. The banks seem to be decorated for our visit—red, white and blue! I like the campion and stitchwort mixed with the hyacinths. Oh, I say, Bel, look ahead!”

“I wondered if you’d notice. I saw it on Wednesday,” Cecily said, with satisfaction.

“Sounds as if she’d done it herself!” Rosalind murmured, her eyes on a blue sea of hyacinths below the trees at the top of the lane.

Maribel was gazing too. "That's lovely! That heavenly blue! My childish side wants to stop and pick them all, but they're more beautiful where they are."

"The same with primroses," said Rosalind. "They ought to be dotted about a bank, like stars; just as bluebells ought to be spread in thousands under trees. It's desecration to make them into tight bunches."

Cecily was listening. "I feel like that about cowslips! They ought to stand out in the wind, on the open hills; they do, quite close to us, you know. It's awful to see them in baskets, being sold in town."

"All the same," said Maribel, "it isn't everybody who can come out and see them on the hills. To come suddenly on one of those great flower-baskets filled with gold, when you're doing the morning shopping and thinking about the butcher's bill or the grocer's order or paying the baker's book—well, it does you good. It happened to me the other day. Masses of cowslip gold in a gipsy woman's basket, in blazing sunshine; the brightness took my breath away; heaped-up gold—treasure!"

"I can see just one good excuse for picking them, and that is to pack them and send them to friends," Rosalind remarked. "I've had boxes of blue and gold from Bel that have made me feel good for days."

"You have to pick them for that," Maribel said. "You must have buds, to send by post; and you have to fetch them."

"Which way now, Cecily?"

They had crept past the blue misty sea, gazing at it worshipfully. The trees above stretched away till they met a wall of pink rhododendrons.

Cecily gave directions again, and the car staggered along a sandy lane towards hills crowned with firs.

They drew up before the red bungalow, crouching under a hill, and Cecily ran to the door.

"Sandy! Are you in? Here are my Guiders!"

"My Guiders! We thought we owned Cecily!" Maribel said laughing.

"Looks as if Sandy of the sandhills wasn't at home."

Cecily came back, looking crestfallen. "She isn't here. Perhaps she's down by the pool. Will you leave the car, or shall I go and see?"

"Where is the pool? I don't see any pool?"

"Through the gate and down that path. It's private, but Sandy has a key. The pool's among those rhododendrons, beside that little hill."

"Oh, let's go!" cried Rosalind. "No one will run away with the old bus, Bel! I want to see the pool, whether Mrs. Sandy is there or not."

"Will she mind strangers walking in on her, Cecil?"

"She never minds anything. She's the right sort; like you and Mrs. Raymond and Lady Marchwood."

The Guiders looked at one another.

“We’re the right sort!” Rosalind murmured, as Cecily went to open the gate. “What a relief!”

“We’ll have to live up to that! Nice of the kid to include us! She might have taken us for granted and been carried away by yesterday’s new people.”

“The gate’s unlocked,” Cecily called in triumph. “Sandy must be here. Don’t make a row! We’ll give her a surprise.”

“You’d better stop shrieking like that, then,” Rosalind warned her.

Cecily led the way down a sandy path, between walls of wild rhododendron, just breaking into bloom. The Guiders ploughed after her, and found their shoes white with sandy dust.

“A change from the Downs!” said Rosalind. “What’s become of the chalk?”

“We’re off the chalk. These sandhills run all along the foot of the Downs, but only on this side; they don’t go past Chanctonbury. This is where we find our pines and our heather.”

“There are millions of rabbits,” said Cecily. “Now don’t speak. We’re just coming to the pool.”

Neither of the elder girls had any desire to speak when they saw the pool before them. Silence seemed much more fitting. It was so dark and still, the shadows of the fir-crowned hill, and the pink of the rhododendrons, reflected in its depths. They stood and gazed, and Cecily watched their faces and was satisfied. She always felt a curious satisfaction when they enjoyed something she had loved.

With a warning look, she led the way to the boat-house. It was built of dark weathered timber and seemed almost part of the hill.

“If only Sandy would begin to play now, at this moment!” was Cecily’s unspoken thought. “It would fit in so exactly!”

No music greeted them, however. She opened the door and peeped in, then threw it wide.

“Sandy, do you mind? Here are my Guiders, my guardians. We guessed you’d be here.”

The Guiders saw a small slim person in a lavender frock, with waving chestnut hair, sitting in the punt in the shade of the house, books and writing-pad spread about her, a basket with a thermos flask sticking out, cushions at her back, a violin in its case lying on the platform at her side.

Sandy, startled and almost dazed, sat gazing up at them. Then she rose hastily.

Rosalind hurried forward. “Please don’t move! You looked so comfortable. Well, don’t fall into the pool, *please!*”

“Forgive us for disturbing you!” Maribel came to apologise also. “Cecily was sure you wouldn’t mind, and we were so anxious to see you and the pool.”

“Indeed, I’m very glad to see you! I’ve often told Cecil I wished I could meet her guardians,” Sandy’s eyes were taking in the girls from head to foot.

“I’m frightfully sorry they aren’t in uniform,” Cecily cried. “They look so—so much bigger, Sandy!”

Sandy laughed. “Then I’m glad. They’re bigger than I am already. And uniform wouldn’t be in keeping with my peaceful pool.”

“That’s so; very much so!” Rosalind agreed. “We oughtn’t to have disturbed your Sunday peace.”

“Oh, but it’s just as peaceful on Mondays! It’s sanctuary; where I come to escape.”

“Hasn’t Cecily found that too?” Maribel suggested. “Isn’t that one of the things you’ve given her?”

“Yes, rather!” said Cecily. “I come here to get rid of my tempers.”

Sandy laughed. “Any one who brings a bad temper here has to leave it in the pool. I am so very glad to see you both. Cecily has told me so much about you.”

“We came to thank you for your kindness to her, and particularly for the music you’ve given her. It has been a real gift and a real help to her,” said Rosalind.

“We hadn’t realised how much she was needing more music in her life,” Maribel added. “You’ve supplied what she wanted. We’re really very grateful.”

Sandy looked at them, bright-eyed. “Then will you let me give her lessons? I’ve been longing to see you, so that I could propose it.”

“Oh, Sandy! If you only would——! Maribel, say yes!” Cecily pleaded, her face ablaze.

The Guiders looked at one another. Rosalind said slowly, “We’d have to think about that. It’s extremely kind of you.”

“I didn’t mean”—Sandy coloured—“on business terms. I meant just as a friendly arrangement.”

“Oh, rot!” cried Cecily. “Rose, it’s her work. She couldn’t teach me for nothing.”

“Of course not. That’s not the difficulty. Perhaps we could talk it over later on, Mrs. Alexander.”

“If you’ll look at the pool for a minute or two, I’ll run to the house and put the kettle on,” Sandy realised there was something to be said which Cecily must not hear. “Oh, of course, you must have tea. My flask only holds enough for one; but the kettle will boil very quickly.”

“No, please, you mustn’t trouble. We must go home for tea,” Rosalind was equally determined. “Yes, I’m sorry, but I have to go back to London tonight. We just had time to rush out here and thank you for your kindness to Cecily. She told us yesterday of you and your pool, and I couldn’t go away without seeing if you really existed.”

“Oh, that’s too bad! Must you really travel to-night?”

“By eight o’clock I shall be in London, and Silent Pools will have faded into a dream. Also sandhills and heather and rabbits and silver birches.”

“You’re forgetting the rhododendrons,” said Maribel. “Mrs. Alexander, there’s something we’d enjoy even more than tea!”

Sandy looked at them, bright-eyed but shy. “Do you mean——? I don’t play well, you know. Cecily thinks I do, but you couldn’t call her a good judge.”

“Maribel has a violin,” Cecily suggested.

“Then we can exchange!” Sandy’s face brightened. “I won’t be shy if you’ll play too.”

Maribel laughed. “Will you trust me with your fiddle?”

They bent over the case together, Maribel considerably taller than Sandy.

“We’ll sit in the punt and be the humble audience, Cecily Brown,” said Rosalind. “We shan’t be critical,” she addressed the other two, “but we’re extremely appreciative.”

“Anything will sound twice as well here by the pool, among these silent trees,” said Maribel.

“They aren’t always silent. You should come in a gale! They make the music then, and I just sit and listen,” said Sandy, and tuned the fiddle against her knee.

The appreciative audience looked at one another as she began to play. Then Rosalind seized the pole and thrust the punt out and across the pool, and they lay under the fringe of rhododendrons, where the robin had come down to drink.

Maribel took her turn, playing folk-song airs with their wistful modal chords and endings. The music drifted across the quiet water, and Cecily sat gazing over the side into the black depths. Rosalind’s eyes were on a gap in the firs, where Chanctonbury’s ring of trees stood framed against the sky.

She came to earth with a sigh, when Maribel, with a smile but no words, had handed the violin to Sandy, and they had each played again. Rose brought the punt back, thrusting the pole against the rock under the bushes, and stepped up on to the platform.

“That’s been a real treat to Cecily and me! Thank you most tremendously, Mrs. Alexander. Now I’m afraid we’ll have to go. Will you walk back with us to the car?”

As they went down the sandy track in single file, Rosalind hung back and allowed Maribel and Cecily to go on. She turned to Sandy and spoke quickly.

“Thank you again for your very kind offer of lessons for Cecil! I didn’t mean to be ungracious; I hoped you’d give me a chance to explain. We’ve had another plan proposed for her, by some people we saw yesterday. She knows nothing about it yet. But if it comes off it will be a big thing for her.”

Sandy’s eyes were bright with interest. “I won’t ask questions. She’ll tell me when she can. I do hope there is music in the plan, Miss Firth, for Cecily has music through and through her. She ought to be trained; she has a gift that could be developed, I’m sure. If your plan falls through, I’ll be proud and happy if I’m allowed to help her.”

“It’s more than good of you. It’s an idea for helping her music; that’s the whole point of it.”

“Oh, good! That’s splendid news. She will repay you, if you’ll give her her chance.”

“I don’t think the plan will fall through. Mrs. Raymond seemed sure—you know Mrs. Raymond, don’t you?”

Sandy’s face had lit up. “I played for her class once. I wish I’d been needed again. She was delightful, so pretty and graceful; it was a joy to watch her! And so helpful and kind! Oh, if she is going to help Cecil, all is well! I am so very glad!”

“She and her friends. But Cecily mustn’t know till it’s settled.”

“No, she mustn’t be disappointed. I’ll be eager to hear more. Thank you so much for coming!”

“We came to thank you,” said Rosalind, taking her seat by Maribel. “Good-bye! Thank you for the music! Jolly person!” she said, as they drove down the sandy road. “You’ve good taste in friends, Cecilia! But she doesn’t look like ‘Mrs.’! There’s so little of her!”

“I felt silly every time I said it,” Maribel agreed. “She’s just a girl. What happened to her husband, Cecily? Have you ever heard?”

“She told me last week. He died, before they’d been married a year. Then her mother died too, and she hadn’t anybody left. She lives all alone, Maribel.”

“Hard luck! If she’d had a family it wouldn’t have been so bad.”

“She has her music,” said Rosalind. “But it won’t make up for all she’s lost.”

Sandy, standing by the gate, watched till the car was out of sight.

“What nice girls! Cecil is lucky in her guardians,” and then she turned back to her thermos tea, her violin and her books, and the dreaming pool.

CHAPTER X AN INVITATION

“To spend the week-end with Lady Marchwood!” Cecily stood on the edge of the platform above the pool and stared at Sandy Alexander, awed unbelief in her tone. “I only heard yesterday. I can’t believe it’s true. Mrs. Raymond asked me at the class last night, and I had a letter from Maribel this morning.”

“Miss Ritchie is to go with you, then? How very jolly!” Sandy exclaimed. This must be part of the ‘plan,’ but it was evident Cecily still did not know that more lay behind.

“Oh yes, and Rosalind! Isn’t it topping? There are two Lady Marchwoods; the one we saw at Mrs. Raymond’s, and another one. She’s a widow, so I suppose she’s old. Maribel will take me in the car and we’ll meet Rosalind, and all arrive together.”

“But who is Lady Marchwood, Cecil?”

“She was at the class last week, when I wasn’t there. Oh, but I was here, wasn’t I?” And Cecily plunged into a breathless story of Elsie, the whistle, Jen Marchwood, and her own new venture.

“You won’t laugh because it’s only a tin whistle, will you? It’s in tune, and it has a ripping tone,” and she piped “The Butterfly” that astonished Sandy.

“Gracious, Cecily Brown! When did you learn to do that?”

“The day I bought it. It was easy. It’s gorgeous to be able to get tunes! I’ve been playing it ever since. Sarah says she ‘can’t abide it,’ so I go out on the hills.”

Sandy sat and gazed up at her. Cecily, encouraged by her intent look, went through all the tunes she knew.

“They danced this at Rayley Park, while I piped. I was scared that I’d spoil it, but it was fun to see them do what I played. I played ‘Set-and-turn-single,’ and they all did it. Then I played ‘Lead out,’ and they did that. It was tophole! But last night, Sandy——!”

“What happened last night?” Sandy was eyeing her in stunned amazement.

“Mrs. Raymond made me play ‘We won’t go Home till Morning’ for the class. I felt awful! You should have seen their faces!—Elsie and Mrs. Green, and all the rest. They knew I’d been practising, but they didn’t think I could play for dancing.”

“Did you play to Mrs. Raymond at her house on Saturday?—Then no wonder!” Sandy was thinking. “They know she’s worth helping.”

“I was shy and said I couldn’t. But later on I wanted to, so I went behind the azaleas. I was shaking all over! But they liked it, and they made me play while they danced.”

“I’m glad they liked it. You gave me quite a shock, Cecil. I had no idea you were a ‘piper’s son.’ ”

“Mrs. Raymond taught us a queer thing last night; a procession round the room, with a weird step; you have to hop on the fourth beat. She looked at me and laughed, and said, ‘Can you pipe that, Cecily Brown?’ I can, too!”

Sandy sat on the edge of the platform above the water, and Cecily explained the second octave on the whistle, and how to make sharps and flats. She told of Jen Marchwood’s wooden morris-pipe, and Sandy confessed that she had never heard of a three-hole pipe, and could hardly believe it could produce tunes.

“Is it to Lady Marchwood’s house you’re going on Saturday?”

“I think so. Mrs. Raymond said something about a ruined Abbey she wanted us to see. But I don’t suppose we shall live in the ruins! Sandy, I wish they knew about you!”

“About me, silly? Why?”

“You could play to them. They’re keen on music. You could play for them to dance. Mrs. Raymond said she wished you could play for the class again.”

“Oh, but she’ll have you now!”

“But I want to dance! It’s almost more fun playing, though,” Cecily added. “I love it.”

“Tell me about your visit to Mrs. Raymond,” said Sandy.

And Cecily launched out eagerly into the story of all she had seen and heard.

CHAPTER XI

THE OTHER LADY MARCHWOOD

On Saturday morning Maribel's car stopped at Sarah's gate. Cecily, radiant and excited, came flying out and flung her case into the dickey. She sprang in beside her guardian, waved her hand to Elsie and Sarah, and they set off, Cecily bare-headed, with red locks blown wildly by the wind.

Away up the London road, leaving the Downs behind, they sped, passing a few miles from Mrs. Raymond's home. From Horsham as far as Guildford was fairly familiar ground to Maribel; then she began to find her way by the map and the sign-posts.

They lunched at Maidenhead, and then made direct for High Wycombe. Outside the station stood Rosalind, watching anxiously for them.

"Well timed, Bel! Isn't this an adventure? I'm thrilled to the limit. Who would have thought, this time last Saturday, that to-day we should be here? We hadn't met Lady Marchwood then; now we seem to be invading her home. We're very much obliged to you for introducing us to these nice friendly people, Cecily Brown. My dear kid, what a sight you look!"

"I'll comb my hair at the gate. Come in here by Maribel. I'll go up behind," and Cecily sprang out.

"Since you've had Bel to yourself all the morning, I will. Is there room for you, besides all the luggage?"

"I'll scrunch my legs into a corner."

"Don't scrunch too hard, or you'll have cramp. Let her go, Bel! Do you know the way?"

"I've vague ideas of it. I want to go across the hills. There's a longer way round, keeping on the level with the railway."

"Oh, let's take to the hills! Does your old bus mind?"

"She's used to it. She's an old sport," and Maribel raced away.

"Rather like the Downs," Rosalind said. "Chalk!—and beech-woods!"

"Yes, I was thinking of Chanctonbury and Lancing. But there are more fields here and less open turf. We must be coming to the edge; the map shows a steep drop.—Yes, here we are!"

She drew up, and they sat gazing out over Oxfordshire. Fields and farms and woods lay spread at their feet, reaching away to a blue haze on the horizon.

"Topping!" said Cecily, and pulled out a comb and did her hair.

“Lots of room,” said Rosalind. “What a change from town! Where do we go now?”

“Down,” Maribel answered, and they crept carefully down a winding road.

“If we’re on the right road, Marchwood Manor and Abinger Hall are just about here,” and Maribel slowed down at cross-roads to read a sign-post.

“Grace-Dieu Abbey! I wonder—they spoke of a ruined Abbey, didn’t they?”

“We seem to be in private grounds,” said Rosalind. “On each side there’s a sort of park. Perhaps one is the Manor.”

Cecily took no part in the speculations. Wildly excited, she sat with clenched hands and burning cheeks, gazing about her.

“There’s a white house over there; a huge place,” Maribel said. “I’m beginning to feel scared.”

“I should be, if it weren’t for last Saturday. I couldn’t be shy with any of that jolly crowd. Buck up, Bel! We’re invited guests this time.”

“That’s true,” Maribel admitted, and the car crept on in search of an entrance to the grounds.

“There!” said Rosalind.

A white gate between big stone posts stood open. The drive within led through fields of buttercups, unfenced, but bordered here and there by bushes, heavy with white and red may. Presently there was another white gate, where a low railing ran across the park, and beyond this was a green sweep of turf, where white cows were feeding.

A belt of copper beeches hid the house and gardens. When these were left behind, Maribel found herself driving through a fringing line of laburnums and lilacs in full flower, and then across lawns where rhododendrons were massed in clumps. The house, big and imposing and white, was reached by a wide curve of the road; round the entrance were beds of bush roses, and climbing roses covered the lower walls.

“Doesn’t seem to be anybody about,” said Rosalind. “Shall Cecily pipe a little tune?”

“Don’t be soft!” Maribel was slightly nervous. “Knock and ask for Lady Marchwood. We might be at the wrong house.”

Rosalind put the question to the maid when she appeared. Then she turned back to the car.

“Come on, you two. It’s all right.”

They left the car and followed the maid through the wide hall, the elder girls trying hard to resist the temptation to look about them. Cecily knew no such scruples and stared frankly, her eyes wide.

The girl led them all the length of the hall and opened a door at the far end. Through the upper panels of stained glass came the gleam of sunshine. It opened on the garden, and the guests had a glimpse of a tennis-lawn and distant orchard trees.

Then the nearer view held their attention. The doorway led into a glass-covered porch, with great pink camelia trees growing in green tubs, and azaleas in big pots. There were basket chairs and coloured cushions, rugs on the floor; green sun-blinds were drawn to make a pleasant shade.

From a low chair to meet them rose—was it Mrs. Raymond? Some one all in white, with the same bright bronze hair and the same brown eyes. Could it be Mrs. Raymond? But where was Jen Marchwood?

“Miss Firth and Miss Ritchie, my lady,” said the maid.

“You think I’m Joan—Mrs. Raymond, I can see,” their hostess smiled. “I’m her cousin, Joy Marchwood. I live next door, at the Hall.”

“Oh, the other Lady Marchwood, whom we were to meet! The—the one who has twin girls?” Rosalind stumbled. She had almost said, “The widow one?”

“Forgive us, but you are the image of Mrs. Raymond,” Maribel added hurriedly.

“But we thought you’d be old!” broke from Cecily, as she stared with astounded eyes.

“Cecil, how rude!” Maribel cried.

“Not at all; very natural,” Joy rejoined. “I’m the Dowager Lady Marchwood, to give me my quaint title. Do I look like a dowager? It is puzzling for you, but you’ll soon learn to keep up straight. When I lost my husband, less than a year after our marriage, Jen’s husband came into the title, as I had only little girls. Sit down, won’t you? We’ll have tea at once. I’m sure you’re ready for it. Which of you drives the car? Do you want to wash? I always like it after driving.”

“Oh, that’s all right, thank you,” Maribel said. “I don’t mind just now. I’m Maribel Ritchie. This is Rosalind Firth, and the babe is Cecily Brown.”

“I’ve heard of Cecily Brown. Jen calls her Cecilytom, because she whistles like a piper’s son. That’s right, isn’t it?”

Joy’s smile melted the last of Cecily’s awe. “I’m not shy now,” she said, “and you can call me anything you like. You’re so jolly, like my Mrs. Raymond, that I can’t quite believe it isn’t her speaking.”

“Please go on thinking I’m Mrs. Raymond, if it stops your being shy,” Joy said laughing. She turned to the others. “Jenny-Wren—your Lady Marchwood—isn’t here to greet you. She had to go to town for a wedding; she’ll be home about six. So she told me to come and entertain you. I live

next door, you know. We'll go along there presently and see the children; Jen's boys are playing with my little girls."

"It's kind of you to come to look after us," Rosalind began. "We wouldn't have liked her to miss the wedding."

"She felt it was a pity to make you wait till next week, when she'd only be away for an hour or two this afternoon. She said it would give us time to make friends! It's a rather special wedding; she couldn't miss it. Jacqueline Wilmot was her first chum at school; she and Jenny-Wren were a married couple for some years, when they were thirteen and upwards. In fact, they had an adopted daughter, nearly as old as themselves. Jack came to Jen's wedding, and of course Jen had to go to hers. Sit here, won't you?"

From the low chair she lifted something, which had been lying across her knees as she sat there. She had laid it down as she rose to welcome them; now she slipped it under her arm and turned away.

"What *is* it, please?" cried Cecily. "Oh, let us see! It's music, isn't it?"

"Please let us look! What do you call it?" the elder girls spoke together.

Joy laid the instrument on the table. "It's my zither. I use it to work out songs when I have to be away from the piano."

"I never saw one before. Won't you let us hear it?" Maribel begged, as they stood looking down at the flat instrument with its many strings of several colours.

Joy drew practised fingers across in deep full chords. "These five are for the air; the rest are the accompaniment. There are thirty-two altogether."

"What a lovely tone it has!" Maribel exclaimed. "It's like a harp."

"Just like a harp. This little ring is for your thumb. It would be too hard work without it."

"Oh, do let us hear it! Doesn't it make your fingers sore?" cried Cecily.

"Only at first. You shall hear it later," and Joy lifted the zither as the maid appeared with tea. "How do you like Jen's sun-parlour?"

"This little glass room? It's very jolly."

"She and Kenneth have breakfast out here. It catches the morning sun. The front of the house only has the sun in the afternoon, so Jen arranged her sun-parlour for mornings. The boys have a baby-pen, and it's put in the middle of the floor and they kick about in the sun with no clothes on."

"We saw the baby last Saturday at Mrs. Raymond's," said Rosalind.

"And Janny and John too, I suppose. Lovely kids, aren't they? Joan's so pleased about John. I had two babies while she had only Janice, though she was married a year and a half before I was. So she was very envious until John arrived. I tell her and Jen they're to stop now that we're all level, with two each. But they won't promise to consider my feelings."

She rose to carry a cup to Maribel. All three visitors sprang up to help.

Joy set down the cup. "Now what's the use of that? You'll fall over one another, and nobody will have any tea. Cecilytom, couldn't you hand round and make your elderly guardians be good and sit still?"

"Oh, please do let me! I will be careful," Cecily pleaded. "I helped Mrs. Raymond last week, Maribel!"

"All right. For the sake of your social education, Bel and I will sit down and be waited on, Cecilia," said Rosalind.

"I am disappointed that you aren't in uniform," Joy Marchwood remarked. "It's a real blow. Every one would have been so much impressed."

"You're laughing at us. Would you really have liked to see us sweltering in collars and belts all through a lovely week-end?"

"I'd have been sorry for you," Joy admitted. "I'm sure summer frocks are more comfortable. But why don't you take off your coats? You really must make yourselves at home, or I shall feel I haven't welcomed you properly."

The coats were thrown aside hastily. "We feel quite as much at home as if Lady Marchwood were here herself," Rosalind asserted.

"Show it by making a good tea, then. You must need it after your journey. I have to break it to you that there's country-dancing to-night on the village green. Jen told me to prepare you."

"What fun! Does the whole village dance?"

"Not quite; but a fair number. We have regular classes, and about once a month there's a public dance, when friends from the neighbourhood drop in, if they care to. I don't dance myself now, but I love to see a big jolly crowd enjoying themselves."

"You'll let us join in, won't you?" Maribel begged.

"You must all join in, of course. I hear you've met some of our friends in town?" and Joy talked of her own folk-dance experiences, in company with Joan and Jen, and the president Cicely, till tea was over.

"There are your rooms," she led the guests upstairs to sunny bedrooms looking over the drive and the buttercup fields.

Cecily, true to the habit which had been reflected in her dream, ran to the window. Her—"How lovely! Simply topping!" was for the view, not for the very comfortable room.

Rosalind turned to Joy. "I love that wall of copper beeches, shutting in the gardens!"

"I love those laburnums against the dark wall!" Maribel exclaimed. "It's a picture when they're in flower like this."

"You've come in the best week of the year," Joy acknowledged. "With the buttercups behind, it is rather embroidered-looking!"

“Decorative; yes, it’s just that,” Maribel agreed.

“Does she have only white cows on purpose?” Cecily asked. “Are all her hens white too?”

Joy laughed. “Jenny-Wren has a taste for white. She doesn’t absolutely refuse yellow chickens and brown cows, but she chooses white ones when she can. The boys have a white donkey and a white fox-terrier pup! Suppose we go and see them; I mean the boys, not the pup and the donkey.”

They walked together through the Manor grounds. First there were gardens and an orchard; then, crossing a strip of park-land, they went down to a long lake, with an island covered with trees. Passing round the lake and through a wicket-gate, they went down a shrubbery path, and came out on another lawn, before another great house. The Hall was older than the Manor and much more beautiful. Built of grey stone with long, narrow windows and many gables it showed its age, and looked very restful and hospitable.

“Oh—lovely!” said Maribel, and stopped.

“It was my home before I was married. It came to me when I was fifteen, when the Abbey came to Joan,” Joy explained. “You’ll see the Abbey presently. They were left to us by my grandfather; Jen’s Tony is called after him. Jen says she owes everything to the Abbey and therefore to Sir Antony.”

“She told us she owed everything to your dancing club?”

“It’s all part of the same,” said Joy. “It was because of the dancing club that my grandfather left the Abbey to Joan and the Hall to me. He saw us dance a minuet in the Abbey and it pleased him, and he made friends with Joan. We were the caretakers, you know.”

At sight of their faces she broke into a laugh. “Oh, yes! You shall hear the story some time. Joan’s a splendid guide to the Abbey; she used to take tourists round and tell them all the dates. Sir Antony loved the Abbey, and had restored it when it was being ill-used. Joan’s knowledge of it pleased him, and he left it to her. But he left the house to me because I really belonged to his family. My mother was his daughter. Now come and see my daughters! I expect we’ll find them very dirty!”

“We’re longing to see them!” Maribel said eagerly.

“They’re in the sandpit,” Lady Marchwood said, and led the way round the side of the house and across the lawn.

CHAPTER XII

MARIBEL SOLVES A PROBLEM

The garden of the Hall was as gay with flowering trees as were the Manor grounds. Lilacs and laburnums, chestnuts and hawthorns, pink and white, made walls of colour around the lawn.

Passing under a red may tree, Joy Marchwood led the way to a grassy arbour. The lawn sloped down to a round hollow, set in green banks. In the middle of this was sand, clean silver sand, in great heaps. Hard at work in the sand were four small people, all in brown holland overalls with little knickerbockers, and bare arms and legs and feet and heads.

Tony Marchwood was not doing much but crawling about. He had tasted sand and found it not to his liking. But the other three were busy and purposeful and so intent that they did not see the new arrivals.

One small girl of three years old was piling sand into a little cart. Another was lying on her chest, burrowing into a sandbank with her fingers, her bare legs kicking in the air. They were their mother over again, with tumbled bronze curls and bright brown eyes. A yellow-haired boy of two was harnessed to the cart and was prancing with eagerness to be off.

“Be quick, Marg’et! It’s enough! Enough!” he shouted, and tugged at the reins.

“Go on, then! You can’t pull it, Andy. It’s too heavy, you know it is. S’pose I’ll have to be a horse too,” and Margaret threw down her wooden spade and went to help.

Then, with a shriek of, “Mummy! Lizzibet, Mummy’s here!” she came flying up the bank.

Elizabeth sat up and stared, sand all over her arms and hair. She rubbed it off and stared again; then starting up she echoed the cry—“Mummy’s here!” and came to throw herself on Joy.

“Where’s my mummy? Where’s my daddy?” shouted the boy. “Aunty Joy, come and dig sand in ve cart! Where’s my mum, Aunty Joy?”

“This is Miss Marchwood,” Joy gravely introduced Elizabeth. “And this is Margaret Joan. Miss Marchwood is Elizabeth Joy.”

“Come and dig!” Margaret invited the strangers. “You can have Lizzibet’s spade. She’s making a tunnel.”

“Margaret!” said her mother.

“E-liz-a-beth,” Margaret tried again.

“There! You can say it beautifully. My dear girls, you’ll have to go to bed ten minutes earlier to-night. You need scrubbing! Have you been rolling in the sand? Elizabeth, look here!” She passed her fingers over the red curls in a caress, and pretended to shake out the sand.

Elizabeth had been making up her mind about the new friends. Afterwards Rose and Maribel agreed that they had both felt nervous as to the result of her examination.

She smiled and held out her hand to Maribel.

“Come and see my tunnel?”

“You’re accepted,” Joy said laughing. “Elizabeth never speaks till she’s sure. I’m afraid the tunnel’s too low down for Miss Ritchie, Elizabeth.”

“I can bend down to it. I couldn’t disappoint her,” said Maribel. “Show me the tunnel, Elizabeth. I’ll lie down and peep in, shall I?”

Elizabeth’s face was radiant. She took the hand offered her and led Maribel carefully down the bank.

“Andrew Marchwood, stop that!” cried Joy, for the small boy, finding that his mother did not appear, was hammering on the cart with the spade.

“Andy, it’s my spade!” and Margaret dashed to take it from him.

“What awfully jolly kids!—I beg your pardon, Lady Marchwood! What very fine children!” said Rosalind.

“They’re both fine children and jolly kids,” Joy said laughing. “My two are very different. Elizabeth is the thinker and Margaret the doer. That doesn’t mean that Elizabeth is a saint and Margaret a sinner!” and she laughed again, at the memories of school days the words called up. “Elizabeth thinks before she acts, but often her thoughts are quite sinful; or suppose we say original?”

“Margaret and Andy seem good friends?”

“Margaret’s always happy with boys. She’s a mistake; I say there’s a boy hiding inside her. She bosses Andrew, and John Raymond when he comes.”

“But do you leave them here all alone?”

“We do not. You could never leave these three alone unless they were asleep. Maidie’s here somewhere. She promised to keep an eye on them if nurse had to leave them,” and Joy looked round, searching for some one.

A slight slim girl of twenty rose from the opposite bank, where she had been sitting just outside the sandpit in the shade of a white hawthorn. Dressed in pale yellow frock and knitted coat, she looked very foreign, with blue-black hair coiled over her ears and very dark quiet eyes. She carried a book, and coming along the bank she held it out to Rosalind.

“You’re a Guide, aren’t you? Will you tell me more than there is in this?”

It was the book of Rules for Girl Guides. Rosalind gasped a little. "I will, of course. I'm a lieutenant. But it's rather sudden. Are you going to be a Guide?"

"I don't know. I hate the very thought of it. But I think perhaps——"

"Then you couldn't possibly be one!" Rosalind cried, laughing at the frankness of the remark.

"Maidie's sure it isn't in her line, and I agree with her," said Joy. "But she feels it's up to her to do something with certain girls in the village. She's been hoping for help from you."

"Bel, come up here!" Rosalind commanded.

Maribel came up the bank, shaking the sand off her frock.

"This is Madalena di Ravarati," Joy introduced the Guiders. "She's my ward, and she has lived with us ever since she was fourteen."

"But they call me Maidlin," said Madalena.

"How pretty! And what a relief!" Rosalind exclaimed. "May we call you Maidlin, too? Miss di—what was it?—would sound so stiff!"

"Please call me Maidlin! I've been hoping so much you would help me."

"She's been reading up about Guides, but she hates the very thought of them," Rosalind explained to Maribel.

"I didn't say that. I think they're splendid—for girls like you. I said I hated the thought of being one myself."

"Oh, I see! I beg your pardon. But you can't be one if you feel like that, you know."

"Why do you hate it so much?" Maribel looked down at her. "And if you do, why are you considering the idea at all?"

"It's so energetic and—and smart, and everything it ought to be. I'm not like that."

"Maidie, take them to the house and send nurse to me," said Joy. "These dirty girls will need to be scrubbed. You can sit on the terrace and talk about the Guides."

"May I stay with you and the kids?" Cecily had been helping Margaret and Andrew to fill the cart and drag it to a castle they were building.

"Yes, you stay and help us," Lady Marchwood agreed.

Maidlin led the way under the white and red hawthorns back to the lawn.

"It isn't too hot now. Come and sit on the terrace."

The wide terrace round the house had grass banks sloping to the lawn. Just outside a long open window stood basket chairs and a little table.

"We sit out here. It's our extra room, and our favourite one. Can I bring you tea, or anything?"

"We've had a lovely tea in the sun-parlour, thanks very much. We want to hear about you and the Guides," Rosalind pleaded.

They sat looking up at her. Maidlin hesitated, sitting on the balustrade and swinging a small white shoe.

“I feel it’s up to me to help Mary-Dorothy. But it’s her worry too. She’s been asked to take a class——”

“Do you mean Miss Devine?” asked Maribel. “The writer? Lady Marchwood spoke of her. We’ve read her books. But you don’t mean——”

“She doesn’t live here, surely?” cried Rosalind. “We know she’s a friend of theirs, but——”

Maidlin slid from her seat and ran down the shallow steps to the lawn. Looking up at the house, she called plaintively to a first-floor window.

“Mary-Dorothy, you’re a famous author, and you ought to be here to explain. It’s Saturday evening! Can’t you leave those proofs? Let that editor wait!”

Then she came back to her place, and sat swinging her foot again and gazing at the Guiders.

“I’m thrilled!” Rosalind exclaimed. “I didn’t expect to meet an authoress! As to what my Guides will say when they hear——!”

“But why does Miss Devine live with Lady Marchwood? Is it rude to ask?” Maribel begged.

“Mary-Dorothy is Joy’s secretary. She writes her books in between,” Maidlin explained.

“Proofs have to be done, Saturday or not,” said Mary Devine, in the doorway behind them. “I shan’t have time for the party if I’m idle now. I’m glad to meet you, Miss Firth and Miss Ritchie. Which is which? And what is Maidie in trouble about now?”

The Guiders sprang to their feet. Mary was not tall; her brown hair was touched with gray, and she wore a lilac frock.

“I know I shall be a frightful disappointment. I hope you won’t tell your Guides more about me than you think is good for them. I hope, also, you aren’t persuading Maidlin to be a Guide, just to help me. It wouldn’t suit her at all.”

“They’ve told me I mustn’t, if I don’t like the thought of it,” said Maidlin. “But they don’t know why I’m thinking of it. I haven’t told them yet about the mess you and I are in, Mary-Dorothy.”

“Then I’ll tell them. They may be able to find some other way out,” Mary said. “Sit down, do! We’ll talk this over.”

“This is what has happened,” she began, plunging into the matter as soon as the girls were seated. “I’ve a class for country-dancing in the village, and lately a crowd of new girls have joined. They’re too young for the class; fourteen and fifteen and even younger, but too old for Maidlin’s children’s class; she has quite little ones on Saturday mornings. These big girls would

upset her class, and they certainly upset mine. They're a nice crowd, about ten or a dozen, but we haven't just the right place for them. It isn't that they're so keen on dancing; but they want to do something, to belong to something. We have a Guide Company in the village, but the captain won't take in any more unless she can find another lieutenant. She must have help; she couldn't handle this bunch alone. I want them out of my class for the sake of the older folk. But none of us wants to turn them loose. As long as they belong to something we have some control over them; we can say, 'You may only come next week on condition you behave.' Joy especially is anxious they should be looked after. So Maidlin has taken it into her head that it's up to her to be the new lieutenant and take them all into the Guides. It's a very sporting suggestion, but I can't accept such a sacrifice. I don't feel she's the type to be a Guide."

"I should hate it!" Maidlin exclaimed. "Uniform and drill and saluting, and being boss! I've never ordered anybody about and I'm sure I never could."

"It doesn't sound as if you'd be a good leader," Maribel said. "But you can't tell. I hated the thought of Guiding. But I liked it once I began, and I've never wanted to give it up."

"But you teach dancing?" Rosalind argued. "You have to give orders then?"

"I don't! It's just a game. I dance with the kids, and they learn without knowing it. I don't boss."

"Couldn't you have a separate class for these girls?" Maribel suggested. "They ought to be taken off Miss Devine's hands. It isn't fair that her class should be wrecked."

"We thought of that, but I was scared. And Betty and Mary say they need something more all-round than just dancing. Betty's sure Guiding would be good for them, but she can't take them without help. She said she'd help me through the tests and tell me what to do. But I don't want to do it! And yet I want to help Mary," Maidlin said unhappily.

"Is Betty your Guide captain?"

"Betty McLean. She went in for it because there was nobody else and there were heaps of girls wanting to be Guides. Joy asked her to be the captain, and she swotted up and went to training-camps, and she's a ripping captain now."

"I believe that would happen to you too," Maribel said. "If you'd only make the plunge, you'd find you liked it. You'd do it all right."

Maidlin shook her head. "Rosamund could have done it. She'd have been ripping. But she's away so much. She has friends abroad, and she goes

and stays with them; she's in Switzerland just now, so the Guides can't have her. I'm just the opposite of everything a Guide should be."

The Guiders looked at one another. Mary Devine remarked, "Maidlin isn't making excuses. What she says is true. She is the opposite type. She might do this, but she'd be unhappy. There's no room in Guiding for the things she's strong in. It would cramp her in everything she cares about. She'd have to develop other sides, and it might be good for her, but she'd find it a very great effort. And yet she could do things for those girls. They're nice girls, full of fun and imagination, but they want a leader, some one to look up to."

"Couldn't you work out some new sort of club, which Maidlin could enjoy and run on her own lines? Or couldn't you run it for them, Miss Devine? They'd love to have you," Rosalind hinted.

"I simply haven't time. I've too much to do for Joy. But I could help Maidlin."

"She hasn't time. She mustn't do one more thing," Maidlin cried. "She won't be able to write if she takes on anything more."

"That won't do. You mustn't interfere with her books. Girls are far too keen on them."

Mary flushed. It still seemed strange to her that any one cared to read her work.

Maidlin hurried on. "You don't understand. She hasn't told you it all yet. She's not fair about herself. She's awfully sporting. Yes, I'm going to tell them, Mary-Dorothy. They can't judge. You don't know yet why I'm so keen to help her; why I feel I must."

"May we listen, Miss Devine?" Rosalind interrupted. "Or is she not allowed to tell us?"

"These girls all go together to our Sunday School," Mary Devine said gravely, a touch of colour in her face. "They're in the 'gang' stage, when they like to do things as a crowd. They've just lost their teacher, and I've been asked to take them on. I've never done anything of the sort before, and, frankly, I'm shy. But I don't see how I can refuse."

"She's terrified," Maidlin said. "But she's going to do it. It's so splendid of her that I feel I could almost be a Guide, if it would help her."

"Oh, but will you have time, Miss Devine?" Rosalind remonstrated. "Won't it mean a lot of preparation? Won't it interfere with your books?"

"That's what I have to find out. I can't tell till I've tried. I can imagine it may even help the books."

Maribel looked at her thoughtfully. "By bringing you more into touch with girls, you mean?"

“That, and other things. Teaching dancing has helped. If I enjoy this new teaching it will probably help everything else that I do. Don’t you think to do a new thing successfully would help all round?”

“You’d feel so bucked with yourself. I see that,” Rosalind agreed.

“There’s more in it than that. It’s not myself I’d feel ‘bucked’ with at all! But I may not do it well; I haven’t started yet. I’d rather not talk about it till I’ve seen how I succeed.”

“The girls will love having you,” Maribel remarked. “Does Lady Marchwood want you to take it on?”

“No, to tell the truth, Joy doesn’t. She thinks I’ll find it too much. Jen doesn’t know yet. She was away when the letter came, asking me to take on the class, and it wasn’t a thing I could write to her about. I’ve been away in Yorkshire for a few days, so I haven’t seen her yet. I came home this morning, after she’d gone to Jack’s wedding.”

“Won’t she say it’s too much for you too?”

Mary looked grave. “Jen is very understanding. I believe she’ll know how I feel. Please don’t discuss it with her; I want to tell her myself.”

“Oh, of course, we won’t say a word!”

“Mary feels it would help so enormously if the girls had something in the week, as well as on Sunday afternoons,” Maidlin explained. “But she can’t possibly do both. I feel I ought to help.”

“It ought to be some one different, too,” said Mary. “They’ll have enough of me on Sundays. That idea of a club just for ourselves is splendid. Perhaps we could work out something, Maidie.”

“That’s the mess Mary-Dorothy and I are in,” Maidlin looked at the Guiders. “We both feel we ought to do something about these kids. Neither of us wants to. She’s said she’ll try. So far I haven’t. But I do want to help her. She can’t do it all alone.”

Maribel leaned forward. “Maidlin di Something-or-Other, why *don’t* you start a Camp Fire?”

“Bel, ripping! The very thing!” cried Rosalind.

Maidlin stared with troubled eyes. “I’ve read about the Camp Fire, and somebody told me about it once. But I don’t know anybody who knows anything about it now. Betty had a school friend who belonged to one, but that was years ago.”

“We’d talked of Camp Fire,” said Mary. “It would suit Maidie exactly. But we felt we didn’t know enough about it.”

Rosalind sprang to her feet. “Your problem is solved! Maidlin will love Camp Fire, and so will the girls. Allow me, Signora, to introduce to you, no longer Lieutenant Ritchie of the Guides, but Kataga, ‘the Stormy Waves,’ Torch-Bearer in Camp Keema, the Camp that faces the Wind!”

Maribel laughed and coloured. “Yes, really! I was Camp Fire before I joined the Guides. I can tell you a good deal, if you really want to know.”

Mary Devine and Maidlin were gazing at her hungrily.

“But how could you do both?” Maidlin cried.

“This is help we never dreamed of,” Mary exclaimed. “Camp Fire, as we have read of it, is what Maidlin is looking for. Anything with poetry and music in it will suit her.”

“Do you sing?” Maribel asked.

“Yes,” said Maidlin. “I never mind singing.”

“Her voice is beautiful,” Mary could go beyond the simple “yes.” “She’s having it trained. Singing is her gift. Miss Ritchie, how did you manage to do both Camp Fire and Guides?”

“Not both at once. I gave up Camp Fire to be a Guide, not because I preferred it but because it was better for our school. I was head girl, and we had a new mistress who wanted to start Guides. It was better I should work with her. It nearly broke our hearts at the time, and I quite meant to go back to Camp Fire as soon as I left school. But when that time came I couldn’t bear to give up my Guides. I still have my gown and honours, and some day I may take up Camp Fire again.”

“Couldn’t we see your gown?” Maidlin begged.

“Run home and fetch it, Bel; I mean Stormy Waves,” said Rosalind.

“Rose never really belonged to Camp Keema, but she was going to join. Her name was Senhahlonee, the Builder—‘She is always building,’” Maribel went on.

“It sounds fascinating!” Mary exclaimed. “Maidie, if you’ll do it, I’ll back you up in every way!”

“You could do it yourself, Miss Devine,” said Rosalind.

“No, I haven’t time. But I’d enjoy it through Maidlin.”

“But I couldn’t. I’d never be clever enough,” Maidlin cried. She was flushed and eager, her eyes as wistful as Mary Devine’s.

“You’d love it. Can’t you see yourself presiding over a meeting—all in the dark, three candles on the floor, sitting on the ground in a ring, you wearing a gorgeous gown you’d decorated yourself, and chains of beads, and a glittering headband, and all that black hair hanging down?” Rosalind said dramatically. “You’ve no idea what you can say and do when you’re dressed up like that, and the room’s darkened, and there’s nobody present but your girls.”

Maidlin looked at Mary, wild hope in her eyes.

“Mary-Dorothy, could I? It would be fun!”

“Oh, cheers! You’ll do it. That’s how you ought to feel! Rose, you’ve won her!” Maribel cried. “The girls will love it. You can work in your

singing, and poetry, and country-dancing, and everything else you're keen on. You could have meetings in the beechwoods. I do hope you'll do it!"

"In the Abbey," said Maidlin, her colour rising. "Here come Joy and Jen! Shall we tell them, Mary?"

CHAPTER XIII

JEN HEARS THE NEWS

“If you people don’t come home to dinner, you won’t have time for any before to-night’s party,” said Jen Marchwood. Tony was asleep in her arms; Andrew was riding on Joy’s back, while Cecily carried his spade and shoes. “I know you’ve forgiven me for being out when you arrived,” Jen went on. “I couldn’t possibly help it. It was a jolly wedding, Maidie, and Jack looked lovely. I liked her nice doctor-man, so I gave my consent.”

“Rather late in the day!” Mary said laughing.

“Still, my approval was a relief to Jacky-boy. I came to fetch my guests and my family, but, knowing I’d find the family in the sandpit, I changed my frock, as you see. Now I’m ready to dance. I’m going to open the ball with Cecilytom. The first dance will be ‘We Won’t go Home till Morning.’ Then I shall dance with each of you.”

“Thank you so much!” Rosalind said. “Miss Devine, would you have the first with me?”

Maidlin turned to Maribel, and smiled. “We’ve a secret. Will you be my partner, Miss Stormy Waves?”

Jen looked at her, then at Mary, and then at Joy.

“‘Traveller’s Joy,’ what has Maidie been having? She’s calling my visitors names.”

“Have you had a touch of the sun, Maid?” Joy asked anxiously. “Mary-Dorothy, what’s the matter with her?”

“Senhahlonee, Builder, I’ll have the first dance with you,” said Mary Devine.

“Mary’s caught it too. Mary-Dorothy, if you have secrets from me I shall shake you,” Jen threatened.

“Don’t wake Tony!” Mary warned her. “Give him to me, Jenny-Wren. Maidlin wants to tell you something. You may drop Tony in your joy.”

Jen thrust the sleeping baby into her arms. “Tell me quickly! Is Maidie engaged?”

“Silly!” Maidlin coloured, and looked at Mary.

“Maidie’s going to be a Camp Fire Guardian,” Mary announced.

“*What?* Maidie, what is it all about?”

Joy set Andrew down on the balustrade. “Maid, that’s heaps better than the Guides! Much more like you. Who suggested it?”

“It’s those rowdy girls in Mary’s Tuesday class,” Maidlin explained. “She wants me to do something to take them off her hands. I’ve been worrying because I thought I ought to be a Guide; Betty said she’d train me, Jen. But I hated the thought of it. I’ve been wanting to tell you, but you’ve been so rushed since you came home. There’s been no time to talk.”

“Garden-party—garden sale of work—tennis tea!” Jen grumbled. “It’s a dreadful life! Miss Firth, I’ve hardly sat down since I came home. People will ask me to open things.”

“She’s the Lady Opener for the neighbourhood,” said Mary.

“Joy won’t do that sort of thing. So they all come to me. Maid, I knew Mary was worried about those girls, but I never dreamt of anything so drastic as your becoming a Guide. My dear kid, what was Joy thinking about? It wouldn’t do at all!”

“I told her so,” Joy remarked. “But Maidie has such a terrific conscience. The more she hated the idea, the more she thought she ought to do it.”

Jen looked at Maidlin, and shook her head. “My child, you must keep your balance. You a Guide! I could weep at the thought. I’d as soon see Tony leading a patrol. Margaret Marchwood would do it much better than you. Joy, that child must join the Guides as soon as they’ll have her. She’ll make a topping patrol-leader.”

Joy laughed. “We’ll try her as a Brownie first. Maidie, what put Camp Fires into your head?”

“Miss Ritchie,” Maidlin said simply. “She’s a Torch-Bearer. She’s Stormy Waves. Miss Firth is the Builder.”

“Constant Builder—Senhahlonee,” said Rosalind.

“What a find!” cried Jen. “Are you really Camp Fire people? I know some one in town who writes Camp Fire yarns, and she’s told me about it. Maid, congrats! You’ll be a lovely Guardian!”

“Somebody must help Mary-Dorothy,” Maidlin coloured again. “She’s in a hole. If her classes worry her she won’t get on with her books.”

“And then she takes on Sunday work!” said Joy. “Jen, tell her it’s absurd. She ought to rest on Sunday afternoons.”

There was an awkward pause. Rosalind and Maribel looked at Mary Devine. Maidlin looked at Joy, distress in her dark eyes.

“Oh, Joy! Mary wanted to tell Jen herself!”

Jen and Mary were looking at one another. “Well, she’ll have to tell me now,” said Jen.

“Sorry!” Joy was annoyed with herself. “Mary, I didn’t mean to give you away. It’s so unusual to have anything Jenny-Wren doesn’t know.”

“It’s all right,” Mary exclaimed, in an instant effort to shield Joy. “It doesn’t matter. Jen, I couldn’t write about it. Miss Smith has given up the

Sunday class those girls belong to, and I've been asked to take it on."

Jen gave Mary a long look. "And are you going to do it, old thing?"

Mary looked back at her. "I feel it's being asked of me. I must give it a fair trial."

"Righto! You're a sport. Tell me about it to-night. I'm far too weary to dance much. We'll sit out and talk. Has Joy been trying to put you off? Oh, but that's absurd! You'll do it if you feel you ought to. She should know you by this time. Don't be ridiculous, Joy Marchwood! Mary's conscience is as active as Maidlin's. They're really exactly alike. If Mary-Dorothy's sense of duty is roused you can talk yourself blue but you won't move her. You ought to know that! Didn't she, shaking in her shoes and trembling in every limb, march up to the Manor and talk to Andrew, when he and you didn't understand one another? Don't you owe something to Mary's sense of duty? Then don't be silly! If Mary feels a thing is 'asked of her,' that's the end of it."

"Jenny-Wren, don't be absurd!" Mary cried.

"Absurd!" said Jen. She took Tony out of Mary's arms. "It's the absurd things that make life worth while. It's absurd that you should give up your quiet Sunday afternoon to teach a dozen rowdy girls. But it's tremendously sporting of you even to consider it. You'll do it well, old dear. The girls will love you. Come along, people! I have to see the boys safely into bed before we have any dinner."

"I'll carry Andrew," Rosalind offered.

"Can you? He's a hefty youth, and he'll kick you with sandy feet."

"The sand will brush off," Rosalind said laughing.

Joy had slipped away to look at her daughters in bed. Mary and Maidlin sat down to talk about Camp Fire.

"That was like Jenny-Wren," Mary said. "She never argued at all."

"She knew it was no use. You'd decided," Maidlin pointed out. "Jen knows when people are in earnest."

"It's absurd that I should be Lady of the Manor, and 'opener of things' for everybody, and the mother of two great boys," Jen went on, as she led her guests down the shrubbery path. "I still feel seventeen, instead of twenty-four, except when I look at Andy. But one has to believe these absurdities are real. I'm sorry you won't see Kenneth to-night; I left him behind in town. Some friends are home from Kenya and he particularly wanted to see them. As I had company at home he felt he could stay. He's grateful to you, and he hopes you won't think him rude."

"We're meeting so many new people that perhaps it's better there shouldn't be another one," Maribel remarked. "You're all like one big family here. It doesn't seem to matter much which house you live in."

“We are rather like that,” Jen admitted. “Mary Devine is Joy’s secretary and lives with her and the twins at the Hall. Maidlin is Joy’s ward and eldest daughter; adopted, of course; there’s Rosamund too, but she’s abroad just now. Joy still lives very quietly, with her children and her music; she has heaps of interests in the village, but Mary looks after most of them for her. Joy won’t take up any social life, like garden-parties and bazaars; she leaves all that to me. I think she’s overdoing the retirement stunt, and I’ve told her so. It’s time she began to entertain and go out. Of course, she has her own friends; but I mean more than that. She ought to come out of her rut and exert herself; she has plenty of time on her hands. But she says she doesn’t want to go to places or to see strangers, and I can do it all. It doesn’t occur to her that I don’t always want to do it either. I shall have to have another baby! That gives me an excuse for peace and quiet for a while.” The girls laughed.

“You don’t think I’ll be satisfied with two, in spite of Joy, do you?” Jen asked scornfully.

“Andrew—Antony; will the next be Archibald or Arthur?” Maribel asked.

“Between ourselves, I’d like the next to be Amelia Alice. I love boys, and I used to say I’d have six; a morris side! But it would be such fun to dress a girl. Now will you rest while I take the boys up to nurse?” as they reached the sun-parlour again.

“We’d better dress for the dancing!” Rosalind exclaimed.

“Don’t dress much! It’s an open-air village affair. Some very good dancing, for we have regular classes. Mary teaches, and Maidie takes the babes, and I lend a hand when I can. But there will be very bad dancing too, for we haul in any one who cares about it.”

“Oh, then I won’t feel too bad!” Cecily exclaimed. “I only know a few dances. I thought I’d have to sit out. Here are Andrew’s shoes!”

“Thank you, Cecilytom. You’ll be all right. Do you know your way to your rooms?”

“Yes, thanks,” Rosalind gave Andrew to the nurse, who came at sound of their voices.

“Dinner in twenty minutes, then! I’ll help you with Tony, nurse. He’s sound asleep.”

All through dinner Jen talked eagerly, but without any reference to Mary Devine. She asked questions about Camp Fire, and knew all the story of Camp Keema, “the camp that faced the wind,” before they went out to the village green.

At last Maribel ventured a question. “How will Miss Devine manage the class, Lady Marchwood? She’s nervous about it, isn’t she?”

Jen looked at her. “Yes, but she’ll do it all right. Mary-Dorothy has no faith in herself. But she has lots of faith in other things. I can’t talk about it till I’ve heard more. I was stunned. I wish I’d been at home while she was thinking it over.”

“I’m interested, because I’ve been asked to do the same thing,” Maribel explained, colouring shyly. “Only for small kiddies; I couldn’t take big girls. But Guides have to go to some Sunday class, and I’ve been asked several times to begin teaching. So far I’ve shirked it; not exactly funkng, but because I really didn’t feel fit.”

“You’d better talk to Mary-Dorothy. I’m sure she doesn’t feel fit. Mary never does feel fit; but she does things. Do you know if she starts to-morrow?”

“No, not till next week. I heard her say so.”

“Then you’d better coax her into the Abbey for a talk. You haven’t seen the Abbey yet, I hope?”

“We hadn’t time. There were too many babies and new friends to see,” Rosalind explained.

“I hoped you wouldn’t have time. I’ll take you there to-morrow afternoon. We’ll kidnap Mary and take her too.”

CHAPTER XIV

“THE LITTLE BIT EXTRA”

The party on the village green was a new experience to Cecily and her guardians.

The whole village seemed to be there, either looking on or taking part. The dancers were of all ages, from elderly members of the Women’s Institute, who enjoyed themselves immensely, to the children of the Saturday morning class. Guides and Scouts were there in uniform; some of the elder girls were really good dancers, others were untidy and wild in their movements. Good and bad danced together, all having a thoroughly happy time.

The piano from the village hall stood on a wooden platform, and Joy sat down to play for the first dance.

Jen led Cecily to the head of a long line, with Mary and Rosalind to complete their star. Presently Maidlin went to take Joy’s place at the piano, and Jen and Mary, breathless, sat down to talk.

When the dance was over the Guiders were accosted by a red-haired Scottish girl in Captain’s uniform. “Pleased to meet you!” she said.

They all saluted and shook hands warmly. “You must be Miss McLean, who runs the Guides here,” said Rosalind.

“My accent gives me away, doesn’t it? I don’t seem to lose it,” Betty said laughing. “We have a jolly company. You’re a Ranger, I see. If I could find some one to take on the Guides, I’d work up a Ranger Company. We’ve several girls old enough. But I can’t leave the Guides without a leader.”

“Why doesn’t Lady Marchwood take it on?” Rosalind asked.

“Oh, she’s far too busy! Every one asks her to do things. And she has the boys to look after.”

“I meant the other Lady Marchwood,” Rosalind said bluntly.

Betty’s eyes widened. “Joy? Oh, she wouldn’t!”

“But why not? She hasn’t so much to do.”

“She wouldn’t think of it. Is that kiddy with Nell your little ward? I’ve heard about her. I take charge of Joy’s Music School, you know.”

“Oh yes, we did hear that. Yes, that’s Cecily. But she hasn’t heard yet. Lady Marchwood wants her to make friends first. You’re kept busy, aren’t you?”

“We’re all busy here. I must go and do my share of the accompanying. We take turns. It’s so much jollier than having a regular pianist.”

She went to relieve Joy, and Jen came up with Mary to demand partners for “Newcastle.”

“We can’t let you two dance together. Split up and dance with us,” said Jen. “I’ll have Rosalind. The next dance will be ‘The Mary and Dorothy.’ Mary’s called after it, you know.”

Mary laughed. “You’d better be my ‘man,’” she said to Maribel. “And my name was Mary Dorothy long before I heard of country-dancing.”

“Yes, but I put in your hyphen!” Jen retorted.

Joy did not dance. She found partners for shy people, and encouraged and instructed, and did a big share of the playing. When she wished to rest, Betty or Maidlin took her place. They were all dancers, and their music told the tale.

“I never heard the tunes sound like this before!” Cecily told Jen, her face radiant. “It’s gorgeous to dance to!”

“That’s because Maidlin is such a keen dancer herself. It makes all the difference,” Jen explained, and did not add that she and Joan Raymond had found the same quality in Cecily’s piping of “Rufty Tufty.”

Tired out, they strolled up the lane homewards, after ending with an exuberant “Sellenger’s Round.” Betty McLean walked along with them, and went into the Hall to talk to Joy.

Mary and Maidlin went on a little way towards the Manor, Maidlin asking more questions about Camp Fire. Rosalind recited Indian names and meanings, so far as she remembered them from her brief association with Camp Keema.

Maribel looked wistfully at Jen and Mary.

“Come and talk to Mary-Dorothy, Maribel! I refuse to call you Miss Ritchie any longer, now that you’ve danced with us,” said Jen.

“I’m so glad you refuse,” Maribel exclaimed. “We felt such outsiders while you called us ‘Miss’! You are so much a big family, and we felt left out. Do tell me about Sunday School!” she begged of Mary. “I feel afraid of trying to do anything so big. I do feel it’s bigger than even Guiding. You’re bound to go below the surface with a class of that sort, and—well, I don’t feel good enough.”

“I feel horribly unfit too,” Mary said gravely. “But I’ve been asked to do it. To refuse seems shirking.”

“Even if you feel you’re not fit?”

“Miss Stormy Waves—no, I mean Miss Lieutenant!—if you sent a Guide on a job, would you expect her to refuse because she didn’t feel good enough?” Mary demanded.

Maribel gave her a quick shy look. “I’d expect her to buck up and do it as well as she could. It would be my business to judge whether she was good

enough.”

“Yes,” said Mary. “Well, there’s no more to be said, is there?”

Maribel looked across at Jen with startled eyes. Then she walked on, thinking. At last she said, “I’d expect that Guide to feel so bucked that she’d been chosen, especially if the job was difficult, that she’d do anything to prove to me I’d chosen the right girl.”

Mary Devine gave her a quick smile. “Miss Ritchie, you’ll do. You can’t go on shirking now. And you know why I can’t shirk either.”

Maribel squared her shoulders. “I’ll have a shot at it, if they ask me again. If I’m needed I won’t be a slacker. But what about you, Miss Devine? Have you really time, with your work and your writing?”

“I’m going to give it a trial for three months. If I find I can’t write as well as teach on Sundays, I’ll give up the class, for I do feel writing is my work,” Mary said gravely. “Jen thinks so too.”

“Jen’s sure of it,” Jen remarked. “Your books go all over the country, and there’s always something in each of them which will really help girls. You mustn’t interfere with them for a dozen village infants.”

“I hope it won’t interfere. But I can’t tell till I’ve tried. It’s the little bit extra, I think, that one is so glad to give.”

“How do you mean?” Maribel asked. “The little bit extra?”

“It’s a favourite doctrine of Mary-Dorothy’s,” said Jen.

Mary explained. “I don’t believe people are really content, and I’m sure they ought not to be, so long as they merely do their necessary work, and then have a good time. We all have our work cut out for us. Jen’s extra is opening bazaars, but her work is bringing up babies. Mine is writing Joy’s letters and my own stories. There’s always something we’ve no choice about _____”

“Mine is housekeeping and taking care of Mother,” said Maribel.

“And Guiding is your extra, the thing you give.”

“It’s also the thing I’m keen on.”

“Because you choose to do it. You *have* to do the other things. It’s the extra bit we do that makes life worth while; the thing we find for ourselves, because we really want to do it. Maidlin is going to be tremendously happy in her Camp Fire. She talks of it all the time; she’s full of plans already. It’s her little bit extra; she’s been needing something more than the dancing class for the children; something to put herself into. Perhaps I’ve been needing something too.”

“I should have thought you had plenty, old dear,” said Jen.

“I don’t know. I’ve had the village class, of course.”

“I like your idea of the little bit extra,” Maribel exclaimed.

“People give it in different ways. Perhaps this new class is my way. I may not have been giving quite enough. One can feel terribly buried in one’s own little books and stories. Now we ought to go back. Maid, come home to bed!”

“I’ve been hearing about Camp Fire too,” Cecily cried. “It sounds jolly fine! I’d like to belong to one. Maribel, couldn’t you start another at home?”

“You’d better be a Guide, if you want to be anything.”

“But you wouldn’t let me be a Guide! I’d like to have an Indian name,” Cecily argued.

Maidlin turned, her pale cheeks flushed. “I’ve been lying awake at nights, worrying about the Guides. I’ve even had nightmares about it—huge mountains I was trying to climb and I always slipped back; and great pits opening at my feet. To-night I’ll feel ever so much better, thinking about Camp Fire. I’m so glad you came here!” she said to Maribel.

“You never told us about the dreams!” Mary exclaimed. “It’s time your mind was made up, if that sort of thing was going on!”

“I’ve made up my mind too,” Maribel looked at Maidlin. “I’ve been shirking a job. Miss Devine’s sporting example has bucked me up to go ahead.”

“Mary-Dorothy, you’ve brought two people into line besides yourself. That’s worth doing,” said Jen. “I’ve no time for these little extras! Did you see what happened to-night? Betty begged me to examine her Guides for their folk-dance badge next week; and Miriam implored me to go on Tuesday and take the chair at their Institute meeting. I already had Wednesday booked for an affair in Wycombe, and I have to go to Risborough to open a garden sale on Friday. It’s an awful life! People left me alone while I had an infant under a year old! Now that Tony’s thirteen months he’s ceasing to be a protection. Nobody ever sympathises with me. If I ask Joy to help she says: ‘You can stand it. You’re in bouncing health, and young, my child.’ As if she was an invalid, and forty! She could quite well examine Betty’s Guides for me.”

“I think she ought to help,” Rosalind agreed. “It doesn’t matter yet, perhaps, but in a few years the twins will be asking why mummy never does anything like the rest of you.”

“You might point that out to Joy,” Jen remarked. “It’s more likely to weigh with her than anything I’ve been able to say.”

“I wouldn’t dare,” Rosalind said hurriedly.

“Oh, I’d dare! Perhaps I’ll use your argument one day. She could help so much. In the meantime I must pull through alone, but it’s a hectic life.”

“You know you enjoy it, Jenny-Wren,” Mary said. “You never take the chair or open a sale without giving the crowd some joke to laugh at. That’s

why you're asked so often. They love to hear you speak. I've heard people say: 'Ask Lady Marchwood. She makes anything go well.' Your 'little extras' cheer up every social event in the district."

Jen coloured. "I'm not a speaker," she assured Rosalind. "I just stand up and babble some rot, and grin, and sit down again. I can't help it if they like it. They're easily amused at sales of work. I'm very shy, really, but nobody will believe it. I suffered agonies the first time I had to speak in public."

"You hide the shyness remarkably well," Mary said. "If you knew how I feel at the thought of speaking to a dozen girls! Good-night, all!"

"Come and have a sandwich and a drink," said Jen to her guests. "I'm always starving after a dance. Dinner seems weeks ago. Come and eat."

CHAPTER XV

JOY'S MUSIC SCHOOL

Maribel stood by her window looking out over the dreamy garden. The day had been so full of new experiences, and the dancing on the green so exhilarating, that sleep was impossible as yet.

With a cautious tap, Rosalind opened the door and peeped in. Then she came to the window also. "Topping, isn't it, Bel?" she whispered.

Maribel, in her blue kimono and with long yellow plaits hanging down, sat on the window-sill and made room for her friend.

"I couldn't sleep," Rosalind added. "I won't wake Cecily. Isn't it splendid for her, Bel?"

"I'm so glad about it. It's so much better than we could have done for her," Maribel agreed. "It's perfect. It isn't only the music, Rose. We thought it was just music they were going to give her."

"I've been thinking that too. It's a big thing for the kid to be brought up by people like these."

"I feel that. We couldn't quite do it. The feeling of this place will soak into Cecil and change her whole life."

"They're an energetic crowd! I wonder if they keep it up all Sunday too? Cecily will go to Miss Devine's class as soon as she comes to live here, or I'll know the reason why."

"She'll want to. Didn't you see her looking at Miss Devine with awed eyes, because of her books?"

"I saw Cecil's face when Miss Devine invited her to dance 'Black Nag' with her."

"She'll go to the class all right," said Maribel. "I'm more thankful than I can say that we went to apologise to Mrs. Raymond. Think what it's going to mean to Cecily!"

"They're going to insist on another visit from us. Maidlin will have to see your gown before she's much older."

"I'd love to come again. I'm glad about Maidlin. She's so bucked at the thought of being a Guardian."

"She doesn't seem as old as you," Rosalind remarked.

"Is she? I thought she was about eighteen."

"She's twenty. Miss Devine told me. She was left an heiress to estates in Italy when she was only fourteen, with an aunt who was the caretaker of the Abbey ruins, and Joy Marchwood adopted her."

“She’s so little and dainty. And she seems such a kid. I can’t believe she’s my age.”

“Jen’s thrilled about the Camp Fire, because it will be so good for Maidlin. She says Maidlin seems to settle down to her dreamy ways, and then suddenly she takes some tremendous leap forward and does a really big thing. But it always has to be for the sake of somebody she’s keen on; to help them out of some mess. Maidlin doesn’t do things until she’s pushed, but if some one needs her help that starts her off, and then she’ll go through with anything. This time it’s to help Miss Devine. But it seems to have happened before, for other people’s sakes.”

“It’s tremendously sporting of Maidlin. I shall help her all I can,” Maribel exclaimed.

Cecily heard the news on Sunday afternoon.

In the morning Jen offered her visitors chairs and books on the lawn. “I’m going to church. But don’t feel you have to come too.”

“We’ll come. I suppose you have to go for the sake of example,” said Rosalind.

Jen looked at her. “That’s true, of course. It wouldn’t do if I didn’t go. But I go because I prefer it. It makes Sunday different, and that’s a blessing, when the rest of the week is such a rush. After I was married—well, after I settled down here, for I lived at the Hall for some months, while Kenneth was abroad—I used to give Sunday afternoon parties. But I found it didn’t answer. Sunday had to be different, if I was to keep up the pace during the week. I don’t mind friends dropping in to tea, but I won’t go anywhere or have a crowd on Sundays. As for church, we’ve such a dear old man in the village that I like to go to hear what he has to say. It always helps.”

“We’ll certainly come,” said Maribel.

“Then we’ll walk down all together through the Abbey. It’s the quickest way. In the afternoon you shall go round the ruins.”

Cecily’s eyes were wide as she followed her guardians and her hostess. They went through the Manor orchard and past the lake; then by the shrubbery path across the grounds of the Hall, and waved their hands to Maidlin and Mary Devine, who were waiting on the terrace for Joy and the twins.

“Margaret’s handbag is lost,” Mary-Dorothy called. “We’ll follow you as soon as it’s found.”

Jen laughed. “I brought little fancy bead bags to the twins from Brighton, after my visit to Joan. They’re the joy of their hearts and they couldn’t possibly go to church without them. It’s Margaret’s that is lost, of course. She’s been carrying it everywhere with her. Elizabeth is more careful.”

“Do they come to church?” Maribel exclaimed.

Jen laughed again. “They escort Joy to the door and then they take nurse or Nell Bell for a walk, until it’s time to take mummy home again.”

A path under the trees led to an old gate, and beyond stood the Abbey ruins. The Abbot’s garden was gay with pansies and wallflowers; then a tunnelled passage led to the sunny green which Jen called the cloister garth.

“I’ll tell you all the stories and dates this afternoon,” she said, pointing out the refectory and the chapter-house as they crossed the garth.

She not only told history and legend, later in the day, but added much more modern stories; of Joan and Joy, as schoolgirls, dancing the minuet on the garth, which won the friendship of old Sir Antony and brought them their inheritance; of the moonlight dance, when the Hall was full of schoolgirls, and the finding of the hidden treasures and the underground passages and the buried church; of Betty McLean’s accident at the Abbey gates and of how she was nursed in the ruins; of the night the twins were born, when Maidlin and her friend Rosamund had slept on the cloister steps and Jen herself had brought the good news in the morning.

They explored the ruins and the passages, and went underground to see the tomb of the first Abbot in the crypt. When they came out to the garth again they found Joy waiting for them. She fetched cushions and a rug from the little room in which Betty had lain, and spread them on the cloister steps.

“Now, ‘Travellers’ Joy,’ fire away!” said Jen, and stretched herself on the rug, but kept one eye on Cecily.

Maribel sat down by Cecily and slipped an arm round her. Cecily looked up in surprise, but smiled; the beauty and the peace of centuries resting on the Abbey had moved her deeply, and she supposed Maribel had felt the same.

Rosalind sat looking from Joy to Cecily. Joy sat on the top step, like a queen, the sun glinting in her bronze hair.

“Cecily Brown, would you like to stay here?”

“Well, that’s putting it bluntly!” Jen murmured. “Poor kiddy! No one could say Lady Marchwood wasted time beating about the bush!”

Cecily stared. “I don’t understand. In the Abbey?”

“Serves you right, Joy Marchwood,” her sister-in-law said. “Start again!”

“Would you like to live at the old Rectory with Betty McLean and study music?”

Cecily sat up. “Your Music School? Oh, Lady Joy! *Me?*”

“Would you like it? You’d have to go to school for a year or two, but there would be music too, good teachers, and heaps of practising, and concerts as part of your training.”

“But what about Bel and Rose?” Cecily understood now the pressure of Maribel’s arm. “I couldn’t go away from them. They’re my guardians!” She flushed. “Lady Joy, it’s too wonderful for words, and I can’t think why you should be so kind. But I couldn’t let down the Guides. They’ve adopted me, and been awfully decent to me. I belong to them. Thank you thousands of times. But I must stick to them.”

“The Guides couldn’t wish anything better for you than that you should become part of this gorgeous place,” said Rosalind. “Become a music-student and be thankful, my child!”

“Cecil, we want you to live here,” Maribel said, speaking gently, for she felt the wild beating of the child’s heart. “It’s better than anything we could do for you. We want you to have the best.”

Cecily looked wildly from one to the other. “You think I could do it? But it seems like—like dropping you for something new as soon as I have the chance!”

“Good for you, Cecilytom!” Jen sat up. “It does look like that. It’s ripping of you to see it. Your Guider guardians would never have suggested it. But they want you to have this training. I tell you honestly you aren’t a scrap more pleased than they were when I proposed it last week. They’re as keen as you can be. So you needn’t worry. They’d be horribly upset if you refused.”

Cecily looked at Maribel. “Is it true?”

“True as true, Cecil. We’re as glad as you are.”

“But won’t I see you any more?”

“They’ll still be your guardians. They’ll decide about your holidays,” Joy explained. “If you want to go back to Sussex and be near your old friends for a few weeks, I daresay they’ll arrange it for you.”

“You’ll see them again,” said Jen. “For I intend to see them. I shall ask them to the Manor. You won’t be allowed to forget them, Cecilytom.”

Cecily looked at her guardians, and then at Joy. Then she turned and hid her face against Maribel’s shoulder. “It’s too good to be true. I can’t believe it. Why are they so kind?”

“Because you love music, and so do I,” Joy said promptly. “And because it’s not so very many years since I wandered about these ruins, restless and irritable and wasting my time, because my music was burning me up inside and I had nobody to help me. Then our first friend called Cicely came along and gave me a scholarship, which meant school and music; Joan ought to have had it, but she stood aside for me. When things happened and the Hall became mine, I had such a happy time that I forgot those restless, unsatisfied days. But I remembered later on and decided I’d help other girls who felt as I had done. You seem to answer all the requirements fairly well. I’ve heard

your story and you've had a rough time, kid. There's music in you; I saw that in your dancing last night, and I heard you sing in church. We'll train your voice, and you shall learn some better instrument than the whistle to express your music! You must hear good music, too; there are concerts in Oxford which you can go to. What will you learn?"

Cecily looked up, her eyes shining. "It can't be true! Oh, please, could I play the fiddle? I've a friend who plays, and I've tried hers. I know how you make the notes. She was going to teach me. How pleased she'll be! She used to play to me. Will there be dancing too? Can I go to Miss Devine's country-dance class?"

"Certainly there will be dancing. Folk-dancing is one of the finest expressions of music I know. You'd better ask Jen to teach you morris. You'd love that as much as country. When can she come to us, Miss Ritchie?"

Maribel looked at Rosalind. "She ought to finish the term at school. It's only May."

"I'd like to wait," Cecily said impetuously. "I'd like to look forward to it. I want to start at once, but I want to look forward to it too."

Joy laughed. "That's very wise of you. Finish your term, but come here for week-ends whenever Miss Ritchie can bring you. Then come here to live in September."

"I'd like that. I'll be used to the idea. Just now it's like a fairy-tale."

"Do you have a Whitsun holiday?" Jen asked. "You might come and live with Betty for a few days."

"We have a Friday and a Monday. It's next week."

"Then come next week and stay over Whitsun," Joy exclaimed. "Can you bring her, Miss Ritchie, or shall I send the car for her? I could run over to see Joan, and it isn't much farther."

"But we'd rather you both came with her," Jen urged. "Miss Stormy Waves, won't you come and bring that Camp Fire gown and help Maidlin to start? I've nobody coming; I had friends asked, but they've had illness and they can't come. Do come and stay with me again!"

"I want them to come to the Hall this time," Joy began.

"No, I spoke first. I shall just keep their rooms for them. They must come and see how I've lived through another hectic week. You will come, won't you? Not only to bring Cecilytom, but to stay, if you can. We dance on Whit-Monday," Jen coaxed. "You'd enjoy it."

"Enjoy it! We'd love it. But you oughtn't to bother with us for a second week-end!"

"You must come, just to see that I really have a husband! I'll keep him at home on purpose to see you. That's settled, then. But you must bring your

gown. Maidie won't sleep for thinking of it."

"What did she dream about last night?" Rosalind asked laughing.

"Journeys," said Joy. "She was packing for a journey, putting her clothes together, and very happy and excited about it."

"That was much jollier than falling into pits and sliding down mountains! Lady Marchwood, we'll consult our home folks, and if mine will spare me I'll simply love to come."

"Oh, so will I!" Maribel cried. "But I'm enjoying myself so much that I feel like Cecily, it's too good to be true! A Whitsun among your woods and ruins and dancers would be wonderful!"

"Woods and ruins and dancers! It sums us up very neatly," said Jen. "Now I must go and be nursemaid. Nurse goes out to-night. On Sunday nights I have my boys all to myself."

"Can't we be nursemaids too, for a few minutes?" Maribel begged. "We shall have to start on our long run home in good time."

"You really must go to-night?"

"I'm afraid we must. Cecil must be at school at nine o'clock to-morrow."

"And I have to be at my job in town. I'm not a lady of leisure," said Rosalind. "I must be home to-night. But we seem to have been here much longer than one day! It's been a real holiday."

"You've taken us into the family circle so thoroughly that we feel quite at home," Maribel agreed. "How I'll love to think we may be coming again soon!"

"Oh, you must come! Whitsun is the right time, for you'll all have holidays then," Jen said, as they went towards the house.

Cecily's eyes were following Joy so wistfully that Joy fell behind and walked with her.

"You'll like the other girls in the Music School," she said. "There are only two just now, and they're about your age. They're the daughters of a mistress at our old school; she married a Russian who lived in this country, before Joan and I went to school. The father died a year ago, and Miss Macey asked me to help Alice and Olga, who were both keen on music. So they're training to be music teachers, Alice of the piano and Olga of singing. They call themselves Ally and Olly!—jolly kids, with lots of fun in them. You're fond of music already; the better work you do the better pleased I'll be. You're perhaps a little old to begin the violin, but as you're so keen you'll do it all right. You'll have good teachers. I fancy you'll sing too, later on."

"I will try, fearfully hard," Cecily vowed. "I'll tell Sandy about it and she'll let me practise finding notes on her fiddle. That will help, won't it?"

“Yes, a great deal. Tell me about her! According to Jen she lives on a sandhill beside a pool. Your guardians seem to have said so last week.”

“They’ve seen her now,” and Cecily launched into an eager account of Sandy and her kindness.

She had nothing to say when, the farewells over, she sat in the dickey among the suitcases and Maribel set off across the hills to Wycombe, to leave Rosalind at the station.

“You’re very quiet up there, Cecilytom!” called Rosalind.

Cecily woke from her dream. “Is that why Lady Jen calls me that? Because of the other Cicely, who gave Lady Joy the scholarship?”

“That’s the idea. At first they were inclined to say they couldn’t possibly invite you, because they couldn’t bring another Cecily into the Abbey circle. Then Lady Marchwood began calling you Cecilytom, because you whistled like a piper’s son.”

“They’ll call her Cecil,” said Maribel.

When Rosalind and her suitcase had been left on the platform to wait for a London train, Cecily snuggled down beside Maribel with a sigh.

“Tired, kid? Have a nap! We’ve a long way to go.”

“I’m dead! It’s all like a dream, Bel.”

“You’re tired with the excitement, and no wonder. I felt it was a dream when I first heard the great kind idea. It’s a wonderful chance for you, babe.”

“I’ll make good! I’ll show them I’m worth it. But it’s my second big chance, Bel. It wouldn’t have happened but for you and Rose and the Guides. I’ll never forget. Why are people so topping to me?”

“Go to sleep!” said Maribel.

“I can’t. I’m dying to tell somebody. Sarah won’t quite understand. I’ll go and see Sandy to-morrow; my homework will have to wait. I must tell somebody!”

“If you can’t sleep, then dream about it. You’re too tired to talk,” said Maribel. “And I must drive carefully in this half-light.”

Cecily said no more, but lay in her corner, seeing visions.

“I can’t believe it’s really true!” she sighed, as they passed Chanctonbury and climbed the steep way through the Downs. “It’s a dream place, and we’ve been living in a dream.”

“I hope we’ll dream again next Friday, then,” said Maribel.

CHAPTER XVI THE FANCY-DRESS TEA

Maribel's little car raced up to the white gate of the Manor, its joyful hooting a fit expression of the feelings of its passengers.

Cecily was in the wildest of high spirits. Rosalind, her office work behind her for several days, was not much more sober. Maribel with difficulty kept steady enough to drive.

The gate stood open, as usual. Cecily, higher in her seat than the others, gave a cry.

"Oh, Bel, go slowly! How pretty! Have they had a wedding?"

The gravel drive was strewn for its whole length with a pink and white carpet.

"It isn't confetti. It's only may. Look at the bushes!" said Rosalind.

"They've put down the red carpet to welcome us. I feel sorry to drive over it," said Maribel.

Maidlin, in a rose-pink frock, came out from behind a bush, and stepped on to the footboard as Maribel drew up in eager welcome.

"I was waiting for you. May I ride here? I'm so glad you've come in uniform! Betty will be so bucked, and all our Guides. Have you brought your gown and beads, Miss Stormy Waves?"

"I have," Maribel assented. "Are you all right there? Frightfully jolly of you to put down the carpet for us! We're touched to the heart."

Maidlin laughed. "Isn't it pretty? Jenny-Wren won't have it swept, because she loves it so much. She says she feels she's had another wedding every time she comes in at the gate. Wait till you see the lawns! Miss Ritchie, I've something to tell you. I do hope you won't mind."

"I mind being called 'Miss.' If Lady Marchwood calls us Maribel and Rose, I think you might."

"I want to, but I wasn't sure if you'd mind."

"If you call me 'Miss' again I'll take my gown home without unpacking it."

"You couldn't! Mary-Dorothy and I have asked the girls to come to the Hall to-morrow to meet you. Do you mind?"

"You'll have to make a speech, Bel," Rosalind remarked.

"Tell me more!" Maribel demanded. "Quickly! We're almost at the house."

“We had a meeting on Wednesday,” Maidlin explained. “Mary told them she was taking them on Sundays, and that I was going to start a Camp Fire during the week, and they could join, if they liked. They wanted to know what it was, so we told them you’d be here for the week-end and you could tell them all about it; and perhaps you’d dress up for them. They were fearfully excited, and they’ll all be here to-morrow. Will you dress up and talk to them, Miss—I mean, Stormy Waves?”

“I hadn’t bargained for that. I thought it was just for you. What does Miss McLean say about the Camp Fire? Doesn’t she think the girls ought to be Guides?”

“She says there’s room for both, and she has plenty of Guides, unless she finds more help. They’re nearly old enough to be Rangers, but she can’t find another captain.”

“I still feel it’s Lady Marchwood’s job,” said Rosalind.

“Jen? Oh, she’s far too busy!”

“No, I mean your Lady Marchwood, from the Hall. She ought to be District Commissioner by the time the twins are old enough to be Guides. But she ought to have experience of Guiding first.”

“Joy?” Maidlin looked at her in horror. “Joy couldn’t do that sort of thing!”

“I don’t see why not. She’s well and jolly, with lots of time on her hands. Girls would love her, and once she’d taken the plunge she’d love them. You liked her, didn’t you, Cecilytom?”

“She’s ripping!” said Cecily.

“She ought to be a Guider,” Rosalind insisted.

“She wouldn’t. I say, you know, Jen’s out. She told me to meet you and give you tea.”

The Guiders laughed. “Is she ever in?” asked Rosalind.

“Is it a bazaar, or a tennis tea?” Maribel asked. “It’s all very well to laugh, but she is a regular sport. I should feel fed up!”

“She said you’d laugh. She does feel fed up, but only at home,” said Maidlin. “The people at the garden-parties and sales of work don’t know she’s fed up. She makes jokes and laughs and is jolly to everybody; she only groans to us. But this was really important; a swimming gala at our old school in Wycombe. She has to give away the prizes. You’ll have tea, won’t you? You’ll let me see that gown *soon*, please!”

“What did she mean about the lawns?” In their interest in talking with Maidlin the girls had not looked about them as they drove up to the house. With one accord they went to Maribel’s window to look out.

Then they knew what Maidlin had meant. The rain during the week had brought down the blossom from the trees. Under each drooping laburnum

was a ring of gold; under every hawthorn a circle of white or red; the chestnuts had scattered pink and white bells on the grass.

“A procession of brides!” said Rosalind. “The fairies have strewn flowers before their feet!”

“Those golden rings are beautiful. I don’t wonder Lady Marchwood won’t have them swept. ‘Lady Joy’ said we had come last time in *the* week of the spring. But this isn’t far behind it.”

“Carpets of red and gold!” said Cecily. “Maribel, you’ll dress up for Maidlin at once, won’t you?”

“Put on your gown and go down to tea in it, Bel,” Rosalind suggested.

“Oh, no! She didn’t mean that. Later on will do.”

“Why not? She’s dying to see it. *I* would, if I had a gown! Just to please her, Bel! You look so regal in it. It wouldn’t take you five minutes to change!”

Cecily was already tugging at the straps of Maribel’s case. “Do, Stormy Waves! I’ll scout on the stair and be sure there are no maids about. There’s nobody else at home.”

“You can keep it on for Jen,” said Rosalind. “She wants to see it too. Come on, Bel! Off with your navy blue!”

“You two are lunatics!” Maribel remonstrated. “The air of this place has gone to your heads!”

“It’s those fairy rings under the trees,” said Cecily, spreading out the yellow gown. “Be quick, Stormy Waves! Here are your beads and headband!”

Maribel gave way, against her better judgment. “It’s mad. You’re both crazy. Builder, I can’t run about a strange house with my hair down, at my age!”

Rosalind was pulling the pins out of the coiled plaits over her victim’s ears. “You can’t wear a gown with your hair up, dear idiot,” she said. “You’d look merely silly. With your plaits down you look *It*.”

Maribel submitted perforce, and allowed them to dress her in the long gown of khaki cloth, with deep brown leather fringe around the hem and the short sleeves and under the arms. Cecily hung long chains of coloured wooden beads about her neck.

“You must have swotted hard to win so many, Stormy Waves,” she said. “That’s why you were a Torch-Bearer, I suppose!”

“It’s a Torch-Bearer’s work to pass on the light to other Camp Fires. You’re only doing your proper job, Bel,” said Rosalind, tying on a dark blue headband with very stormy waves worked in white beads.

“That’s why I brought the things,” Maribel retorted, slipping on a silver ring and a silver bracelet. “I couldn’t decently refuse.”

“You look like a princess. I feel horribly out of it in navy blue,” Rosalind mourned. “See that the coast’s clear, Cecilytom. The maids would have fits.”

Cecily reported everything quiet. “Maidlin said we’d have tea in the sun parlour. It’s only a few steps from the bottom of the stairs, Bel.”

“I shall announce you in proper style,” said Rosalind. “I’m longing to see Madalena’s face!”

“Madalena will look better, with her black hair, than I do. Fair plaits are so silly!”

“Much sillier to have none at all! You needn’t grouse about your long fat ones. They look jolly fine. Now if Cecily joins the Camp Fire, she *will* look funny!” Rosalind teased.

“I wouldn’t have long hair for pounds, except for dressing up; not for always,” said Cecily, hurrying forward at Rosalind’s side to catch a first glimpse of Maidlin’s face.

Rosalind threw open the door of the sun parlour.

“The princess Stormy Waves——!”

And then an awful silence fell.

In that moment, as the door opened, they had all heard voices—strange voices, and a man’s laugh.

Maribel stood petrified in the doorway, framed by the dark hall behind. Rosalind stood staring wide-eyed at—as it seemed—a room full of people.

“Gosh!” said she. “We’d forgotten there was a husband!”

Maribel, scarlet, turned to fly. But Maidlin had started up and was between her and the door.

“How simply gorgeous! Oh, how lovely of you! Don’t go away! It’s only Ken and Mike. You wouldn’t mind, if you knew them. And anyway, *look* at Mike! He’s a sight, if you like. You look like a queen, Maribel-Stormy-Waves!”

“It’s too bad,” Kenneth Marchwood and the younger man had risen. “Miss Ritchie, I apologise. We weren’t expected to tea. Please don’t run away! I had heard about this; Maidlin has been full of the new project all week. But I had no idea you were inveigling her into something so picturesque. Won’t you sit down and tell us all about it? Is this the new music-student? And Miss Firth, I’m sure. I’m Kenneth Marchwood. I apologise for my wife’s absence, but she couldn’t let down her old school.”

“We thought you’d gone with her,” Maribel faltered.

“I wasn’t invited,” Kenneth said laughing. “May I introduce my young cousin, Michael Marchwood? Known to us, as you perceive, as Mike.”

Mike Marchwood, tall and dark, and young, was in Scoutmaster’s khaki shirt and shorts. He and Rosalind saluted one another’s uniform and shook hands.

Maribel said helplessly, "I'm a Guide too. They made me dress up. It was to please Maidlin. I'll go and change——"

"Oh, not till you've told us all about it!" Maidlin pleaded. "I'm aching to know what the pictures round the skirt mean, and all about the beads!"

"I'm camping a few miles away, with a crowd from town," Michael explained. "That's my excuse for coming to tea in this rig-out. Ken came to have a look at the camp, and he kidnapped me and brought me along to see Jen and the kids."

"It's a fancy-dress tea, that's all," Rosalind said resignedly. "Get over the shock, Bel! Sit down and make up your mind to be a princess!"

"I'd rather go and change," Maribel pleaded.

"Oh, please don't! It would disappoint us all so much," Kenneth urged. "After all, if Mike can parade the country in bare knees, why should you mind looking like a princess? Does she look like a princess in her everyday frock, Miss Music-Student?"

"Not a scrap," said Cecily. "She's quite ordinary."

Maribel lifted her yellow gown and made a curtsy. Then she sat with much dignity in the biggest chair.

"I must be waited on. I can't do anything useful in so many beads. Thank you, Mr. Scoutmaster! May we come to see your camp?"

"Cheers! All's well!" Rosalind collapsed into a chair. "I was afraid she'd go and take 'em all off. We had such a job to tog her up. If we'd known tea was to be in fancy dress, we'd have felt different."

"Ken and Mike, make yourselves useful," said Maidlin, sitting down again at the table. "Maribel, I really didn't know. I found them here crying out for tea, after you'd gone upstairs."

"The fairy brides round the lawn went to our heads," Rosalind explained, accepting bread and butter from Michael.

"The fairy brides?" said he. "Can't we see them too?"

"I've no doubt you can, if you look, and if you've a poetic soul," she retorted.

"Oh, the trees!" said Maidlin. "Aren't they lovely? The gardener's so worried because Jen won't let him touch the lawn or the paths. Maribel, do all those beads really mean things you've done?"

"You've time to do a good deal in three years. Perhaps you can understand how I felt when I had to give it all up for Guiding, for the sake of the school."

"I don't know how you could. Her name's Stormy Waves," Maidlin explained to Kenneth and Mike. "Are those waves on your headband, Maribel?"

“My dear good people, what are you all playing at?” cried a voice in the doorway, and Jen came in, just in front of the maid bringing the fresh pot of tea.

Her eyes swept round, dancing with amusement. Rosalind’s navy blue and turned-up hat—Michael’s khaki and shorts—Maribel’s beads and yellow robe and thick fair plaits framing her face—Jen took them all in, while the normally-clad members of the party watched her face with enjoyment.

Maribel sat gazing at her hostess, her cheeks burning but her head erect, with much dignity. Rosalind’s eyes danced. “It really was an accident. We thought there was no one here but Maidlin.”

“What I say is, the princess comes out of this much better than Mike,” said Kenneth. “If he isn’t shy, in that Boy Scout rig, she needn’t be. And I suppose Camp Fire Girls are sisters to Boy Scouts, aren’t they?”

“Oh, not sisters!” murmured Rosalind.

Maribel glared at her. “Go and put your head under the tap, Builder,” she retorted.

“Gorgeous!” said Jen, and dropped into a chair. “Did it really just happen? Sorry I’m not dressed up too. But I’m glad to see you all, in any costumes! I escaped without tea, saying I had visitors. It was a great deal truer than I knew! Mike, if you want decent meals, you may run along here at any moment.”

“That’s sporting of you, but we do cook in camp, you know. Have you been to camp, Miss Firth?”

“*Have* we been to camp, Bel? Cecilytom, have we? We have camped on the shore of the Lake of Annecy, in Haute Savoie,” Rosalind said haughtily. “If we hadn’t, we shouldn’t be here. For that’s where we found Cecilytom, and that’s why we came here.”

“We’ll drink the health of the Lake of Annecy,” Kenneth said, with enthusiasm. “For if you hadn’t come here Maidlin might never have become a princess. It’s a most picturesque outfit, Miss Princess. But is it practical? For camping, for instance, isn’t Mike’s costume more useful?”

“You don’t go about all the time in a gown,” Maribel exclaimed. “We wore middies—loose blouses; and brown skirts. The gown is only for ceremonial meetings.”

“You light candles, and say verses, and sing and dance, and sit in the dark,” Maidlin added.

“Oh, it fits in with all that!” Jen agreed. “Ken, don’t talk. You don’t know enough about it. It’s most becoming, Maribel. I didn’t know you were so pretty.”

“She’ll be a disappointment to everybody when she appears in uniform,” said Rosalind.

Maribel had coloured. Michael Marchwood’s eyes had been saying something very emphatic, which he might not put into words. “In that case, it’s time I went and changed. But you won’t expect us to go on wearing uniform, I hope? We came down in it to please you, and because Miss McLean said her Guides were having church parade on Sunday, and we felt we’d like to show them we belonged to them. But you wouldn’t ask us to wear it all the time!”

“Well, no! That wouldn’t be fair. You’ll tell us all about the gown before you take it off, won’t you?”

“My name was Kataga, the Stormy Waves,” and Maribel stood and pointed out the waves and rocks and tossing boats on her gown. “Here’s a girl facing the wind; that was the name of our Camp—Keema, ‘to face the wind.’ Here are wind-symbols, blowing clouds and trees; here are curved lines for music; this is my rank. My headband has white waves on a dark blue stormy sea. I think that’s all.”

She made another curtsey, and slipped through the door and disappeared.

“Jolly kid!” said Kenneth Marchwood. “Lots of good stuff in her! I was afraid she’d run away at once, but she stuck it out. Carried it off well too!”

“Bel’s one of the best,” said Rosalind. “I was at school with her when their Camp Fire collapsed. Bel was keener on it than any of them; she was the leader, the only Torch-Bearer, and nearly all the juniors were willing to follow her. When it was obviously necessary for the sake of a united school, she had the grit to change over to the Guides and take the rest with her, though she felt terribly bad about it. It needed real courage, for her chum refused to change and called her a traitor, and wouldn’t speak decently to her for months. Bel stuck to the Guides and worked up the Company, first as patrol-leader and then as lieutenant, and backed up the new captain in every way. She’s a regular sport.”

“If I can slip off to-morrow afternoon, I’ll drop in to tea, Jenny-Wren,” said Michael.

Jen nodded, without comment. “I’m sure you’ll be glad of a decent meal. Stay to dinner! I’d advise you to make the most of your relations. Rosalind, I’m sorry my remarks made Maribel run away. It was thoughtless of me, but she did look so pretty with her hair down. She’ll feel shy about coming back to us. Won’t you run up and change into a cool frock, and then come down and have some tennis? Then perhaps she’ll come and join in.”

“Topping! I’d like to change. Thanks so much!” and Rosalind raced upstairs.

“Tennis, Bel!” she shouted, at Maribel’s door.

“Rosalind Firth, how could you let me in for that?” Maribel demanded, coming in from her own room.

“I? My dear, you know I had nothing to do with it. I like Sir Kenneth, and the Scout will be all right when he gets over his shyness.”

Maribel, re-plaiting her hair, asked abruptly:

“Rose, are you engaged to Alan Kennedy?”

“This also is sudden!” gasped Rosalind. “No, I am not. You know I’m not.”

“Are you going to be?”

“That’s another question. We might, some day.”

“What does he feel about it?”

“I don’t know what he feels. But he *says* he won’t have anybody else. Says it’s me or nobody.”

“I’m glad. I was sure it was coming. He’s been keen on you ever since that Annecy camp.”

“Keep it to yourself, Bel. It isn’t official.”

“Righto! I only wanted to know. Is it the same with you? Alan Kennedy or nobody?”

“That’s about it,” Rosalind admitted. “I measure everybody else by him. The Scout, for instance. He looks quite a nice youth, but he’s not—well!”

“That’s silly. You can’t compare people like that.”

“You can, when one of them’s different from all the rest of the world. It gives you a sort of standard,” said Rosalind.

“Oh, well, Alan Kennedy’s not my standard!”

“That’s a mercy!” Rosalind retorted. “You’d better find a standard for yourself. I suggest Scout Michael. He’s a nice boy, and very good-looking.”

“Don’t be an ass!” said Maribel.

“He thought you were a nice girl, and a lot more than good-looking.— Oh, I say, Bel, don’t let’s be idiots! Come and play tennis, and forget all this tosh!”

“Thanks be, she’s coming to her senses!” said Maribel.

CHAPTER XVII

JEN SPEAKS OUT

Scoutmaster Marchwood, or Scout Mike, as Rosalind called him, had no intention of losing sight of "the princess." He made the most of his invitation to the Manor, and was there whenever he could leave camp without obviously neglecting his duties. In spite of chaff he continued to appear in khaki, explaining that he had brought only camping kit with him.

He turned up on Saturday afternoon on his motor-cycle, and found Jen and Maribel playing Kenneth and Rosalind on the tennis-court. Joy watched from the shade of the sun-parlour, which was a sun-trap in the early morning only and in the afternoon gave useful shelter from the sunshine. Breakfast had been served out there, to the joy of the visitors, but now that the sun was overhead they were grateful for the shade of the blinds on the glass roof.

They had all spent the morning making the closer acquaintance of Joy's music school in the village. Betty McLean had welcomed them and had taken them over the old house and garden, and Cecily had formed an instant friendship with Alice and Olga. In the afternoon Maidlin and Mary Devine had carried off the guests to the Hall, and in a corner of the garden Maribel had dressed up again and had appeared from among the bushes before the astonished eyes of a dozen stunned, eager schoolgirls. She had told all she could of Camp Fire and had answered many questions. Then she had changed again and had hurried back to the Manor with Rosalind, leaving Cecily to join in the discussion of plans with Mary and Maidlin.

Jen had insisted that they must be home to tea. Rosalind guessed the reason, and was not surprised when the honk of the motor-cycle came from the drive.

"Game!" she cried. "Bel, you aren't up to your usual form."

"Sir Kenneth and you make a strong pair," Maribel retorted. "I've had a strenuous afternoon."

"And she hadn't a strong partner," said Jen. "Ken can beat me any day. Here's Mike! Maribel shall have another chance with him as partner. Hi, Mike! How's the camp?"

"Very fit. I've come to dinner, thanks very much."

"In that fancy suit?" Joy remonstrated. "Michael, haven't you any clothes with you?"

"Uniform's all right anywhere!" said Rosalind. "Scouts all safe, Mr. Marchwood?"

“Fit as fiddles, thanks. A jolly crowd, but they need a tight hand at times.”

“I can believe it. Do go and play with Sir Kenneth, and work off some of your feelings before you play with us! I’m sure you have to keep a good deal under while you’re with the boys.”

“Sometimes,” Mike admitted. “But it would be unnatural if we didn’t have a few rows.”

His eyes had swept quickly over Maribel’s white frock and neatly-coiled yellow plaits, and he did not show any sign of disappointment.

“She hasn’t a bead anywhere about her,” Rosalind said. “She’s no longer Stormy Waves. She’s quite tame to-day.”

“Sir Kenneth, have you a cold tap handy?” Maribel demanded.

“Just round the corner. Think you’re likely to need it soon?” Kenneth asked obligingly.

“I’m sure Mr. Marchwood will protect me. May I hide behind the Scout movement? You wouldn’t hand me over to the enemy, would you, Scoutmaster? When Bel’s Red Indian side comes uppermost she’s a terror,” said Rosalind.

“Be a good little girl, or I’ll write and tell somebody in Switzerland,” Maribel threatened.

Rosalind subsided. “He wouldn’t believe you. He knows better. Aren’t we to see that singles match?” she turned to the Scoutmaster.

“I’ve had a strenuous day too. Suppose you play Kenneth first, Miss Firth,” he suggested.

“I’m game!” Rosalind looked at her host, and they went out to play together.

“Rose will be beaten to a jelly. It won’t hurt her,” said Maribel.

“What did that hint mean, Bel?” Jen demanded. “Is there somebody in Switzerland?”

“They aren’t engaged—officially. But Rose admits they’re going to be. He was in charge of the camp, with his sister, when I and the Guides were there and we found Cecily. Mr. Kennedy was the camp chief. I was sure he was interested in Rosalind. She’s been more than once to stay with his sister. He’s very jolly, though hardly good enough for Rose.”

Jen laughed. “Every girl says that about her friend’s engagement. I’m very glad; she’s good fun, and a downright jolly girl.”

Scoutmaster Marchwood looked anxious. If that camp by the Lake of Annecy could produce one man, why not two? He promised himself some private talk with Rosalind before the week-end was over.

“Miss Ritchie, can you find me a bungalow?” he asked.

“A bungalow?” Maribel stared at him. “Oh, certainly! Any number! But I don’t carry them about with me. What *do* you mean?”

“A bungalow in Sussex, near the Downs. I’m to be in Brighton for some months on a job, and my mother and sister would like to spend some time on the south coast. You’re from Sussex, aren’t you?”

“Yes, but I’m not a house-agent. I know several people who have bungalows, but I don’t know that any of them are wanting to let for the summer. But I’ll tell you if I hear of anything.”

“That would be ripping of you. They’d like to be near the Downs.”

Then he went reluctantly to play the promised set with Kenneth, in the hope of a partnership with Maribel afterwards.

Jen watched the foursome presently with dancing eyes. “Joy, I’m going to be a matchmaker. I feel it coming on!”

“I thought you were going that way. Don’t be too obvious about it, Jenny-Wren, or you’ll scare them off.”

“It would be fun! They’d make a good couple. He’s dark, like Andrew was, and she’s so fair. And he’s just the right height.”

“What matters more than height or colour is that he’s quite keen already,” said Joy. “He’s terrified lest she has somebody in the background too.”

“He’s safe enough. She’s just a kid, much younger than Rosalind. But a very jolly kid! I’d like to have her in the family,” Jen said maternally.

“It would be good for Mike to settle down. He races about on that bike at a fearful speed.”

“You’re a nice one to talk!” Jen exclaimed. “What about your own motor-bike days?”

“I nearly killed you,” Joy’s lips pinched at the memory.

“Nearly,” Jen agreed. “But not quite. Come and see the boys! Kenneth can look after these young people!”

“The twins sent a message to you,” said Joy, rising to go up to the nursery. “It’s this: ‘Aunty Jen, may we play in your lake on Monday morning?’ I’ll be there to keep an eye on them, you may be sure.”

“The answer is: ‘Yes, if Andrew and Tony may play in your sand-pit on Monday afternoon, Aunty Joy.’ That’s a good arrangement. You can look after all four, while the rest of us go to see the dancing.”

“*See* the dancing! You know you mean to lead it yourself. All right; I’ll take care of all the babes,” Joy agreed.

“Won’t you dance, old thing?” Jen pleaded. “People would be so pleased. They like me, but they love you. You were their boss for years before I counted at all. There’s a shadow on everything while you’re left out. You can’t think Andrew would mind!”

Joy bent over Tony, who was gurgling with happiness in his bath.

“He wouldn’t mind. But I don’t care to begin again.”

They played with little Andrew and teased Tony and waited till both boys were in bed. Then Joy said wistfully, “I’m going home to my own kids. Come and see them, Jenny-Wren! You haven’t seen them to-day. Those girls are all right. Ken will take Rosalind to look at the fruit, or something, and give Mike a chance to talk to Maribel. Ken’s very sensible!”

“The fruit! The green fly, perhaps. I’ll come. I’d like to hear how Maidie’s meeting finished.”

They walked together towards the lake. Jen suddenly made up her mind and took a plunge.

“Joy, couldn’t you help Betty with her Guides? I know it would need a most tremendous effort, and real courage, to take the first step. But you’ve plenty of courage. You’ve shown us that. It’s only that you aren’t using it just now. You’re not, you know,” as Joy stood and stared at her in horror.

“I? Guides? Jen, are you crazy?”

“Not a scrap! You’d do it well; you’d be a splendid captain. The girls would love to have you. Think how proud they’d be!”

“I think you need Maribel’s cold tap,” Joy retorted. “I a Guide captain! You lunatic!”

Jen sat on a bench above the lake, where Maidlin had once given a Rose Party and the twins had come to their first country-dancing. “I am not a lunatic. But neither am I afraid to say what I think, as everybody else is where you’re concerned. We’ve left you alone for three years. You do lots of jolly things, like the Music School; but you do them all through other people. They’re all a question of money. You’re generous; but you’ve plenty to give. You don’t give service; you don’t give yourself. You keep out of everything. Your interests are the twins and your music and your house. They’re all parts of yourself, even the twins. You don’t do one thing that takes you out of yourself.”

Joy sat on the grass and gazed across the lake at the trees of her own gardens. “Go on! You seem to be enjoying yourself, Jen Marchwood.”

“I’m not. I hate it, but it’s for your good,” Jen said stoutly. There was terror in her heart, in spite of her resolute tone. What if Joy should really resent her words? Joy’s capacity for misunderstanding was great; she had hurt many people very deeply. What if this assault were a mistake or premature, and Joy did not forgive the interference? What if the friendship of years should suffer, and constraint and reserve creep in between the two households?

Jen called up all her courage and went on. “Joy, I’m sure it’s a mistake. If you’d do even one thing that would bring you out into touch with other

people! Here's a nicely-trained Company, your own village girls, and Betty to help. If you'd take them on, she could take the seniors as Rangers. Or you could take the Rangers; I believe they're not expected to do so much drill as the Guides. You'd revel in it, Joy."

"My dear child, I should hate it," Joy said coldly.

"You wouldn't! Oh, Joy, you wouldn't! There's one part of you that would love it. It's the Margaret part, and it's being starved, Joy."

"The Margaret part?" Joy turned and looked at her, as if she really thought Jen had taken leave of her senses. "Are you hysterical, or feverish?"

"I'm neither. Surely you've realised that each of your twins is one side of you? Of course, they're Andrew as well; but they are parts of you. Elizabeth Joy is the side that made Cicely call you 'The Cat that walked by Himself'; the solitary part, that likes to go off alone and dream; the side that is on top just now, and that produces your music but makes you shut yourself up away from people. You're giving in too much to 'Elizabeth.' Margaret is your other side, that revelled in doing things, in motor-biking and dancing, that loved Vacation Schools and classes and being one of a crowd. You *know* you have that side, and Margaret Joan has it strongly. You're murdering your 'Margaret' side by smothering it. That side of you would love to be a Guide Captain."

Joy was staring at her. "Whatever put all that queer stuff into your silly head?"

"It's absurd for you to go on as if you were fifty. You're twenty-seven," Jen said sturdily. "You're just the right age to boss a Company and manage a crowd of girls. Other people do it, though it's sometimes an effort. Look at Maidlin! Seriously thinking of being a Guide, because she saw some one must do something, and now taking up Camp Fire and throwing herself into it for all she's worth. Maidie's more of a hermit in her heart than even you; she'd dream all day if she were left to herself. But she's taking on a thumping big job because she sees it's needed. Look at Mary-Dorothy! Do you suppose she wants to be a Sunday School teacher? Don't I know that Mary used to work up to the limit on Saturdays and then rest all Sunday? She'll have to do less on Saturdays, if she's to give up her Sunday afternoon rest. Does she want to do that? But she sees there's a job to be done, and she feels she must try to do it. What about you? Here's a job in your own village, and you're turning your back on it."

"I'm not cut out for this job," Joy argued.

"My hat! Do you think Mary feels cut out for Sunday School teaching? Or Maidie for being a Guardian? How can you know until you've tried?"

"Look here, Jen Marchwood! Why don't you do it yourself?" Joy cried.

“Because I couldn’t keep it on,” Jen retorted. “Any thing I do has to be temporary. I can’t book up for months ahead. I sincerely hope my family isn’t going to stop with Andrew and Tony. If I have what I want, I shall have more babies, and my Guiding would be interrupted. You know quite well that I can’t take on regular jobs. I can open bazaars and give away prizes, but I can’t be tied down to weekly stunts.”

Joy sat silent, her eyes on the island in the lake where Maidlin had once been nearly drowned.

Jen eyed her closely. Then she said, “You must remember there’s a day coming when Margaret and Elizabeth will ask questions, ‘Traveller’s Joy.’ They’re forming their ideas of you already. You don’t want to feel you’re a disappointment to them. But it’s going to happen, if you aren’t careful.”

“What do you mean?” Joy turned in a flash and looked at her, terror and anger in her eyes. “I a disappointment? Why should I be?”

“My dear, Margaret will certainly ask why her mummy doesn’t do things as other people’s mothers do. She questions everything already. And Elizabeth thinks things out.”

Joy stared up at her. “And you think—they’ll be puzzled?”

“They must have a vague idea already that you’re always at home. Quite soon they’ll begin to wonder why. They can’t help it. They may never ask; children grow up accepting the state of things they’ve always known. But their impression of you will be: ‘Mother can’t do things, like Auntie Maid and Auntie Jen and Auntie Mary.’ How can they help it? You could change all that before they begin asking questions,” Jen pleaded. “Think how proud Margaret would be, when she becomes a Brownie, of a mother who was a Guide Captain!”

Joy saw it clearly; Margaret Joan’s point of view was obvious. She sat with clenched hands and gazed down into the lake again.

“By the time they’re ready to be Guides, you’d certainly have become District Commissioner. You know you’d be asked at the earliest possible moment. Think how thrilled the twins would be! Think of going to school and knowing your own mother was District Commissioner!” Jen coaxed.

Joy saw that clearly also. But she saw too a picture of herself in uniform, and shrank.

Jen leaned over her. “Joy, never mind what they’d think of you. That’s a big thing; but it isn’t everything. Think of them—of the joy you could give them! You’ve given them so much; don’t hold back the biggest thing of all. Give them a mother who’ll be a companion—who will take part in all they do. Think what they’ll miss, to say nothing of yourself, if, as they grow older, every new thing they do takes them away from you! It will, if you don’t enter into their interests. You’ll stay at home and write songs, and

they'll go and be Guides, and dancers; and all you'll do will be take an interest when they come home. What if you did all those things with them, Joy? My dear, you *can't* lose that joy, both for yourself and for them. Give them a mother who will be a comrade, Joy. Andrew and you would have done it together. You're brave enough to do it alone. Don't let them grow up without you, Joy—Now I'm going back to my babes. I'll come early tomorrow to see your girls. I hear my noisy crowd looking for us; I'll go and head them off. Think it over, dear. I won't worry you about it again. And don't hate me! You know I love you and the twins better than anybody in the world except Ken and the boys."

She kissed the top of Joy's head and hurried away.

CHAPTER XVIII

JOY DECIDES

Cecily came flying through the garden, but stopped short at sight of the group talking on the tennis-court. Jen and her husband and the Scoutmaster were all there, besides her guardians. She hung back, and hesitated.

“What’s up, Cecilytom? You look thrilled about something,” Rosalind called her to join them.

“Oh, please!” Cecily came up breathless, shy but eager. “I want to go and stay at the Rectory with Miss McLean and the girls. She’s asked me. I want to feel I’ve started. Would you mind?” she looked at Jen. “I know it isn’t fair, when you’ve asked me here; and you’ve been so kind. It’s topping here! But Ally and Olly asked me to stay, and then Miss McLean asked me too. She wouldn’t have said it if she’d thought you’d mind!”

“I don’t mind. Betty knows I’m willing she should have you,” Jen said cordially. “Run and pack your little case, and we’ll send it down for you.”

“But she mustn’t go using different people’s beds every night!” Maribel’s housewifely sense protested. “It’s absurd! Cecil, won’t it do to spend your days with Miss McLean and the girls?”

“Oh, but she wants to talk to the others at night! They’ll have pillow-fights and raids,” Jen said laughing. “We used to! I’m not sure that I’ve grown out of it yet. If you want company in a midnight raid on Rosalind, Bel, call on me for help! Run along, Cecilytom! I want you to do just what you’ll enjoy most. Is the Camp Fire all settled?”

“We’re going to have one. The rest will be ahead of me, if I can’t join till September. But they can’t wait, of course. We’re choosing our names; Maidlin has chosen hers already.”

“Don’t tell us!” Jen interrupted her. “She’ll tell us herself.”

“We talked a lot,” said Cecily. “Maidlin has all sorts of ideas. I think Miss Devine suggested some of them. She went away quite soon; Maidlin says she’s thinking about Sunday School to-morrow. But Maidlin stayed, and we discussed things.”

“I’m sure you did! And you’ll go on discussing all night. You couldn’t possibly do anything so dull as stay here with us,” Jen teased.

Cecily looked at her doubtfully. “It’s nice here. But the girls——”

“I know, kid. I’m glad you’ve made friends. Go along to the girls and make the most of your time. Betty and I arranged that she should have you if you cared to change over.”

Her last doubt set at rest, Cecily raced away to pack, and presently disappeared with her suitcase in the car, waving good-bye with a radiant face.

“Exit Cecilytom,” said Jen. “She’ll be much happier among her own crowd. I’m so glad she’s making friends. I can quite believe Mary-Dorothy left the meeting soon,” she added. “She has to-morrow on her mind. That class is really burdening her. I doubt if it’s right for her to do it.”

“It mustn’t interfere with her writing,” Rosalind exclaimed.

“We’re all telling her that. But she insists on giving it a trial. She’s made up her mind, and that’s the end on’t. But it’s been sitting heavily on her all week.”

“Isn’t that only because it’s the first time?” Maribel suggested. “I’m sure I shall feel awful the first Sunday!”

“I hope it’s only that. But Mary-Dorothy is an old worrier,” Jen sighed. “She can’t take anything easily. She’s probably swotting up far more than is necessary. But nothing we can say will stop her.”

Maidlin came through the gardens after dinner, in quest of sympathy. “Jen, I must have somebody to speak to! What have you done to Joy? She’s hardly said a word all evening.”

“Leave her alone,” Jen advised. “She had tea with us and I walked home with her and we talked. She’s thinking something out.”

“It isn’t another song,” Maidlin argued. “I know her song look. This is different. She’s worried. But the kiddies are all right, Jen.”

“It isn’t the twins; at least, only indirectly. And it isn’t a song. It’s me—something I said,” Jen explained. “And I suppose Mary-Dorothy’s buried in tomes in the library, swotting up learned stuff for her twelve small girls to-morrow?”

“Mary’s gone into the Abbey. She asked me not to come.”

“Oh!” Jen looked thoughtful. “You poor kid!” she said. “You are left stranded! I’m glad you came to tell us. Tell us all about your meeting and your plans! Cecily says you’ve told them your new name. May we hear it?”

Maidlin coloured and laughed. “I want to be Nawadaha, out of ‘Hiawatha.’ I don’t know any Indian names. But I like singing better than anything.”

“The sweet singer! You couldn’t be anything else,” Jen agreed. “Come and tell the others!”

The Guiders and Kenneth were walking down the drive with Scout Mike, to see him off on his cycle at the gate. When they came back it was to tell Jen they wanted the car on Monday morning, for a visit to the camp.

“We’re to go in uniform,” said Rosalind. “We’re to inspect the camp!”

“You’ll have to hurry back and change for the afternoon dancing,” said Jen. “Come and hear about the new Camp Fire!”

“Maribel, I want you to come and start us, in about a month,” Maidlin pleaded. “We’ll send up our fees and have our Charter; the girls are going to pay their share and then begin saving up for rings and gowns. I thought I’d send for my gown and begin to decorate it, and then, if you’d come, we could have our first real meeting, with the Charter, and you could hand the torch to me. Would you? The girls know you’ve helped us already, but I want them to see you do it—to see you give your light to kindle our fire. That’s right, isn’t it?”

“That’s symbol language. It’s right, and you’ll make a jolly good guardian if you work on those lines,” Maribel said. “Always act things out, if you can.”

“That’s what I thought. If Cecily could come with you for another week-end, she could join with the rest, and then she could begin to work and she wouldn’t feel so far behind.”

“That’s thoughtful. She’d love it. We’d like to come,” Maribel looked at Jen.

“The Manor is at your service. Or if we happened to be full, there’s always the Hall. Joy would love to have you. Just arrange it with Maidlin, and we’ll find you beds.”

“And I shall see that Mike turns up for the week-end—quite by accident, of course,” Jen added to her husband, in an undertone.

Kenneth laughed. “Mike won’t wait for you. He’s going bungalow-hunting in Sussex immediately.”

“Oh, good for Mike! We’ll help them on!” Jen said enthusiastically.

Maidlin’s explanation of her Indian name reminded Rosalind and Maribel that they had not heard her sing. They begged for music, and she went to the piano without a trace of shyness, and sang—folk-songs, and songs written by Joy—in a contralto of such depth and power, and yet so sweet, that her future destiny seemed obvious.

“I’m only training,” she said. “I’m the first of Joy’s music-students. I still have a great deal to learn.”

“I shouldn’t have thought there was anything more you could do with a voice like that,” said Rosalind. “Aren’t you going on the stage, in grand opera?”

Maidlin shrank, and then laughed. “No, please! What a horrible idea! I’m only having lessons because I want to sing as well as I can.”

“You must make the most of your voice, of course. You could make your fortune with it, if you wanted to,” said Maribel. “Please sing to us again!”

“I must go home. Joy will be sending Mary-Dorothy to fetch me.”

“We’ll go with you,” and they walked in a crowd through the gardens together.

Joy steadily avoided Jen on Sunday morning, and it seemed to Jen that Mary Devine did the same. Jen laughed, with understanding sympathy, and gave herself up to her guests.

“Poor dears! They both have weights on their minds! I won’t plague them. I’ll hear all about it in time,” and she led the Guiders home from church through the beech-woods, and left Joy to go with her children and Maidlin, and Mary to slip away alone.

“Mary-Dorothy won’t rest till this afternoon’s over,” Jen remarked to Maribel. “I know everything she’s thinking. She’s in a perfect funk about that class. She couldn’t bear to be spoken to about it. Didn’t you see how she kept away from us?”

“Surely she won’t find it as bad as she expects?”

“Of course not. She never does. But she worries just the same. She’s desperately unhappy this morning!”

“She shouldn’t take it on if she feels like that about it,” Rosalind exclaimed. “It can’t be her proper work if she hates it so.”

“She doesn’t hate it. She’s dying to do it. But she’s sure she can’t. I asked her, and she told me,” said Jen. “That’s Mary-Dorothy’s way. She never believes she can do anything. I had to make her dance by sheer force; but she enjoyed it enormously. She’s more than happy in her writing and in her work for Joy, but I had to bully her into both, and to keep on at her too.”

“You used to throw cushions at her,” Kenneth remarked.

“That happened the first day he saw me. That’s why it made an impression on him,” Jen explained. “I only hope Mary doesn’t have too bad a time this afternoon. I’m dying to hear about it; I’d like to catch her on her way home, but perhaps I’d better not. She’ll come to church parade at night.”

As the Colour-parties carried the flags up the aisle, and Betty, in her captain’s uniform, received them, the King’s Colour first and then the Company Colour, Joy stood beside Maidlin, very conscious of Rosalind and Maribel standing at attention in the Manor pew, and of the Guides in two blue rows across the centre of the church. Some of them were big girls of sixteen. It was true; they ought to be Rangers, but they could not be Rangers unless they had a captain.

Jen’s arguments were tormenting Joy. The thought that she might disappoint Elizabeth and Margaret cut deep, but the suggestion that she might be going to fail them in something she could have given went still deeper. Her whole life was one desire to give them the best, to make up for the loss they had not yet realised. It was certain they would want to take part

in everything that was going on; Joy knew she would wish them to do so. But were they to do it without her? She had never faced that question until Jen flung it before her, sitting by the lake.

Held by her problem, she did not hear the address given to the Guides. She awoke as the Colours were carried out of the church, the Guides following in a long line. With Maidlin and Mary, she went out after them and watched the dismissal, noting vaguely the smartness of Betty's salute.

Jen's car was waiting, and Rosalind and Maribel sprang in, with Kenneth driving.

"No, I'm not coming," said Jen. "I'm going to walk home. Joy, they're going to camp service with the Scouts. Mike invited them. Wouldn't you like to go?"

"No, thanks. I'm going home. You go, Maidie. You'd be interested."

"I'd like to see a camp service. But what about you, Joy? Won't you come?"

"I'm going to walk home with Betty." Joy turned quickly to where Betty stood, surrounded by a crowd of blue-clad girls.

"Oh, I wonder——?" Jen whispered, as the car drove off.

Then she turned away quickly. "Mary-Dorothy, I'm forsaken by all my friends! Walk through the Abbey with me, old thing! You're looking so much happier than you did this morning, my dear!"

"I am happier," Mary, agreed, as they turned down a path with walls of bare grey beech stems and a soft brown carpet underfoot.

"How did the class go this afternoon? I've been dying to hear."

Mary gave a little laugh. "I enjoyed it."

"Mary-Dorothy! Truly? Oh, how ripping!"

"Nobody could be more surprised than I was. It had never occurred to me that I might like taking the girls," Mary confessed.

"How like you! Why shouldn't you like it, you old silly?"

"Because I didn't think I could do it, Jenny-Wren."

"And you found you could? Haven't I told you, often and often, that you can do things?"

"You certainly have. But I never seem able to believe it." There was a more confident note than usual in Mary's voice.

Jen looked at her quickly. "You shouldn't be so doubtful of yourself, old dear. I suppose you'd prepared stuff for the kiddies that was far above their heads?"

"No, not that. I'd had the girls at dancing; I knew them fairly well. It was myself I was wrong about. I'd prepared far too much," Mary confessed with a laugh. "I had no idea how much I should need. I'll learn in time."

“You wouldn’t tell me what you talked about, I suppose?” Jen asked yearningly.

Mary flushed. After a pause she said gravely, “It’s Whit-Sunday, Jenny-Wren. I hadn’t any choice.”

“Oh!” Jen gave her another quick look. “I expect they liked it, Mary-Dorothy,” she remarked.

“I’m certain there has been guidance in my life, and always for good. I told them it was the same for everybody, but that every one wasn’t awake to it, and that they must wake up and recognise the guidance and respond to it, if they wanted to be fully grown-up people,” Mary said. “Now, Jen, it’s my turn to ask. What have you done to Joy? She isn’t like herself at all. What have you been saying to her?”

“Asked her to be a Guide Captain.”

“Jen! Jenny-Wren, you didn’t dare?”

“Oh, I dared. I was terrified! I thought for a moment she was going to turn me and rend me and close the gate between the gardens. I thought Andrew and Tony would never play in the sandpit again. But we didn’t have any scene. I left her to think it over.” And Jen outlined the arguments she had used.

“She’ll do it,” Mary cried. “She has plenty of courage. She’ll do anything in the world for Elizabeth and Margaret.”

“She may do it for them, but it will do her all the good in the world too.”

“I know. She needs it. I’m glad you spoke out. Nobody else would have dared, Jenny-Wren.”

“I couldn’t let Joy spoil the future for herself and the twins just because I was frightened of offending her. She’ll tell us when she’s made up her mind.”

“I’m glad she came to the service to-night,” Mary remarked. “How nice your pretty girl visitors look in uniform!”

“Oh, my dear!” Jen cried softly. “Mike’s frightfully smitten with Maribel! She’ll be one of the family before we know it. Isn’t it fun?”

“She’ll be a very nice little cousin for you,” Mary said, laughing. “How does she feel about it?”

“She likes him,” Jen said, in a motherly tone. “She’s so polite to him; calls him Mr. Marchwood, even when he isn’t there. Rose is polite enough when he’s present, though she often calls him ‘Scoutmaster’; but I happen to know that to Maribel she speaks of him as ‘Scout Mike.’ I heard her; she didn’t know, of course. And Bel responded primly with ‘Mr. Marchwood.’ She isn’t having any jokes about him.”

“And you think that’s a good sign?”

“Sure! They’re splendidly matched at tennis.”

“That’s hardly good enough to marry on,” Mary observed.

“It’s a good beginning, though. Remember how Ken coached me in cricket, when I was trying not to marry him?”

“You tried hard to escape the awful fate,” said Mary. “But you’ve never been sorry, Jenny-Wren.”

“Sorry! My dear, I wouldn’t change Ken for a million pounds!”

Mary laughed. “Don’t hurry Stormy Waves. You refused to be hurried yourself. You took your time. Give her time too!”

“She’ll be Mrs. Marchwood, as I wanted to be,” Jen sighed.

“You’re sure it is Maribel? What about Rosalind?”

“She’s half engaged to a man in Switzerland. Oh, it’s Bel or nobody, with Scout Mike now!”

Joy had seen them turn off towards the Abbey. With Betty she strolled down the path into the beechwoods.

“Your girls looked very smart to-night, Bets. There’s a nice crowd of them now.”

“Too many,” said Captain McLean. “I can’t take any more, but there are three Brownies almost ready to fly up to us. We can’t keep them back much longer. I must have more help, but I don’t know where to turn. The obvious thing is to move out the seniors and form a Ranger Company. Several of them are very keen. But we haven’t a captain for them.”

Joy stood and looked at her. “Could I do it, Bets?”

Betty gasped. “You? Oh, Joy!” she stared wide-eyed. “Joy, of *course* you could! They’d love to have you. But you wouldn’t take it on? Oh, Joy, dear, what has happened to you?”

Joy, walking on, explained, her voice unsteady. “Jen says I’m going to fail my twins if I don’t do Guiding and so on with them.”

“Oh!” said Betty. Her hand slipped through Joy’s arm. “I see the point. You’re very wise; and so is Jenny-Wren. Tell me what she said, if you can, dear. Oh, Joy, what a help you’d be to us!”

Joy told Jen’s arguments. “And you know, Bets, she’s right. There is a part of me that envies you all. I’ve often looked at you, marching into church with your Company, and Miss Fleming with the Brownies, and thought what a good time you must have and how fascinating it all seemed. I could be as much thrilled as any of the girls if we had a Ranger Company and our own Colours. As for dancing, I often envy Jen and Maidlin and you on the green. I don’t exactly want to dance, but I keep remembering what fun it used to be. But none of it—Guiding or dancing, or any of these jolly things—seemed right or reasonable for me now. My job is to think of Elizabeth and Margaret before anything. I’ve tried to do it. I never dreamt I might fail them by leaving them to enjoy things without me.”

Betty's thoughts were racing ahead. "She's growing tired of living so quietly. The old Joy is coming back. It has taken three years for the shock of Sir Andrew's death to wear off. I don't think that's too long. She's been wonderfully brave, but there has been a cloud on her. It's wearing off."

"What do you think, Bets?" Joy asked, with a new doubt of herself in the shock of Jen's suggestion. "If I did this job, for the children's sake, of course, would people understand? Or would it look as if—as if I'd forgotten? It isn't that, you know."

"Dear, nobody would think that for a second!" Betty cried. "They'd just say how wise you were, now that the children are growing big, to begin to look ahead and be ready to join in their interests. Anybody worth considering would understand."

"And could I do it?" Joy spoke humbly. "Isn't it very difficult? Don't you have to know all sorts of useful things?"

Betty laughed. "I'd coach you. You wouldn't have any difficulty with the tests. Oh, Joy, is it true? I can't believe anything so splendid! To have you to work with!" Her eyes were sparkling. "Oh, Joy, *do!*"

"Tell me what I'd have to do. There's one thing, Bets," Joy pleaded. "Until I'm used to it, can't I do it only at home here in the village? I don't want to go to big county rallies and things. It's just for our own girls you'd want me, isn't it? I might feel less bad about it later on."

"You'd grow used to it quickly, dear," Betty's hand pressed her arm. "But there wouldn't be any need for you to go to things of that sort, unless you wished. I could always take the Company and your girls with them. If you'd take the Rangers, you'd drop into it gradually. There wouldn't be many to start with, but it would work up quickly once you were the captain. I've four who are over sixteen and two more of fifteen who would soon be moved up; and I know at least three big girls who would join if there were Rangers, but who can't possibly be expected to join as Guides. What a joy for the Guides to look forward to—to be promoted to your Company! I suppose you know you're the goddess of the whole village, all the more because of what has happened? Jen is a topping Lady of the Manor, and they love her; but they loved you for years before she began to count, Joy."

"Tell me what I'd have to do!" Joy pleaded again, and they walked down the beech path, discussing qualifications and tests.

CHAPTER XIX

SCOUT MIKE LEARNS TO DANCE

“You people must learn your step!” Jen called her guests out on to the lawn on Monday morning. She carried her wooden morris pipe and whistled a little air. “Come on! One—two—three—hop!”

“Oh, we know it!” cried Cecily, who had come to join in the expedition to the Scout camp. “Mrs. Raymond taught me. We practised hard last Wednesday, and she said my step was nice. Look! We can do it, Lady Marchwood!”

She caught Maribel’s hand and led her round the lawn to the tune of the Helston Furry. Rosalind, laughing, caught her other hand and joined in.

Jen stopped piping to laugh. “Most un-traditional, with three dancers! Yes, your step’s all right, so I’ll spare you the lesson. Go and call on the Scouts! But be home in time to change into those pretty frocks you wore yesterday.”

“Did Mrs. Raymond know I’d be here for your Whit-Monday dancing? Is that why she made us work so hard at it?” Cecily cried. “Oh, how topping of her! Some of them nearly died; they were so tired!”

“How brutal of Joan to keep them at it so long! No, I’m not coming to the camp. I’ve home duties to see to. There’s Kenneth hooting to tell you he’s ready. Run along and enjoy yourselves, children. Don’t be rude to the Scouts! Ask Mike to come and dance this afternoon. I’ve asked him over and over again, but I’ve never been able to persuade him to take the plunge. He scorns dancing of any kind. Perhaps you’ll be able to bring him round. You’ll come back here to lunch, Cecilytom. Ally and Olly can do without you to-day. We’re having a luncheon party; Joy and her crowd are coming from the Hall.”

As the car raced up the red-and-white-strewn drive at lunch-time, it overtook an Austin Seven, also going towards the house, and Cecily gave a shriek of excited joy. “My Mrs. Raymond! Has she come for the dancing? Oh, how ripping!”

Joan heard and laughed, and waved her hand. “Of course I’ve come for the dancing!” she said, when they were greeting one another on the lawn. “Didn’t I teach you the Helston on purpose?—I didn’t bring the babes, Jen, and Jack decided to stay with them. We’ll come later on and stay for a night or two. Yes, they’re well and naughty. I hope your boys are the same?—Are

you going to dance in uniform, Miss Firth? I'm sure Betty's girls will be pleased."

"Not even to please the Guides! Come and change, Bel! We've been inspecting a Scout camp," Rosalind explained. "So we did the thing in style."

"Is that Michael Marchwood's boys?"

"Haven't you brought him back to lunch?" Jen demanded. "Well, that was a mean trick!"

"He couldn't get off. He'll come along in the afternoon, but only to look on, of course. He's quite definite about that. Say's dancing's all tosh," Kenneth explained. "Tommy—he's Mike's second-in-command—Tommy has his girl down for the day, and he wanted to take her out to lunch."

The Guiders ran off to dress, and Jen led Joan indoors to see the babies. "Tommy's not the only Scoutmaster who has a girl to entertain!" she said.

"You don't mean that Mike has found a girl to suit him at last?" asked Joan.

"Whisper!" Jen commanded, bending over Tony, who had not wakened from his mid-morning nap. "Yes, I think so. Isn't it fun? But don't say anything. It's too soon to tease her. They only met on Friday."

"One of Cecily's guardians? Really, Jen?"

"Maribel. He saw her first in a Camp Fire gown with her hair down. She looked a picture, and he's called her 'the Princess' ever since."

"What a good thing for Michael the Guider guardians came to call on me!" Joan said.

"We'll see if she makes him dance this afternoon. You first met Jack in a morris side!"

And laughing at the memory of their first folk-dance school, they went down to greet Joy and Maidlin.

"Listen, people!" said Joy. "I want something off my mind. I don't know if you'll think me very queer, Joan, but I'm going to be a Girl Guide."

"A Captain of Guides, Joy!" cried Jen.

"Joy, my dear girl, what has happened to you?" Joan exclaimed.

"I've been scolded, for my good. I've been told some home truths by a candid little sister."

"Jen, is it your doing?" Joan cried.

"She wants to be ready for Elizabeth and Margaret. To be in things with them, you know," Jen explained, rather incoherently. "So she's going to help Betty. 'Traveller's Joy,' you're a real sport! Tell Joan all about it. I'm going to tell Rosalind."

She raced upstairs, and hammered on her guest's door. "Rose Firth, let me in! I don't care if you're undressed. Open the door!"

Rosalind stood in the doorway, her dark hair loose on her shoulders. "Is it a fire? Or has a baby fallen into the lake? Bel, come and help!"

"Joy's going to be a Guide Captain! I had to tell you, Rose. You don't know how grateful I am! You gave me the argument that won the day."

"Really? I am glad!" Rosalind exclaimed.

"You won't rag her about it?" Jen pleaded. "Pretend it's the most natural thing in the world. She's fearfully afraid of being teased."

"As if we would!" Maribel cried. "It's splendid of her! How the girls will love her!"

"Her own kiddies will be glad when they understand," Rosalind said thoughtfully.

"She's thinking chiefly of them. But Betty and the whole Company will be glad. Hurry! I had to come and tell you!" and Jen sped away again.

When the Guiders came down to lunch in their dancing frocks they both greeted Joy with a Guide's salute.

"Topping, Lady Marchwood!" said Rosalind. "You'll make a splendid Captain!"

Joy coloured. "You Guide people are all so smart and clever. I shan't be a credit to you. But Betty says she can shove me through the tests, so that I can pretend to be a captain. I'm going to take the elder girls," she said to Rosalind. "Your red badge means that your girls are Rangers, doesn't it? Is it sensible? Betty thinks it's wise. There won't be so many of them, for one thing."

"A jolly good idea!" Rosalind said. "It will be a new start for them. If you want things different from what Miss McLean has done with them, you'll say, 'Now that you're Rangers we'll do it this way'! How bucked they'll be to have you!"

Joan said wistfully, "Won't you go one step farther, Joy, and dance with me this afternoon? I haven't a partner, as Jack couldn't come. It would please everybody so much to see you lead the procession!"

Joy stood looking down at the grass. She sighed at last, and looked up at her cousin. "I won't lead. That's Jen's job, with Kenneth. But I'll dance with you, Joan, just for a little while."

"That's good of you," Joan said quietly. "I'd rather have you than anybody. Weren't you my first partner? It will help to make things go, if you join in. We've missed you."

"I don't want to dance much," said Joy.

"In a very few years," Jen began, "we shall have Elizabeth Marchwood dancing with my Andrew and Margaret with Tony. That will be thrilling, if you like."

“And John and Janice together?” Joan asked indignantly. “How dull for them! Janice will expect one of your boys as a partner, I’m quite sure. John can take the second twin.”

Joy laughed in spite of herself. “We really needn’t arrange it yet.”

“No. Come to lunch; much more practical! It’s nearly cold,” said the mistress of the house.

Eager-eyed, Cecily and her guardians watched the greetings on the village green, when they had all walked down there after lunch. The Whit-Monday dancing was a tryst for friends from far and near. Many old school friends came by car, or train, and there were eager cries of: “Hello, Georgie! How’s school? Is Edna coming?”—“Cheers, there’s Barbara!”—“You all right, Dorothy?”—“Nice of you to come, Molly!”—“Oh, come and speak to Mirry! She’s brought the children to look on!”

“I’ve brought one child to dance,” Miriam, the first Queen of the Hamlet Club, said laughing. “Seven years old is old enough; she knows the step! I’m the first to bring my daughter as a partner!”

“But you always were ahead of the rest of us! Jolly to have her here; what a big girl you are, Mirry! I remember how you threw her at me, at her first party, because you wanted to dance yourself!” Jen said.

The grown-up Cicely who had started the dancing and brought about all the friendships, years ago, came with her eldest boy, a sturdy youth of five, but left him to watch from the car, with his nurse, while his mother joined in the procession. She greeted her small namesake, who was gazing at her eagerly. “Are you the little Cecily, who is coming to the Music School? Joy told me about you. You’re a piper already, I hear!”

“Aren’t you glad you did it?” Cecily asked shyly.

“Did what?”

“Started this dancing. They say they owe it all to you.”

“Nice of them to think so! I expect they’d have come across it, if I hadn’t insisted on their dancing! But I am jolly glad. All my first morris six are here to-day, except one who lives in France.”

“Was Lady Marchwood one of them?” Cecily ventured.

“Which? But I won’t tease; it’s too bad of them to have the same name! No, they and Joan Raymond came later, when we discovered the Abbey. Good luck to you with your music! Remember you’re my namesake; you must do our name credit. Now we’re going to start. Who’s your partner?”

“They all said they’d dance with me presently. I was to begin with Miss McLean, but she sent word she’d be late.”

“Oh, then, have a turn with me. I haven’t even a husband; he’s in Ceylon. We change partners presently. Everybody’s pairing off; Miriam has her small Mirry; she’s often my partner.”

Flushed and proud, Cecily allowed Cicely to take her into the line. Jen and Kenneth were leading. A murmur of delight went round at the sight of Joan leading Joy to be second couple.

“Joy’s dancing again,” Cicely Everett said, half to herself. “That’s an improvement. She’s kept out long enough. Jolly to see those two together again!”

“Aren’t they alike?” Cecily cried. “And both all in white! Don’t they look funny together?”

“We’re used to it. I suppose it does look odd to you. I remember I thought I was seeing double when Joy appeared after I’d first met Joan. I wonder what has brought her back to the dancing? Who worked the miracle?”

“I think it was Lady Jen,” Cecily said shyly. “I heard them talking. It’s something to do with the twins; Lady Joy knows they’ll want to dance in a little while, and she’ll want to do it with them. She’s going to be a Guider and help Miss McLean too.”

“My hat!” said the President. “I’m very glad to hear it. She’s shut herself up too long. I must inquire into all this!”

Rosalind and Maribel danced together, with Maidlin and Mary Devine as their second couple to join in their star.

“Maidlin will be missing Rosamund,” said Cicely Everett. “I wonder when she’s coming home?”

“Oh, look! Here’s the fiddler! They said a girl played for them!” cried Cecily.

“Margia Lane has played for us for years. She’s a sport! We all owe more to her than we realise.”

Then the Helston music began, and the Furry Dance circled round the village green. This first turn, Cecily found later, was something of a ceremony, when partners were invited formally; and she marvelled at her good fortune in being chosen by the President just because they shared a name.

Jen and Kenneth led the procession round the green and up and down several streets. Then every one rested, and drank lemonade in the front gardens of houses and cottages whose owners had been making preparations all morning. When Margia struck up again it was a round dance, and with new partners everybody ran to join in “Gathering Peascods.” Other dances followed, with “spasms of procession in between,” as Cecily had been warned would be the case.

The whole village seemed to be dancing, and there was no keeping to friendly sets. Guides, Scouts, members of the Women’s Institute, and of nothing at all, danced in rings with the visitors and made up their longways

sets. Jen produced her pipe and played for occasional dances, while the fiddler found a partner and had her turn. Betty arrived and claimed Cecily for a processional and “Galopede.” She had “Mage” with one of her guardians, and “If all were Paper” with the other.

“Miss Lane’s a brick, but she must be tired!” Maribel exclaimed. “I wonder if she’d let me help? I think I’d be good enough, Rose?”

“Come and offer!” Rosalind caught her hand and dragged her across the green. “Miss Lane, this girl has danced everything so far; it’s time she rested. She plays quite decently. Won’t you let her take a turn? It’s hard work for you!”

Margia handed over her violin gratefully. “Will you? Sometimes I have help, but we thought there was no other fiddler here to-day. They want ‘Butterfly’ and then ‘We won’t go Home.’”

“Right!” said Maribel. “I’ve played both dozens of times for our Guides.”

“Dance with me, Miss Lane?” cried Rosalind. “We’re all so grateful to you!”

They met Jen and Joan in the star, and Jen gave Margia a startled look. “Who’s playing? Are you in two places at once? Why, it’s ‘the princess’! How ripping of her!”

“It’s all right, isn’t it?” Rosalind asked, as she made the arch. “Lady Marchwood, you’re too tall for this dance!”

“Sorry! It’s topping music. I must thank her presently,” and then they separated.

“I love playing,” Maribel said, as Jen and Joan and Cicely came up to thank her. “If you’re satisfied, I’m enjoying it. I often play for the Guides.”

“We didn’t mean to make our visitors work! But it’s only fair for Margia to have a chance to dance. Thanks no end, Stormy Waves! A very small child has asked me for ‘We won’t go Home,’ so I must go. We’ll look fearfully funny,” Jen sighed. “You mustn’t laugh. Fortunately there are no arches, and I can be a man!”

“I hope you will! If the poor kid has to turn you under her arm, she’ll be the worse for it,” Joan said laughing. “Who is she?”

“Oh, only village! She grins at me when she sees me, and to-day she brought up the sweetest little note to the house, asking me to dance with her. Think of the courage it must have needed! I was tremendously touched. I wrote her a very proper letter of acceptance,” and Jen went off to find her small partner, who would be envied by all the rest of the village that evening.

Presently they saw the Lady of the Manor chasing away a crowd of children as if they had been chickens. “Shoo! Run away! I can’t dance with

you all. I'd have no feet left. Hilda was brave enough to ask me this morning, but I can't take you all on. You must dance together. It's 'Jenny Pluck Pears' now; make up rings and choose your first couple."

Kenneth was an able M.C. and knew his duties from long practice, though he was not a great dancer himself. The Helston with his wife was enough for him; after that he took on the work of making up sets and seeing that each had sufficient space.

Maribel played for "Jenny," and then begged to be allowed to lead one procession, walking on ahead as she had seen Margia Lane do. She was marching round the green, followed by a long line of untiring dancers, when she came face to face with Michael Marchwood at a corner. Her face quivered into laughter, but she did not lose a beat. She left him staring after her, and the procession passed him by.

"Hello, Mike!" cried Jen, as she passed, dancing with Cicely Everett. "Come and join in! Ask a village kid; she'll teach you the step!"

"Come and help *me*, Mike," said Kenneth. "I've a full-time job. Come and earn your tea! When they stop this, make 'em into couples in lines, not more than seven couples in a set. Make the pole the top. It's 'Flowers of Edinburgh' next."

The directions meant nothing to Scout Mike. How he was expected to "make the pole the top," and the top of what, no one troubled to explain. They all seemed to know what Kenneth was talking about.

Mike looked round for his princess. The music had stopped, and Maribel was handing over the fiddle to another girl. He drifted in that direction, leaving Kenneth to his "full-time job."

"Don't you want to dance?" Rosalind hailed him gaily. "Never done any? It doesn't matter; you can do this. Bel, you take him and be Twos. He'll know it before you reach the top. I've promised Cecil a dance," and she raced away.

"It isn't hard," said Maribel.

"It looked great sport," said he. "I've always dodged Jen's shows. But it doesn't look as bad as I thought. What do you do?"

"Stand still till it comes to the swing. The Ones do all the work. You swing and change with me—this way! Take my hands—Now lean back and skip. Try it; nobody's looking. They're all too busy making up sets."

Scout Mike set his teeth and plunged into folk-dancing. To hold his princess's hands tightly was a good beginning. She did not let him off easily, however.

"Skip! You must do it properly, or I won't dance with you. Keep time with me; yes, but let the other foot come in front alternately. Your left's

doing all the work. That's it! That's quite good. Now lean back and face me; don't twist round one shoulder."

This, too, was a command any scout could obey with enjoyment. Mike faced his partner so emphatically that she flushed and checked a laugh.

"That's a good position. Keep it up! Now use your weight; lean back. You're far heavier than I am; try to pull me over; you won't do it! Don't bend your elbows; you spoil your swing at once; straight arms! There! That's beautiful. Now come and join on to Rose's set!"

"Is that all we have to do?" her pupil asked incredulously. "Topping fun! It isn't half bad!"

"All just now. Watch the Ones; you'll have to do the figure presently."

That sobered Mike, and his high spirits dropped considerably. He watched closely, then started, as Maribel cried, "Swing! I'll guide you!" and caught both his hands.

"See! We've changed places. We're moving up," she explained breathlessly, for his swing was anything but gentle.

"I'm catching the idea. Do we go all the way to the end before we do the twisty business?"

"It's a Figure Eight," she said primly.

"My aunt! So it is. Round the lady first; is that right?"

"That's it. You're getting on."

"I like this!" he said enthusiastically, when he had swung with her several times, the firm grasp of her hands keeping his direction right—all unconscious that she was doing the man's work and guiding him to his new place each time.

"Good business!" Maribel exclaimed. "It is fun, isn't it? You must try something else."

"Are they all as easy as this?"

"Well, no! Now—no, not yet! We have a rest for one turn," and she just saved him from dashing into the hey. "When they've changed places, then it's your turn to start."

When the moment came, Mike looked at her in agonised entreaty. "Couldn't you do it first? What do I do with my feet?"

"Go on! You'll be all right. The same step; the one you've been doing all the time. Round the man—that's a man, though it looks like Mrs. Raymond. Cheers! That's it!" and Maribel began her own hey.

"Congratulations, Mr. Marchwood!" said Joan Raymond. "You'll be a keen dancer in no time."

"Now you join in; do it with me, but on your own track. Oh, show him, somebody!" Maribel cried helplessly.

Joan kept the agitated Scoutmaster right. In another moment he found himself swinging with his partner.

“I made a mess of that. It’s worse than I thought!” he groaned. “Shall I drop out and watch?”

“*No!* What an awful idea! You’re all right. Just do your Eight twice over, and take no notice of me.”

The result of these directions was a collision and more apologies from the dazed scout. But he grasped what was wrong, and the third attempt was successful.

“That all right?” he panted. “Gosh! Doesn’t it make you hot? Going this way’s worse than the other.”

Maribel laughed. “This is last time.” She curtseyed, and he hurriedly made a very low bow. “Now couldn’t you take me to have an ice? I say, you know, you did jolly well. It was topping of you to dash into it like that.”

“It’s all right when you get the hang of it. Where can I find that ice? You don’t look a bit hot! How do you manage to keep cool?”

“I’m the opposite of cool! You swing so hard. Oh, don’t apologise! I like it. Oh, tea! That’s better than ices! Come and find Rose, and we’ll have it together. Or do you want to talk to Sir Kenneth?”

“I’d just as soon not see Ken,” Scout Mike admitted. “I let him down badly just now. Told me to come and help, and to make the pole the top. Didn’t say what it was to be top of. I didn’t know what on earth he meant. So I came to ask you, and you made me dance.”

“What an excuse! But he was only being kind to you. He’s a splendid M.C. without any help. Rosalind! Tea!”

“I’m coming,” Rosalind joined them. “Let’s find a quiet garden. Isn’t this a hectic occasion?”

“Bit strenuous,” said the Scoutmaster, who would have preferred tea for two.

“You did jolly well. I had my eye on you,” Rosalind understood him thoroughly. “You should ask Bel to show you the Helston step. Then when we start again you could be in the procession.”

“Would you?” he looked at Maribel eagerly. “Will you do it with me?”

“I’ll see how you manage the step,” she retorted.

Rosalind sat down with them at a table under a rose-covered arch. While the dances were in progress, the older village folk had been spreading tables for tea, and soon every garden was filled with a noisy crowd.

“Nice to have this corner all to ourselves!” said Rosalind. “What else will you let Mr. Marchwood dance, Bel?”

“If he’d do what he’s told I’m sure he could manage ‘Bonnetts.’ But he won’t; he’ll mess up the cast, I know,” Maribel sighed.

“Couldn’t you show me?” The scout’s eagerness was obvious.

Rosalind chuckled. Suddenly she sprang up. “I promised Betty McLean to have tea with her and talk Guiding! So I did! You’ll be all right, Bel; Mr. Marchwood will look after you,” and she vanished.

Maribel frowned. Rose should hear about this at night!

But Scout Mike, blessing Rosalind, began to ask questions about the coming dances, and she had to explain, tracing diagrams on the table top.

“I know a chap in town who goes in for this sort of thing,” he said. “Frightfully keen too. I’ll ask him to give me some tips, shall I?”

“Ask him to take you to a Hyde Park party,” Maribel suggested. “Rosalind goes; she’d look after you.”

“Don’t you go? Couldn’t you come up to town and stay with her?”

Maribel laughed. “Not just for country-dancing. I’ve Guides and other things needing me at home. Come and find a quiet corner and I’ll teach you that step. You ought to dance in one procession!”

“I’m on for quiet corners!” murmured Scout Mike, as he followed her.

Every one was busy with tea. They easily found an empty lane, and the Scoutmaster enjoyed a private lesson in the step of the Helston Furry Dance. Maribel sang the tune and emphasised the beat with her hands.

“That’s it!” she cried. “Now you do that step leading your partner forward; then you turn and make a star with the next couple. Your partner will tell you when it comes, until you’re used to the music.”

“Oh, but you’ll be my partner, won’t you? I couldn’t do it with anybody else,” he urged, in obvious alarm.

“Rubbish! You ought to dance with other people. Ask Lady Marchwood!”

“I wouldn’t dare. She’s such a posh person when it comes to this sort of thing. Won’t you be decent and hold my hand?” he coaxed.

“Baby!” said Maribel.

CHAPTER XX

THE DARING OF CECILY

After the first procession Joy dropped out of the dancing. The big car from the Hall stood under the trees, with Elizabeth and Margaret, cleaned up after their game in the sandpit. Every guest stopped to speak to them, and Joy went and sat with them, greeting her friends as they came up and sending Nelly Bell, the nurse in charge, to join in the dancing.

The twins and Nell went home to tea, and Joy joined Jen and Kenneth, Joan and Maidlin in the front garden of the old Rectory, which was now the Music School. Betty McLean was in charge here, and Cecily joyfully did her share of the waiting, as if she had been already a student and an inmate of the house.

“Where are your pretty guardians, Cecilytom? I hope they’re finding some tea,” said Jen.

“Rosalind’s here, in the other garden. She said Bel was having tea,” Cecily explained. “I don’t know who asked her, but Miss Betty asked Rose.”

“I wonder who asked Miss Stormy Waves!” said Kenneth. “I want a word with Scout Mike. Has she found him his bungalow yet?”

“Give her time! She keeps her bungalows at home.—Mike wants a bungalow on the Downs for his people,” Jen explained, in answer to Joy’s question. “He asked Maribel to find him one.”

“I suppose you know Mike Marchwood danced ‘Flowers of Edinburgh,’ with the yellow-haired Guide girl?” said Betty McLean.

“I don’t believe it!” Jen said firmly. “He’s never danced a step. I’ve often tried to haul him in.”

“Somebody else has managed it for you. They met Edna and me just as they began to come down the line. He’d been rather well pleased with himself so far, but the heys were a shock,” Joan laughed.

“*Why* wasn’t I there to see?” Jen wailed. “I’ll keep an eye on him after this!”

A few minutes later her wish was granted when she and Cicely Everett, watching the Helston procession which opened the second part of the programme, saw Mike and Maribel hand in hand.

“*Look* at Mike!” Jen cried. “The Helston, step, and all, as jolly as you please! He couldn’t do a step of it yesterday. Maribel’s worked a miracle!”

“It’s the pretty fair girl who fiddled. Has she been teaching him?”

"I quite expect she has. Lady President, can't you see? Michael will learn anything to satisfy Maribel!"

"Oh, really?" Cicely gazed at the dancers. "Well, they're a very jolly couple. Help them all you can!"

"I'm doing it, bless them!" Jen said fervently.

Joy and Cecily were dancing also, and they remained partners for "Christchurch Bells."

"I don't know it, Lady Joy!" Cecily warned her.

"I'm quite sure your guardian's partner doesn't know it either. Come and have a lesson, both of you! We need four," said Joy.

Maribel was looking distractedly for another couple. "I can't teach it to you alone!" she argued to the eager Scoutmaster, who had thoroughly enjoyed his processional.

Joy's suggestion was gratefully accepted, and with Maribel as second woman and Joy as first man they hastily put the novices through the turns and the ring and practised the clapping. Cecily grasped this quickly, but Mike was dazed at first; then he grasped the idea and tapped his partner's palms in such a gingerly way that she was moved to remonstrate.

"Clap properly! I'm not made of eggshell. Oh, you pig! You horror!" as he obeyed her literally and her hands tingled.

"I say, you told me to!" he apologised, with laughing eyes.

"I didn't say *slap* me! All right, I'll forgive you, but can't you strike the happy medium?"

Mike was enjoying himself by this time, however. When the dance began he kept her on tenterhooks all the way up the line, for she never knew whether he would slap or merely tap her hands. If she prepared for a stinging clap she was sure to receive the gentlest touch; time after time he took her by surprise.

"If you'd stop being so funny and think what you're doing, you might sometimes manage to give the right hand," she said wrathfully at last.

"Right? But I've been giving left to the new lady, all the way along. You told me to!"

"Left's right. Well, I can't help it! Left *is* right for second man," hurriedly, as she saw the teasing in his laughing eyes. "Left is correct," she added precisely. "You'll have to give different hands in a moment, so look out."

"Gosh! We're almost at the end! It is different going the other way, like that last one was? I say, can't we slip out and have a rest? No one would notice. What about another ice?"

"Funker!"

“Oh, righto! But you’ll have to tell me. I like being taken care of,” Mike said audaciously.

“If you’d think a little about your dancing, you’d be quite all right,” Maribel said severely.

“My dancing! Stars, there wasn’t much of it an hour ago. You’ve taught me an awful lot, you know, Miss Ritchie.”

“Sorry it’s been so awful,” Maribel retorted, and curtsied as the music stopped. “Oh, I’m tired! Yes, I’d like another ice. I mustn’t dance much more. I have to drive Rosalind to Wycombe. If I’m too tired I shall be dithery.”

“You’re not going away to-night?” he asked in alarm.

“Rose must go home to-night, for she has to be at business to-morrow morning. Cecily ought to go too, to be ready for to-morrow’s school, but we’re letting her miss one morning. I shall drive her home early to-morrow. But we’re taking Rosalind to the train after dinner.”

“Couldn’t I drive you?” Mike suggested eagerly. “I’m used to a car. I’m sure you’re fagged.”

“I don’t think there would be room. It’s a tiny car, and Cecily will expect to come——”

“Oughtn’t she to go to bed, after all this dancing?” the Scoutmaster asked. “She’ll be overtired. And she should be fresh for to-morrow.”

“How thoughtful you are!” Maribel mocked. “I can’t throw the kid over like that. If she didn’t care about the ride it would be different.”

Cecily unexpectedly preferred to stay at home. “I’ll say good-bye to Rose here, if anybody else will go with you, Bel.”

“Well, what about it?” Rosalind demanded. “Bel can’t drive home alone in the dark. She might run into a hedge and you wouldn’t find her till the morning.”

“Mr. Marchwood says he’ll come, and drive the car,” Maribel explained. “I’ve had such hard work making him give the right hand, you know.”

“Which happened quite often to be the left,” Mike added. “She never had such a thick-headed pupil before.”

“Oh, you didn’t do so badly!” said Rosalind.

She hurried upstairs to change into her uniform for the journey, when dinner was over. “Well, Stormy Waves, you’ve done your good deed for one day! Sacrificing your own feelings and mine so that Scout Mike can drive you home alone in the dark!”

Maribel gave a little laugh. “Haven’t you heard? Lady Marchwood insists on our having her car, and says she’s coming too. Mike—I mean Mr. Marchwood—is to drive——”

“Maribel Ritchie! ‘Mike’! You are coming on!”

“I don’t call him that,” Maribel said hastily. “I’ve caught it from you. It’s only because he isn’t here.”

“Most deceitful. So Jen has her eye on you! I’m to sit behind and talk to her, I suppose.”

“That’s the idea,” Maribel agreed. “She says she’s so tired that she’s sure she’ll go to sleep on the way home.”

“That was to comfort Mike! Lady Marchwood knows what she’s about. Stormy Waves, are you going to be nice to that boy?”

“He’s no more a boy than Alan Kennedy! Except perhaps in ‘Christchurch Bells.’ He was rather an infant then,” and Maribel laughed. “Rose, don’t be absurd! I’ve known him for three days, and father and mother haven’t even heard of him.”

“Father and mother aren’t on in this act. After the way you kept him to yourself to-day——”

“I didn’t! I couldn’t get rid of him. You were awfully mean to disappear like that.”

Rosalind laughed. “I’d expect you to do the same for me. My dear little one, there’s no doubt what Scout Mike wants. What are you going to do about it?”

“Nothing. Wait and see if he forgets all this as soon as we’re out of sight.”

“He won’t. Don’t worry!”

“I shall wait. I may never see him again.”

“You’ll see him again all right!” Rosalind buckled her belt. “Hope you’ll have a jolly drive home! He’ll be late back at camp. Jen Marchwood’s an absolute brick to look after you so well. She must be nearly dead.”

Jen was, indeed, very tired. She smiled wearily at Rosalind as they took the back seat. “Do you want to talk? I haven’t an idea in my head except the tune of the Helston Furry.”

“I’m fagged out,” Rosalind admitted. “But it has been a topping day.”

“Then let’s go to sleep in the corners!” Jen said contentedly.

When the car had left Rosalind at the station and begun the homeward journey, Jen went to sleep in earnest. She woke and yawned as they drew up at the Manor.

“Quite a jolly little nap! Thanks for the drive, Mike. Most refreshing! I love an evening run. Now you’d better fetch your bike and skip off to camp, my lad! And never again tell me you can’t dance, for I’ve seen you. I shall expect you at my Whit-Monday revels every year. Stormy Waves, I shall ask you too, because you taught him so nicely. Good-night, dear!” There was meaning in the kiss with which she left Maribel at her bedroom door.

When the dancing was over, Cecily had gone back to the Rectory with Betty McLean. She was so quiet that Betty feared she might be overtired and suggested supper in bed.

“I’m not too tired, thank you,” and Cecily slipped away by herself into the garden.

A few minutes later, nerved to a great effort, she sought Betty. “Miss Betty, there’s something I want to say to Lady Joy. We’re starting so early that I can’t leave it till the morning. But I can’t go home without saying it. May I run up to the Hall now? She won’t be having her dinner yet. It won’t take very long. Please let me go!”

Betty looked at her curiously. A nervous nature herself, she recognised the strained look in the girl’s face and knew she was strung up to a high pitch. If denied and sent to bed, she would not rest.

“Is it important, Cecily? Lady Marchwood won’t be expecting any one to-night.”

“I’ll apologise. I must ask her something, Miss Betty. Truly I must.”

“Don’t be long, then. Go quickly,” said Betty, and hoped anxiously she had been wise.

Cecily raced through the lanes; running chiefly from her own thoughts. She knew she was going to do an unheard-of thing. Rosalind would have said: “Cecil it’s not *done!*” She quailed at the words, hearing them as plainly as if they had been spoken. But she knew she could not bear to go away till she had seen “Lady Joy” once more.

The great idea had come to her during the dancing, as she watched Margia Lane fiddling on the green and heard Joy say how grateful they were for Maribel’s help, as they had no other violinist to relieve Margia.

All through the revels the thought had haunted her. She had tried to speak during her dance with Joy, but the processional had been short and the following dance had been harassing, with its changes of hands and the “cast” she could not remember at first. Joy had gone home soon afterwards, and Cecily had watched her with a sinking heart. Why had her courage failed her?

The ordeal of ringing at the door of the Hall and asking for Lady Marchwood was spared her, for Joy and Maidlin were sitting on the terrace before the house.

Cecily felt very small, very shy, very childish, as she walked up the drive. She was self-conscious enough to feel she must look absurdly out of place alone there.

Then Maidlin sprang up from her cushion on the stone balustrade and came down the steps and across the lawn. Cecily’s frightened heart cried out in gratitude; the ordeal was lightened at once.

“She understands. She’s jolly nice. She’ll be a ripping guardian!” she said to herself.

“Could I speak to Lady Joy?” Cecily looked shyly at Maidlin. “I know it’s mean to bother her, but we’re going so early to-morrow. She’d gone home before I had a chance; I mean—I was frightened——” she stumbled, but tried honestly to be truthful.

“You need never be frightened of Joy. Come and tell her; she wants to hear. I’m going away to talk to Mary-Dorothy. Did you like her class yesterday?”

“It was topping! I shall go always when I live here. She’ll have me, won’t she?”

“I’m quite sure she will. Now you tell Joy all about it. Nobody’s shy with Joy!” Maidlin gave Cecily a friendly nod and went into the house.

Joy was coming down the steps to meet them. “Come and sit over here, Cecilytom,” and she led the way to an old stone seat under a pink chestnut tree.

Joy took one corner and thrust a cushion at her back.

“Make yourself comfy! No one can hear us here. Now, kid, what’s the matter?”

Cecily stood before her, gratitude shining in her eyes for this understanding greeting.

“Lady Joy!” she burst out. “I know it’s awful of me, but I had to come. Could you *possibly* take somebody else as well as me at the Music School?”

Joy raised her eyebrows and stared at her. Cecily grew scarlet, but hurried on bravely.

“I daren’t ask you to have her instead of me, because it wouldn’t be fair, when you’ve been so ripping as to ask me. But there’s another bedroom, and Miss Betty says it’s waiting for the next girl you find. And—and I know somebody!” she said breathlessly. “Somebody who *ought* to be helped! Is it too dreadful of me to come and tell you?”

Joy sat up. “No, it’s very nice of you. It shows you trust me. Who is your friend? She doesn’t know you were going to suggest it, I suppose?”

“Oh, no! I only thought of it this afternoon.”

Joy nodded. “Is it somebody at your school?”

“No, it’s Sandy,” Cecily explained, breathless with eagerness. “She plays rippingly already. But she had to give up before she took her final exam, and live in the country because of her mother. Then her mother died; but Sandy didn’t begin again. She’s being wasted, Lady Joy. Her music’s tophole!”

Joy’s interest deepened. “Sandy? The friend who plays to you and lets you find notes on her fiddle? I have the impression that she lives in a pool among rhododendrons and sandhills; a sort of Undine!”

“Not *in* the pool! She plays to me by the pool. She lives in a bungalow on the sandhills.”

“A bungalow? Mike!” said Joy. “Well now, Cecily, tell me more about your friend. Do you suppose she’d come, if I asked her?”

“She’s frightfully keen on music,” Cecily said hopefully. “She’s always been sorry she didn’t take her exams. But she’s quite old, you know.”

“Oh! I wonder if she’d have the grit to begin studying again? I’d have to see her,” Joy was thinking aloud. “See now, Cecilytom! Don’t breath a word of this to anybody till I give you leave, not even to Maribel. It wouldn’t be fair to Miss Sandy.”

“She’s Mrs.,” Cecily explained. “Didn’t I tell you?”

“I’ve only heard of her as ‘Cecilytom’s friend, Sandy of the Sandhills.’ But if she’s married, how could she come here?” Joy asked, puzzled.

“He’s dead; her husband. She doesn’t talk about him; he died when they’d only been married a year.”

“Oh!” said Joy, her voice sharp with sudden pain.

Cecily looked at her in dismay. She did not know Lady Joy’s story very well, but she realised it must be something like Sandy’s. Lady Joy, too, must have had a husband and lost him. Cecily looked away quickly, and stared at the house, wondering what to say.

“Has your ‘Mrs. Sandy’ any children?” asked Joy, after a pause.

Cecily turned quickly. “No, she hasn’t anybody. *He* died, and then her mother died, and she had no one left.”

“I shall go to see her,” said Joy. “I can’t promise anything till I’ve been. I’ll say I want to thank her for her kindness to you.”

“You’ll need to write and tell her you’re coming,” Cecily explained. “She’s out giving lessons every day.”

“I’ll ask her to fix a time. Then I’ll go and stay the night with Joan. I’ll let you know what comes of my visit. Till then, don’t tell anybody, Cecily.”

“I won’t,” Cecily promised. “You don’t mind, Lady Joy? You aren’t mad with me?”

“I feel it’s jolly of you to be so sure of me that you weren’t too shy to ask,” said Joy.

Cecily flushed. “I nearly was too frightened.”

Joy smiled. “You were very brave. But then you’re very fond of ‘Sandy.’ It isn’t so hard to be brave when you care for somebody, is it?”

Cecily’s thoughts flew to the past. “You can do it,” she said. “It’s difficult, but you can do it, if you care enough.”

Joy’s mind was on her own problem. The thought of her twins had nerved her to a great effort. “That’s right,” she agreed. “I hope it won’t be difficult to come to me next time, Cecilytom.”

“It will be easy!” Cecily cried. “You understand so well!”

Joy rose. Understanding, she knew, was not her strong point, but she was learning that a fellow-feeling could help towards understanding sympathy.

“I’ll do what I can about your Mrs. Sandy, Cecil. Now run home to supper. I’m sure you’re tired out.”

“It’s been a gorgeous day!” Cecily sighed happily. “And this just makes a perfect finish to it!”

CHAPTER XXI

A SURPRISE FOR SANDY

Joan Raymond slept at the Manor that night, and set out early next morning in her little car, with Maribel and Cecily close behind. They called remarks now and then, and travelled together as far as the lane that led to Rayley Park. Then Joan left the main road, and Maribel drove on towards the blue line of the Downs, crowned by Chanctonbury's dark clump.

She left Cecily at Sarah's gate, with orders to go to school in the afternoon, and to explain her absence to the headmistress.

As Cecily, tuned up to a high pitch of excitement, and carrying shoes and her pipe, in case it should be wanted, entered the village hut on Wednesday evening, her friend Elsie met her, full of excitement also.

"Cess, the weirdest thing! There's somebody with Mrs. Raymond, and she's the very image of her! Who is it? You know them all now, lucky bouncer!"

Cecily's face lit up. "That's Lady Marchwood. She's Mrs. Raymond's cousin."

"It isn't Lady Marchwood! We saw her before. She had yellow hair, bobbed and curly. This one's hair is as red as Mrs. Raymond's. She's her twin sister; she must be."

"It's Lady Joy; the other Lady Marchwood, the one who lost her husband." Cecily ran to the hall. "Oh, Lady Joy, what fun to see you again!"

The rest of the class had been forced to realise the fact that Cecily Brown had been accepted on terms of friendship by their teacher and her home circle. They were staring already; they merely stared a little harder as Cecily dashed up, without any shyness, to the "twin-sister" of Mrs. Raymond, who, however, wore a grey and black silk frock, while their teacher wore bright blue.

Joy was standing by the piano. She smiled at Cecily's eager greeting. "I've come to see the class. What's first, Joan? I'll carry on till your pianist comes."

She broke into the tune of "Galopede," and the class recognised the difference in the music and sprang to attention.

"Cecilytom," Joy whispered, "I'm going to see your friend Mrs. Sandy to-morrow."

Cecily's face shone. "You are kind! She knows about you. She says you—all of you at the Abbey—must be the kindest, happiest people in the

world.”

Joy laughed. “I want you to whistle for ‘Rufty Tufty.’ Joan’s going to ask you.”

She listened with interest to Cecily’s piping, and at the end said, “Yes, that’s very good. You have music and rhythm in you. We’ll help you to bring them out.”

Joan dropped a hint to one of the older women, and a whisper ran round that this Lady Marchwood had twins. One woman ventured to ask a question, and Joy’s face lit up as she answered. There was a crowd round her in a moment, and she had to tell so much about Elizabeth Joy and Margaret Joan that Joan Raymond declared her class was being ruined.

“You and your twins! I’m here to teach country-dancing! Nobody wants to dance to-night!”

“I expect Lady Joy’s letter has upset Sandy,” Cecily said to herself. “She’ll be scared, and pleased, and excited all at once. I do hope they like one another! I don’t see how they can help it.”

Sandy had indeed lived in a whirl of preparation ever since the letter arrived. Joy’s statement that she would be visiting her cousin at Rayley Park, and would like to know when she might call and thank Mrs. Alexander for her kindness to Cecily Brown, had not aroused Sandy’s suspicions, but it had caused her much surprise and had given her great pleasure.

“How I’ll love to see her, after all Cecil’s stories!” she said to herself.

She was waiting at the gate as Joy’s car ploughed its way up the sandy lane from the high road.

Joy, looking for the “quite old” friend of Cecily’s, saw a slim girl of her own age but not of her height, with waving chestnut hair parted and drawn back loosely from her face and rolled up behind. She wore a frock of lavender-blue linen which matched the lupins in the little garden. Other lupins of pink and yellow and blue made banks of colour inside the fence.

“How kind of you to come! But what’s the matter?” cried Sandy. “Am I as funny as all that?”—for her guest, after one startled look at her, had gone off into a peal of laughter.

Joy pulled herself up. “Mrs. Alexander, I’m fearfully rude. I apologise! But Cecily told me you were *quite* old, *much* older than she is! You’ll understand it was a shock to find you just a girl.”

Sandy laughed. “But I am much older than Cecil; twelve years. That’s a lot to fifteen, Lady Marchwood. Will you come in? There’s nobody about; the car will be all right. Didn’t you ask Mrs. Raymond about me? I’ve met her. You’re very like her.”

“I know you have played for her. But I didn’t ask her about you, as I was coming to see you myself. I particularly didn’t want to talk about you to

Joan, and I wouldn't let her come with me this morning, I want to talk over an idea with you, and to have it settled before anybody hears about it."

Joy, with Michael Marchwood in her mind, looked curiously about the bungalow, noting the dainty furnishing and the good choice of colours. "What a pretty room, Mrs. Alexander!"

"It's restful, I think. Is it something about Cecily you want to discuss?" Sandy asked. "Won't you sit down? I do apologise for asking you to come in the morning, but I have lessons to give in the afternoon and evening, and you said any time would do."

"It suited me very well. Won't you let me see your pool, Mrs. Alexander? I've heard so much about it that I've had a feeling you lived in a pool on the sandhills. This pretty little house is quite a surprise."

Sandy laughed. "I sleep out in a hammock, but not down by the pool. I bathe there most mornings, though. I've been wondering if I could have Cecil to stay with me in her holidays. I'd enjoy having company, and I think she'd like it. She won't begin with you till September, will she? You are giving her a wonderful chance, Lady Marchwood; but indeed, she's worth it. She'll do you credit. I've been longing to teach her."

"I know. You've been more than kind. You have really helped Cecily by giving her music. Her start came from you and Joan," said Joy. "Can't we go to the pool, Mrs. Sandy?"

Sandy led the way down the sandy paths through the heather and bracken, to the rhododendron woods and the silver birches. Joy followed, looking about her in much interest.

The pool was dark and still as ever, reflecting the circling pine-trees. Sandy opened the boat-house door and they went in and stood on the platform.

"This is what I've heard about!" Joy exclaimed. "Yes, it is beautiful. I don't wonder Cecily finds it soothing. Any one would feel it so."

Sandy drew up the boat, and Joy stepped in eagerly. They drifted towards the pines, Sandy dipping an oar almost without a ripple.

"And you bathe and work and read here? I'm sure you often play to these trees," Joy suggested.

"They're real friends. I usually bring my meals here. It's easy for one. Will you have coffee here or in the house, Lady Marchwood? I didn't know which you'd prefer. There's a flask in the boat-house; or it's ready at home, if you don't care for picnics."

"Oh, you shouldn't have troubled! But how very nice of you! I'd much rather have a picnic," Joy cried.

Sandy paddled to the platform and reached out for a basket, which stood waiting at the edge. She unpacked it, placing cups on the floor.

"It makes a good table. Just the right height, and nice and steady," she said, producing cakes and biscuits and pouring from the flask.

"You've done this before," said Joy. "How very comfy! A large steady table, and yet we sit and sway gently in the boat! I am enjoying this!"

"I wish you could have come for tea. But I can't let my children down."

"I have to go back to mine. I don't care to be away for more than one night."

"Cecil told me about the sand-pit, and the babies at the Manor, and your beautiful twins," said Sandy.

"The sand-pit's a great joy. They never tire of being thoroughly grubby. That was delicious! It was very kind of you to think of it. There's one other thing I want. Don't you know what that is?"

Sandy coloured. "You mustn't believe all that Cecil says. Remember her 'quite old'! She has no standard, so she can't judge."

"I shan't let her forget. But I suppose we're all old to Cecily! Won't you play to me, Mrs. Sandy?"

"My music's going downhill," Sandy said hurriedly. "At one time I thought I really could play, and I was studying at the Academy. But I had to leave town, and I've had no help since. I don't think you should ask me, Lady Marchwood. I'm not shy or frightened, but I may disappoint you and spoil your pleasant morning. You should have really good music to fit all this!"

"I won't be critical. I would like some music!" Joy pleaded.

Sandy said no more, but stepped out on to the platform and brought her violin from a corner.

Joy sat trailing her fingers in the water, looking down into the depths, across at the tall bare pines, through the gap to Chanctonbury's blue height. "Thank you!" she said at last. "Cecily didn't exaggerate this time. She merely said your music was tophole! I've enjoyed that, Mrs. Sandy. Now won't you come and sit in the boat and hear my business?"

Sandy, looking puzzled, joined her in the boat.

Joy leaned forward. "Mrs. Sandy, couldn't you come with Cecily to my Music School?"

Sandy started, and stared at her incredulously. "Lady Marchwood! I? But—but why?"

"Because you love music, as I do. I won't go so far as Cecily, and say you're being wasted here. If you're teaching music to numbers of children we mustn't call it waste. But you could come back and teach better after a year or two's study, when you had taken your diploma. Do think of it! It would be such a joy to me; and to Cecily, to have your company."

Sandy was staring at her wildly. “But—but I couldn’t afford it, Lady Marchwood! It has been my dream that some day I might finish my training, and be nearer town, so that I could hear good music occasionally. But I can’t manage it yet.”

“It wouldn’t cost you anything,” Joy said quietly. “You’d let your house, of course. That would give you what you’d need for clothes and current expenses. You’d live in our old Rectory, and your training would be my affair. You’d share Cecily’s music-master, and there would be all the concerts you wished.”

“But I couldn’t—you couldn’t”—Sandy stumbled over the words. “Why should you do that for me?”

“Because I want to. Don’t deny me a real pleasure?” Joy pleaded. “There’s just the same reason as there is for my asking Cecily. You love music, and you want to study. My little school has room for one more; there’s an empty place waiting for you. It’s meant for girls who want to give their lives to music. Mrs. Sandy, I thought of my school just a few weeks after I lost my husband and my twins were born, and it was the greatest joy to think and plan for it. It helped me at a very bad time. I’ve had joy out of it ever since, but never yet as much as I shall have if you and Cecily come. Don’t disappoint me!”

“You make it impossible. I can only try to show how I thank you. I can’t put it into words.” Sandy turned to gaze into the pine-wood, and Joy hung over the side of the boat and did not watch her.

Presently Joy, with a great effort, said: “There’s more reason for you to come than for Cecily. I want you much more than I want her. Mrs. Sandy, you’ve known the same trouble that I’ve had, and you’re no older than I am. My dear, I’m so sorry; I’ve felt as if I were the only girl in the world to whom it had happened, but in finding you I’ve realised there are others. If I can help one of them even a little to have a happy time again, let me do it!”

“I felt like that too, as if nobody else could ever understand,” Sandy whispered.

“And you were left, without the one thing that made life possible for me. When I think of my little girls and what they mean to me, and of what life would be without them, I want to do everything I can for other people, out of gratitude. And especially for you, because you haven’t any twins. You must come and see mine. You won’t deny me, I’m sure.”

Sandy, with quivering lips, held out her hand. “I’m so glad you have your twins. I’ve been so lonely. But if you give me friends, the friendly kindly circle Cecil talks about, that will be over.”

Joy grasped her hand. “My dear, come to us as soon as you can. We’ll welcome you.”

“Is it true?” Sandy’s voice was incredulous. “Shall I see all the people Cecil has told me about, and your village green, and the Abbey?”

“Our ruins, and woods, and dancers, as Maribel Ritchie puts it! Then you’ll come? I *am* glad!” Joy exclaimed. “Now about your house! Will you let me see the whole of it? For I think I can let it for you. You must tell me what price you’d want.”

Sandy looked at her, speechless and wide-eyed.

Joy laughed. “It sounds as if I’d been sure you would come, but that’s not so. I was very much afraid you’d make objections and disappoint me and Cecily. I haven’t let the house without consulting you! But I know some people who want a bungalow in this part of the world, and yours is so very pretty that I’m sure they would fall in love with it. They are cousins of my husband’s, a widow and her daughter. Her son has a job which will take him to Brighton for some time. He could come to them here on his motor-cycle.”

“Oh, very easily! Will you come and see the house?” Sandy cried. “Do they keep a car? It’s rather out of the world.”

“They wouldn’t mind that. Mrs. Marchwood is an invalid and would want to lie out in the garden. Her daughter is keen on gardening and painting. If they could find a woman to work for them——”

“I could help them in that. And there’s a little shop, only five minutes’ walk through the woods, where you can buy most things and ’phone to the village for everything else,” Sandy said eagerly.

“Couldn’t be better! Let’s go and see the house!”

“Did Cecil ask you to ask me?” Sandy asked shyly.

Joy looked at her. “Yes! It doesn’t make any difference, does it? I didn’t decide until I’d seen you. I told her I couldn’t promise. As soon as I saw you I knew I must persuade you to come.”

“That’s what makes it all right,” Sandy spoke more shyly still. “If you’d written, and I’d found that she had asked you to have me, I couldn’t have accepted. But you have made me feel you really mean it. It was a beautiful thought of Cecil’s.”

“It needed a great deal of courage. If you’d hesitated, I’d have told you how much it cost the child,” and Joy told of Cecily’s late visit after the Monday revels. “She realised she was doing an unusual thing, and she apologised. She felt the difficulty of it, but she went through with it for your sake. It was brave as well as thoughtful. It was almost heroic!”

“Yes,” Sandy said, her eyes shining.

CHAPTER XXII

SANDY HELPS

“Oh, please, can I see Maribel?” On Saturday evening Cecily stood anxiously on her guardian’s doorstep.

Maribel appeared in uniform. “Cecily, what’s the matter? I’ve just been out with the Guides.”

“Oh, Bel, such fun! I had to come and tell you. Sandy’s going to the Music School! Isn’t it gorgeous?”

“Mrs. Alexander, from the sandhills?” Maribel cried. “But how has that happened, Cecily?”

“Lady Marchwood went to see her. She asked her, and Sandy said ‘yes,’ and Lady Joy left a note for me at the cottage, to say it wasn’t a secret any longer.”

“You had known then?” Maribel interrupted. “When did you and Lady Marchwood arrange it?”

“After the dancing on Monday. She told me not to tell till she’d seen Sandy. Sandy wrote and asked me to go and see her this morning. She’s so pleased, Maribel! She nearly cried.”

“What a funny idea! Does she want to go to school again? What put it into Lady Marchwood’s head?”

“Me,” Cecily said simply. “I mean, I did, Bel.”

“You *asked* her to have Mrs. Alexander?”

“Yes. Sandy hugged me, all the time she was saying I shouldn’t have done it. She knows how awful I must have felt. I did, too! But Lady Joy understood; she helped me out. She was a dear about it, Bel.”

“Well, you have cheek!” Maribel looked at her helplessly. “Fancy asking!”

“I could ask for somebody else. It wasn’t for myself,” Cecily cried. “Bel, will you take Sandy when we go for the first Camp Fire meeting, at midsummer? Lady Joy’s asked her to go. Look, it’s in the letter!”

Maribel sat down and read the letter. “All right. I’ll write to Mrs. Sandy. We’ll call for her. You know Rosalind can’t manage it this time?”

“Oh, what a shame!” Cecily’s face fell.

“They have visitors. Rose sends her love to everybody and hopes we’ll have a topping time.”

A motor-cycle drew up before the gate. Cecily, glancing out of the window, cried: “It’s the jolly Scout man! Did you know he was coming,

Bel?"

Maribel turned to the window, her eyes incredulous. "It's not! But it is! No, I had no idea——"

"Hadn't you asked him to come and see you?"

"Of course I didn't ask him!"

"Well, you needn't be so cross! I only asked," Cecily said, in an injured tone.

Maribel pulled herself up quickly. "Sorry, kid. I wasn't cross, only surprised."

The little maid was showing Michael Marchwood into the room. He gave a quick salute to the uniform. "Miss Ritchie, I've come to thank you."

Maribel laughed. "That's nice of you, but what is it for? I haven't an idea."

"For finding us a bungalow. Joy tells me of a beauty which will just suit, so I wanted to thank you at once."

"It would be much more to the purpose to thank Lady Marchwood. I've had nothing to do with it."

"Oh, but I'd asked you to find us a house," Mike argued. "I had to tell you."

"I'm glad you've found one, but I know nothing about it," Maribel retorted. "Where is the bungalow?"

Cecily's eyes were sparkling. "He'd better thank *me!*" she cried. "It's Sandy's bungalow! They're going to take it while she goes to school."

Maribel's face lit up. "What a topping idea! Mr. Marchwood, it's a lovely little house. Your mother is sure to like it."

"I haven't seen it, but she likes the idea of it. Is it near here? I've been hoping you'd run over in your car and call on them," he explained. "They won't know a soul. Would you? Is it near enough for that?"

"Oh, it's quite easy! I'll go, of course; and perhaps they'll come to see us. I'll tell mother you're here. She'll like to meet you. Cecily, what bus are you going home by? Don't be too late!"

Cecily took the hint. "I'd better go. Mr. Marchwood, I made Lady Joy go to see Mrs. Alexander, and that's how she found your bungalow."

Mike laughed. "Then we all thank you very much."

"Are you coming to the Abbey for the Midsummer dancing? Maribel's going to take me and Sandy, so you could talk to her about the house."

"It's worth thinking of," said Mike. "We could have a business talk between the dances."

Maribel had left the room. She returned now to say, with heightened colour caused by her mother's understanding look, "Won't you come and see mother, Mr. Marchwood? If you'll talk to her while I change, I'll see

about supper. Mother hopes you can stay. Cecily dear, you'd better run for that bus."

Cecily disappeared. "How jolly for Bel to see him again! He's such fun," she said to herself. "She's sure to see a lot of him, if his mother comes to Sandy's house."

"Of all the wild excuses!" Maribel said to herself, as she changed her uniform. "He knew perfectly well I had nothing to do with that bungalow! But, of course, he did want to ask us to call on his people! And it's jolly for mother and father to meet him; I hated the feeling that they didn't know him, and so did they. On the whole, I'm glad he made an excuse to come so soon—even though it was a very thin excuse! They seem to be getting on very well; he's making father laugh, and I think mother likes him. I'll retire to the kitchen and see about a salad!"

Scout Mike wanted to see the bungalow, but shyness kept him from intruding on the owner, he explained. It would be pleasanter for every one if Cecily Brown, as the natural go-between, could take him to see Mrs. "Sandy." If Miss Ritchie could spare an afternoon from her Guides and would lend him her little car, perhaps he could run over with Cecily one Saturday. And of course, as Cecily's guardian, Miss Ritchie would come too.

"Another slim excuse," Maribel retorted. "Don't you go out with the Scouts on Saturdays?"

"Not every week. Are you as devoted to your Guides as all that?"

"Wednesday is Guide night. To-day was an extra outing," Maribel explained.

"Same here! Besides, there's Tommy. It's good for him to do some work sometimes. What about next Saturday?"

Maribel looked at her mother.

"I should go. You'd enjoy a picnic on the hills," Mrs. Ritchie said promptly.

Michael beamed at the prospect of such a delightful mother-in-law. "Can you bag Cecily Brown for that day, Miss Ritchie?"

"I'll write to Cecily. I'll come, then," Maribel agreed.

Mike Marchwood looked thoroughly well pleased with life as he mounted his cycle and hooted away. And Mr. and Mrs. Ritchie looked at one another, for Maribel, putting away her uniform, was singing, "Where have you been all the day, My Boy Billy?"

The Saturday afternoon call on Sandy was a complete success. One glance at the couple in the front seat of the car was enough for her. When the inspection of the bungalow was over, she handed the keys of the gate and boat-house to Maribel.

“You’d like to show Mr. Marchwood the pool. Cecil’s coming with me; I have to go to the shop. We’ll have tea ready in an hour.”

“I want to go to the pool, too,” Cecily protested.

“You’ll come with me,” Sandy said firmly. “I want you to carry a parcel.”

“Why wouldn’t you let me go with them?” Cecily demanded, as she went down the sandy track.

“Because we mustn’t spoil their fun. This is their time, and they must be allowed to be alone together. Cecil, my child, that nice lad is going to marry your prettiest guardian, as soon as she’ll let him.”

Cecily stood and stared at her. “Mr. Marchwood marry Bel? But they aren’t engaged!”

“And how are they going to be engaged if you insist on going about with them?”

“Oh! You mean—he’s going to ask her?”

“He wants to. I don’t say he’ll manage it to-day. If she isn’t ready, she won’t let him. But he’ll ask her soon. You must help them.”

“How can I help? I’d do anything for Bel!”

“Do just what you’re doing now. Go out with them, and then lose yourself, or go to see the view, or pick flowers; leave them alone for a time. They’ll love you for ever; he will, anyway. Don’t be surprised if you’re invited to come here again, or to go out on the Downs. Soon they won’t want you; they’ll go off alone. But just now it’s easier for him to ask her if he asks you too; and it’s much easier for her to agree to go. They’ll make an excuse of taking you out.”

Cecily chuckled. “I shall score! Sandy, I am glad! I thought Maribel looked pleased about something when we started to-day.”

“We’ll set tea in the garden for them,” said Sandy.

“Mrs. Sandy, won’t you play for us down by the water?” Maribel asked, after tea.

“I will, very gladly.” Sandy carried her fiddle to the shore of the dark pool.

As she played, she smiled at Cecily, lying in the punt. For the other two had wandered along a path among the silver birches and were out of sight behind a clump of rhododendrons. Sandy shook her head solemnly at Cecily and played on, till they reappeared presently, farther up the pool.

“It sounded jolly from over there, Mrs. Sandy,” said Scout Mike.

“Yes, the music is so pretty coming across the water,” Maribel added.

“Do you know the Downs, Mr. Marchwood?” Sandy asked. “Couldn’t you take Cecil up to Chanctonbury one Saturday? It’s some time since she went.”

“That’s an idea?” Mike fell, or rather leapt, into the trap joyfully. “We might do it next week. You’d come too, wouldn’t you?” he looked at Maribel.

“You ought to give some time to those scouts,” she protested.

“Tommy’s carrying on; they’re all right. Couldn’t you come up to the Ring too, Mrs. Sandy? Four makes a jolly party,” he suggested innocently.

“I’d enjoy it,” Sandy was equally innocent. “I haven’t had a picnic for ages. It will be delightful!”

“And we’ll come home a different way, Cecily Brown,” she said, as they went on ahead to the house.

“Righto! I see the idea!” Cecily agreed.

The surroundings of Sandy’s bungalow filled Mike with delight, perhaps because of the opportunities offered by the narrow paths among the heather and the quiet corners among the rhododendrons. He was certain his mother would enjoy the gardens and the sight of the long line of Downs constantly before her, and he knew his sister would want to spend all her time sketching and gardening.

“You will come to see them, won’t you?” he begged of Maribel. “And your mother? Couldn’t she come in the car?”

“We’ll try to come,” Maribel promised. “They’ll be lonely unless people come to see them.”

“I hope you’ll come some Saturdays. I shall be here for week-ends,” Mike added.

“I shall come on—Thursdays!” said Maribel.

CHAPTER XXIII

MARIBEL'S PARTNER

During the weeks between Whitsun and Midsummer, Scout Mike made the most of his opportunities. By the time Maribel drove again to the Abbey, with Sandy and Cecily, the friendship was rooted firmly.

They drove to the Manor through fields waist-high with sorrel and big white daisies, while underneath were buttercups and a wonderful blue carpet of speedwell.

Jen welcomed them at the door of the sun parlour.

"We'll have tea here, and then Cecilytom shall go to the Music School, and Joy wants Mrs. Sandy at the Hall. I'm so pleased to see you!" she greeted Sandy warmly.

"I feel I know you all, from Cecil's stories." Sandy's eyes took in this new Lady Marchwood with enjoyment.

"You shall see my baby boys, and then Joy will show you her little girls. Stormy Waves, I've invited a partner for you for to-morrow night."

Maribel coloured, but met Jen's eyes bravely, a twinkle in her own. "Mike told me you'd asked him."

"Bel dear, I am so glad," and Jen kissed her. "We want you in the family."

"I'm not one of the family yet. But perhaps, when I'm twenty-one——"

"Twenty-one! You baby!" said Lady Twenty-four. "And when will that be?"

"In September. As for twenty-one, you must have been married at twenty-one yourself," Maribel added.

"But I'd lost all my family. I wanted to start a new one, in my own home. You're going to help Maidlin with her meeting to-morrow, aren't you? Her friend Rosamund is coming home from Switzerland, and Maidlin wants the Camp Fire to be a real thing before Ros comes. It's such a joke about this first meeting!"

"How's that?" Maribel asked, coming to the table to fetch her cup and Sandy's.

"At first Maidie said no one must be present but you and the girls. Any one else would make her too shy. Then she said Mary-Dorothy might sit in a corner and watch, as the girls are just as much hers as Maidie's, since they go to Mary's Sunday class. Then Maidlin realised she couldn't do without Joy, so Joy is to go with Mary. So then I wept and said I was the only one

left out, and that was too much for poor Maidie. She admitted she'd been thinking that herself; so I'm to be allowed to watch too. Mrs. Sandy, I'm afraid she won't extend the invitation to you; but there's always the Abbey!"

Sandy saw the Abbey ruins that same evening, however. She met Maidlin and Mary Devine at the Hall, and they all went into the Abbey with Jen and wandered in the cloisters and the refectory.

Next morning Joy took Sandy to the Rectory to meet Betty McLean, and she went there again in the afternoon, when the Camp Fire meeting was in progress.

The Abbey and the Hall were set in a wall of beech-woods. Joy and Jen and Mary went out by a little gate, near the sand-pit where the twins were working hard and came to a glade, with grey stems all around. Jen spread a rug and they sat under a giant beech.

A dozen schoolgirls, in tunics or jumpers, were sitting in a circle round a small pile of wood. The fire had been built carefully under Maribel's directions during the morning. Cecily was there, with Alice and Olga from the Music School; the others were all from the village or neighbouring farms. No one was even whispering; the expectant silence was electric.

Down a path came Maribel, in yellow gown and beads, headband and plaited hair. Joy murmured: "Oh, pretty kid! And how it suits the woods! No wonder Mike calls her princess!"

Maribel, holding a lighted torch, addressed the girls.

"Do you desire to be Camp Fire Girls?"

"Oh, rather! Yes, please, miss!" cried several.

Cecily frowned at them. "We do desire it, Stormy Waves."

"Will you keep the Law of the Fire?"

"We will!" There was a fervent chorus.

"Have you found a Guardian for your Camp Fire?"

"We wish Maidlin di Ravarati to be our Guardian."

"Then ask her to light your fire."

Cecily and Olga sprang up. "Guardian, come to our Camp Fire!" they cried.

The circle took up the call. "Miss Maidlin, come and light our fire!"

Maidlin, shy but eager, came out from among the trees. She wore her gown, undecorated as yet, except for the fringe on the sleeves and at the hem; but she had woven a headband of sparkling golden beads, with notes of music and dark figures of birds upon it, and her very long black hair hung down in two thick plaits. She looked quite enough of a "princess" to move her girls to admiration and devoted loyalty.

"Maidlin, will you be a guardian to these Camp Fire Girls?" asked Maribel.

“With all my heart, Stormy Waves.”

“Then light their first fire—

“I hand the torch to you!

Oh, hold it firm and true!

That every younger Camp Fire Girl

May look for light to you!”

Maidlin thrust the torch in among the twigs. They crackled and blazed, and Maribel fed the fire with small pieces of wood.

Maidlin stood and made the sign of Fire, and the girls responded shyly.

“We are Camp Waditaka, the Adventurous Camp, the Camp of Brave People,” she said. “I am no longer Maidlin di Ravarati, but Nawadaha, the Singer. Has any girl chosen her new name?”

“Oh, please, Nawadaha!” Cecily stepped forward. “I am Wopida, Gratitude. People have been so awfully jolly to me,” she explained, breathless with embarrassment. “I couldn’t choose any other name. I do hope I’ll always show how grateful I am.”

Maribel had looked up, surprised and touched.

“How topping, Cecil!” she said. “That’s lovely of you, kid.”

“‘Gratitude’—that’s a beautiful name,” said the new Guardian. “Anybody else?”

“Come on, you two!” Cecily turned to the other Music-Students. “You can’t be Ally and Olly here, you know!”

Olga declared herself to be Hakanaki, the Sunrise, and Alice, Sinago, the Grey Squirrel.

“We will take all these names with due ceremony,” said Maidlin. “Write your old names and burn them in the fire, and tell us your reasons for your choice. But first we will sing,” and she led them in “Burn, fire, burn.”

Maribel stood by the fire and recited the various Desires, and the girls repeated the Law in chorus.

“Nawadaha, as your Guardian, has the right to claim honours won in the past,” said Stormy Waves. “She claims these few; others she will work for and receive as she wins them, as you will all do.”

She hung a chain of coloured beads round Maidlin’s neck, and Camp Waditaka raised a cheer of approval as they saw the effect on the yellow gown.

“We thought I’d better have a few to start with,” said Maidlin, forgetting ceremonial language. “I hope we’ll all have heaps, and gowns and rings too, quite soon. But we’ll have to work jolly hard.”

Then, remembering, she went on with dignity:

“We will now take our names, and then our sister, Stormy Waves, will talk to us about the Law.”

Her eyes met Joy’s for the first time, full of entreaty. Joy touched Mary and Jen, and they slipped away through the wood.

“Maidie thinks the girls won’t speak out about their names while we’re there,” Joy explained. “She made me promise we’d go once they had started. They won’t all be as brave as ‘Gratitude!’”

“Nice kid!” said Jen. “Didn’t Maidie look lovely?”

“Talking of Cecily Brown!” Joy began. “I’ve been wondering if something couldn’t be done to find her people. I know the story,” as Jen exclaimed in surprise. “We don’t want anything to do with those French guardians. But she had lived in England as a small child. She must have lived with somebody. They might know who her people were. Can’t she tell us where she lived? We could make inquiries for her.”

“She was only a tiny kid when she was taken to France, Joy,” Jen urged. “She wouldn’t remember names. Maribel says she can only say that she lived with ‘Aunty’; she doesn’t know where.”

“Could we advertise? I’d like to know who her people were.”

“What would you advertise?”

“I don’t know,” Joy admitted. “But a detective agency might have ideas. We’ll question her and see if there isn’t anything she remembers that would give us a clue.”

Maidlin and Maribel came together out of the woods to have tea on the terrace at the Hall.

“Where’s the gown, Nawadaha?” cried Joy. “You looked topping, Madalena!”

“We changed in the wood,” Maidlin dropped into a chair, a far-away look in her eyes.

“We had a fine meeting,” said Maribel. “They’re a nice crowd, Miss Devine, and very keen. Cecily’s gone to tea with Ally and Olly, of course.”

“Stormy Waves does it all beautifully,” Maidlin drew a long breath. “I don’t feel I’m really here yet. We’ve been miles away. Bel, that was a lovely way to close the meeting!”

“Oh, come down to earth, Maidie!” Jen said laughing. “If Camp Waddy—what was it——?”

“Waditaka, Jenny-Wren.”

“If it makes you more dreamy than ever, Joy mustn’t let you have too much of it. You need something to keep you on the earth, not to lift you above it. You should have been a Guide, after all.”

Joy was speaking of her new idea to Maribel. Stormy Waves looked doubtful.

“I’m afraid there’s not much hope. It’s a very kind thought; but we questioned Cecily closely when we adopted her, and we could find out nothing from her. She didn’t know the name of the village, and she didn’t know ‘Aunty’s’ name. It may have been anywhere.”

“Was it near the sea?” asked Joy. “She could tell you that, surely.”

“There wasn’t any sea. She saw the sea for the first time when she was taken to the convent.”

“Inland, then,” said Joy. “Were there hills? Or woods?”

“She says there were trees, and flowers in the garden. There was a well,” Maribel added. “She was told to keep away from the well, for fear she’d fall in. And there was a cat.”

“It sounds like any one of a thousand villages,” said Jen. “Advertise for a village with a well, and trees, and a cat, Joy—do!”

“Scoffer!” said Joy. “I shall talk to Cecily. Perhaps she’ll be able to add something to the well and the trees and the cat.”

“In the meantime, come and dance on the village green. Isn’t it Midsummer Eve?” cried Jen.

Maribel’s partner appeared as the first dance started.

The motor-cycle raced up, and Mike, in scouting costume, sprang off beside her. “Am I late? Can’t we join on at the end?”

“No, you can’t do this. We’ll ask for something you know presently,” Maribel cried, as he went towards the line. “Mike, it’s ‘The Mary and Dorothy.’ You know you can’t set and turn single! Don’t give yourself away before the crowd!”

“Trust me! Come on! I can do it, honestly!”

Wide-eyed, Maribel began the dance with him. “I say! Your step’s improved! What has happened to you?”

“Been getting tips in town,” he grinned. “How’s that? All right?”

“Beautiful! Well, quite passable! I wouldn’t have believed you could do it so decently. Have you been going to classes?”

“Some,” he told her. “They teach you the easy things for shows like this. The chap I told you about told me where to go. But I haven’t any use for that other business—with little sticks and hankies, and no girls in the set. What d’you call it?”

“You awful specimen!” said Joy, hearing the words as she led Maidlin down the middle. “Call yourself a man, and speak like that about morris?”

“I tried it. Too much like work,” he called after her. “But this is a first-class game. I’m on for any amount of it. I’ve learnt stacks of dances,” he said proudly to Maribel. “I get ’em all mixed up, but if you give me the tip I’ll be all right. Once I get the hang of the tune and know which it is I’m not so bad.”

“And you never told me you were going to classes!”

“Thought I’d spring it on you to-night. ‘Hey Boys’?—Oh, I can do that! How many do we need?”

“You *can*’t! You’ll make a hash of it!”

“We’ll dance with Jenny-Wren and Kenneth. They won’t mind if I mess it up. Give me a wink now and then, Ken, old man!”

“You’d better not be in our set!” Maribel warned Jen. “He isn’t taking it seriously. I don’t believe he knows the first thing about it.”

“I shall, when we start. I’m quite smart at catching the idea,” Mike said happily.

Maribel sighed. “Anything may happen, but I can’t stop him. He’s beyond me. He thinks he can dance, you know. Isn’t it awful? What can we do about it?”

“I’ll duck him in the horse-pond if he messes up our set,” Kenneth suggested. “I didn’t know you were out with your scouts again, Mike?”

“’Nother lot. Tommy’s in charge. He’s in the dumps, so he’s staying in camp. His girl’s turned him down,” Mike said unconcernedly.

“You don’t seem at all upset for his sake!” Maribel remonstrated.

“Not a scrap. He’ll get another. Had two already. Always having ’em. All the girls like Tommy—for a month. Here goes!”

The efforts of the other three kept Michael fairly straight in the dance, and his pride at the end was immense.

“Jolly fine! I did that one all right, didn’t I?”

“Your ‘gipsy’ was wrong, and you bumped into me in the second figure, trying to cross in front of me, and you forgot about the siding, and anyway, your siding isn’t right,” Maribel retorted.

“Gosh!” said Mike limply. “Bad as that? And I thought you’d say ‘lovely,’ like you did before.”

“I never did! You aren’t a bit lovely!”

“Come and dance ‘Peascods’ with me, Mike, if Bel’s unkind to you,” said Jen.

As they sat drinking lemonade and resting, after several dances, Jen turned to Maribel.

“Has Maidlin told you our latest job? Your little friend, Mrs. Sandy, will be useful, if she’s as willing to help as she has been to-night.”

“I’m sure she’ll play any time you want her. Isn’t her music jolly to dance to? What’s the new job?”

“As if I hadn’t enough, with garden-parties and sales and prize-givings! We’re being asked to take dancers to other villages and show them what country-dancing is like. I yarn a bit, and then I pipe while Maidlin and the team dance. ‘Men’ in white frocks, women in blue; it looks pretty on a lawn.

We've been to one Women's Institute already, and we're asked to another. We've some really decent dancers in the team, and they love it."

"It sounds very jolly!" Maribel exclaimed. "But don't they all want classes afterwards?"

"That's the trouble; they do. I'm hoping Maidlin will take one lot, and Rosamund will help when she comes home. Mary really hasn't time for more than her class here, and I can't take on any more."

"You have plenty to do," Maribel agreed. "Is it as bad as it was at Whitsun?"

"Oh, my dear, worse! The flower-shows have begun now. I shall really have to have——" Jen stopped, but looked at Maribel with laughing eyes.

"I know. But you needn't do everything you're asked," Maribel urged.

"I do refuse, if I can't fit things in," Jen said, as they walked round the green together. "But I hate doing it. It disappoints folk, and I'd rather be fagged than do that. Do we strike you as a very busy crowd? Or as rather slack?"

"It's the busiest, jolliest place I've ever seen. Rose and I said so after our first visit. You always have heaps going on, and you all enjoy everything so thoroughly."

Jen gave a sigh of relief. "That's nice! I've often wondered how we'd strike an outsider. You're not that now, but you were, a little while ago. I couldn't *bear*," she explained with emphasis, "to sit down and enjoy all this and not feel I was working for it! Joy feels the same; her home and her children mean so much to her that she had to give out somehow to other people. And so she's looking after Cecily and Mrs. Sandy, and the girls over there. And she's a Guide Captain, though that's more for the sake of the twins than anything else. But it has been a tremendous effort to her."

"I'm sure of it. She's very plucky to face it at all."

"Mary Devine's another," Jen went on. "When she said it was 'being asked of her' that she should teach those girls on Sundays, she said exactly what the rest of us feel. We have so much; we must give something or explode. The thing asked of me, apart from keeping Kenneth happy and looking after the boys, seems to be to go to all these fêtes and shows, and help to make them a success. People say I help, so I suppose it must be true. It isn't much, but if it's all I can do——"

"Oh, but it's a great deal!" Maribel exclaimed. "Lots of the fêtes are for hospitals. You're a most useful member of society, as well as an ornamental one!"

Jen curtseyed. "I try to be both!" she said. "But sometimes, Bel, I do feel the things I do are so futile! There are such big things to be done in the

world, and here am I opening bazaars and giving away prizes and taking the chair at the Women's Institute! It seems so footling."

Maribel stared at her. "Aren't you well? Is it indigestion, or hay fever, or something?"

Jen broke into a laugh. "That's crushing! You mean I'm talking awful tosh?"

"Absolute rubbish. And you know it," Maribel's tone was firm. "You can't be well, if things are looking as crooked as all that."

Jen sighed. "And that's how she receives my shy little cravings for a larger career! But I'll admit I scold Mary-Dorothy when she tries it on."

"Does Miss Devine think her books are tosh?" Maribel demanded.

"Not when she's in her right mind. But she has spasms of wondering if it's worth while spending her life writing yarns for kiddies, and teaching country-dancing, or if she's shirking and there's something bigger she ought to be doing. I rise up in my wrath and slay her, when she talks like that. She's doing her proper work, and as a rule she's sure of it."

"You should sympathise, if you have the same spasms yourself," said Maribel. "You're both very silly!"

Jen sighed again. "My dear little cousin-to-be, you're still just a baby. I expect it's old age gives Mary-Dorothy and me those qualms. Your time will come!"

"Old age! Twenty-four! Come and join in 'Sellenger's Round'! I must take care of Mike," and Maribel flung off the problems scornfully.

Jen laughed. "When it's Mary-Dorothy's problem, I'm sure she's daft. But when it's my own—when it's sales of work and garden shows, not writing books and teaching—it does look like a waste of time. But I don't see any escape, so I may as well be jolly about it. If I'm desperate for a change, I shall have another"—and she nodded, and laughed, and ran out to the green after Maribel.

CHAPTER XXIV ROSAMUND BRINGS NEWS

A fortnight later Maribel, making out her shopping list, was handed a telegram by the maid. She read it with startled eyes, then raced upstairs to her mother.

“Mother! From Jen Marchwood; she says—‘Ring me up as soon as possible. Shall be in till three o’clock’—and gives her ’phone number. What can have happened? Where’s the nearest ’phone? Mrs. Baker would let me use hers.”

“That would be pleasanter than the post-office,” Mrs. Ritchie agreed. “Come and tell me what it’s all about, before you go to the shops, Bel.”

“Oh, rather!” and Maribel ran across to the house opposite.

She gave Jen’s number, and presently was listening wide-eyed to her voice.

“*No!* Jen, *how?* You can’t—it’s too wonderful! Oh yes, I’ll bring her at once. Can’t you tell me more? Oh, I’ll quite understand, if you have to be out! You can’t cut the big flower-show. I needn’t say how much we all thank you!”

Then she raced back to her mother.

“Mother! It’s too wonderful! Jen thinks they’re in touch with Cecily’s mother! She wants us to go at once; she thinks Cecily can prove it somehow. Can you manage without me?”

“Of course! My dear, how amazing! Didn’t Lady Marchwood tell you how it had happened?”

“She said: ‘Rosamund’s come home from Switzerland, and she believes she knows Cecily’s mother.’ I just yelled—I’m afraid I really did!—‘Her mother? You don’t mean her mother’s *alive?* We were told all her folks were dead years ago.’ And Jen said: ‘Rosamund’s sure of it. But we must have Cecily here before we can prove it.’ *Can* it be true, mother?”

“It’s very wonderful, if it is. Who is Rosamund? I haven’t heard of her before?”

“We don’t know her yet. She’s one of the Abbey crowd, but she’s been in Switzerland for three months. She’s Maidlin’s chum, and has lived there since she was fifteen,” Maribel explained. “Mother, I’ll take the car and do the shopping; you must have food in the house! Then I’ll fling some things into a bag and fetch Cecily. I’ll lend her night things. I’ll send Sarah a wire, so that she won’t expect Cecil to-night.”

"I'll have your suit-case ready," her mother promised. "What about lunch?"

"We'll stop at Horsham. Could I bear not to tell Cecily? She'll nearly die with excitement, and she won't eat."

"Don't tell her much," Mrs. Ritchie advised. "They may be wrong, and the blow would be terrible."

"I can't risk that. No, I won't tell her. Thanks awfully, mother dear! You are a brick!"

And Maribel ran down to the garage for the car.

A few urgent words to the headmistress explained the situation. Miss Ansell did not like giving sudden holidays, but in this case she did not hesitate.

Cecily came from her gym class, looking dazed. "Maribel! What's the matter?"

"Fetch your coat and hat, Cecil. I'll tell you as we go along. Never mind your books."

"Wrap yourself in the rug," Maribel commanded, as Cecily sprang in beside her. "Will you be warm enough with only your blazer? We're going to the Abbey," and she drove warily out of the school gates into the busy street.

"Bel! Now? Straightaway?"

"Right away, as fast as we can. Without clothes or anything. I've a nighty for you in my bag. Jen rang up an hour ago, and begged me to bring you."

Cecily's face was ablaze with excitement. "But why? What's happening? Why do they want us?"

"She didn't tell me all about it. Maidlin's chum, Rosamund, has come home; have you heard of her?"

"Oh, rather! Maidlin's dying to hear what she'll say about Camp Waditaka. She thinks no end of Rosamund. Is it a party because she's come home? But I can't go in my gymmy, Bel! Can't I go home and change?" Cecily pleaded.

"I think not. Don't worry, babe! Jen said we were to come as quickly as we could."

"It's very weird!" Cecily said, settling happily into her seat. "I wonder Miss Ansell let me off!"

"Miss Ansell knows about your plans for next term. She said you'd better go," said Maribel.

"I felt awfully guilty," she told Rosalind later. "The kid sat there enjoying the wind, and looking a perfect sight, all blown to bits; and never dreaming what it was all about, and that I knew! I longed to tell her, but it

seemed mean. She's so excitable, and we had all that long road before us. She'd have been worn out with the suspense. So I didn't rouse her suspicions; but it was horribly difficult."

She glanced at the wind-tossed hair and flushed face beside her, and realised that if the question of likeness were raised, Cecily Brown would be recognisable at any age. The vivid red hair, the straight heavy fringe, the dark eyes, must all have been the same even in babyhood. Was Cecily like the mother Rosamund believed she had met?

"I say, Bel, isn't it ripping the way the Abbey people have taken us into their crowd?" Cecily exclaimed. "Fancy wanting us because Rosamund has come back! Isn't it topping of them?"

"Simply topping," Maribel agreed.

"Maidlin's awfully keen on Rosamund. She says Camp Fire's the first thing she's gone into without Rosamund to back her up."

"Then I should think it was good for Maidlin to be left on her own for a while," said Maribel.

She was obviously thoughtful, and Cecily, after a glance at her face, lapsed into silence.

Three hours later Maribel pulled up sharply at sight of a stranger sitting on the white gate of Marchwood Manor.

"Is she waiting for us? Is it Rosamund?" Cecily whispered, and hurriedly smoothed her hair.

A tall girl dressed in blue, with yellow plaits coiled over her ears, jumped off the gate. As the car stopped, she came up and stood leaning on the door and gazing at Cecily.

Under her steady look Cecily coloured. "What's the matter? I know I'm untidy. Is there a smut on my nose? You might speak to Maribel!"

Maribel had waited, with deeper understanding. Now she asked, "Is it Rosamund?"

Rosamund stood erect. "Yes. You must be Maribel Ritchie. Pleased to meet you!"

"Is it all right?" Maribel's eyes, searching Rosamund's blue ones, demanded satisfaction.

"Yes. I'm certain. But we'll make sure; she can prove it. Doesn't she know?"

"Don't I know what?" cried Cecily.

"It would have been brutal to tell her," said Maribel, white with excitement. "But it's been very hard not to say anything. What can she prove?"

"Bel, is there a secret? Oh, you are mean, not to tell me! What is it, Bel? Is anything wrong?" alarm and doubt blazed in Cecily's face.

"It's all right, kid. Don't be frightened," Maribel looked at Rosamund.

Rosamund held out a photograph. It was a picture of a garden archway covered with roses, and sitting below the roses an elderly woman, with a child leaning on her knee. The little round face, with dark eyes and straight heavy fringe, had not changed in ten years.

Maribel gave an exclamation. "It's Cecily!"

Rosamund watched Cecily intently, and said nothing.

Cecily, white and wild-eyed, stared at the picture. "It's Aunty!" she gave a cry. "Aunty in the garden! Where is she? I went away from her to the convent; Monsieur fetched me; it was ten years ago. The roses were yellow, and Aunty called them Emily Something."

"That does it!" Rosamund cried. "We were sure the child was you; you've not altered. But if you remember 'Aunty,' that's proof!"

Maribel put her arm round Cecily, who had begun to tremble. "It's all right, dear. Don't be frightened! We want to hear how Rosamund found your Aunty, don't we?"

"Where is she?" Cecily pleaded. "Can I go to see her?"

"Perhaps. I don't know where she is, but I think we can find out. But I've some one much better than your Aunty to give you, kid. Who do you think gave me that picture?" Rosamund's voice was full of triumph.

Cecily stared at her, wide-eyed. "I can't imagine. Don't you know where my Aunty is?"

"I've no idea. I was given that picture two days ago by your mother. I know her—I say! She's going to faint! Oh, I am sorry!"

"No, she isn't. She wouldn't do anything so silly," Maribel spoke clearly, but her arm round Cecily tightened.

"Buck up, babe! It was a shock, wasn't it? We ought to have told you more gently."

"I'm awfully sorry!" Rosamund said contritely. "I'm a clumsy brute. I didn't think it would upset her so much."

"She's all right now. She'd never dreamt of seeing her mother. Give her a minute or two!"

Cecily, very white, had hidden her face on Maribel's shoulder. She was trembling, and a sob broke from her.

"Maribel—my mother? Is it true? They said—everybody said——"

"I know. And we believed it. There must be a story behind all this, Cecil. We'll ask Rosamund to tell us, shall we?"

Cecily looked up, brushing her hand across her eyes. "Can I go to see my mother? Where is she? Is she here? Why didn't she come?"

"Because she's ill, but I believe, when she hears about you, she'll be better very soon," Rosamund explained, eager to atone for her carelessness.

“She’s in a hospital in Switzerland, kid. My mother died there two years ago; I made friends in the village, and I’ve been staying with them. A girl friend of mine, Karen, is going to marry the son of the doctor at the head of the hospital, Sir Rennie Brown; and she goes to play her fiddle to the patients. I went with her, because I remembered how much they used to enjoy having some one new to talk to, when I was there with mother, and among the friends I made in the sanatorium was little Mrs. Perowne.”

“Perowne!” Maribel exclaimed.

Rosamund glanced at Cecily. “You made a muddle of your name when you were little. It’s Perowne, not Brown.”

Cecily gazed at her in stunned silence, her lips apart.

“Or Monsieur and Madame, who took charge of her, altered it purposely before Cecily was old enough to understand,” said Maribel. “At the convent she was called Cécile le Brun. Perhaps it was their doing.”

“More than likely. Little Mrs. Perowne was lonely, so I tried to be nice to her. She hadn’t a soul belonging to her; most of the patients had visitors, but she never had anybody. I noticed that, and I used to go and talk to her. We decided that I should be her visitor regularly—I say, kid, don’t do that!”

Cecily had caught her hand and kissed it passionately. “You were good to her when she hadn’t anybody. You saw she was alone—you noticed, and you thought about her! “—she was nearly crying.

Rosamund had grown scarlet. “I wouldn’t have told you, if I’d thought. Don’t thank me! I only talked to her and listened to her stories of the baby she had lost. I’m sure it broke her heart. But she likes to talk about you.”

Cecily looked up, her eyes awed. “Me? She talks about me?”

“All the time. She told me the story and showed me this picture of you and your nurse. It stood beside her bed. And under her pillow she kept something else. She only parted with it because we hoped I had found you. I was sure I’d found you! Well, look at that!” Rosamund took a case from her pocket and opened it to show a miniature.

“Cecil! It’s you!” Maribel cried. “Oh, Cecily, what a dear little baby you were! Look at yourself, Cecil!”

Cecily scarcely glanced at the picture. “Can’t I go to her? Is she still in Switzerland? Can’t we do something at once?”

“I’m going to send a message, saying it’s all right. She’ll have it to-night, and she’ll begin to pull round at once. As soon as you can be ready I’ll take you to her.”

Cecily gave a sob, and turned again to hide her face in Maribel’s arms. “My mother will know about me to-night! I *can’t* believe it! And I’ll see her quite soon. Bel, is it true?”

“I believe it is. If she had those pictures of you—and if you remember your ‘Aunt,’ and the arch with the yellow Emily Gray——”

“That’s the name!” Cecily cried.

“Of course. Then she must be your mother, and it really is true. Look at your baby-picture, Cecil!”

Cecily looked shyly at the painting. “Is it like me? Yes, there’s my ugly straight hair, as red as ever.”

Maribel and Rosamund laughed.

“You ungrateful girl!” said Maribel. “It’s beautiful. It’s a wonderful colour.”

“Everybody’s always told me it was hideous.”

“I hope you won’t think it’s hideous when you see it on your own mother. I hope you won’t tell her so,” Rosamund remarked.

Cecily looked at her with startled eyes. “Is she like me?”

“You’re the image of her. Her hair’s cut straight across like yours, and of course the same colour, and shingled. She looks such a kid, to have a big girl of fifteen.”

Cecily’s lips quivered. “I can’t believe it yet. It’s like a fairy story.”

“Is she very ill?” Maribel asked anxiously. “Is there hope that she’ll get better, Rosamund?”

Rosamund looked straight at Cecily, who had turned white. “Every hope—now. There wasn’t very much before. But even the chance that we had found Cecily did her good. When she knows it’s true she’ll turn the corner, and begin to pull round.”

“Couldn’t you send the message at once?” Cecily pleaded. “Why are we talking, when she doesn’t know? Could we take a telegram to the office?” Her voice shook with eagerness.

“Come back to the house, then, and I’ll send somebody. Or do you want to send it yourself? Can you make room for me?”

“With a little squeezing. Or Cecil could go up behind,” said Maribel. “But oughtn’t we to see Lady Marchwood first?”

“Oh, Jenny-Wren’s out. I’ll ride in the dickey and go on talking from behind you.—Yes, I know. Jen always is out, isn’t she?”

Maribel explained the laugh with which she had heard the answer. “At Whitsun Maidlin met us just here, and said: ‘Jenny-Wren’s out.’ But we were prepared this time. She told me about the flower-show.”

“She’ll be home early. She knows all about this,” Rosamund explained. “I had to tell them, of course. Jen, and Joy, and Maid, were all sure as soon as they saw the picture that it was their ‘Cecilytom.’ And I knew I’d be sure as soon as I saw her. But we felt if Cecily knew her old nurse, that would prove it.”

She sprang into the back seat and Maribel set out for the village.

"I *was* sure," Rosamund went on. "The moment I saw you, kid. You looked up at me with my little Mrs. Perowne's big dark eyes full of questions."

"It's lovely—the way you say that!" Cecily cried.

Rosamund looked puzzled. "The way I say what?"

"My little Mrs.—Perowne!" Cecily jerked out her new name shyly. "You say it as if you were fond of her. I know you've been good to her. It's lovely of you!"

"I'm very fond of her. She's a dear, and so brave and patient, and so lonely. I've done everything I could, but it hasn't been much."

Cecily looked at Maribel, quite unable to speak.

Maribel said soberly, "It was probably a great deal. The hospital will give her all the care she needs, but you gave the kindness. She's felt she had a friend; she wasn't alone."

"It's nothing to what Cecily's going to do for her," said Rosamund, as they swept round the village green.

"I? Can I do anything for her?" Cecily's face lit up. "How can I? What can I do?"

Rosamund laughed, and sprang down outside the post-office. "You can send her your love. That will do more for her than all the medicine in the world."

"Oh! Will you?" Cecily begged, breathless with eagerness.

"We'll say: 'Cecily sends her love. Coming soon as possible.' How will that do?"

"Oh, topping!" Cecily whispered. "May I—might I send it, please?"

Rosamund laughed again. "Come and write it yourself."

Maribel sat waiting in the car, her thoughts busy.

"We've done it!" Rosamund cried, as they came out again. "Cecily has sent her first message to her mother."

"They say it will be there in an hour or two!" Cecily's voice was full of awe. "Bel, I can't believe it."

"I don't blame you. Now what about the story?" Maribel pleaded. "How did it all happen?"

"What about waiting till we're back in the garden?" Rosamund suggested. "This is hardly the place for a three-volume novel of a story?"

She climbed up behind. "Hop in, Cecilytom! It won't take us five minutes to run back to the Manor. We'll wait there for Jenny-Wren. Joy's doing Guide stunts with Betty, and Maidlin's swotting with her, for a heap of the stuff is the same for Guides or Camp Fire—tying reef-knots and that sort of thing; Maid's knots are all grannies. So Joy and she are training together.

It's topping for them. You owe your mother to Maid's Camp Fire, Cecily. Did you know that?"

Cecily turned in her seat and stared up at her. "How?"

"That's what is puzzling me," said Maribel. "What made you connect Cecily with Mrs. Perowne's lost baby? You didn't know what Cecil was like?"

"Oh, but I did! That's the point. I heard from Maid about Cecily Brown and the Music School, and that you didn't know Cecily's story, and that she had redder hair than anybody at the Abbey. I didn't pay much attention, at the time; but it all came back to me, and I found Maid's letter and read it again, when Joy sent me a snap of the new Camp Fire, with Maid herself in her gown and beads, and her girls all round her. And there in the front row was my little Mrs. Perowne staring at me."

Cecily gave a gasp. "What did you do?"

"I gave one yell and went bolting to find Karen, to ask what she thought. I did have the sense not to fling myself on an invalid and blurt out: 'Your kiddy's alive! I've found her!' Karen was as thrilled as I was, and she was sure it would do Mrs. Perowne good to be told. But we asked Sir Rennie, to be on the safe side. He was as excited as a schoolboy; he went at once and told her himself, and then I took the Camp Fire photo to show her. We compared it with the photos she had, and I showed them Maid's letter, that said Cecily's hair was bright red and her eyes were very dark. And we all looked at Mrs. Perowne, for there she was, just the same. She was all to pieces with the shock and the excitement; for a few minutes I was jolly thankful Sir Rennie was there. Then she bucked up and pulled herself together and begged me to come home and make sure. We all felt that I'd know as soon as I saw Cecily; since I knew her mother, I was the only person who could be certain of them both. And we felt that Cecily would prove it if she recognised her nurse. But we'd have been sure without that."

"And you came all that way to find me?" Cecily asked, her tone full of wonder.

"I wired to Joy that I'd be home a week sooner than I'd expected, and packed at express speed and came flying across Europe to tell the story to her and Jen."

"Did you say you had lived here for a long time, Miss—Rosamund?" asked Cecily, as the car turned in at the Manor Gates.

"Yes? Since I was your age—fifteen. What about it?" Rosamund asked, startled by the change of subject.

"You're just like the rest of them. You take the trouble to do kind things. Lady Jen and Lady Joy, and Mrs. Raymond, and Maidlin, and Miss Devine and Miss Betty—it's the same with all of them. And you do it too; you were

worried because *she* was all alone, and you took the trouble to be good to her. Did they teach you to be like that?"

Rosamund jumped down and opened the door of the car. "Come and sit among the roses! I don't think they taught me. Perhaps it's infectious and I caught it without knowing. Or it may be in the air of the Abbey. There's something in what you say, Cecily Perowne,"—Cecily grew scarlet and looked shyly at her and then at Maribel—"as regards the rest of our crowd. They are like that; a jolly sporting set, who will do anything for anybody. But I didn't know I was. I'm not quite one of the family; I don't really belong, as Maid does. She was adopted properly, but it was more of a joke in my case. Joy has been decent beyond all words to me, but I have relations in the background. My father will want me some day. Maid has nobody else; she really does belong here. If I've absorbed a little of the Abbey feeling I'm glad. It makes me feel more one of the family."

"I think you're one of the family all right," said Maribel, struck by a wistfulness in Rosamund's tone which escaped Cecily.

"I'm sure you belong!" Cecily cried. "You're just like all the rest of them! Didn't you cut short your holiday to come and fetch me, though you'd never seen me?"

"I was dying for an excuse to come home," Rosamund confessed, laughing. "I'd been seized with fearful homesickness. I fairly galloped across Europe. I wanted to see everybody. And I was *very* keen to see the girl who'd looked at me out of Maid's Camp Fire picture with the wistful dark eyes of my little Mrs. Perowne!"

The same eyes looked at her now. "Tell us! You said there was a story!" Cecily pleaded.

"Sit down and be comfy, then! Shall I fetch you tea?"

"Oh, please tell us first!" Maribel begged, and took one of the basket chairs among the rose-bushes. "We couldn't possibly think about tea!"

CHAPTER XXV

ROSAMUND'S STORY

"Mrs. Perowne saw me looking at the picture by her bed," Rosamund began. "It was so like her that I was afraid it must be a baby she had lost, but it might have been herself at two years old. One day she told me the story. She was travelling in Europe with her father when she was nineteen; she had lost her mother years before. Her father had spoiled her, but he had times of strictness, and to other people he was always very stern. Even Ruth was afraid of him in her heart. You're Cecily Ruth Perowne, kid; she gave you her own name and your father's. She met Cecil Perowne in Paris, and married him against her father's wishes."

Cecily had looked up, breathless, on hearing her full name for the first time. Now her face clouded.

"He'd never forgive her, if he was as strict as you say."

"He never did. It was the beginning of trouble. Her husband was kind; she never said one word against him; but he was obviously one of a bad set, and I imagine he was weak, though probably not bad himself. They had very little money, except now and then when he seemed to have plenty and explained it by saying he had had luck. She thought he won it at the casinos and gaming-tables. You were born, and soon afterwards he died, when you were about two years old. Your mother brought you to England and left you in the care of an old servant, somewhere in the country. That was about the time the miniature was painted."

"Was Cecily's father French?" Maribel interrupted. "We've always thought she was half French. But the name might be English?"

"Half French; his mother had been French. But he had quarrelled with his father, and so long as Mrs. Perowne knew him he had nothing to do with his family. Mrs. Perowne believed that his parents were dead, but she never made sure, because he had always been so certain they would never have anything more to do with him."

"And what did she do?" Cecily pleaded. "She left me with Aunty; I can just remember her. I stayed with her till I was five. Why didn't my mother stay with me?"

"Because she hadn't a penny. She wrote to her father for your sake, and had no answer. So she set out to earn her own living and to support you. I said she'd been very plucky,"—as Cecily's eyes kindled—"and she said: 'Well, I had to do it.' She had a good voice, and she was a very fine pianist,

so she found work, accompanying concert parties, and presently had a great stroke of luck. She was invited to go to Australia as accompanist to a well-known singer on a big concert tour. It meant going a very long way from you, and for a longer time than she could bear to think of; but of course she had to go. You were being well taken care of, and the engagement might lead to bigger things. So she went to Australia, and from there to the States, and the miniature of the red-headed baby went everywhere with her. The tour lasted over three years. Then she came home, with another good trip arranged for, to India this time. She came to see you, feeling all was well; she had found her work, and as soon as you were grown up you could travel with her.”

Cecily was staring at her with parted lips. “And—and wasn’t I there, when she came?”

“You weren’t there. The old nurse could only tell that a foreign gentleman had come and had said he was to take you to your mother, who was ill in Paris and was asking for you. She had let you go, and had not heard of you since.”

“And didn’t it kill my mother?” gasped Cecily.

“It very nearly killed Mrs. Perowne. She tried in every way to find you, and searched for months, till all her money and strength were gone. Then she broke down, and had a long illness, which must have been the beginning of the trouble that has become serious now. She came back to life, not wanting to live; and even went on with her work, because people are made so that they must go on living even after they have lost all that makes life worth while. She told me she kept a tiny hope that you would turn up some day.”

“And I was there all the time, in the convent near Paris!” Cecily choked and turned to Maribel, who caught her in her arms. “She was looking for me, and I didn’t know!”

“Your mother went back to Australia, where she had made friends, and there she had some real success as a singer. She says her voice seemed to please people more after her illness, and she had engagements to sing instead of to accompany other people, and she did very well. Then she was taken ill again, once or twice; she was never really strong after she lost you, and she kept having breakdowns. At last the doctors told her she had signs of serious lung trouble, and advised her to come to Europe for treatment. She went to Switzerland, to Sir Rennie Brown’s sanatorium up on the mountains, and she had been there for some months when I knew her. They’re all very friendly up there, like a big family, and they cheer one another up and sympathise with each other. Karen Wilson plays her violin to them, and the girls from the big English school, St. Mary’s, in the valley,

come up and give them concerts. You mustn't think of your mother as lying all alone in a hospital, Cecily. Everybody has been very good to her. But of course it wasn't like having anybody of her own. She liked to talk to me about you."

"If *only* I could have been with her all the time!" Cecily cried.

"You'll be with her now. Here comes the Lady of the Manor!"

Up the drive came Jen's big car. She saw the girls and spoke to the man; the car drew up, and Jen came across the lawn.

Cecily ran to meet her. "Oh, Lady Jen, I've got a mother! I've found my own mother! I sent her a message; we said: 'Cecily sends her love.' I don't really believe it, Lady Jen!"

Jen put her arms round her. "Congratulations, dear kid! We're all so glad. How happy she'll be! It's lovely for you both. There's no doubt about Cecilytom, is there, Ros?"

"Not a shadow. She's Cecily Ruth Perowne."

Cecily, scarlet, looked shyly up at Jen. "It's awfully sudden to be given a mother and a long new name!"

"You'll find congratulations showered upon you! Send for tea, Rosamunda, and then we'll go to the Hall and tell Joy and Maidlin."

"I'm dying to tell everybody," Cecily sighed. "Maidlin's my Guardian; she ought to know. And Lady Joy is a sort of guardian too, isn't she?"

"Surely, since you were going to her Music School," Jen agreed. "I wonder what you'll do now?"

Cecily looked at her, with startled eyes. "Won't I come back here to the School? When my mother's better, I mean?"

"Of course you will!" Jen exclaimed, seeing the first shadow of parting in her face. "You couldn't say good-bye to us all, could you? I expect your mother will want you to come, and you know Joy will be glad to have you."

"But then I won't be able to be with my mother," Cecily faltered, with sudden realisation of an inevitable choice. "Maribel, I *couldn't* go away from you and Rosalind for ever!"—her voice broke.

"You silly girl, don't worry about all that now!" Maribel scolded. "All you have to do is to go straight to her and be very happy and help her to grow well and strong. Later on we can arrange things for you. I'm sure she'll want you to have the training in music which Lady Marchwood has offered; it's the chance of a lifetime, and you must tell your mother all about it and talk it over with her. If you come back to the School, I've no doubt you'll see me and Rose now and then."

"Tea is ready in the sun parlour," said Rosamund. "Madam!" to Jen. "Don't you want to take off that posh Lady-Opener's frock and put on some homelike rags and be Jenny-Wren once more?"

“I do, badly. But I want tea even more. Come along, Maribel and Cecily Ruth! Fancy your having a mother as well as all your guardians!” Jen teased. “You’re well provided for!”

“I’ve been jolly well ‘guarded.’ I shall tell her how good everybody has been to me. But I owe the newest guardians, and my mother, to Maribel and Rose and the Guides, for they ‘guarded’ me first. I’ll never forget. May I write all about it to Rosalind?”

“You’d better let me do that,” Jen suggested. “You’ll be too busy packing and saying good-bye. Bel, you must run her home to-morrow morning; we’ll give her one day to say good-bye to Sarah and school and Mrs. Sandy, and to collect her possessions. This is Tuesday; on Thursday Rosamund will pick her up about nine o’clock in our big car and take her straight to Newhaven for the morning boat. Can you do that, Ros? You’ll have to be off from here by six.”

“Right! I’ll be there. See that you’re ready, Cecily Perowne! You’ll see your mother by midday on Friday!”

Cecily put down her cup. “I’d better not hand round to-day. I’m all shaky. Will you really go all that way with me?”

“When did you reach home?” Maribel asked.

“Last night,” said Rosamund. “Why?”

“It’s awfully sporting of you to take all that journey twice in a week,” Maribel exclaimed.

“I like it. I must see Cecily Ruth safely to her mother.”

“You’re more than kind,” Maribel said warmly.

“Cecilytom, there’s one person who doesn’t know all about it,” Jen began.

“Yes, Rosalind. But you said you’d write, and I want to tell her too.”

“I meant Joan. Couldn’t you make time to look in at her class to-morrow night and tell her?”

“I’d love it!” Cecily’s face lit up.

“Now come and tell Joy and Maidlin!” Jen said presently, when she had run upstairs to change her frock. “The boys are in the sand-pit with the twins, so I must go to fetch them.”

Rosamund and Maribel followed them through the gardens and past the lake.

“So you’ve bagged Mike Marchwood! They’ve been telling me,” said Rosamund. “I’m glad. You’ll keep him in order. I ought to have married Mike and made myself really one of the family.”

Maribel looked at her quickly, and Rosamund laughed.

“Oh, no! He didn’t want to, and neither did I. He knew me when I was Cecily’s age, in plaits and a tunic. He doesn’t believe I’m grown up. I’ve no

intention of marrying anybody; I want to do things on my own. But it would have been a relief to feel I belonged to the rest of them.”

The wistful note was in her voice again. Maribel exclaimed, “But surely you do feel that? We’re newcomers, but they’ve made us feel as if we were old friends.”

“Friends! Yes, and heaps more than that. There’s nobody in the world like Joy, unless it’s Jenny-Wren. So far as they’re concerned I’m one of the family. But I’m not a kid any longer, and I can’t help seeing there’s no place for me here. I’m not needed, though they’re always glad to have me.”

“It’s more than that,” Maribel said. “They all miss you desperately when you’re away. I’ve been here long enough to see that.”

“I know,” Rosamund agreed. “But I’m not needed. Everything goes on all right when I’m not here. I feel it more than ever since this last time away. Maid’s branching out and doing things on her own; this Camp Fire business is topping for her, and I’m glad about it; but it’s the first thing I haven’t had to boost her into. And Joy and her Rangers! She’s really keen now, and it’s splendid for her. I’m not a selfish pig; I’m glad to see them doing things and leaving me out, for it’s so much jollier for them. But I’m not needed, here or anywhere else. And I want to be needed! I’ve a queer feeling”—and she paused.

“Can’t you tell me?” Maribel pleaded. “I know I’m still almost a stranger. But not quite, Rosamund! And you may not want to say this sort of thing to any of them.”

“It’s decent of you to understand! I can’t say it to them. They’d worry, and think I wasn’t happy, and that they’d left something out they might have done. That isn’t so; they’ve done everything. It’s only that I’ve grown up, and I can’t help seeing there’s no real work for me here. And I want to work! I can’t settle down and do nothing.”

“Jen’s hoping you’ll help with the new village classes,” Maribel observed.

“I will, of course, until something else turns up. But teaching country-dancing isn’t enough; it’s fun, for evenings and parties and so on, but there’s not enough in it. That’s what Mary-Dorothy says; I talked to her last night, when Joy and Maid were in bed. We had a regular pow-wow, till about one o’clock. Mary knows how I’m feeling; I can always tell her things. She teaches country-dancing and enjoys doing it, but only as an extra. She has her writing; that’s the big thing in her life. Now there’s this Sunday class as well. She’s loving it; she feels she’s mothering those girls; lucky kids! She agrees that I wouldn’t find it enough to teach dancing.”

“What are you thinking of, then? You wouldn’t go away from here? You’d break all their hearts.

“Not now. I haven’t any plans; it’s too new an idea. I didn’t realise till I came home how unnecessary I am. Out there in Switzerland I kept on thinking of coming home and settling down—for a time, of course. Some day my father will need me to look after him, but he doesn’t want me out in Ceylon.”

“Then what was the queer feeling you began to speak of?”

“That something must be going to happen to me, that will decide things for me,” Rosamund said gravely. “Some door will open, and I’ll go through, and then I’ll find my work. There must be work for me to do somewhere. I can’t have grown to twenty-one, and a big strong hefty creature, and not be needed somewhere! I shall wait till it happens, but I believe it will come, and if my job comes along I shall plunge into it, Joy or no Joy. She won’t like it; she’ll see no reason why I shouldn’t stay on here doing nothing for ever. And Maid will weep. But Jen and Mary-Dorothy will let me go; they’ll understand.—Don’t say a word to anybody, will you?” she begged, as they came within sight of the Hall.

“Not to a soul! If it happens I’ll stand up for you.”

“Thanks! I’ll be glad. It will be one more on my side,” Rosamund exclaimed.—“Joy, your Cecilytom is the image of her mother!”

“Congratulations, Cecily!” cried Joy. “Now we understand about your music! Maidie Nawadaha is in the sand-pit with the twins. Come and tell her it’s all right!”

“What I want to know,” said Maribel, as Cecily raced away in front of Joy, “is why Monsieur and Madame took the trouble to kidnap Cecily. They couldn’t want her? It’s all rubbish to say, as they told her, that it was for her father’s sake?”

“Oh, bosh!” said Rosamund. “They must have thought there was money in it. They’re evidently adventurers, and her father was one of the gang, or at least was pally with them. They meant to make money out of the kid, probably from the French relations. Then they found it wouldn’t work; perhaps the grandparents were dead, or perhaps they refused to have anything to do with her; and so Cecily was left in the convent. I expect they were jolly glad to be rid of her.”

Cecily’s cry to Maidlin rang out. “Oh, Guardian, Nawadaha, have you heard? I’ve found my own mother!”

Jen and Joy, Rosamund and Maribel, looked at one another.

“It is topping for the kid!” Rosamund said. “I am so glad I was able to help!”

“She’ll always feel you gave her her mother,” said Maribel. “There’s one queer thing, Rosamund! You’ve heard Cecily’s story?”

“Only vaguely. You and the Guides picked her up at some camp in France, didn’t you?”

Maribel laughed. “At the summer camp of St. John’s and St. Mary’s, the schools——”

“*No!* The schools for children whose parents have to go to the Platz? I know heaps of people who were at St. Mary’s! How weird,” said Rosamund. “How small the world is!”

“Oh, my dear children, the older you grow the smaller it will seem!” said Jen, in a motherly tone.

“Sounds quite elderly!” said Rosamund. “But I’m thrilled to know you found Cecily at the St. Mary’s camp. Tell me who else was there!”

And she strolled through the gardens talking to Maribel, while Jen and Joy fetched their babies from the sand-pit.

CHAPTER XXVI

ROSAMUND SAYS GOOD-BYE

It was Monday evening. Cecily, walking among the flowers by a narrow path, high on a ledge above the Swiss valley, felt it must be a dream that a week ago she had not known she had a mother. The last three days seemed a lifetime, but a new life. In the old life she had been Cecily Brown, with no mother. Cecily Ruth Perowne was a new person, rich beyond words, and happier than she had ever dreamed was possible.

The valley was set in a ring of great snow giants. There were smooth round heads and jagged black peaks of rock; black precipices lined with silver waterfalls, green meadows starred with flowers. A thousand feet below was the valley, with its river and the railway to Italy, and the big schools, St. John's and St. Mary's. The Platz, on a ledge near the snow, had old black châteaux and the big buildings of the sanatorium.

Rosamund walked with Cecily for the last time. She was starting for home by the night express.

"You won't be lonely, now that you've made friends, Cecily Ruth? You'll have Karen; she'll always help."

"And she plays to us. I love her fiddle as much as I loved Sandy's. I shan't be lonely. But I'm glad you came with me and helped me to make friends."

"Pipe me one little tune," said Rosamund, and sat on a boulder.

Cecily's red locks blew wildly in the evening breeze, as she stood and piped "The Old Mole" and "Ruffy Tufty," her eyes on the snow peaks.

"How you play! I almost had to dance," Rosamund exclaimed.

"I wonder if I'll ever have any more of that jolly dancing?" There was a wistful note in Cecily's voice.

"My dear infant, why not?"

"I can't, out here."

"But you won't stay here. Your mother's stronger already. Soon she'll be well, and you'll go away."

Cecily fingered the pipe and stared at her. "You're sure? You aren't just saying it?"

"Sir Rennie's sure, which is all that matters. He's delighted with her improvement since Tuesday night, when she had your telegram."

"Tuesday night! Not a week ago!" Cecily's tone was full of awe. "I think she's better since we came on Friday, Rosamund. But I was afraid I was

imagining it.”

“No, you’re right. She’s stronger. She may have to winter here for some years. I doubt if she could stand the damp and fogs of London. She may find some place that will suit her, or she may spend the worst months here. But she’s going to be cured, and that’s all that matters.”

“Yes,” said Cecily. “Nothing else counts at all.”

Rosamund rose. “I must go back. It will soon be time to start. Cecilytom, Joy gave me a message for you, that I was to tell you last thing. When your mother is well enough, in the spring if not before, Joy wants you to bring her to the Hall for a long visit. Then you can start at the Music School; Joy’s really keen you should come to her for your training, for, of course, you’ll go in for music now. You mustn’t disappoint her! Your mother will want to meet all your sets of guardians, from Maribel to Maidlin, and they can’t all come out here. She must come to the Abbey and meet the whole crowd, and Joy and Jen and the babes. Then she’ll make her plans; but Joy hopes, if Mrs. Perowne takes up her concert work again, she’ll leave you with us when she has to go travelling. When she begins talking of plans you’ll know she’s really better; and then you’ll tell her these ideas and give her Joy’s message.”

“You know my Camp Fire name, don’t you?” Cecily cried, a break in her voice.

Rosamund looked at her. “Maid told me. Awfully jolly of you to choose it!”

“Everybody has been so good to me! Why should Lady Joy plan for mother and me? And you—I haven’t known you for a whole week yet; but look at the things you’ve done for me!”

“Any message for the Abbey crowd?” Rosamund asked, in a businesslike tone.

“Only my very best love. And more thanks than there are words in the world to say!”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Abbey Girls Play Up* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]