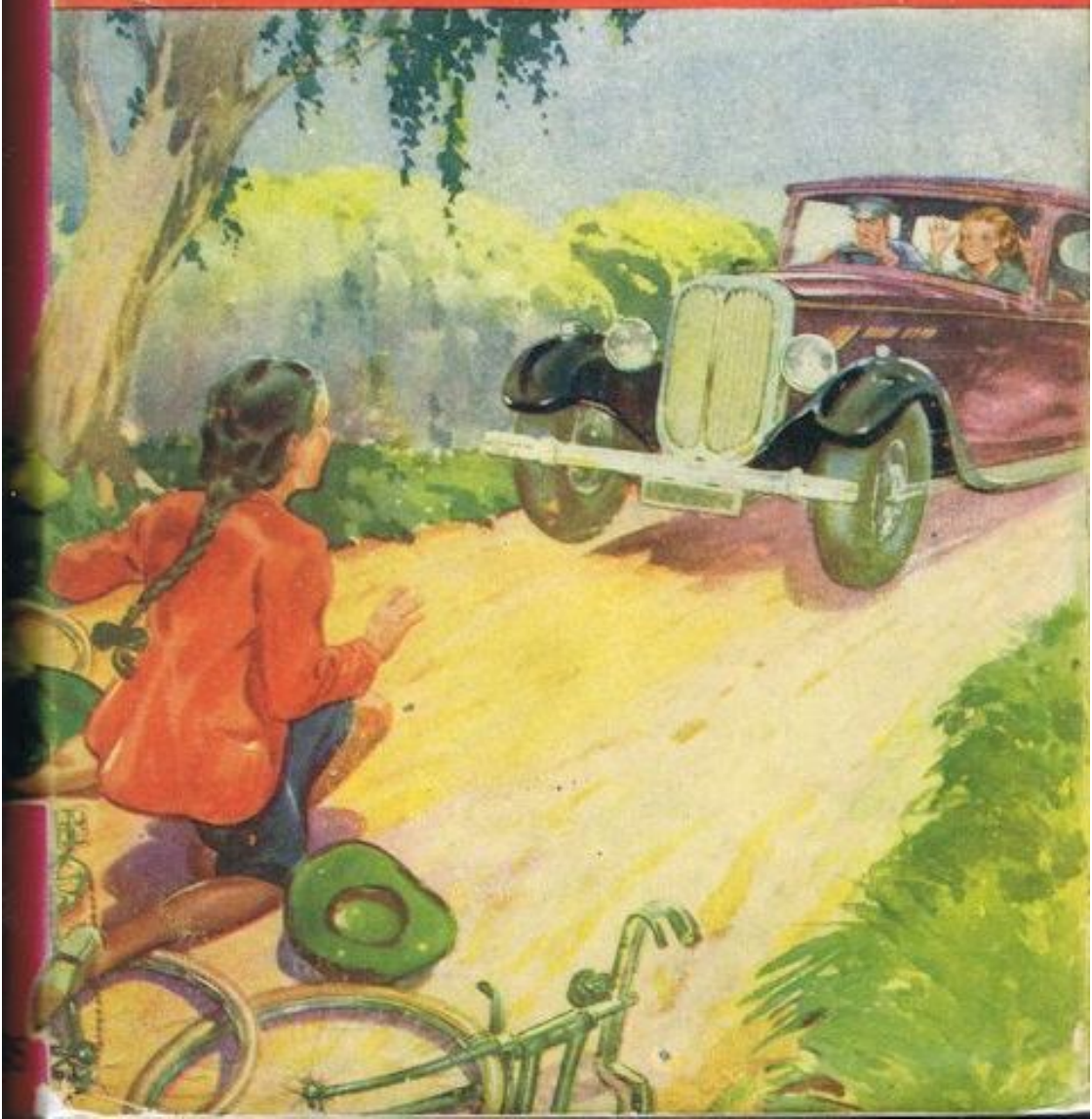


# THE ABBEY GIRLS AT HOME



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*Title:* The Abbey Girls at Home

*Date of first publication:* 1929

*Author:* Elsie J. Oxenham [Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley] (1880-1960)

*Date first posted:* Jan. 18, 2020

*Date last updated:* Jan. 18, 2020

Faded Page eBook #20200134

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

# THE ABBEY GIRLS AT HOME

*by*  
ELSIE J. OXENHAM



COLLINS  
LONDON AND GLASGOW

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First Printed in this Edition 1947

Reprinted 1948

Reprinted 1950

*To*  
MY FATHER AND MOTHER  
WHOSE TEACHING HAS MEANT  
SO MUCH TO ME  
AND TO ALL OF US

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

## CHAPTER I

### IN QUEST OF JENNY-WREN

“One for me! A dozen for Chris, as usual,” and Betty McLean laid her sister’s letters on the breakfast-table and sat down. “Mine’s a fat one, anyway!”

The sun was streaming into the morning-room, and the windows were wide open to the little garden. Chris, married four months ago and just home from a tour abroad, was fair-haired and pretty; but not so pretty as Betty. Betty, just twenty-one, had soft red hair plaited round her head and a fair freckled skin, and was as Scottish in her type and colouring as she was in her accent and her shy, reserved nature.

There was a touch of seriousness in her gray eyes which had come from the experiences of her home life; and Chris, glancing at her as she sat absorbed in her letter, noticed it afresh and wondered how she could banish that look from her younger sister’s face. The invitation to Betty to visit her new home had been given with the idea of “cheering Bets up,” for home was lonely for Betty now.

Betty’s boarding-school life in Yorkshire had been very happy at first, but towards the end had been clouded by a heavy shadow. Her twin sister had had to be taken from school owing to illness, and Betty’s last year had been spent without her twin and burdened by the knowledge of Meg’s growing delicacy. She had left school early, as the family had gone abroad, in the hope that the Swiss air and the care of famous doctors would cure Meg’s trouble; but these efforts had failed, and Meg’s passing had left Betty heart-broken.

Her parents, anxious on her account also, had carried both Chris and Betty off for a long visit to friends in South Africa, and they had returned only in time to prepare for Chris’s marriage. Now, after a few quiet, lonely months at home in Scotland, Betty was visiting Chris in her new home; and Chris had just one idea, to take Betty out of the dreamy, half-sad state into which she had lapsed, and to give her back her interest in life.

“What a topping idea!” Betty looked up, an unusual flush on her cheeks and a light in her eyes. “I say, Chris, I wonder if I could”—and she paused.

“Why not?” Chris said cheerfully. “I’m certain you could. What is it, anyway?”

“Would you come with me? You didn’t know Jenny-Wren, but you’d like her, and I’d like to have your company. I think I’d be too shy to go

alone.”

“Jenny-Wren? Have I ever heard of the lady before?” Chris pondered. “Tell me a little more, Bets. Does Jenny-Wren ask you to go to see her? Where is she? The car’s at your service; and so am I, if I haven’t promised to be elsewhere. But you know——”

“Oh, I know! You have six engagements for every day. It’s hard work to be a bride! No, Jen hasn’t asked me, or I wouldn’t be shy. She doesn’t know I’m in town. But she’s living in the country, somewhere near Wycombe, and Tickles says it isn’t far and why don’t I go to see her? But there’s Lady Marchwood; I’d be terrified of her.”

Chris handed her a cup of coffee, her eyes dancing. “One fact I have grasped. Jenny-Wren lives near Wycombe. That’s really helpful; you can easily run down to see her, if you have her address. Go to-day; I’m not using the car. I can’t come with you, though. I’ve a dozen old ladies coming to tea, to inspect dear Tom’s wife. Now, Bets! Tell me a little more! Who is your Jenny-Wren? Where does she live? Who wants you to go to see her? *Tickles*, did you say? Sounds like a puppy or a kitten. And what has Lady Marchwood to do with the whole affair?”

“Sorry,” Betty apologised. “I forgot you left Rocklands in the Middle Ages. It was all after your time. Jen Robins lived at The Grange, and we used to go across the moor and have tea with her. When I was Head, Tickles—Tekla—was an important junior; she’s now in the First Form, which seems absurd, and she’ll be Head next year. This letter is all about school, but at the end she says:—‘Why don’t you go to see Jenny-Wren? She was up here, at The Grange, in the Easter hols, but of course we didn’t see her. Her mother died suddenly, and Jen came home for a few days. But she couldn’t stay here alone; her father died six months ago, you know. So she’s gone back to stay with Lady Marchwood at Abinger Hall, near the old Abbey she used to tell us about. You know she’s engaged, I suppose? I should go to see her, if I were you, Bets.’—I didn’t know Jenny-Wren was engaged. It’s a nuisance; I wish she wasn’t,” Betty sighed. “I wonder who the lucky man is?”

“A relation of Lady Marchwood’s, I should think; perhaps her son,” Chris said practically. “I agree with Tickles, Bets. By all means go and look up Jenny-Wren. Is she nice?”

“We loved her,” Betty said briefly. “She and I and Rhoda were real chums.”

“Oh, if you loved any one she’s all right! Why not go this afternoon? I’ll need the car to-morrow; for the next few afternoons, in fact. There are calls I must return, and receptions and other things I’ve promised to go to. But to-day the car’s yours, and you know you’ll be glad to miss my tea-party. You



haven't met any of the dear people, so it would be fearfully stale for you. Why not have a country drive and call on Jenny-Wren?"

Betty glanced out at the sunshine. "It sounds tempting. I'm not keen on meeting people I don't know, whom I'll probably never see again. But"—and she hesitated—"what about Lady Marchwood? Jen's staying with her. If it were only Jenny-Wren, I'd go like a shot. But suppose Lady Marchwood isn't nice?"

"Would your Jenny-Wren be staying with her if she were not?" Chris asked seriously.

Betty laughed. "Jen may be used to her. I'm frightened of Lady Marchwood."

"No, you're not. You're only shy; and you must get out of it, my dear. I'll order the car, and you'll go. You may never see Lady Marchwood, you silly kid. You'll ask for your Jenny-Wren; I suppose she has a name of her own?"

"She's Jen Robins. Oh, if I thought I wouldn't need to see anybody else——!"

"It's more than likely you won't. Don't be a babe, Bets! You're of age!"

"I don't feel it," Betty said soberly. "I do hate doing things alone!"

Chris glanced at her quickly. This was the great trouble. Betty readily admitted that for Meg all was well; Meg was freed from the burden of weakness and ill-health which she had borne for years. But for herself, used through all her childhood and growing period to be one of two, the loneliness and sense of incompleteness were crushing. Betty missed her twin more than anybody understood; half of herself was gone; and she shrank continually from doing things alone.

"I wish I could come with you, old girl," Chris said gently. "But as I don't know Jen Robins, I'd really be in the way. You'll have a much jollier chat with her alone. You'd better go to-day, for it will be days before I could go with you. It's most likely you'll see her by herself. You needn't be nery."

"I will be scared when I get there," Betty admitted. "But I'll forget all about it as soon as I see Jen. If she's out I'll write and ask her to fix another day, or to meet me somewhere."

"How gray suits you, my child!" Chris said warmly that afternoon, as she tucked Betty into the car. "It shows up all your colour. You look lovely; you needn't be shy of meeting anybody whatever! I say, you don't know who these Marchwood people are, do you? I've just been asking Tom about them."

Betty's nervous look returned. "Chris, what do you mean? They aren't anybody particular, are they?"

“That’s what I want to know. There was Sir Andrew Marchwood, the explorer, who was killed out in Africa a month or two ago. Is your Lady Marchwood a connection of his?”

Betty looked scared. “I thought I’d heard the name somewhere! I don’t know; I don’t know anything about them. Chris, suppose she’s his wife or his mother! I couldn’t go calling at the house!”

“Oh, but you aren’t going to see her! If that should be the case, it would make it all the more certain that you’d see only your Jenny-Wren, that’s all. Lady Marchwood wouldn’t be receiving people, if she’s his mother. He had a mother in this country, I know. I must ask Tom if Sir Andrew Marchwood had a wife! All sorts of people got married while we were at the Cape last year. But Tom’s gone back to the office, so I’ll have to tell you at night.”

“By that time I suppose I shall know as much as Tom; unless Jenny-Wren’s out,” and Betty waved her hand bravely as the car set out.

Then she settled down in her corner, her face sober; for the prospect of possibly intruding at an inconsiderate time into the family circle of a famous explorer was enough to daunt a bolder spirit than hers. As she thought it over, she almost told the driver to take her home again. But though Betty could shrink from an ordeal and even shirk it, she could not bear to be laughed at. To face Chris and own she had turned tail would have been too much. It was easier to go on, hoping desperately that fate would be kind, that Chris had been right, and that she would see only Jenny-Wren.

Rather than dwell on the possible ordeal before her, her thoughts wandered off along a well-known track, as she sped swiftly westward. Out in Switzerland, in the blazing sunshine of the Platz above the Marienthal, Betty had sat by Meg’s bed and they had planned for the future—dreams which Betty now knew her twin must have guessed would never be realised. Betty herself had refused to look facts in the face; she had an ostrich-like faculty for burying her head and ignoring truth; and until the very last she had clung to her belief that Meg must be better soon. The shock, when it came, had stunned her, and though she was unaware of it she was still numb from its effects.

Even now, the thought of life without Meg did not seem possible. So impossible did it seem that Betty was hardly facing it. Half the time when she sat dreaming, her eyes rapt and not unhappy, she was re-living those talks with Meg and going over the plans which would never be carried out; the flat in town, which they had discussed even to the colour of the wall-paper and the china, the college life for Meg, her own music, the quiet evenings of work and practice and talk, the concerts and country jaunts, the visits from their parents, the holidays which would always be spent in Scotland;—it had been all arranged. Now none of it could happen; but in her

dreams, while wide-awake, Betty lived in that life, thought about it, hungered for it. To-day, as she raced westward, she was so far away that she saw nothing of the suburbs, and roused herself only as they crossed a long bridge and dived into tree-hung country roads.

“I’m not looking at anything! It is silly; it’s lovely country,” and she began to look about her. “This is Buckinghamshire, I suppose!”

Through little towns, rapidly becoming suburbs, they came to Wycombe and passed on, through the sweeping rounded Chilterns, to Risborough, where they left the hills behind and took the road below the wooded slopes. The chauffeur stopped once or twice to ask his way; and at last he turned to Betty, to point out a white house on the hill in front of them.

“Marchwood Manor, miss. But you want Abinger Hall? They say that gray tower among the trees is the Hall.”

“Abinger Hall; that’s right,” Betty said perplexedly. “But it’s Lady Marchwood’s house. Why doesn’t she live at Marchwood Manor?”

“Couldn’t say, miss. Shall we go to the Manor first?”

“No, go to the Hall. I was told to go to the Hall. But I don’t understand. Perhaps Lady Marchwood has let the Manor,” and Betty sat frowning in perplexity as the car swept through a village with a neat, triangular green, and up a lane under arching beech trees.

Then she leaned forward with a cry. “Oh! Stop one moment, please! That must be the Abbey. We’re all right; we were to come to the Hall, near the Abbey,” and she gazed eagerly up at the great ancient gateway, behind which lay the Abbey ruins.

“It’s beautiful! I’d like to go and examine it. But it wouldn’t be polite. We’d better go on. One moment!”—and she leaned over the side and called to a small girl in the road. “Does Lady Marchwood live at the Hall?”

“Yes—Miss Joy——” the child stared at this ignorant foreigner. “Lady Marchwood—yes, miss.”

“It sounds all right,” and Betty nodded to the man to drive on. “But who is ‘Miss Joy’? And what has she to do with Lady Marchwood? And why is Lady Marchwood living here? It’s all rather mysterious!”

Her natural nervousness came over her again, as she realised that she had almost reached the Hall. If only she had not been alone! It was one of the moments when she craved for somebody, some one to keep up her courage. Always shy, she had become shyer still since she had lost her twin. If only Meg could have been there to laugh at her fears!

To banish her shrinking dread, she began desperately to remember her old-time friendship with Jen Robins. What good friends they had been! How jolly Jenny-Wren had always seemed! Betty saw a swift series of pictures; Jen, with long yellow plaits and long white legs and a short frock of vivid

blue, dancing morris jigs in the garden at The Grange, leaping and waving white handkerchiefs; Jen gravely watching the children she had taught in their dances and talking seriously of the improved feeling brought about by folk-dancing in the village; Jen, after her accident, lying on her couch under the yellow birch tree in the garden, on the sunny autumn afternoon when everybody brought gifts and the morris pipe was found, her plaits cut off and her curly "bob" already beginning to grow; Jen's face as she tramped through the snow, clasping the Basque pipe to her breast, after the rescue of the old fisherman; Jen gazing intently, as her children danced in the competition, listening to the judge's comments, radiant over the success of her team; Jen as the maypole in the middle of "Sellenger's Round," as the school teams and the village children caught hands and danced around her.

"What a jolly time it was! I do hope she's as nice as ever! She'll be nearly twenty-one; can she still be our Jenny-Wren? What will she be like grown-up? And engaged! Oh, bother! I wish she wasn't!"

Then the car turned sharply into the drive of the Hall, and Betty's wandering thoughts came back to the ordeal of the moment.

"What a lovely park! What gorgeous beech trees!—Oh, here's the house! What a big place!"

In her nervousness it was the size of the Hall, and not the beauty of the house, that she noticed. But before she had time for further thought, the car was drawing up before the door.

Betty would have liked to send the man to ask if Miss Robins was in. But she pulled herself together, and stepped out bravely.

"After all, if Jenny-Wren isn't here, I needn't see anybody. If she is, it will be all right," she said, as she rang the bell.

"Can I see Miss Robins? I think she's staying here," she said to the maid.

She could not understand the look which came over the girl's face. "Miss Jen—Lady Marchwood—yes, miss," she stammered.

"Not Lady Marchwood. It's Miss Robins I want to see; Miss Jen," Betty insisted, her fear of the dreaded Lady Marchwood forcing out the words.

"Miss Jen—yes, Lady Marchwood," said the girl helplessly again; and she turned to some one in the entrance-hall behind her.

"Not Lady Marchwood; Miss Jen!" Betty laughed afterwards at thought of that duet of helpless misunderstanding.

"Who is it? Who is the out-of-date person whose voice I seem to know? I'm afraid she can't see Miss Jen without seeing Lady Marchwood too," cried a voice, full of curiosity and suppressed amusement.

The girl threw wide the door. "Lady Marchwood,—Miss Jen," she said triumphantly to the visitor.

Betty gave a cry of joy and incredulous amazement. “Jenny-Wren! It *is* you! What does she mean?”

Jen, in a white frock, with waving yellow curls, and dancing eyes, her arms full of red roses, stood gazing at her from the lowest step of the dark oak staircase.

“Betty McLean, by all that’s weird and wonderful! Oh, come in, my dear! What fun to see you again! Take these, Alice,”—and she thrust the roses at the maid. “Put them in water for me. Now, Betty——”

“Jenny-Wren!” Betty had seen a gleam of gold. “Jenny-Wren, you aren’t *married?*”

Jen tilted her chin defiantly. “Why not, please? I’m quite married. I’ve been married for a fortnight. I’m Lady Marchwood,” and she curtsyed. “*One* of the Lady Marchwoods! There’s an appalling number of us about. But I’m certainly one of them.”

Then she broke into a laugh. “Didn’t you know, really, Bets? You poor thing! What a shock! Don’t you know *anything*? Come and hear all about it;—tea, Alice, please! In here, Betty; I must get that bewildered look off your poor face!” and she threw open the door of a small sitting-room.

“Tell me what you mean at once!” Betty said firmly.

## CHAPTER II

### BETTY AND MEG

“You tell first!” Jen commanded, pushing Betty gently down into a chair. “I’ve told you the worst, the very worst, about me. But I’ve had the biggest shock. At least you came here expecting to find me; I hadn’t the remotest notion you were anywhere near. My explaining will keep. But where have you sprung from, Bets?”

Betty hastily told the circumstances which had brought her to the Hall, as the quickest way of inducing Jen to tell her own story. “I was staying in town with my married sister. Tickles wrote from school, asking why I didn’t go to see you, and giving me your address. Chris sent me in her car—no, she’s not waiting outside!” at a quick question from Jen. “She had an engagement, so she couldn’t come. I came alone in the car.”

“Driving yourself? No? Alice will give the man some tea. It was ripping of you to come, Betty. But what have you been doing with yourself, my dear?” Jen asked severely. “You don’t look well. And you look *much* older than twenty-one! Have you been ill? Or is anything the matter?” and her face lost its laughter and grew kindly. “I don’t like the look of you, Betty,” she scolded gently. “I think you need petting. What’s up?”

Betty had flushed, but now she laughed. “You sound motherly. It’s sweet of you, Jenny-Wren, but I’m all right. We’ve had trouble; and we’ve been travelling since. I’m just home from the Cape. But I’m very well, really. Now tell me what it all means! Tickles said you were staying with Lady Marchwood. You say you *are* Lady Marchwood! And you’ve only been married for a fortnight? *Jen!* Have I arrived in the middle of your honeymoon? But Tickles didn’t know!”

“I don’t suppose she’s heard yet. I’ve had a week of my honeymoon; the rest’s postponed. I’m looking forward to it later on,” Jen said airily. Then her voice grew grave. “Betty, dear, don’t you know? We’ve had great trouble here. Really, I’m as sober as anybody could wish, and even a little sad; but the surprise and the joy of seeing you made me forget. And the shock of hearing you arguing with Alice—I really had to laugh. Poor Alice! We’re having such a time, trying to educate them all up to my new name; and then, when she’s doing her very best to remember, you turn up and insist—‘*Not* Lady Marchwood; Miss Jen!’ And the poor girl—‘Yes, Miss Jen—Lady Marchwood!’—doing her level best to stick to it. It really was priceless!”

“I’m sorry,” Betty apologised. “I thought both Alice and I had gone daft. But isn’t there another Lady Marchwood, Jenny-Wren? Tickle said you were staying with her; and a child in the road, when we asked the way, said, ‘Miss Joy—Lady Marchwood.’ Do you wonder I arrived feeling in a perfect fog?”

“I don’t blame you,” Jen conceded. Then she explained quickly, “Betty, dear, this is Joy Shirley’s house. You remember Joan Shirley, who came home with me to The Grange after that accident I had? Joy is her cousin, and as like her as if they were twins. Joy married Andrew Marchwood a year ago, and went out with him to Kenya. His younger brother, Kenneth, stayed at home and got engaged to me. Their mother lives at Marchwood Manor; I expect that’s been puzzling you too? She’s old Lady Marchwood; Joy is young Lady Marchwood. I don’t know what I am to the neighbours, for we aren’t seeing callers at present; but I suspect I’m ‘little Lady Marchwood,’ if any one of my height could be called little. Or perhaps ‘the new Lady Marchwood!’”

“But how——?” Betty began. Then her face grew grave. “Oh, Jen! I’d forgotten! Sir Andrew—out in Africa——”

“Yes. Joy came home two months ago, expecting him to follow her. He—didn’t. The news came at a bad time for her and nearly killed her. But she’s all right now, and almost strong again; and the twins are little angels.”

Jen’s eyes were dancing. She laughed and nodded, as Betty raised her eyebrows.

“Yes! Perfectly beautiful little girls, just like Joy and Joan, with their lovely bronze hair. Both girls; that’s why I’m Lady Marchwood. I hoped I’d be ‘Mrs.’ But it can’t be helped. They’re three weeks old, and angels for goodness. And, of course, they’re the greatest possible comfort to Joy.”

“Oh, I am glad she has them!” Betty said fervently. “She can’t feel she has lost everything if she has two babies to live for.”

“She says,” Jen said soberly, “that she feels her life is over—but at the same time that she’s begun a new life. She’s being very plucky, Bets; it’s done me good just to be with her. At first she was stunned, and wanted only to hold the babies and cry; but now she’s beginning to plan, for them first and then for all of us. She’s going to miss Andrew fearfully, but she isn’t going to go under, as we feared at first. The babies have saved her.”

“But what about you, Jenny-Wren?” Betty urged. “Did you say you’d been married only a fortnight? But where is—is your——?”

“My husband?” Jen said calmly. “Better get used to it! I’m only getting used to the idea myself. It still sounds funny. Ken had to go out to Kenya at once, to see about things for Joy and settle up about his own shamba; for he’ll live at home now. I thought I’d have to go out to Africa with him, and I

was dreading it. I'm rejoicing to think that I can stay at home with Joy. We were married before he went, and we toddled off to town together for a week. Then we 'had a few words and parted,' and he went to Kenya and I came home to Joy and the twins."

"Oh, Jenny-Wren! That's rather sad for you," Betty cried sympathetically.

"It is," Jen agreed. "But it won't be for very long. And I insisted on being married. I absolutely refused to let him go unless he married me first."

"Was it all your idea, Jenny-Wren?"

"Oh, he proposed it!" Jen admitted. "But I'll confess I jumped at the idea. Joy tried to make me wait, so that I could have a swanky wedding and invite people like you; but I'd lost all my own family and I wanted to belong to somebody. So Ken took me into his family, and made me Joy's sister, and he left me his mother to look after. We're worried about her; Andrew's death was a terrible shock to her, and she wasn't well when it happened. So I'm living half here and half at the Manor, and taking care of everybody. It's far easier to do it as 'the new Lady Marchwood,' than just as Jen Robins, an old friend of the family!"

Betty laughed and agreed. "And have you and the twins and their mother all this great house to yourselves?"

"My hat, no! We're a large family. There's Mrs. Shirley, to begin with. She's Joy's aunt, who brought her up and has been like a mother to her. Just at the moment Aunt Shirley's staying at the Manor with Lady Marchwood. Joy's illness and the anxiety and the birth of the twins upset her, and she had rather a collapse last week. The excitement was too much for her; and my wedding came on top of all the rest. So as soon as I came back from town I persuaded her to go to the Manor for a few days; I thought she'd rest more thoroughly if she went right away."

"She'll be company for old Lady Marchwood too," Betty remarked.

"And there's a delightful companion there, who is really a nurse and is splendid with old ladies, and she can look after two as easily as one. It's jolly for them all; they're both pleased about it, and the change is really doing Aunt Shirley good. We miss her here, but there are plenty of us left! There are Joy's adopted twins as well; she adopted two daughters two years ago," Jen explained. "It really served her right to get twin girls of her own, for she always used to speak of Ros and Maidie as 'my twins.' Rosamund's seventeen, and Maidlin is sixteen; quite hefty girls to be adopted by Joy, who is only twenty-four herself! They're at school at the moment, but you may see them presently. Maidlin is the reigning May Queen at school; Ros was the Queen two years ago, and I came in between. Yes, absurd, wasn't it? But I went back last year, for cookery and other domestic stunts, and they



made me be the Queen. If you hear me called Brownie, that's the reason; I was the Brown Queen—beech brown. Maidlin is the Primrose Queen. My cookery wasn't very extensive, as things happened, and I had to leave; but such as it is, it's being quite useful, for on top of everything else we're cookless, temporarily. Our—I ought to say Joy's—old cook is away nursing her mother; a friend who was staying in the village came to the rescue, and cooked for us and pulled us through Joy's illness and my wedding and my time in town. But three days ago she was wired for, because her little sister had suddenly begun with appendicitis and had to be operated on at once. So Nancy, who dotes on the kid, packed up and fled; and we felt rather stranded, till we got in a nice sensible woman from the village. Her cooking is as sensible as she is, but not always quite as nice; very reliable, but not frilly or thrilling! So occasionally I drift into the kitchen and fling a few things into a basin, and sometimes quite a decent pudding comes out; and Ros and Maidie fall on my neck. Joy *says* she likes my pastry and my cakes! Everybody's been very kind and polite!"

"I'm sure your cooking's top-hole," Betty said, laughing. "But I feel I ought not to have come at such a time, Jenny-Wren. We had no idea; we didn't know whether your Lady Marchwood was connected with the explorer we had heard about or not. Will you apologise for me, and say I wouldn't have dreamt of coming if I'd known? And you must be busy too; I *am* sorry——"

"I'm not sorry! Haven't I said I'm overjoyed to see you? But I *am* busy, acknowledging wedding-presents," Jen said haughtily. "They've been pouring in while I've been in town. People hadn't any warning; it was all over in such a hurry, and we never told anybody. Joy sent word round at the last minute, and folks came to the church; but there wasn't time for presents. So now clocks and spoons and salt-cellars are arriving by every post."

"Congratulations!" Betty said warmly, laughing. "I'd have brought a salt-cellar if I'd had the least idea."

"I have to write about them all myself, of course. It's not a job I can shove on to Mary-Dorothy—Mary? She's Joy's secretary, and our best friend, and she writes books for girls and dedicates them to me. I'm her godmother; well, she says so. She looks after the village; Joy has all sorts of social stunts going on, clubs and hostels and homes and country-dancing. Mary kept them all happy and attended to all the business while Joy was abroad. She's one of the family. We'll invite her to tea with us on the lawn. I see Alice is setting it out there; good girl! She knows what I like. Would you like me to steal Elizabeth and Margaret for you to see how beautiful they are?"

“Elizabeth and Margaret?” Betty turned to her, an indescribably startled look on her suddenly white face.

“Why, what’s the matter? What *is* it, Betty?” Jen cried anxiously. “What have I said to upset you?”

“I’m silly,” Betty caught her breath. “I was taken by surprise. Are the new twins called Elizabeth and Margaret?”

“Elizabeth Joy and Margaret Joan. What about it, Bets?”

“What pretty names!” Betty said conventionally, but her lips were quivering and she looked through the open window out to the lawn.

“Betty McLean, I shall shake you if you don’t tell me what’s the matter!” Jen said sharply. Then she laid her hand on her friend’s knee. “What is it, old chap? Do tell me!”

“I’m not sure if I can,” Betty said unsteadily. “My twin was Margaret; I’m Elizabeth, of course. I told you we’d had trouble. Meg—she was always Meg at home, though at school they called her Maggie, because they had a Meg and a Margaret already—she was ill and at home when you got to know us at Rocklands, so you never saw her. We took her to Switzerland, and we were there with her for months; but it was no use. I miss her every day. As children we did everything together. I can’t get used to being alone.” It was a real cry from her heart.

Jen’s face had softened into understanding. “I didn’t know. I am so sorry, dear! You’ll miss her all the time. It must be frightfully hard to be brave and go on alone, but you’ll do it. She’d want you to, wouldn’t she? I know how I felt when father went first and then mother. A twin must be a very sore loss. But you’ll do it, Bets; you’ll pull yourself together and go ahead. Nobody with any grit in them can be content to sit down and feel hopeless. It’s just what Joy’s having to do, in a way; to make up her mind to go on alone. She’s going to make something of her life, even without her husband; and you’ll do it too, Bets.”

“But she has her children. They’ll make up for everything,” Betty said unsteadily. “As you said just now, she’ll begin a new life for their sake. I have to go on with my old life, but without Meg. We’d planned all our lives together.”

“You’ll have to make a new start. Wait for me one moment, old chap!” and Jen was gone, racing off upstairs.

She went quietly into the big sunny room where Joy sat by the open window, gazing out with hungry brown eyes at the lawn and the beech avenue; eyes which asked an endless question of life.

She turned back to the present at sight of Jen, however. “Who’s here, Brownie? I saw a strange car. Is it somebody for you?”

Jen knelt beside her chair. “‘Traveller’s Joy,’ may I borrow Betty and Meg? I want them to do a little missionary work downstairs.”

Joy frowned at the contraction of her children’s stately names. Then she smiled.

“What missionary job have you found for them now? You may always have them if there’s work for them to do. They’re pleased to help. What is it, Brownie? Who wants to see them? How are they to be missionaries? And why are you messing up their names? You must have some reason, for you know I don’t like it. You aren’t just teasing, Jenny-Wren?”

“There’s another Betty downstairs,” Jen explained. “Such a pretty Scottish Betty! I’d love you to see her sometime. She was at that school near my home, and I knew her when she was the head girl. We were great friends. She came to see me, not knowing *anything*; she sends all sorts of apologies to you for intruding, but she hadn’t the least idea. She nearly swooned when she saw my wedding-ring; and she’s rather dazed by all I’ve been telling her.”

“I can believe that, if you talked at your usual rate,” Joy said dryly. “What a pow-wow you must have had! And does she want to see the babies?”

“Her twin was Meg, and she’s just lost her, and she’s heart-broken and lonely, ‘Traveller’s Joy.’ When I referred to Elizabeth and Margaret, her face showed me there was something wrong, so I made her tell me. She feels she can’t live without her Meg, who was evidently her other half.” Jen’s eyes met Joy’s.

Joy looked away quickly to the garden again. “Take the children to her, Jenny-Wren. Give her my love, and tell her she must find something to give her heart to. She can’t live if it’s empty and crying out. Bring the babies back to me quickly.”

Jen kissed her. “You dear brave thing! I’ll only keep them for five minutes. I know you don’t like to feel they’re out of your sight. Nurse must carry one. I daren’t go downstairs holding two.”

Joy smiled wistfully as the children were lifted from their cradles, and little Margaret gave a protesting murmur, which was promptly echoed by Elizabeth.

“I’m sure they hear one another. As soon as either speaks the other answers. They’ll be a perpetual duet when they can talk,” said Joy. “So far as I can see, they both copy one another. It’s not always Elizabeth who begins the conversation, by any means, although she’s the elder. Give a nice message to Aunt Brownie’s Betty and be good girls downstairs, children!”

Jen laughed and carried Margaret away, followed by the nurse with Elizabeth.

Betty was standing by the window looking out over the lawn.

“This is Joy’s little Margaret, Bets,” Jen said gently. “Sit down and hold out your arms! I’ll fill your lap with babies; Margaret on that arm; Elizabeth on this one! There! Do you wonder Joy feels she has something to live for?”

“Oh——! The little angels!” Betty whispered, as the tiny red heads nestled against her.

Jen repeated Joy’s message. “You’ll find something or some one, Bets. There must be somebody needing you.”

“How very kind of ‘Joy’! Will you thank her for me, Jen? I can’t think of her except as Joy; I hope she won’t mind. It’s beautiful of her to think for me at this time. And tell her I’ve never seen such lovely babies. Look at the wee curls already!”

“It’s the dainty hands and feet I love. I could cuddle their toes all day; I try to, don’t I, nurse? And they can grip with their fingers already; look!” and she gave one finger to each twin and laughed as the little crumpled hands closed on them. “They cling like small monkeys!”

“Do you do anything in this house besides baby-worship?” Betty queried.

“I write notes of thanks for salt-cellars,” Jen reminded her.

“Oh, yes, I forgot the salt-cellars! I must hurry home and see if I can find one for you. I’m interrupting your work most frightfully. But I do appreciate having been allowed to see these wee people.”

“It’s not everybody who is honoured to that extent,” Jen informed her. “But they come down to speak to very special friends. They’re meeting all our circle by degrees. Now, Margaret dear, if you could bring yourself to give up that finger, it’s time you went back to mother!”

“Margaret Joan! Elizabeth Joy! I understand the Joan and Joy, but where did the other names come from?” Betty asked.

“Margaret is for Mrs. Shirley; Joy’s aunt and Joan’s mother. Elizabeth is for Lady Marchwood; our mother. Joy and I call her ‘our’ mother now; neither of us quite feels like saying ‘my’ mother. I can’t put her in the place of my own mother, and Joy still has Auntie Shirley. But Lady Marchwood is ‘our’ mother; and that reminds us that we belong to one another at last. Now, babies, say good-bye to Auntie Betty! It’s tea-time for everybody!”

### CHAPTER III

## WHAT HAPPENED TO BETTY

Jen stood on the terrace waving good-bye as the car bore Betty away down the beech avenue.

Tea had been laid in a grassy corner, whose walls were red climbing roses. Then Jen had led the way down a shrubby path and through an old gate into the Abbey ruins, and had shown Betty quickly round.

“You must come again to see it properly, and to hear all the stories and see the underground parts. It’s a long job to do it thoroughly; if I start on the legends you won’t be home to dinner and your sister will be sending out wireless inquiries for you. I’m sorry you haven’t seen Ros and Maidie, but they often have to stay after school. As Queen and ex-Queen, they’re important people, and they’re needed for all sorts of things,” Jen had explained. “You’ll find me here or at the Manor, so I do hope you will come again.”

“I’d love to!” Betty said warmly.

As she lay back in the car, after waving good-bye to “Lady Marchwood,” Betty was conscious of a happier feeling than had possessed her before her visit. It was not merely the easing of her nervous dread or the happiness of renewed friendship. There had been an indefinable atmosphere about the house, a sense of courage in the face of loss, and of resolute rebuilding of life, which had ministered to her own need.

“Jenny-Wren makes a lot of Joy’s pluck,” she said to herself, as they drew near the lodge gates. “But she has plenty herself. It can’t have been easy to let her husband go away so far, after only a week together. And when Joy’s husband didn’t come back—no, Jen must have her bad times, though she says nothing about that. Of course, those babies are helping them all. If I had something that really needed me! I suppose I shall find something. I haven’t been looking for it; I’ve only been thinking how lonely I am. Their way is better; I shall have to buck up! I’ve been a slacker. There’s mother, to begin with; she misses Meg too. I’ve only thought about myself. I have been selfish.”

Her brows puckered in a frown. Then, as the car swerved round a sharp corner, just beside the great Abbey gateway, Betty sprang up with a wild cry. “Oh, stop! Stop quickly! You’ll run over them!”

Two cycles lay in the road, one with a twisted wheel. Two schoolgirls were just picking themselves up from the dust when the car bore down upon

them.

Betty's shout was echoed by a yell from one girl and a scream from the other. The chauffeur jammed down his brakes and swung the car round into the hedge. The turn was too sharp; the wheel caught the edge of the ditch, and the car crashed over on its side.

"And all because Maidie wouldn't run over a hen!" Rosamund cried breathlessly. "Is anybody hurt? We're all right; you've done for my bike, but it was a bit damaged—oh, I say!" Her voice sobered in terror. "Is she hurt? Who is she? She's not—not dead, is she? Maidie, keep away! I'll tell you in a moment!"

White and frightened, the man, unhurt himself, was trying to drag Betty out of the wrecked car. She lay limp and stunned, her head cut by the broken glass, her eyes closed. She had started up in fear for the girls, and had been thrown forward on to her head.

"Must fetch help," the man panted. "She's not dead, missy. Where's the nearest hospital? Where can we get another car?"

"At the Hall," Rosamund said steadily. "We'd better take her there. It's the nearest place; the hospital is miles away. Lady Marchwood wouldn't want her taken so far. Were you coming from the Hall? Had she been there? Oh, then, of course we must take her there! Maidie, are you hurt? Can you run? Then scorch home and tell Jen; through the Abbey will be the quickest way. Say they must send the car. Go quickly; I'll be more use here. But—Maidie! Don't frighten Joy! If Jen's with her, get hold of Mary. But do it quickly!"

Maidlin nodded, with trembling lips. She was no use in an emergency such as this, but she could go for help, and she was tremulously eager to do something. She cast one terrified look at Betty, who moaned as Rosamund, with steady hands and set lips, helped the man to lay her on the grass. "Is she dead, Ros?"

"Not a bit. Stunned a little, that's all. She'll be sitting up and asking for brandy by the time the car gets here," Rosamund said cheerfully. "But do be as quick as ever you can, Maidie. One never knows."

Maidlin raced off at full speed through the old gateway and into the Abbey grounds, much happier for those comforting words.

Rosamund looked at the man searchingly, to see if he had believed it. What she saw in his face made her say quickly,—

"You couldn't help it. You couldn't run over us. If any one's to blame, we are. You did the only possible thing. Will you please go to the Abbey and ask for some brandy, in case she comes round? And bring water; I could bathe her head. Ask Mrs. Watson to come; tell her what's happened. And you should take some brandy yourself."

As the caretaker, with many exclamations of pity, washed Betty's cuts and bathed her face, Rosamund asked hurried questions of the chauffeur.

"Who is she? Can you give us her address? We'll have to let her friends know. Are they on the 'phone? Lady Marchwood will do everything possible; they'll have 'phoned for our doctor by now. It's a good thing it happened so near the Hall. We'll get her put to bed quite quickly."

Mrs. Watson looked up. "We could carry her into the Abbey, Miss Rose. It's nearer. I've heard say you shouldn't move folks more'n can be helped till the doctor's seen them, for fear there's something broke inside. It's a long way to the Hall if you go round by road."

"But with the car—oh, goodness! The car's got a wheel off! Jen said so this morning. I say, Ann, we'd better carry her in to your rooms! You could make up the bed in Joan's little room, where Maidie slept the day the twins were born?"

"Easy, Miss Rose. I'll fetch a mattress and we'll lift her gentle."

"Yes, that's best," Rosamund agreed; and while she waited and tended Betty, one part of her mind, working alone, said that it was just as well Maidie had been adopted by Joy and taken to the Hall, and had not been left to her aunt's bringing up.

Maidlin, her bruises forgotten, raced through the Abbey buildings, across the cloister garth, and down the tresaunt to the gate which led to the Hall. In less than five minutes she was panting out her story to Jen, whom she caught on the terrace, just setting out for the Manor to spend the night with her new mother.

"Maidie! What *is* it, child?"

"A lady—hurt—the motor," gasped Maidlin. "It went in the ditch—by the Abbey. Ros says will you send the car to bring her here?—and she isn't dead—but she looked like it—and—and don't frighten Joy, Jen."

Jen ran to the telephone. She rang up the doctor, and then the Manor, asking there for Lady Marchwood's maid. "Edith, I won't be able to come to-night. We've had an accident; none of us—a friend. I don't know yet how bad it is. I'll ring up again later. Tell Lady Marchwood not to expect me."

Then she called Mary Devine from her study, and told her what she knew. "Don't say anything to Joy yet. She has gone to bed, so she won't see us bring her in. It must be Betty McLean, who was here to tea, I'm afraid. I'm going to her now. Get a bedroom ready, Mary; and see to Maidie. She's had a fearful race. Now, Maidie, exactly where is Betty? The car's under repair, so we'll have to carry her. You came through the Abbey; is that nearest? All right; don't tell Joy yet, unless you have to; if you must, let Mary tell her."

And she raced off across the lawn and into the Abbey grounds.

Mary asked a few questions of Maidlin, then bade her rest and get her breath, and went off upstairs to prepare a room.

In Ann Watson's little room within the Abbey walls, Jen bent over Betty, who lay, white and still, on the mattress Ann had hastily stripped from her own bed and given to the frightened chauffeur. He and Rosamund had lifted Betty very carefully and carried her in, without jarring her in any way.

Rosamund gave a sigh of relief. "At last, Brownie! We've done all we can think of. Is she a friend of yours? She isn't dead; but I don't know how much she's hurt. She moaned when we lifted her."

"I knew her when she was your age, and at school." Jen was steadying herself with a great effort. Her lips quivered, but she bit them fiercely. "You've done splendidly, Ros. I'm glad you've brought her in here. There's only one thing more—to wait out in the road and stop the doctor's car. He needn't go up to the house. I 'phoned, and he was in and said he'd come at once."

"Right. I'll stop him," and Rosamund slipped out and ran back to the road, and stood straining her eyes for the first sight of the car.

Jen turned to the caretaker. "Ann, could you make up the bed in the little room? If she has some internal injury the doctor may not want her carried all the way to the house. She might be better here for a few days; then we could take her to the Hall afterwards."

"Yes, Miss Jen—m'lady. Miss Rosamund thought of that. Shall I make it ready now?"

"Rosamund doesn't lose her head," Jen said, with relief in her tone. "Yes, I think the bed should be ready. I'll bathe her head.—Oh, Betty, my dear, I am so sorry!" she whispered, as she took Ann's place.

But Betty only moaned and did not hear.

Rosamund came in with the doctor, hastily telling how the accident had happened. "What can I do now, Brownie?" she whispered, as they drew back and left him to make his examination.

"If you'd run to the house and ask nurse to come and help," Jen suggested gratefully. "I'm afraid you'll have to tell Joy about this now. Can you do that, Ros? It won't hurt her; but tell her gently. I don't think I ought to go while Dr. Cairns is here; and I couldn't bear to go until I know what he says."

"Of course not. She was your friend," Rosamund nodded. "I'll tell Joy, Jenny-Wren." Her eyes met Jen's bravely; she did not like the task; she was even a little frightened, for Joy was only just beginning to pick up strength after a very terrible shock; though Betty had not been her friend she might very well be distressed by the news of her serious injury at their very gates. But Rosamund would not shirk, and she would not ask Jen to leave her



friend at such a moment. And yet nurse must be fetched, and therefore Joy must know.

“You’re a brick, Ros!” Jen whispered warmly. “One other thing; send round to the garage and tell them; the men must help the chauffeur with his car. We must ’phone to Betty’s sister, too, but not till we’ve heard the doctor’s report.” Her lips quivered again. “Betty came to see *me*,” she said unsteadily. “If she hadn’t cared about me enough to come, she wouldn’t be lying like that now.”

“Don’t be a goat, Brownie,” Rosamund drew her outside the door and spoke vigorously. “She might have come to see you a dozen times and have been all right. It wasn’t you; it was that hen.”

“Hen?” Jen stared at her dazedly.

“Maidie wouldn’t run over it; the silly thing ran out under her wheel. She turned and caught my wheel and we crashed and went down; and then the car came round that sharp corner, perhaps just a shade too quickly. Betty stood up and yelled to the man to stop; they were on top of us, as we’d been on top of the hen a second before, and the man swerved just in time; the car was all mixed up with my bike. It tipped over on the edge of the ditch, and Betty overbalanced and shot out on to her head and was cut by the glass. It was the hen and nobody else, Brownie.”

“I wondered how it happened,” Jen admitted. “Tell Joy all about it, Ros. And send nurse quickly. Make light of it to Joy and Mary; and tell Maidlin it will be all right.”

Rosamund nodded. “Queer, how we all try to save Maidie!” she said to herself. “We seem to think she can’t stand anything. I suppose there’s something in it; she says so little, but so much goes on inside her. She takes things so badly. But she can’t have us to act as fire-screens all her life! She’ll have to come out of her shell and pull herself together—my aunt! What a mixture! I’m thinking wildly to keep myself from thinking about telling Joy. The sooner I get it over the better. There’s no need to be so scared, you ass!” she said to herself severely. “Joy’s all right. She won’t faint or cry or anything. But all the same I don’t like having to tell her bad news.”

“Oh, Ros, how is she? Is she dead?” Maidlin came flying out on to the terrace.

“No, silly. The doctor’s there——”

“Is who dead? Girls, what are you talking about?” Joy had been standing by the open window above them before getting into bed. She leaned out, her long bronze plaits drooping over her white wrapper. “Ros, has anything happened to Jen?” she cried, her voice sharp with terror.

“Maidie, you idiot!—No, Joy, Jen’s all right,” Rosamund called reassuringly. “I’m coming up to tell you all about it. The girl who was here to tea with Jen has had a little accident, that’s all. Jen’s taking care of her; she’s in the Abbey. I’ll come up at once.—Maidie——” and then, at sight of the fear in Maidie’s face, Rosamund said no further word of reproach. “It’s all right, silly. There’s no harm done. But you must learn to think. I’d been sent to tell Joy gently, and under her very window you shriek out, ‘Is she dead?’ Of course, Joy thinks you mean Jenny-Wren and gets the wind up! Go round to the garage and tell them there’s been an accident to a car outside the Abbey, and they must go to help. Don’t look so blue, you infant! You haven’t done Joy any harm. You’d better come and see for yourself that she’s all right; but go to the garage first.”

“Maidie’ll be in the depths for days now,” she said, as she entered Joy’s room. “You must buck her up somehow, Joy. She thinks she’s done you harm.”

“She mustn’t be a silly child,” Joy said impatiently. “Tell me what’s happened, Rosamund!”

Rosamund glanced at her, as she lay back in a big chair. “She’s nervy still. She had a fright about Jen. She’ll say something to upset Maidie if she isn’t careful,” the thought flashed through her mind.

Then quickly and clearly she told the story. “Jen wants nurse to go, in case the doctor needs help, Joy. Can Maidie and I help you here? Or shall I call Mary?”

“Will you go at once, nurse? You’ll be able to help Jen. You might stay here, Ros; you’d be most use. If one of the children wakes and cries, the other will join in; and I’d want help. Nelly Bell’s out, or it would be all right. Mary will be needed, if they bring Betty here. I didn’t see her, but Jen talked of her as ‘Betty.’ You’d better stay with me,” she said, as nurse hurried away, full of sympathy and eager to help. “Maidie isn’t really——”

Rosamund closed the door with meaning emphasis.

Joy looked at her and knit her brows. “What’s that bang for, Rosamunda?”

Rosamund turned to her, flushed and indignant. “You people! You and Maidie. Don’t you know you’ll break her heart if she hears you say she isn’t any use? Don’t you know she’ll come flying up here to see if her silly question has done you any harm? Don’t you know she’s dying to be of use to you—as we all are? And then you go and say she isn’t *really* any use! It’s true, but that’s no reason for saying it, is it?” and she faced Joy, hurt indignation in her eyes.

“Oh——!” said Joy helplessly, and gazed at her incredulously.

“I don’t understand you people, who care for one another so much and yet can’t see what you’re doing to one another,” Rosamund said bluntly. “You’re just as bad as Maidie, and you’re seven years older. If she’d heard you she’d have gone and drowned herself in the Manor lake, or hidden herself weeping in the Abbey crypt, or run away to sea, or something. You’d have broken her heart. Why don’t you think sometimes?” Tight-lipped and indignant, she turned and began to pick up the baby-clothes nurse had dropped.

Joy raised her eyebrows at the implied rebuke. Then as she watched Rosamund straightening the room, pausing to lay her hand gently on little Margaret Joan as she stirred and gave a tiny cry, picking up the elder twin and hushing her, laying her down again very carefully, and going on with her tidying and making ready for the evening, Joy’s face changed, losing its resentment, and she gazed absorbedly at the younger girl, as if seeing her for the first time. Rosamund was quiet and business-like and efficient, tall and graceful, with two long yellow plaits hanging down her back; there was no sudden change in her; and yet Joy felt she was looking at a new person. Had this new Rosamund been there always, and had she been unnoticed? Or had the new person sprung to life as Ros faced her with hurt, indignant eyes, and asked her why she did not think? Joy was suddenly sorry and ashamed that she had called up that look and that rebuke. She never questioned its justice; all her life her trouble had been that she did not think.

After a long, thoughtful scrutiny of Rosamund’s determined face, Joy said gravely, “Thank you, Rosamunda. You’ve saved me from doing real harm. I’m deeply grateful.”

In a moment Rosamund was on her knees beside her. “Joy, forgive me! I had no right to speak to you like that.” Her arms went round Joy, and she hid her face in Joy’s lap.

Joy put her arm round her. “What I want to know, Ros, is how *you* understand so well? You thought for both me and Maidie. How did you manage it?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Rosamund said brokenly. “I don’t know how I dared to speak like that to you.”

“I’m very glad you did. But what made you understand so well?”

“I don’t know,” Rosamund said helplessly again. “I suppose it was because I’m so frightfully fond of you both. I was wild with Maidie because she’d frightened you; but I went all silly when I thought of how much you might have hurt Maidie. You can say or do what you like to me; but she can’t stand anything. You’d almost kill her if you hurt her, Joy. You don’t know how much she cares about you.”

“What I do seem to see is how much you care for Maidie, Rosamunda,” Joy said, wonder in her tone. “I knew you and she were good chums, but I never thought you cared specially much for her—or for anybody; not out of the ordinary, you know.” Her eyes searched Rosamund’s flushed face curiously.

With a cautious tap on the door, Maidlin cried outside, “May I come in, Joy?”

Rosamund sprang up. “Perhaps I care more than you think. I don’t talk about my feelings. I can’t, if I care enough. I can babble about things that don’t matter.—Give Maidie something to do, Joy. I’m going to help Mary, and be ready if Jen sends for anything.—Maidie, call me or Mary if the babes wake. You stay here and help Joy,” and she fled, first to her own room for a moment, and then to ask Mary Devine to give her something useful to do.

## CHAPTER IV BREAKING THE NEWS

Jen came wearily across the lawn. The shock and the strain of the last hour had worn her out.

Rosamund met her at the door. "Come up to Joy's room and tell her, Brownie. She's in bed and dying to know the latest news. Jen, Betty isn't ——?" Her awed, anxious face finished the question.

"No, but she's very badly hurt," Jen said unsteadily. "Nurse is in charge, but I shall go back to the Abbey for the night. Betty mustn't be moved. She's in the little room, and Dr. Cairns says she'll be much better there for a few days. He doesn't want her carried even as far as this. Is Joy all right?"

"Quite all right, but she wants to know the latest."

"We'll go to her at once. I can tell her everything in five minutes. Then I have to ring up Betty's sister; the man could give me their number, fortunately. They'll be expecting her home soon now." Her voice quivered. "It's all right, Ros," she added hastily. "I'm tired, that's all."

"You mustn't sit up," Rosamund remonstrated.

"I couldn't possibly go to bed," Jen retorted.

She sank down by Joy's side in the chair Maidlin placed for her. The sight of her white face moved Joy to a fuller realisation of the seriousness of the position than Rosamund's story had done, for Rosamund had deliberately made light of the trouble.

"Jen!" Joy whispered, really frightened. "Is your friend—oh, not that, Jenny-Wren!"

"She may pull through," Jen spoke hurriedly. "I didn't mean to scare you, dear. I suppose I'm a bit fagged; it's been rather a shock. Betty's very badly hurt, but she's going on nicely, and we've done everything possible for her. Dr. Cairns is sending in a nurse for to-night; can you do without Nanny till the new one comes? He says we'd better have a day-nurse, too. Ann's being a jewel; she produces hot water, and cold water, and bottles, and bandages, and splints, like magic. I'd never have believed your aunty could rise to the occasion so well, Maidie. She'd like to wait on Betty and nurse her; but Dr. Cairns says she'll have enough to do waiting on the nurses, and, of course, she may have to go at any moment, if tourists come to see the Abbey."

"We'll close the Abbey to visitors," Joy said quickly.

“No, we won’t. It isn’t fair, and there’s no need. People would be upset if they’d come for miles to see it. They won’t trouble Betty. We’ll bring her here as soon as she can be moved. She’d hate to know people had been turned away on her account.”

“Is she conscious?” Joy asked pityingly.

“Oh no. She hasn’t wakened at all. There’s concussion, of course. The doctor hopes that will pass off. One leg’s badly fractured, and her collarbone; and there’s something wrong inside, but he wouldn’t say much about it. Nurse understands, and she knows what to do. I shall stay there, in case Betty wakes during the night.”

“Jenny-Wren, you’re going to bed,” Joy said firmly.

“Dear, if Betty does wake, I must be there to hold her hand,” Jen said quietly. “Do you suppose I could go to sleep, or even lie in bed, knowing she might have come round and be feeling all alone with strangers? She won’t know where she is or what has happened. I’m the only person here she knows. And she’s been hurt because she’d come to see me. Whenever she wakes I’m going to be within call. Once she understands, it won’t matter so much; but just at present no one would be any use but me.”

“Jenny-Wren, I am so sorry,” Joy said, deepest sympathy in her tone.

“If Betty wakes she may have pain. We don’t know yet. I said I hoped not; but nurse said she hoped she would! I think she meant that if there was no pain it would mean there was harm done to her spine. If Betty’s in pain, I’m going to hold her hand. I haven’t forgotten how Joan held my hand all one night, till mother came.”

Joy hid her face, for she had never ceased to blame herself for Jen’s accident four years ago.

“Silly!” Jen laughed and pulled the bronze plaits. “Look at me, as well and strong as a horse! Oh, if I could feel sure Betty would get over it as I’ve done!”

“I never stop giving thanks because I didn’t kill you, Jenny-Wren,” Joy said brokenly.

“Didn’t come anywhere near killing me, my dear. I take a lot of killing,” Jen said airily. Then her voice grew grave. “‘Traveller’s Joy,’ I mustn’t stay here gossiping. I just came to tell you the latest. I’m going to change into some sensible clothes; think of sitting up all night in a white frock! An old, warm woolly will be best. Then”—her voice quivered—“I have an awful thing to do. But it must be done; it had better be done first, I think, before I get any more frightened about it!”

“What is it, Brownie?” Joy and Rosamund and Maidlin all looked at her anxiously.

“Can’t any of us do it for you?” Rosamund asked bravely. “Why should everything fall on you?”

“I want your help,” Jen said quickly. “I’ve a job for you, Ros. But I must do the other myself; I must ring up Betty’s sister and tell her.”

“Oh——! Yes, that is rather awful,” Rosamund admitted. “I suppose no one else could do that, Jenny-Wren.”

Jen rose, her face tense. “I’ll go and get it over. I’ll come in again before I go back to the Abbey, Joy.”

“Brownie, you must stay a little while with me. There’s something I must tell you,” Joy said urgently.

“I can’t stay to-night. You must see that, dear. I’m sure it will keep till Betty’s better,” and Jen kissed her as she lay. “Tell Maidie! I’m going to take Ros away for a few minutes.—Rosamund,” she said, as she closed the door, “I want you to go to the Manor and tell our mother and Aunt Shirley all about it. They’ll want to ask questions. I’ve ’phoned, of course; but they’ll want to see somebody, and I simply can’t spare time to go to-night. Will you do that for me?”

Rosamund made a grimace. “Brownie, I will. I don’t want to, but I’ll do it—for you. I’m shy of your mother-in-law; she strikes me dumb. But I won’t funk.”

“You’re a dear! She won’t scare you to-night, Rose; she’ll be too keen to hear everything.”

“I say, Jenny-Wren! I know what Joy wants to tell you!” Rosamund said impulsively.

“Oh?” Jen paused by the telephone, raising her eyebrows. “Did she tell you?”

“No, but I know. I was rude to her; well, I jawed her for not thinking of anybody but herself. She wants to ask you if it’s true.”

“It was hardly the time to do it, was it?” Jen asked soberly. “Why did you break out like that? I thought any of us could put up with anything from Joy at present.”

“You do think me a brute! And a baby!” Rosamund said warmly. “It wasn’t anything to do with *me*! She may say what she likes to me. I’d only say: ‘All right, old chap, if you like!’ whatever she said. But this was Maidie.”

“Oh!” said Jen again, and gazed at her thoughtfully. “Joy wasn’t horrid to Maidie, surely?”

“She was going to be. I told her off, and she thought better of it. Then I felt awful and I apologised. She isn’t mad; she was sweet about it. But she wants to ask you if she’s really as bad as all that.”

“You seem to have made the most of my brief absence,” Jen remarked. “If Joy merely wants to discuss her own character, that will certainly keep till Betty’s better. I’m glad to know it’s nothing serious. I was afraid you and she had been scrapping.”

“I thought nothing would induce me to scrap with Joy just now. But when she came out with, ‘Maidie isn’t really any use,’ I couldn’t stand that. Maidie would have had a fit if she’d heard.”

“She didn’t hear?” Jen asked sharply.

“Not a word. I saw to that.”

“Good for you, Ros! We don’t want Primrose upset too. Now give our lady mother our love, and tell her all about the trouble,” Jen nodded her farewell and turned to the telephone, her face grave again.

Rosamund fled, only too glad to escape. She had no wish to hear that conversation.

“Is that Mrs. Carmyle? I’m Jen Marchwood; Jen Robins, whom your sister, Betty McLean, came to see this afternoon. She hadn’t heard of my marriage. Yes, she’s still here; we knew you would be expecting her back. Mrs. Carmyle, I’m awfully sorry, but—well, Betty’s had a little accident. The car crashed, and she was thrown out.—Yes, getting on splendidly. We’ve put her to bed, and our doctor has seen her. We’re doing everything for her. She’s quite comfortable.—No, you couldn’t do anything, really. *Please* don’t come to-night. In the morning, if you must. But we’ll be very careful of Betty, and we’ll do everything.—Of course, I know you’ll want to come, but if you *could* wait till the morning—you see, we’re rather upset here. My sister-in-law has just lost her husband, Andrew Marchwood. You’ll know his name. She has twin babies, only three weeks old.—Yes, it was a shock to Betty. She was afraid she was intruding. But I showed her the twins and then she felt better. Yes, she loved them, of course.—Oh, *please* don’t feel that! Joy—Lady Marchwood—is only too glad to be able to have Betty here. It isn’t the *least* trouble. We’ve plenty of room, and there are heaps of us to look after them both. I’m going to sit up with Betty, and if she seems to want you to come I’ll ring you up, even during the night. Yes, I promise I will, if there’s any need.—Well, I’m afraid I can’t; I can’t tell you very much, because the doctor didn’t tell me. He’s sure she’ll be all right, but she must be kept quiet.—N-no, she isn’t exactly conscious. She banged her head, you know. But he’s sure that will be all right.—Oh, of course, if you feel like that you’d better come! But, honestly, it won’t do any good. You can’t do more for Betty than is being done.—Yes, we’re getting in a nurse, and I shall be there as well. I’ll ring you up if there’s anything at all to tell.”

Then she paused, biting her lips to steady herself, struggling to keep back her tears. A man’s voice was urgently demanding full particulars;



Chris's husband, Jen supposed.

Briefly she told the story of the accident,—the hen, the girls in the road, the swerve into the ditch.

“Betty's leg and collar-bone are broken; there is slight concussion; the doctor fears some internal injury, but he can't say yet,” she said, with desperate calmness. “There may be nothing very serious; nothing that time and patience won't put right. Nobody can say yet. I'll ring you up again as soon as there's any definite news. You can come if you like, of course. I can get you put up in the village, but the hotel is very small. If you could wait till the morning, you could run down then and satisfy yourselves that we are doing everything. Betty can't possibly be moved; and even if she could, we'd want to keep her here. I feel it's my job to get her right again; she came here to see me. I want to go back to her now.—You'll wait till to-morrow, then? Oh, I'm so glad! It's good of you to trust us. Thank you very much! You really couldn't do any more than we're doing already. Yes, I will ring up again if there seems any need. I'll let you have the latest news at ten-thirty to-night, shall I? All right; I'll ring you up then. Your man will be coming home to tell you more about how it happened. The car's rather badly smashed, but our people are helping him with her. I'll see him before he goes and tell him anything more I can think of. I needn't say how sorry I am about it all.”

Jen turned away, looking worn out.

Mary Devine had been waiting at the library door. She came forward quickly. “Jenny-Wren, dear, come and have some dinner before you change. It's waiting for you. You must take care of yourself, if you're going to sit up. I shall come with you, in case you want to send a message.”

Jen dropped into a chair. “Mary-Dorothy, you angel! I don't want anything to eat, but I suppose I'm needing it. Mary, that was an awful thing to have to do!”

Mary set a plate of soup before her. “Were you breaking it to her friends? Brownie, dear, that was very hard on you.”

“There was no one else to do it. They had to be told. I was afraid they'd insist on coming to-night, and we don't want any more people about. But I've persuaded them to wait till the morning. Will you come with me for a little while, Mary? I shall want to send word to them later in the evening. I've promised to do that.”

“Of course I'm coming. You don't think I'd leave you alone with nurse and Ann Watson, do you?”

“It will be a strange nurse; that's the trouble. If it were Joy's dear woman I shouldn't need any other company. But Nanny must be here for the night.

The new one is sure to be good, but she'll be a stranger. She won't understand about Betty and me, and how I feel."

"I shall be there," Mary said decisively. "We'll lie on Ann's bed, and if Betty moves, nurse will call us. I'm going to see that you rest as much as possible, Brownie. You're tired out."

"There are so many things to think of. I had another idea while I was 'phoning," Jen said eagerly. "I suppose Rosamund's gone? I've sent her to the Manor. Mary, you might ring up the Manor, and ask them to send Ken's car here for a few days. Joy's is out of order, and we may need a car at any moment. We shall have to fetch these people from the station to-morrow, unless they've got another car from somewhere. Our car at the Manor isn't being used.—Oh, how I wish Ken were here! He'd see to all these little things for me.—Mary, if you *knew* how I'm missing him!"

Mary bent over her and kissed her hair, as she took her plate away. "Brownie, none of us knows, except perhaps Joy. But we do know how plucky you are. It's hard on you to have all this trouble, when he isn't here to stand by you."

"I feel so horribly alone," Jen gave a rueful laugh. "You wouldn't think one week of being married would make such a difference, but it does. I'm part of Ken, and part of me's gone to Africa. I'm attending to all this business, but there's only half of me to do it. I feel as much alone as Betty does without her twin.—Well! I must get back to her, Mary-Dorothy!"

"The half of you that's here is a very useful, practical half," Mary observed. "Go and put on a warm frock, Jenny-Wren."

"Thank you for taking care of me, aunty," Jen said gravely, and ran upstairs to change.

## CHAPTER V

### BETTY'S FIRST NIGHT

"Can't you talk just for half an hour, Jen?" Joy asked wistfully, as Jen, in a warm jumper and short skirt, bent over her to say good-night.

"Not for five minutes, dear. You wouldn't want me to stay just now. I hope you'll have a good night and that the twins will be angels."

"They always are. I hate to think of you sitting up all night, Brownie!"

"Mary-Dorothy's looking after me like a mother. I'm going to call her aunty. Good-night, dear! Good-night, Maidie! Take care of them all for me. I'll send nurse back as soon as ever I can. The new one will be arriving soon. You can do without Nanny for a few minutes longer, I hope, 'Traveller's Joy'? I don't want to be left quite alone, just in case Betty—" and Jen paused, her face showing her nervous fear. "I don't really know anything much. I shouldn't know what to do if——"

"We're all right," Joy said quickly. "I wish I wasn't so useless. I'd like to help. But I felt played out by the time I came back to bed, Jenny-Wren."

"You aren't very fit yet, and it's been a shock to all of us. You *are* helping, old chap, by lending nurse."

"She must stay as long as you need her. Maidie's helping me splendidly," Joy said, with intention.

Maidlin's face lit up, though she said nothing. Jen said warmly, "I'm sure she is. I'm glad she's here. You'll be all right in her hands. And Nelly has just come in; I saw her downstairs. She'll come to help too. Good-night, all!" and she kissed them all round and hurried away.

It was a strange night. The moonlight shone on the ruined arches and broken columns of the Abbey. The new nurse sat watchfully by Betty, who showed very little sign of life.

Mary and Jen, after a long anxious look at her, took a rug and sat out in the cloisters, as Maidlin and Rosamund had sat three weeks ago, when every one was in distress on Joy's account, on the night when the twins were born. Jen recalled it, as she nursed her knees and gazed across at the chapter-house windows.

"I sat with you in your room, and you scolded me for losing faith, Mary-Dorothy. Only three weeks ago!—and I'm a married woman now, and the twins are quite big girls. And Ken's on his way to Kenya, and Joy's nearly well after the fearful shock about Andrew."

“She’s been far braver than we dared to hope,” Mary agreed thankfully. “She’s had a lot to help her, of course.”

“The twins, yes. I say, Mary-Dorothy!”

“And you; and your wedding. It all helped. And all her home; everything she loves so much, all round her. What is it, Brownie?”

“Rosamund’s growing up,” Jen announced seriously.

“I know. We all know. Why, particularly, to-night?”

“Joy didn’t know. She hadn’t seen it. Ros had the pluck and the good sense to turn on Joy and row her this evening,” and Jen told the story Rosamund had told her.

“I wonder she did it,” Mary commented. “We’ve all been so careful what we said to Joy.”

“Too careful, perhaps. We’ve been in danger of keeping her in cotton-wool. She’s nearly well again. If we overdo the gentle stunt, Joy will lapse into it and expect it for the rest of her life,” Jen said bracingly.

Mary laughed. “We don’t want that. But we’ve felt for her so much, Jenny-Wren.”

“We do still. My dear, every time I ache for Ken, I remember Joy,” Jen said quickly. “Don’t think I’m forgetting; not for a second! But Joy has to live; she has to begin life again. We want her to be herself again. You don’t want her to turn into a whining invalid, pitying herself and expecting to be sympathised with and waited on, do you? She’s nowhere near it yet; but haven’t you seen it happen in people after some big shock or illness, when their kind friends were too kind and went on treating them like eggshell? They like it, and so they develop neuralgia, or nerves, or headaches, or rheumatism, so that people will keep on sympathising and waiting on them. I’ll save Joy from that, if I make her hate me for ever.”

“Do you really think she’s in danger of that?” Mary asked doubtfully. “I haven’t seen that sort of thing, as I suppose you have. Remember, I’ve worked for years in an office in the middle of town, with no circle of friends; just the other office girls. I don’t really know as much about people as you do, Jenny-Wren.”

“No, I’ve had more experience in that way,” Jen assented thoughtfully. “You ought to meet more people, old thing. You won’t be able to go on writing books unless you do.”

“Oh, I’m meeting people *now!*” Mary said, with a laugh. “But I’ve an odd feeling that I’ve wasted several valuable years—on one side of me. It’s as if half of me had been asleep. I’ve a blank in one part of me.”

Their eyes met. Jen said gravely, “I suppose that’s about the truth, isn’t it, Mary-Dorothy? But you’re all awake now, my dear.”

“As to that,” said Mary, very soberly, “who knows? The part of me that was asleep is awake and going ahead. But there may be other parts. . . . I didn’t know I was half asleep. I may not know now. How many parts of us are there?”

Jen looked at her quickly. “Mary dear, how you do think things out! You go deeper than I do. That’s true, of course.”

Mary moved restlessly. “It’s owing to you and Joy I’m awake at all. I’ll never forget!”

“Oh, well! Think what fun it was for us, meeting you and taking you to places! Do you remember your first party, with the children at Plaistow? And think of the things you’ve done for us! You gave Joy her husband; and you forgave her—well, I won’t, then!” at Mary’s quick indignant movement. “I know she didn’t mean it. But the things you’ve done for her! And for me!”

“Brownie, do you really think Joy is in danger, as you hinted just now?” Mary changed the subject firmly.

“No. Not yet,” Jen said decidedly. “But I think *we* were in danger of bringing it on. Ros has saved *us* from doing Joy harm; that’s what I think.”

“I see. That’s possible,” Mary assented.

Presently Jen, speaking sadly, told Betty’s story. “She evidently feels a great sense of loss; her twin was half her life. I hope Bets will find something new to fill her heart, for it’s very sore and empty at present.”

At half-past ten Mary went through the ruins to the Hall, to ’phone to Betty’s sister the message—“No change.” When she came back she insisted on Jen’s coming into Mrs. Watson’s little sitting-room for a cup of cocoa and biscuits, and then begged her to lie on the bed and rest.

“You needn’t undress. Here’s your woolly dressing-gown; wrap yourself in it and roll on to the bed, Brownie. Nurse will call you in a second, if you’re wanted. Yes, I’ll come too; and we won’t talk. Mrs. Watson will rest on the couch in here.”

Jen gave in, since nurse had assured her that Betty might lie like this for hours. “If I can go to sleep I’ll be more fit later on, when I may be needed. There will be Betty’s sister to see to-morrow,” she said.

As she and Mary lay down together, Jen’s arm crept round her friend. “Mary-Dorothy,—no, I’m not going to talk; not for long! But something’s worrying me.”

“Go ahead, then, Brownie, dear.”

“What about chance, and accidents?” Jen whispered. “I’m trying to find out what I believe, as you do, Mary. That night, before the twins were born, when I turned so funky and you scolded me, you said you didn’t believe in chance, but in guidance; and that things that happened were meant for the

best, to help us. But this *was* an accident, Mary? You couldn't believe God wanted Betty to be almost killed, just because she'd come to see me?"

Mary's arm tightened round her. "Jenny-Wren, I want to run away! I'm not good enough to answer such a hard question. But I have been thinking about that, Brownie."

"Yes?" Jen queried. "I thought you would. How far have you gone, Mary? May I hear?"

"I've changed my mind," Mary said, with sudden eagerness for sympathy. "I'd like to know what you think. These things are so difficult; and so important! What I really mean is that I've gone a step further on, I think, and it has made things look different. I don't feel as if any of my thinking was definite or finished yet; I'm only groping, Brownie."

"It's definite. It may not be finished," Jen said unexpectedly. "But it would be dreadful to feel your thinking was finished and you'd never get any further, Mary-Dorothy! So dull and hopeless! You'd die."

Mary assented, with a little laugh. "Even if I have to change my mind I'd rather go on."

"That's growing, yes. Where have you got to now?"

"That if the fortunate things in our life were sent to help us, and were not chance, we must say the same of the terrible things; illness, and accidents, and disasters—like fires and earthquakes and shipwrecks," Mary said quickly. "Do you really believe God sends those? I know people used to think so. But I can't; not if He is our loving Father. But we must be logical. How can we pick and choose? Where do we draw the line? We're *sure* He doesn't send the horrible things, like Betty's accident. If He sends only the good things, where do the others come from?"

"That's where I'd come to," Jen whispered. "I want it explained to me, Mary. Do you think He's so far away that He doesn't care and it's all just chance? Oh, I *can't* believe that!" There was revolt in her cry.

"Not for a second!" Mary said sharply, her arm tightening round Jen again. "I never said He didn't care."

"Oh! Go on then, Mary," Jen said more quietly.

"Things happen in obedience to laws, which very often we don't understand," Mary said quickly. "Sometimes we see a glimpse of the law; sometimes not. They aren't just unconnected happenings, 'sent' by Him to be good for some people. If you follow out that idea, you'll have an awful picture of the world. The same thing might be good for me and bad for you. *No!* Things are the result of laws, and they're all—and we're all—linked up, so that the working of the laws becomes so complicated that we can't follow it, and the results look to us accidental. One of the biggest laws is that of our personalities; we, being what we are, will do certain things in certain

circumstances. Maidie, being Maidie, *couldn't* run over that hen, though in avoiding it she ran into Rosamund; and Betty, being Betty, couldn't sit still when she thought the girls were under her wheels, though in jumping up she was thrown out on to her head. Do you see? Of course, the law is automatic. Neither of them thought about results. But what Maidie and Betty would do was decided long ago, by their own natures. It wasn't chance."

"I'm beginning to see," Jen said eagerly; she had listened in absorbed attention. "And Betty's driver couldn't run over the girls, just because he was a careful driver. And so it happened. But they needn't have met just at that corner, Mary?"

"You needn't have kept Betty talking quite so long," Mary retorted. "Or the girls needn't have stayed quite so long at school."

"Oh——! I see. We can't get to the bottom of it. Then you think—but you said God cared, Mary? Doesn't He help at all?"

"To begin with, there may have been help, even in this accident," Mary said quickly. "It might have been worse. The man might not have been able to swerve in time; the girls might have been run over."

Jen shivered. "Mary, I never thought of that! But it's true. Or Bets might have been killed."

"Or Maidie or Ros might have been hurt when they fell, and have been unable to jump clear when they saw the car almost on top of them."

"I'll *never* say there wasn't help and care again!" Jen whispered, seeing terrible visions.

"I believe God's help is in everything that happens," Mary said slowly, as if feeling her way. "But that it comes through *us*, not through the happenings. The laws aren't altered; they're fixed, and they'll go on, whatever we do. But we aren't fixed; I'm not; you're not. We see Ros and Maidie and Joy changing and doing unexpected things every day, but always developing, yet always along the lines of their own natures. That's a law too; we're all growing, reaching out. I believe—I have it! The thing we're growing towards is our perfect and complete response to God, to His wishes for us. He works inside us, always towards that end; not forcing, but persuading; guiding and leading us. Sometimes we go as He wishes; often we don't. *I* didn't, when I wasted years in silly dreams, instead of doing what I'm having to do now, years too late. But He's given me a second chance, through you, Jenny-Wren. You, *being what you are*—it's law, not chance!—were decent enough to be interested in me and to take a little trouble; it was your way of following His wish for both of us. You obeyed the feeling inside you which was His voice; and it remade my life. It wasn't your chance coming into our office; a dozen people came every day. It was your obeying His law, in yourself, that did it, and saved me."

Jen lay close to her, very quiet, and said nothing for a time. At last she spoke. "I didn't know. I merely did what I felt would be jolly. I really wanted to see you dance; you looked so tired! I said it to Joy the very first night. And it was such fun, and I felt so bucked, to see you grow young and jolly, and dance, and teach, and wear pretty frocks, and be real friends with people, and write your book! But it all came out of that feeling of mine that I must see more of you and—and help you somehow. Mary, I'm beginning to see what you mean; and I feel you're right. If only everybody obeyed that law! If only everybody recognised it!"

"That's the tragedy of the world," said Mary gravely. After a moment she added, "We have all to see to our own bit, Jenny-Wren."

"Yes. I won't forget. Then you believe things do just happen, so far as we're concerned, since we can't understand or see the laws; and that they aren't 'sent' to us; but that what matters is what we do about them, and the way we take them?"

"I believe," said Mary, in a low voice and rather shyly, "that God is in everything that happens, in His laws. But that He is still more there in our actions; in 'what we do about things,' as you put it. I believe He will guide our reaction to these things, if we are willing, so that everything can work out for good; everything! I believe He will bring good out of everything, if we allow Him to work in us. I don't believe, for instance, that an illness is sent to any one to teach patience, as people used to say; but if the illness comes, through causes no one may be able to see, I believe He can bring good out of it, if the invalid is willing to be taught by Him. Jen, when Betty is better, can't you see a possibility that good may have come out of all this?"

"How? I hadn't gone as far as that?"

"To Joy, if she perhaps learns to forget herself in other people's troubles. To Betty, if she perhaps has to stay here for a while; you may be able to help her to be less lonely."

"And to you and me, because we've found new ideas and can see things more clearly," Jen said unexpectedly. "Yes, I do see. But we have to see the good and to fall into line. I do see how much it matters. Now, dear—yes, nurse? Do you want me?" and she sat up hurriedly, shaking back her curls, fright in her eyes—everything forgotten but the fact that the nurse was at the door, whispering, "My lady! Could you come?"

Jen slipped past her into the little room. It was a tiny chamber, almost like a monk's cell, in the thickness of the wall. The door to the cloisters was wide open; a good lamp from the Hall stood on an old carved chest, the light screened from the bed.



Jen bent over the bed. Betty's eyes were opening feebly. "Meg?" she whispered.

Jen kissed her. "Bets, dear, I'm here—Jenny-Wren. It's all right, Betty."

The tired eyes opened suddenly very wide. "Mother? Where am I? What \_\_\_\_\_"

"Drink this, Bets," Jen held to her lips the cup the nurse had handed her. She slipped an arm under Betty's head and raised her an inch. "Just a little, there's a good chap. That's splendid! Now you'll go to sleep, and to-morrow you'll hear all about it. I'm going to stay here with you, Betty. Everything's quite all right, dear."

The sight of her and the repeated assurance did their work. Betty was too weak to argue or question. Her eyelids dropped again, and in a few minutes she was asleep.

"Splendid!" the nurse whispered exultantly. "That's what we wanted. She'll do now. She'll sleep for hours. I'll call you if she wakes, my lady; but I don't expect she'll need you any more now till the morning."

"Do you really think I could go to sleep?" Jen had withdrawn carefully, and they were standing out in the cloisters. She shivered in the night breeze sweeping across the garth.

Mary threw her dressing-gown round her. "Come to bed, Jenny-Wren. It will be all right now."

Jen looked at the nurse doubtfully.

"I shall watch her," the nurse said reassuringly. "You can go to bed safely. You could even go back to the Hall if you wished. I'm sure you won't be needed again."

"Then I'll go to sleep in about five seconds," Jen said thankfully. "But I'll stay here, just in case— Mary, you could go to your own bed; and you could slip in and tell Joy Betty's better."

"I'm going to run across and tell her," Mary promised. "But I'm coming back to sleep here with you, also 'just in case—,' Jenny-Wren."

"Aunty!" Jen whispered, mocking but touched and grateful. "You do take care of me, Mary-Dorothy! I'll love to have you. But we won't talk any more.—I had to be here," she added. "Betty did need me."

"Yes, you were the saving of her, Brownie," Mary agreed. "Without you she'd have been unhappy and restless, and she might not have slept. You were just what was needed to satisfy her."

"I must see her through. She came here to see me," Jen said wearily, as she rolled into bed.

Mary tucked her up. "I'll be back in ten minutes. I'll creep in beside you. See that you're asleep, Jenny-Wren."

“I shall be, aunty. Don’t worry!” Jen assured her, and she was sound asleep when Mary returned.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PROBLEM OF JOY

“Better this morning. Sleeping soundly. Nurse is delighted,” Jen was at the telephone, talking to Betty’s sister. “You’ve the loan of a car? Oh, good! We’ll be pleased to see you, but, if you don’t mind, stop at the Abbey ruins and come in there. There’s no point in going on to the Hall. Betty’s in the Abbey; it was nearest, so we carried her in there. Lady Marchwood isn’t well enough to see any one, and I shall be waiting for you at the Abbey. About eleven, then; I’ll arrange for lunch to be ready for you at the Abinger Arms, in the village. You’ll be very comfortable there. You’ll understand we aren’t entertaining at the Hall at present. Oh? Oh, I am sorry! That is hard on you. I do sympathise. I quite understand you’ll have to hurry. We’ll do anything we can to make things easy, and Betty is having every care. You really can leave her to us quite safely. I’m sure you’ll feel that when you see her.”

She hung up the receiver and turned away.

“Telephone talk sounds so silly,” Rosamund said severely. “What is it all about, Brownie?”

“Mrs. Carmyle has heard this morning that her mother, and Betty’s, of course, is ill away in Scotland. There was a letter asking Betty to go home to take care of her, as she hates the thought of having a nurse. Mrs. Carmyle feels she ought to go, but can’t because of Betty. If we can make her feel Betty’s all right here, she’ll go to her mother. Hurry up, Ros! The car’s waiting to run you down to school. You’re lucky to have it, but considering the state of your bike and Maidie’s we must get you there somehow.”

“We’re jolly thankful to Ken for marrying you and giving you his car,” Rosamund remarked. “Come on, Maidie-Primrose! We’ll be late if you stay so long kissing those kids.”

“I like kissing them,” Maidlin observed.

Jen watched them from the terrace as they drove away, and then looked up at the window where Joy sat. “I’m coming, ‘Traveller’s Joy.’ But I mustn’t stay. I must be on hand in case Betty wakes. Mary would tell you about last night. Betty will feel lost again when she wakes, if I’m not there.”

For a few minutes she talked with Joy. Then she hurried away. “I must be respectable when these people come. After all, I belong to you now; I mustn’t let down the family,” she said gravely. “I’m not afraid you or Ken

would be ashamed of me, but our mother-in-law might feel annoyed if I received strangers, looking as if I'd slept in my clothes."

"Must you go back so soon, Jenny-Wren?" Joy asked wistfully, when Jen came back, looking fresh and summery after her bath, in a cool morning frock of lavender linen. Her dislike to mourning had come into sharp conflict with her duty to her new family, and she had realised, as she had done at the time of her mother's death, that other wishes must be consulted besides her own. Loyalty to Andrew's mother forbade her to wear bright colours, but she claimed her privilege as a bride, and was wearing white and lilac, amethyst and lavender, more than black.

"I must, dear. I'm sorry, but if you'd seen Betty's frightened eyes, and her relief at sight of me, you'd understand."

"I'm lonely," Joy said sombrely. "You can't exactly call the babes company yet."

"I know. I'm frightfully sorry to leave you. But you're too good and plucky to mind, just now. I must go and see to Betty's people, old chap," and Jen kissed her and went soberly back to the Abbey.

Joy sat thinking, and gazing out at the garden. "I don't believe I am 'good and plucky.' I don't like being left alone," she said gloomily.

"Would you not think of going downstairs to-day, my lady?" the nurse ventured.

Joy shrank; that would be an ordeal in which she hoped to have Jen's support. "No, nurse, not to-day. I don't feel up to it."

The nurse looked dissatisfied, but did not urge her; and Joy sat and gazed out at the trees, and wished the twins could grow suddenly old enough to be played with. The next moment she was hoping they would not grow too quickly and lose the helplessness for which she loved them. She sighed, and wished some visitor would come to see her and to admire the babies. But that was not likely, as she was not receiving visitors. She sighed again, and wished that Jen would come back. And nurse frowned and looked troubled.

In the Abbey, Jen was waiting for Betty's sister. At the sound of the motor brakes she went out to the entrance and met Chris Carmyle in the shadow of the big arched gateway.

Chris, hurrying in, felt sudden relief at sight of her hostess. This Lady Marchwood was just a girl of Betty's age, but she had an air of dignity and authority which promised well, and she looked capable and full of sympathy. Chris saw a tall, slim girl of twenty-one, with bobbed yellow curls, wearing white and lavender, who came forward quickly to greet her.

"I'm so sorry you are in such trouble! It's very hard your mother's illness should come at this moment. But if you could feel satisfied about

Betty, then you could go off to Scotland with an easy mind. I'm sure, once you've seen our delightfully kind nurse, you'll feel you could leave anybody in her hands! We brought Betty in here, because it happened just out there, at the Abbey gate," Jen explained, leading the way across the grass to the ruins. "At the earliest possible moment we shall carry her to the Hall, of course; but the doctor doesn't want her moved for a day or two. We've a beautiful big room waiting for her in the house, and a warm welcome; and when she reaches the convalescent stage she'll enjoy herself there tremendously. But for the moment, she's very comfortable here. She's asleep, as I told you; and it's important she shouldn't be wakened. But nurse is satisfied with her, and that's all that matters."

Together they stood and looked down at Betty. "Poor kiddy!" Chris whispered, tears in her eyes. "She's had such a hard time."

"I know. She told me," Jen responded cautiously. "We'll make her very happy here when she's through the worst of this, if you'll trust her to us for a while."

"I'd have done anything to save Bets from this. I wish I'd come with her yesterday!"

"I don't see how that would have saved her," Jen said practically. "I'll be very good to her, Mrs. Carmyle; and she does like me, you know. When she woke in the night she was frightened at first, of course; but when she saw me she cheered up and felt all right."

"She fell asleep quite happily as soon as she saw her ladyship," the nurse confirmed the statement.

"I can understand that," Chris glanced at Jen, who was gazing down at Betty with an almost motherly look. "I know you'll be good to her. It's just that I don't like going so far away."

"Oh, but you must go to your mother! It's the first thing Bets will ask, when she is able to think. She'll ask if we've told you of her accident, and when she hears of her mother's illness—which she won't do till she's strong enough to stand it—she'll be restless at once, unless we can assure her you've gone to help. It's really the biggest thing you can do for Betty at present, for she'll feel her place is with her mother. You can't help Bets herself, for she can't be moved; but you can ease her mind about her mother."

"I'll try to think of it in that way. I feel I really must go north, for mother can't stand very much, and as Betty's told you, we've all had a difficult time for the last few years. I've been afraid mother or Betty would break down; mother's illness isn't a surprise," Chris explained. "But I can't help feeling we're imposing on you by leaving Betty on your hands. And yet—I couldn't *bear* to leave Betty in hospital!"

“My hat, no!” Jen forgot her new dignity and spoke out in horror as a schoolgirl and not as ‘Lady Marchwood.’ “You couldn’t do anything so awful! We’re frightfully bucked to have her here. Once she begins to feel better, I’m going to give her the time of her life! There’s the whole Hall at her disposal; you’d better run through the Abbey and have a look at it before you go. And if she wants more than the Hall and its gardens, there’s my house next door, the Manor; she can have that too. Betty shall have every mortal thing she wants, when she’s well enough to want things.”

“I see we can leave her in your care,” Chris said hastily. “I’m sure you know how grateful we are. Might I have a few words with nurse?”

“I’ll stay with Betty. You go out and walk in the cloisters.”

As Chris questioned the nurse closely, her eyes roamed over the ruins, the arches of the chapter-house, the high, beautiful windows of the refectory, the green, sunny central garth, the broken pillars of the cloister porches.

“Betty will love the peace of this, when she’s a little better,” she thought, while she listened to the nurse’s technical explanations.

Nurse lowered her voice. “Dr. Cairns is afraid there may be some internal trouble. He is waiting as long as he can, to let her get stronger; but he may have to operate,” and she gave certain details. “I’ve said nothing of that to little Lady Marchwood, as I saw she didn’t know. She’s so very young to have so much responsibility. I didn’t want to frighten her. If you could call on Dr. Cairns on your way home he would tell you more. He has been here this morning, and is pleased with the patient’s progress.”

Chris, deeply distressed, was glad of the excuse to go across the garth for a glimpse of the Hall before facing Jen again. “I mustn’t upset her if she doesn’t know. Thank you for telling me. I’ll try not to go north till that’s over, if I can possibly stay. This way? Down the narrow passage? Thank you! Oh, what a beautiful place! Yes, Betty will be very happy here, if——” and she stood gazing at the old gray house beyond the gardens.

“The widowed Lady Marchwood is there, with her babies. They are doing everything to make things easy,” the nurse explained. “My colleague is coming in presently, and I am to sleep in the house over there.”

“They are more than kind. I must see the doctor as soon as I can,” Chris said restlessly.

“You won’t say anything to our Lady Marchwood? The doctor said he would tell her himself if there were any need.”

“I won’t frighten her,” and Chris hurried back to Betty’s room.

After one more look at her sister, she insisted on leaving at once, rather to Jen’s surprise. With renewed thanks, Chris rejoined her husband in the borrowed car and they drove away.

Jen gave a sigh of relief. "That's safely over! She'll be easy in her mind now. She's very nice, and very like Betty; but we really don't want visitors at present! Now, nurse, can you spare me for ten minutes?"

"If I must. But I think you should be here, my lady. If she wakes, you can soothe her better than any one else. And I'm going off duty very soon."

"Yes, I see that. I must be here. I'll be back in ten minutes," Jen promised.

She raced off to the Hall for a breathless word with Joy. "They've been. Very nice, but awfully upset, of course. The sister's very like Betty. They went off in a hurry; I think she's going to Scotland at once. They'll be easier in their minds now. I'm going back to the Abbey, 'Traveller's Joy.' I really must——" hastily, for Joy's face had lit up at sight of her. "The new nurse is coming in at twelve. I must be there."

"But you needn't stay over there?" Joy pleaded. "Now that these people have gone, what are you needed for? Can't you speak to the new nurse and then come back to me?"

"Joy, old girl, how could I? I hate to say no to you," Jen said unhappily, "but I must be there in case Betty wakes. She's sure to wake soon; she's slept for hours. I must be there beside her. You do see that, don't you, dear?"

Joy's lips quivered. "Oh, go if you feel you ought to, of course. I wanted you, that's all."

Jen bent over Elizabeth Joy, who was stirring in her cradle. Then she turned to Joy. "You couldn't want me if you thought Betty was waking and needing me. You couldn't talk to me, knowing she was all alone. I'll come in for a moment as often as I can, my dear, but Betty needs me more than you do just now. You *do* see that, only you haven't thought it out. Don't you, 'Traveller's Joy'?"

"I suppose so," Joy said drearily, and lay back in her chair and gazed out of the window.

"I'll ask Mary-Dorothy to come and talk to you as soon as she comes back. She's gone across to the Manor to tell them the latest news."

"I don't want Mary. I want you," Joy said shortly.

Jen raised her eyebrows. "Well, you can't have me, just to sit and cheer you up. I must, and you must, and we all must think of Betty first just now. What we want doesn't matter," she said briefly, and kissed Margaret Joan and withdrew.

Joy's nurse followed her quietly out of the room. Joy, staring unhappily down at the lawn, did not notice that she had gone.

Jen turned at sound of the opening door, her eyes full of distress. "Nurse! Oh, what shall we do? Has she been like that all morning? You do feel that I

ought to stay in the Abbey, don't you? Betty's life, or her mind, may depend on her being kept quiet at present."

"Yes, you must stay. But we're up against a difficulty here. I've been troubled about Lady Marchwood all day," the nurse said urgently. "I asked her to go downstairs, but she wouldn't hear of it. I thought it might help her. She ought to be out in the garden."

Jen led her into her own room. "Don't you know why she shrinks from that? Don't you understand? She has to dress herself as a widow before she can go out. She's putting it off; she'll want me to help her bear it. Her new clothes will bring the new state of things home to her. She shrinks from facing up to it. Don't urge her, nurse. It's a big ordeal for her."

The nurse's face had softened. "That's so. I hadn't realised that. Poor child!—forgive me, but——"

"I won't forgive you if you don't feel like that. Go on feeling, 'poor child.' It's what she needs," Jen said vigorously. "Be good to her, nurse, and be patient and gentle. She isn't strong yet. She'll be all right; I'm *sure* she'll be all right. But you must help her, for I can't just now."

"It's you she wants, unfortunately. If her aunt could come back from the Manor——"

Jen shook her head. "Not to-day, I'm afraid. She's very frail; we mustn't ask too much of her. All this trouble about Betty would have upset her dreadfully; she's much better out of it. Joy would be the last one to want her brought back. I must run, nurse! Try to comfort Joy for me!"

The nurse shook her head and went gravely back to her patient. She knew very well that to Joy she was "a dear, good, old soul," but only nurse, after all.

"This is nearly the last straw," Jen said brokenly, as she sat on a cushion on the cloister steps just outside Betty's room, after greeting the new nurse and sending the first one off to the Hall to bed. "How to keep straight between petting Joy too much and hurting her by seeming to neglect her, is too difficult for me! But I *must* think of Betty first! I'm sure Joy will understand. If she doesn't see it now, she will when she's stronger and has thought it over. I must just go ahead and do the right thing, and leave everything else to work out by itself."

But she sat looking very serious for a time, for she was beginning to feel she was carrying a heavy burden. At last she took up her pen and writing-pad with a sigh, and went back to the task Betty's visit had interrupted, of acknowledging the wedding-gifts which had arrived during her stay in town.

"I can only do what seems to be staring me in the face and asking to be done," she said, when she talked over the problem with Mary later in the day, after one of her brief visits to Joy's room. "If I do my best, surely things



will come out all right. But I can't see my way at present. Just now things seem to be getting worse. Joy's frightfully upset with me because I won't stay with her. She isn't saying much; I'd feel better if she'd say a little more! She doesn't usually keep things bottled up. I don't know what she's thinking; but I know she's feeling bad. But I couldn't stay so far away, Mary-Dorothy!"

"If you care to sit with her, I'll stay in the Abbey and come for you at once if you're wanted," Mary suggested.

"No, I'm not going to do it. I won't have Betty waiting and worrying even for five minutes. You saw how she looked last night! Joy isn't a baby; she must just do without me. The trouble is, she didn't see how Betty looked! She doesn't realise how bad she is. If she understood, she wouldn't want me to be away. Joy's kind, you know, Mary; it's only that she hasn't realised."

Mary assented, her mind going back a year, to the time when Joy's lack of realisation had wrought havoc in her own life.

"The girls will be back from school presently. Perhaps things will be better then. They'll be company for Joy," she said. "It is hard on her to be alone, Brownie. She depends on other people so much. But she won't have me just now."

"It's queer that she should want company so much," Jen meditated. "Joan's often told me how as a kid Joy used to go off for whole days alone, walking in the woods. That's why she's 'Traveller's Joy' or 'Wild Cat'—the cat who walked by his wild lone through the wild, wet woods. But she does seem to want company just now."

"She wants you; she doesn't want merely to be amused," Mary said briefly.

Their eyes met. Then Jen said quietly, "I must go on with my letters, Mary-Dorothy."

"Yes," Mary agreed, and went back to the house.

"Joy wants to be first. She doesn't like to feel Betty matters more to Jen than she does. It's what we were talking of in the night; she wants all the attention. She always did," Mary said slowly to herself, thinking and analysing as was her way. "She hasn't changed. This has always been her trouble, that her thoughts couldn't go past herself. Just now she has every excuse. But it makes things very difficult. And it's very hard on Jen."

## CHAPTER VII

### BETTY'S SECOND NIGHT

Rosamund and Maidlin were very late home from school. They had been unable to say when they would be ready to leave, so the car could not be sent to fetch them, and they had had to come by train and walk from the station. Rosamund's opinion of Maidie and the hen was expressed plainly and often before they reached home and had nothing at all to do with Betty McLean's accident.

"You're very late, Ros," Mary met them at the door.

"Well, Mary, it's rather thrilling. We had a meeting, and——"

"Don't tell me," Mary interrupted. "Save it for Joy. She needs cheering up badly. Jen has had to be with Betty all day."

"Oh, how is she? Sorry, but I'm afraid we forgot her at school. There's always so much going on."

"Is she very bad, Mary?" Maidlin asked anxiously. "Are Joy and Jen upset?"

"She's getting on fairly well, but the doctor isn't quite satisfied. Have you had tea? Then do go and talk to Joy, Maidie. She's had to be alone nearly all day."

"She has the kids," said Rosamund. "Righto, Mary! We'll go and tell her all about it. You come too. You'll be as thrilled as she will."

"The twins aren't exactly company for Joy yet," Maidlin remarked. "They sleep all day, Ros. Joy likes to talk. If she's left alone she'll think about Andrew."

"Well, don't forget you haven't touched your prep.," Rosamund said warningly. "When you get with Joy you forget everything else. I'm not going to get into a row to-morrow just to please Joy, and neither are you. But we must tell her—come on, Primrose!"

"Such thrilling news, Joy!" Rosamund burst out with the story. "We had a school meeting, and Mackums announced that she'd bagged a princess to come and give away the prizes at the end of term. Maidie will have to be presented to her, because she's the reigning May Queen, and she's to go in all her robes—Maidie, I mean, not the princess—and sit on the platform, and——"

"And I *won't*," Maidlin burst out, flushed and shy. "Not unless Ros does too. She acted as Queen for Jen all last year. I won't do it without her." Her eyes were wide with shrinking dread.

“I don’t believe Mackums will have two of us! Besides, it’s silly; it makes you look so soft, as if you were frightened to do things alone.”

“I am. I only said I’d be Queen because you promised to help. You never told me I’d have to be presented to princesses.”

Rosamund collapsed with a shout of laughter. “You goat, how could I? I never dreamt a royal princess would honour our humble—er—seminary. Maidie, don’t be an infant! You can’t have me to hold your hand always!”

“I hate doing things alone!” Maidlin said vehemently. “And you shouldn’t shriek in here, Ros. You’ve wakened Margaret.”

“*Is* it Margaret?” Rosamund asked sceptically. “I don’t believe you know. You’re only guessing.”

“It is Margaret. Joy and I know them apart. We know you don’t,” Maidlin said confidently. “Let me hold her, nurse. She’s always good with me.”

“You’re quite a good nurse, Maidie,” Joy said quietly, as she watched Maidlin hushing the baby.

Maidlin flushed with pleasure. “I love the feeling of them. They’re so round and little. Joy, I needn’t be presented to princesses without Ros to back me up, need I? You know she promised to help.”

“You’ll have to talk to Miss Macey about that,” Joy said wearily. “You can’t expect to have Ros to rely on for ever, Primrose.”

“I must have somebody,” Maidlin stated what was to her an obvious fact. “I can’t do things alone.”

“What rot!” Rosamund said indignantly. “It would do you all the good in the world if I had scarlet fever and went into hospital for the rest of the term.”

“If you have anything of that sort you’ll certainly go to the hospital,” Joy said hastily.

It was she, not Rosamund, who suggested prep. presently. “I’m tired—I don’t want to talk.”

“But Mary said we were to cheer you up!” Rosamund remonstrated.

“You can’t,” Joy said shortly. “I know what I want, and I can’t have it, apparently. I don’t want to hear about school.”

“Oh, very well!” and Rosamund stalked off indignantly.

“What do you want, Joy?” Maidlin asked wistfully. “You know we’d all do anything you asked.”

“I want everything,” Joy said sombrely. “You can’t help, dear kid. Come back and play with the babes after supper; they’re adorable then.”

Maidlin went soberly away, and presently looked up from the prep. she was not doing to say anxiously, “Ros, don’t you feel Joy is different?”

“How do you mean?” Rosamund pushed aside her Latin for a moment. “Of course she’s different. She’s married.”

“Being married doesn’t do it, so long as you’re happy and things are all right.” Maidlin had been observing and forming conclusions quietly. “Joy wasn’t different when she came home, though she’d been married a year and been to Kenya; not different in the way I mean. She was just the same as ever. And Jen’s just the same, and she’s married. But sometimes Joy seems different now.”

“Things have happened. It would be queer if she wasn’t different.”

“She seems suddenly grown up. I sometimes think she’s bored with us.” Maidlin voiced a secret growing fear. “We’re only kids. She doesn’t care about school and all that matters to us. If—if she stops being interested in us at all, Ros——”

“You ass, what an imagination you’ve got!” Rosamund mocked. “She won’t. Besides, you’re going to stop caring about school yourself soon; I know *I* am! I’m nearly eighteen; you’ll soon be seventeen. We must grow up too, that’s all. We have to stop being school infants and catch up with Joy and Jen. We shall do it in a year or two. It will be all right, Primrose. Don’t look so scared! You needn’t have such fits at the thought of growing up. It will be quite good fun.”

“I want to go on just as we are, for ever,” Maidlin said, her head bent, her eyes on the paper on which she was drawing twin babies.

“We can’t. You’d better make up your mind to it. Joy’s kids won’t stay as they are. I shall have to fetch Jen to talk sense to you.”

“You’re not to tell her,” Maidlin said hurriedly, shy at once, and afraid of a lecture. “You know you never give me away, Ros!” she pleaded.

“Go on with your prep. and let me do mine, then. And do stop worrying about nothing,” Rosamund scolded. “I’ll put thistles in your bed if you keep on.”

Maidlin carefully turned down her bed that night, but found no thistles. Rosamund watched her through the connecting door and chuckled.

Jen appeared on the terrace early next morning. “Ann’s going to give me breakfast in the Abbey. I came to fetch my letters and to tell you not to wait for me. We had a bad night,” she said, and her voice was tired.

“Oh? Sorry! So did we,” Rosamund said darkly, after glancing round to be sure Maidlin was not within hearing.

“What do you mean, Ros? Was anybody ill?”

“No, but Maidie had bad dreams again, and yelled out as she used to do, and I had to go and put the light on and sit on her bed and talk sense to her.” Nobody could have guessed from Rosamund’s casual tone how gentle she had been and how well she knew how to comfort Maidlin’s nightmares.

“Oh, *dear*, I am sorry! I thought she’d grown out of that! Had anything worried her? What were you doing last night?” Jen asked in distress.

“Nothing out of the way. Prep.—talking to Joy—playing with the twins; Maidie didn’t have a big supper. She *was* a bit worried,” Rosamund admitted. “While we were doing our prep. she was talking about Joy, and about not wanting to grow up; you know how scared she is of anything new! She hates the thought that she’ll have to grow up. I don’t know what she thinks will happen to her! *I* think it will be fun, and I told her so.”

“That was right. What did she dream about?” Jen asked, bending to pick a rose.

“The usual thing—‘something very big and something very tiny’—and the sudden change from one to the other that she says is ‘so awful that she wakes up and finds she’s crying, and I’m always there holding her tight.’ She can’t tell more than that.”

“No; she can’t tell, so don’t tease her. I’m glad you are always there, Ros. You’ve been the saving of Maidie. It’s made all the difference having you here. Joy’s been glad a thousand times that she didn’t turn you down, but had you here with Maidie all the time. You’ve been the most tremendous help. I know that’s how Joy feels.”

“Oh, don’t talk rot, Jen!” Rosamund had grown scarlet. “I haven’t been any help, really——”

“Oh, but you have. I’ve heard Joy say so. Now, Ros, don’t rag Maidie about her dreams. She’s always so dreadfully ashamed of them afterwards. Make her think of something else. That dream of sudden frightening changes is her fear of growing up, put into a picture and haunting her while she’s asleep. Nancy explained that to Mary while I was away in April, and Mary told me. Maidie dreamt last night because you’d let her talk about growing up. We *want* her to talk about it, but not at bedtime and not in a frightened way. She mustn’t keep it to herself and brood over it, of course. If you can help her to look forward to growing up, and make her feel it will be interesting and good fun, you’ll do more to cure her nightmares than all our tonics, and much more than scolding or ragging could ever do.”

“How queer!” Rosamund said reflectively. “She doesn’t want any change, you know. She wants to go on for ever as she is now.”

“That’s why she has that dream,” Jen said briefly. “Make her think of other things. What put her on to it last night?”

“She said Joy seemed to have grown up and to be bored by talk about school. She evidently thought the next thing would be that Joy would be bored with *us*.”

“She’s got hold of the truth,” Jen said bluntly. “Joy will always be fond of Maidie, but she can’t be satisfied with a little schoolgirl as a companion.

Maidie's trying to keep herself a little girl. She'll have to grow up if she's to keep up with Joy. Think what Joy has been through lately!"

"I said something like that; and Maidie had fits at the thought of growing up."

"Don't rub it in too much," Jen advised. "But that's the right tack to go on, Rosamund. She must *want* to grow up; and the most likely thing to make her want it will be if Joy seems to need her, as a friend and not as an adoring baby. I think I'd better remove myself altogether for a time!—Now I must fetch my letters and go back. I've had a word with Joy; but she's very wrathful because I won't stay." She spoke lightly, but there was distress in her voice.

"Is Betty worse?" Rosamund asked quickly. "I am a pig! I never asked you."

"She hasn't slept much. She's having a good deal of pain," Jen said unsteadily. "I can see nurse is worried. We're waiting to hear what the doctor says. An hour ago Betty fell asleep at last; so as soon as I've had breakfast I'm going to be down, and nurse will call me when she wakes."

"I suppose you've been sitting holding her hand all night?"

"Well, wouldn't you?" Jen demanded. "Suppose it was Maidie?"

"Was she very bad, Brownie?" Rosamund had heard the break in Jen's voice.

"She liked to have me there. I talked about old times, and her school, and the friends we both knew. She said it helped. But I hope she'll sleep now till the doctor comes."

"You must go to bed, or you'll be ill, too, Jenny-Wren," Rosamund said anxiously.

"Oh, don't worry about me! I'm all right. But—it's only that there's nobody, no one to depend on," Jen said brokenly, in a sudden rush of confidence. "Mary's a brick. She stayed in the Abbey all night again, in case I needed her. But—oh, *how* I want Ken! You can't understand how much I want him, Ros!"

"I wish you'd let us do something!" Rosamund urged desperately. "Need we go to school? Can't I stay at home and help? Surely I could do *something*?"

"You'll help more by taking Maidie to school and keeping her busy," Jen had pulled herself up sharply. "Don't mind me, Ros. I'm only sleepy. We'd all rather you went to school. Looking after Maidie is your job. It's a big one, and you do it rippingly. It helps us all."

"I'll fetch your letters," Rosamund said eagerly. "I say, Brownie! I couldn't cable to Ken to come home and help, could I? He could go to Africa later on. Where will he be now? Where could we catch him?"

“Ros, don’t talk rubbish!” Jen thrust the temptation away hurriedly. “He couldn’t help. This will all be over long before he could reach home, and Betty will be well again.—Thanks, old chap!” as Rosamund silently brought her letters. “Don’t be late home, if you can help it. Maidie will be tired, if she had a broken night.”

Rosamund watched her go across the lawn; then she turned to go into the house with a sigh. “Good old Brownie! How I wish I could really help! She’s just about done in. It isn’t fair! Why should it all fall on her? I should think Joy might help! She’s all right again now.”

Jen went soberly across the cloister garth. “I couldn’t tell Ros the truth. She’s desperately fond of both Joy and me. If I’d told her that the worst trouble is that Joy has been thinking all night that I’ve been neglecting her, and so this morning she’s really upset to find I’m still needed in the Abbey, Ros would be furious—and heart-broken! She’d want to go and row Joy. No, I daren’t tell her. Oh, surely Betty will be better to-day, and then I’ll be more free to be with Joy! But Joy is being unreasonable, and it makes things very difficult.” And she went wearily in to breakfast in Ann’s little kitchen in the Abbey walls.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A CRISIS

Joy had looked sombre the day before, but she seemed really unhappy this morning, and nurse's troubled look deepened. Something would have to be done.

Joy sat gazing listlessly out across the garden. Once more nurse suggested gently that she should go out and sit under the trees, but the idea was rejected abruptly. The twins had been out in the sunshine every day for some time, in charge of the under-nurse, Nelly Bell; but Joy, who was quite well except for her lack of energy, still lay in her big chair in her dressing-gown, her hair on her shoulders in its two thick plaits. Nurse loved the deep bronze colour and had enjoyed brushing and braiding it, but now she was anxious to see "My Lady's" hair go up. This long-drawn-out invalidism was not right; but it seemed as if only Jen could rouse Joy's lost energy, and Jen was not available.

Nurse suggested that Maidlin should stay at home from school; that Mary should come and talk for a while; or that Mrs. Shirley should be sent for. Joy negatived all these ideas curtly; she was feeling ill-used and neglected; she wanted Jen, and Jen was too busy to come to her; and she would not be comforted. The idea that Jen had no time for her, now that Betty was here, conceived in a moment of depression, had taken hold of her mind at a time when it was too weak to fight against it; she had lost all sense of proportion, and she had never realised the seriousness of Betty's condition. Jen's anxiety seemed to her exaggerated and she resented it deeply. All night a real jealousy of Betty had been growing in her, and she had lain awake, breaking her heart because she was sure she had lost her friend.

After breakfast Jen, instead of sleeping, came across to the house and up to the bedroom for a few moments. "I came to see you, old thing. I'm supposed to be having a nap, but I couldn't sleep, though I'm dead tired. Shall we play with the babes for a while? Give me little Margaret, nurse! Joy can have Elizabeth. Joy, I don't know what's the matter; they don't tell me very much; but I'm sure, and Mary's sure, they aren't satisfied with Betty. Something isn't going quite right." She looked anxiously at Joy, craving for sympathy in her secret fear.

"Oh? I'm sorry. What do you think is wrong?" Joy asked politely.



Jen's lips quivered; she was desperately in need of heartening, and Joy's tone had been without any trace of warmth.

"I don't know. I'm sure nurse is worried. We're waiting for the doctor."

"I hope he'll come soon and ease your minds."

Jen rose abruptly. "Joy, I can't stay. I'll come and tell you later. I—I care too much, and you don't care at all. I can't——" and she laid Margaret on Joy's other arm and fled.

"Jenny-Wren!" Joy began, in sudden fear. But Jen did not pause, and Joy, with two babies in her arms, could not run after her. She sat hesitating; then in a moment she saw Jen racing across the lawn to the Abbey gate.

A wave of bitterness swept over Joy. It was largely anger at her own behaviour, but she did not know that. "She only cares about Betty now. She didn't stay with me for two minutes." The knowledge that she had driven Jen away was more than she could face, and she did not realise that Jen had come for sympathy and that she had failed her. To her first jealousy was added her unconscious anger against herself, which vented itself on Jen; at that moment, and for the black hour that followed, it really seemed to Joy as if the friendship of years had fallen to pieces.

Jen lay on her bed in the Abbey, where she had flung herself down with her head buried in her arms, and tried to think. "Joy's ill; I'm not. I'm tired, but I'm perfectly fit. She doesn't understand. If I don't, either, this thing will grow into a quarrel, and we shall never be happy again. I can't tell Mary; I can't tell anybody. Nobody must know; it would be giving Joy away. Mary knows what Joy can do when she doesn't understand; but she had patience with Joy and she still loves her. I've never come up against it, for myself. . . . I can't love Joy less than Mary does! I've *got* to remember she doesn't understand. She isn't herself yet; she's still ill; and she's had an awful time. She's never seen Betty, and she doesn't know how bad she is. . . . It's all right, and I'm not really fed up with her; not a scrap. But—oh, if *only* she had understood! If only there was somebody!"

The thoughts came jerkily and painfully. A truth forced its way to recognition. "In a sense, this is the real Joy; but I've always chosen to look only at the jolly Joy we all love. This is the spoilt, petted Joy that she keeps in the background. I haven't let myself think it was there.—Poor kid! *She* knows it's there! She tries awfully hard not to let it get on top. Just now, because she's seedy, it's got the better of her. She'll be sorry later. I mustn't let her know how much she's upset me. She'll never realise; she'd never have known about Mary if Andrew hadn't told her. If she ever knows how badly I wanted help, and how she let me down, she'll feel horribly sick about it. I'll take care she never guesses," and resentment against Joy died in a rush of almost motherly desire to save Joy from the burden of that

realisation. That it might be good for Joy to know was a thought Mary Devine might have suggested, but which did not occur to Jen. Her only wish, now that the idea had come to her, was to shield Joy from knowledge which must be a grief to her.

A tap on the door called her to Betty's room. The doctor had arrived and wanted to speak to her.

Ten minutes later Jen stood again at Joy's door, and this time she was white and shaking and breathless. Her need for someone to help her was imperative. In spite of the last rebuff, she had come again to Joy; in this desperate crisis even Mary was not enough. Joy would comfort her when she understood.

"Joy—the doctor—Betty——" her voice broke.

"I'm *sick* of Betty!" Joy flared out.

Jen turned and ran from the room.

"She's in dire trouble," nurse said quickly. "Didn't you see her face? It's serious. Go after her, my lady. She needs you. She's going to break down. Or shall I go?"

"Jen? Break down? I don't believe it," Joy said uncertainly. But she rose and went to the door.

Then, at the sound she heard across the quiet corridor, she sped to the door of Jen's little blue bedroom.

Jen was on her knees by the bed, her arms flung out, her shoulders torn with sobbing.

In two steps Joy had her in her arms. "*Jen!*" she whispered, terror-stricken.

Never in all their friendship had she seen Jen cry. The foundations of life itself seemed to be giving way. That, indeed, was what was happening, for Joy had rested at every point on Jen's strength and steady balance.

Jen had been holding this off for hours. The last blow had fallen, and, worn out with the strain of watching and the final trial of Joy's misunderstanding, she could not bear it. She cried, and shook, and clung to Joy, and sobbed in a breathless way that was very frightening.

Joy held her tightly. "Jen, tell me!" she begged, half sobbing herself. "Jenny-Wren, I've been a brute. I haven't helped you. I've let you bear it all alone. Brownie, what is it? What did you come to tell me? Can I help? Isn't there anything I can do? Wouldn't it help you to tell me, dear?"

Jen clung to her, fighting for breath. "I can't—oh, I couldn't bear it alone! Joy, I wanted you. I must have you, Joy. Hold me close; help me!"

Joy hugged her tightly. "I haven't been helping you all this time. Jen, forgive me!" Dimly she saw what it had meant to Jen to be without her sympathy.

Jen spoke brokenly. "You're helping now. This is what I wanted—you. Joy, the doctor has to operate on Betty. There's something wrong internally; some pressure he must remove. It will be very critical. I didn't know; he's just told me. He's gone to fetch a specialist from Oxford, a surgeon. I couldn't bear it alone, Joy."

"I didn't know it was as bad as that," Joy said, startled. "I *am* sorry! Oh, Jen, that's dreadful!"

"I didn't cry before him," Jen whispered shakily. "I kept quite steady and sensible, I think. We made all the arrangements. But as soon as he'd gone I just bolted to you, Joy."

"And I said——" and Joy's heart stood still. "Jen—oh, forgive me!" she whispered. "How I must have hurt you! Jen, I didn't understand!"

"You'd never have said it if you'd understood, old chap," Jen whispered, and clung to her again.

Joy's arms tightened round her, and she sat on the bed and stared at a new vision of herself—childish, petty, jealous, wrapped up in her own trouble and shutting her eyes to everything else.

It was one of the great moments of her life. The first had been when Jen lay injured in hospital, hurt by her carelessness, in much the condition in which Betty lay now. A second time Joy had hurt Jen by lack of thought. She vowed fervently that it should never happen again. There should not have been a second time; it must be the last.

Jen raised her head and spoke bravely. "I'm an idiot to go to pieces like this. I'm better now; you did help me, Joy! I was so tired; and so aching for somebody. But there isn't time for crying. Joy, listen! I didn't want to worry you about Betty any more. I saw you were feeling irritated. But I had to ——"

"I was jealous, like an infant," Joy said honestly, her face burning. "I thought you didn't care about me any more. I didn't realise how ill she was. Jen, I feel just sick!"

Jen stopped her quickly. "Dear, we'll leave that till afterwards. There isn't time; *we* don't matter just now. I came to tell you that Dr. Cairns says Betty must be brought here. The light in that little Abbey room isn't good enough. It might mean her life——" she quivered again.

"Of course, she must come here," Joy said eagerly. "You said a room was ready for her. Is there anything I can do? Jen, tell them to do everything, and to make any arrangements they like. The house is at their service. You knew that, didn't you? You didn't feel you had to ask?"

"I wasn't going to ask anything," Jen confessed. "I've told the nurses to do any mortal thing that will help Betty. It's either that or the hospital; and

it's a long way to the nearest hospital. It will hurt her to be moved," she said brokenly. "I knew you wouldn't let her be carried miles in a car."

"How soon, Jenny-Wren?" Joy faltered.

"As soon as the doctors come back and they can bring her here. The night nurse is sitting with her, and the day nurse has come to get things ready. I told her to help herself to anything she wanted."

"I'm glad you did. I wonder you trusted me, after the way I've been going on."

"You didn't trust *me*, old chap," Jen whispered. "You didn't know how ill Betty was, and you hadn't seen her, so you couldn't care much about her. But you've known me for seven years. You might have known nobody could come before you. We can't always understand our friends, but we ought to trust them, 'Traveller's Joy.'"

"Yes. I'm a worm," Joy said abjectly. "Jenny-Wren, tell me something to do that would help you! Shall I go and help the nurse?"

Jen thought quickly. Joy must be comforted; to let her feel she was helping would be the kindest way to do it.

"Dear," she said, hesitating, "I don't like to ask it, but if you were downstairs it *would* help. Not while the doctors are here; we'll be better out of the way then, so I shall come to sit with you. But afterwards; you're so far away up here, and I shall want to talk to you all the time. Couldn't you come down this afternoon? I suppose—I oughtn't to ask it, Joy, but——"

"I'll do anything that will save you, Brownie!" Joy burst out.

"I must 'phone to Betty's sister," Jen said unsteadily. "I promised. She won't have gone north yet. I—I don't feel I can *bear* to see her and talk about it, Joy! I shall collapse again and howl like a kid, even if Betty's getting on well."

Joy knit her brows. This was asking a great effort of her.

Jen said hurriedly, "You mustn't, Joy. I'll see her. She's very nice."

Joy said gravely, "I'll see her. As soon as the operation is over you're going straight to bed for the rest of the day, Jenny-Wren. I know it's no use proposing you should go before. I'll come down, and if there are people to see I'll see them. It's my house. There's no reason I shouldn't. I'm perfectly well; I've been funking the new beginning, that's all. You go and see the nurse, and then sit with Betty till the doctors come. Does she know?"

"Yes," Jen said brokenly. "But she's very ill, Joy. She's had bad pain all night; we didn't have any sleep. He told her he'd have to put her to sleep before he could take the pain away. She just said: 'Thank you! As quickly as you can, please!' I couldn't bear any more, Joy. I kissed her, and ran away."

"And I——!" Joy began again. She pulled herself up sharply. "But you're right. We mustn't think of ourselves. But remember this, Jen

Marchwood! I'll never forget how I failed you, when you were tired out and breaking your heart, and you came to me, and I drove you away. I'll *never* forget! Now you go and prepare things. I'll have to dress, if I'm to go downstairs. I can't receive people like this."

Their eyes met. Jen said quietly, "You are plucky, old chap. I understand. I'm going to help you through. The pretty new things I brought for you from town are in your dressing-room. Come and look at them and choose which frock you'll wear. I'm sure the size will be all right; I've shopped with you often enough."

She made Joy sit in a big chair while she spread out the black frocks she had chosen while in town with Kenneth. "I only brought samples. You'll want to choose for yourself later on. But these will do to go on with."

"They're all right," Joy said drearily. Then she roused herself bravely. "Jen, they're really pretty, and you're a dear to have chosen so carefully. I always liked black; do you remember I once said that some day I'd wear nothing else? I didn't think——" her lips quivered.

"You'll look better than you ever did in colours," Jen remarked. "I know you don't care just now, but you will look topping. That one? Let me help you into it, dear; and then I must run back to Betty."

"No, I'll dress myself. I'd like to, Brownie. You run along to her now; she'll like to have you while she's waiting. Come and see me again later on, when—you know; when the doctors are here."

"I shall bolt to you again," Jen said unsteadily, her voice broken with dread.

"You go right back to Betty," Joy said, with authority in her tone. "I'll tell Mary to ring up Mrs. Carmyle. Don't you worry over one more thing."

"Will you? Oh, Joy, you are helping!" Jen cried fervently. "I was dreading that. But——"

"I'll do it myself," Joy said, with sudden resolution, "Then I can invite her to come here. Jenny-Wren, I'm going to see to things now, if only to make up for the way I let you down to-day."

Jen hugged her. "It takes half the load away to hear you say that! But don't hurt yourself, 'Traveller's Joy.' Don't do too much. Remember the twins!"

"There's nothing the matter with me," Joy said brusquely.

As she dressed, after Jen had gone, Joy talked to herself severely. "I let Brownie down badly. I nearly broke her heart by failing her when she needed me. I didn't understand; *why* do I never understand people? She always does . . . The trouble about me," she decided bitterly, "is that I'm thinking such a jolly lot about myself and how I feel that I've no time for anybody else. Of course, I don't understand! I don't try. I don't take the

trouble. It's not——" her face tightened in pain—"it's not what Andrew wanted me to be like. He tried to help me. He'd have hated to see me as I've been these last few days."

Her unhappy face, as she put on the frock she had chosen, was not for its colour and meaning, but was due to her new vision of herself. She shook herself impatiently. "I'm thinking all about myself again! This is going to stop. There are things to do to help Brownie. I'm going to see her through this trouble. She needs looking after. I know Mary's tried to do it, but there's a share for me as well. At least I needn't add to her worries by being a miserable drag on everything!"

She went back to her room, determination instead of despondency in her face.

Nurse looked up anxiously. "What was the matter?—oh, come! That's an improvement. I am glad!"

Joy, looking about fifteen with her hair still hanging down, went to the dressing-table and began to unwind her long plaits. "I'm going downstairs, nurse. I have to telephone, and other things. Jen needs me; she must have help," and she told Jen's news, while she brushed out her veil of bronze hair.

Nurse looked grave. "I'm sorry. Perhaps I could help, if you could spare me. We must all help Lady Jen, my lady. She looked ready to break down."

"She's done up. I'm going to look after her," Joy said briefly. "I didn't quite realise what a strain it had all been on her. I'm going to send her to bed as soon as the operation is over."

"Yes, but don't overdo it yourself," nurse warned her. "Remember, you haven't walked much yet. You'll feel limp at first. There must be no running up and down stairs for a day or two, my dear. If you go down, you must stay down for some time."

"I'll be good," Joy promised. "I will take care, for it would mess things up awfully for everybody if I crocked up again. But I must be where I can help Jen."

"I'm sure that's wise," nurse agreed quietly, and rejoiced in the new life and resolution in her patient's voice.

## CHAPTER IX

### BURYING THE SKELETON

Mrs. Carmyle, arriving in deep distress in the early afternoon, was received by a gravely-dignified new Lady Marchwood, who was sitting waiting for her in a big chair on the terrace.

“Please sit down! I’m not allowed to stand about; I’m not very fit yet,” Joy explained. “Betty is doing well; you shall see her presently. The operation is over and is successful, so far as any one can say yet. She is asleep, and it’s the best thing for her. The doctors are sure she will make progress now. We had a very anxious time, but it’s all safely over.” She said no more of the terrible hour when Jen had knelt beside her, her face hidden in her lap, drawing comfort from the clasp of Joy’s arms; and they had waited in silent suspense till the nurse came to say that all was well.

“My little sister-in-law, whom you saw before, has been sent off to bed,” Joy continued her explanations. “She had been up all night with Betty, and she was getting over-tired. I promised to tell you everything, or she would not have been able to rest.”

“It is exceedingly kind of you to let me come,” Chris Carmyle began, realising that this black-robed girl with the wonderful red hair must be the widowed Lady Marchwood. “She’s beautiful, more so than the younger one,” an undercurrent of thought went on in Chris’s mind. “But she’s very white and sad; she shouldn’t be seeing visitors yet. I mustn’t stay long. It is good of her! But I’d have liked to see the tall yellow-haired girl again; I loved her, somehow. And she seemed so fond of Betty!”

“Nurse will take you to have a peep at your sister,” Joy was saying. “I told you when I rang you up that she was here. They couldn’t operate in the Abbey; those little rooms are so dark and poky. She’ll be all right here; we have heaps of room.”

“I don’t know how to thank you for all your kindness,” Chris said gratefully. “You have been friends indeed in Betty’s time of need. May I see her?” and she turned eagerly to follow nurse.

When she came back to the terrace, Joy had a baby in her lap and Nell Bell stood by with the other twin.

“I thought you would like to see my little Betty; but we call her Elizabeth Joy. The other one is Margaret Joan. Your Betty has seen them already, so you ought to be introduced to them. They are very important people,” Joy said, smiling rather wistfully.

“Oh—Lady Marchwood! What perfect darlings! Oh, this is kind of you!” Chris said delightedly, and sat down and held out her arms to Nelly Bell. “Give me Margaret, please! Will you trust me? I must be able to tell Betty I’ve nursed them. What little beauties they are! *Look* at the curly hair!—and your own wonderful colouring! How proud you must be! How thankful you must feel that you have them,” Chris said shyly, bending to kiss Margaret Joan.

“They’re a great help,” Joy said gravely. “Now, Mrs. Carmyle, may we give you tea? It’s all ready.”

“Oh, please don’t think—oh, that’s too kind!” as Mary Devine came forward with a cup and plate. “Then please take this precious baby, somebody! But you shouldn’t have dreamed of tea,” Chris apologised.

Nelly Bell rescued Margaret and nurse came to take Elizabeth. Joy said quietly, “I’m sorry this trouble has happened at a time when we can’t entertain you properly. I feel you ought to be staying in the house. But you’ll understand it would be difficult. I’m not allowed to do much yet. What will you do? You can have a very good bed at the inn; or the woman in the Abbey could put you up.”

“Oh, but I’m just off to Scotland to nurse our mother,” Chris said quickly. “The doctor warned me yesterday that this might be necessary for Betty, so I decided to wait a day or two. Now that it’s safely over, I shall see him on my way back to town; and if he seems satisfied with her I shall go north the day after to-morrow. Perhaps you would let me have the latest news to-morrow. If all’s well, I shall feel I can go away safely.”

“We will certainly ring you up, both morning and evening, and, of course, if there is any change,” Joy promised.

“I don’t know how to thank you, Lady Marchwood. I can’t say a fraction of what I feel,” Chris stumbled over her words as she said good-bye. “This visit has been a real privilege, and I do appreciate most deeply the kindness of it, in the circumstances. I am sure Betty will do well now, with all the care you are giving her. And apart from that, thanks to your thoughtfulness, I can picture her surroundings, and I know the friends among whom she will be convalescing. I’ve seen enough to know that she will be very happy; she couldn’t possibly help it.”

“That’s very nice of you,” Joy said warmly. “We will do our best for her. Jen will be here, and she is very fond of Betty.”

“I couldn’t imagine a jollier place for Betty to be in, or a more beautiful one, or kinder people to look after her,” Chris said fervently. “And I do thank you especially for your kindness. You can’t have wanted me to-day. You have been more than kind. I do hope——” and then she checked herself and said good-bye and hurried away.



“How could I say I hoped she’d be happy again, when she was looking at me with those great, sad brown eyes?” she asked herself, as she drove away. “But she will; she must be. It can’t be the end of everything for her; she’s no older than I am. After all, she has the children! Oh, I do hope she’ll soon be happy again!”

Nurse was urgently suggesting that Joy had been downstairs long enough. But Joy refused to go back to her room so soon. “I like being out here, nurse. I won’t run about; it won’t hurt me to sit in the sunshine. I’m enjoying it. I shall come out here early to-morrow.”

“That’s good news! We shall have you strong in no time. But go slowly for a day or two, my dear.” Nurse spoke in the motherly tone she had dropped into during those dark days when the news of Andrew’s death had had to be broken to Joy and Jen had not been there to comfort her. The older woman’s sympathy and tenderness had meant much to Joy in that lonely time; and she liked to be “my dear,” better than “my lady,” where nurse was concerned.

Jen came out on to the terrace, after a couple of hours’ sound sleep, heavy-eyed and yawning, demanding tea. “I hear you’ve been a beautiful hostess to Betty’s sister. That’s what nurse says. You are a brick, ‘Traveller’s Joy’! It was lovely to be able to roll over and go to sleep, knowing you were in charge and everything was all right.”

Joy rang for fresh tea. “Mrs. Carmyle is very nice. She thanked me very prettily. I could see she was frightfully disappointed not to see you again. She kept looking round for you. But I wasn’t going to spoil your beauty-sleep for her. You were needing it, Brownie.”

“Was I looking so un-beautiful?” Jen mocked. “*You* don’t need any beauty-sleep, old thing! How that frock suits you! Wasn’t it clever of me to find it for you? It’s your style exactly. I saw you in it the moment I came across it.”

“Drink this,” Joy commanded, handing her the cup. “It may help to clear your brain. You need it. You sound a bit wuzzy. Have you seen Betty yet?”

“Yes, she’s still asleep. I’m going to send a note to Rosamund in the car, telling them to be like mice if they don’t want to be sent to the Manor for the week-end.”

“That will calm them. I was wondering how we could warn them.”

“If they come and see you sitting there they’ll both give a yell,” Jen remarked. “The car’s fetching them. They promised to be ready by five today. Where are the kids?—I mean, your daughters?”

“Nurse and Nelly have taken them in. Jenny-Wren, listen to me and answer me!” Joy began urgently. “Had you just about decided to turn me

down and have no more to do with me this morning? Was our seven-years' friendship nearly broken down?"

"I wish you wouldn't talk about it. I'm sure it isn't good for you," Jen said indignantly.

"It's worse for me to sit thinking about it. Tell me, Jen! I'm sick of myself."

Jen was sitting on a cushion at her feet. She laid an arm across Joy's knees and looked up at her. "You needn't be. That's silly. I understood how you felt, old chap."

"You always do," Joy said restlessly. "I rather wish you hadn't understood, this time. I was feeling perfectly infantile. *Were* we in danger of quarrelling, Jenny-Wren?"

"Not for a moment. I knew it was because you were ill and you didn't understand how bad Betty was. I wouldn't have quarrelled with you, 'Traveller's Joy,' and I wouldn't have let you quarrel with *me*."

"I thought I'd lost you," Joy said, almost under her breath. "And I thought if I lost you, as well as all the rest, there *would* be nothing left. I never knew how much I cared about you till I thought you cared more for Betty than for me."

"You poor dear! But it was awfully silly of you, even if you were ill," Jen scolded gently. "I knew it would come all right in time."

"But you were making allowances—putting up with me because I was ill? If I hadn't ever understood, we'd have had a poor sort of friendship afterwards, it seems to me," Joy said urgently.

Jen sat with bent head, thinking, her fingers playing with her wedding-ring. "You're right, Joy," she said gravely at last. "We were in danger; I was wrong. If it had just blown over without being explained, there would have been a misunderstanding between us, something we hadn't cleared up. You'd have felt I'd been unkind and neglectful; I'd have felt you'd been silly and distrustful of me. We'd have covered it up, but there would have been something we were afraid to look back upon, a skeleton in the background. That wouldn't do between you and me, old chap. We couldn't have a shadow between us for ever. It was you who cleared the air, by coming to help me when I howled like a baby. I *was* frightened! I'd had a real shock when the doctor told me. I simply had to cry over somebody; I'm so glad it was you! Joy, I'll always be grateful to you because you were honest and brave enough to save us from that skeleton."

"I! I didn't do it. It just happened."

"Oh, no! You saved us. You were plucky enough to see you'd been silly and to say so. It needs courage to do that. It was you who plucked the skeleton out of the shadows and dangled him in front of us, so that he can

never haunt us any more,” Jen said dramatically. “Now that we both understand, and nobody’s making allowances for any one, we can bury him and leave it all behind us.”

Joy’s face was sober. “Brownie, in one way that skeleton—that jealous, childish person who didn’t understand—was the real me. It was a real part of me, anyway. I am like that. You haven’t quite seen it before. Now that you know, aren’t you going to hate me?”

Jen laughed. “I don’t feel it beginning, ‘Traveller’s Joy.’ ”

“I’ve always been like that,” Joy said restlessly. “When you call me that, it reminds me how I used to go out for days at a time and leave Joan and aunty to do all the work in the Abbey. I was a selfish little pig. I haven’t changed much, I’m afraid. Andrew was going to help me to be nicer,”—she caught her breath and paused.

Jen squeezed her hand and laid her cheek on it. “Then, of course, you will be, dear old girl. You’ll do anything he’d have wanted.”

“I’d like to. But it’s difficult alone,” Joy whispered.

“My dear, don’t I know? Haven’t I felt alone these last two days? I’ve fairly ached for Ken. I wanted somebody behind me, and that’s exactly where he’s so useful; some one to back me up. Ros offered to cable for him this morning! I think she felt desperate.”

Joy did not laugh. Instead she cried sharply, “I ought to have been standing by you! If I had thought of you, instead of thinking only of myself, you wouldn’t have gone away without help when you came to me in trouble. I failed you; I shan’t forget that. Jen, I made it all harder for you, didn’t I? I added to the load you were carrying? Look at me, and answer me, Jen!”

Jen looked at her honestly. “Of course you did, old thing. I’m too fond of you not to have wanted your sympathy. I was dying for your help. I’d be a queer sort of friend if I hadn’t been. But you gave me help when things were at their worst. If you knew how I felt when you came and picked me up and let me cry all over you, you’d know just how much you helped me and how thankful I was. The whole thing was lighter and easier at once, the moment you came.”

“I wish it had been yesterday that I came to my senses, and not to-day,” Joy said gloomily.

Jen laughed. “All I have time to think of is how glad I am that you understood at all. Joy, dear chap, we aren’t going to go on talking or even thinking about it. We know one another better because it happened, and that’s something to be thankful for. Now we’re going to put it away and go ahead to new things. It’s the only way to get on with life. I think you should go back to bed. You’ve done a tremendous amount for a first time, and it’s

been no end of help to have you taking charge. In a day or two, if you're careful, you'll be able to do anything you want."

"I like being out here," Joy owned. "I was funking the first time, Brownie."

"And you plunged into it to help me! Everything will be different now; I can be with you so much more now that Betty's in the house. But Betty's being here isn't the only reason," Jen said deliberately. "It's chiefly because you understand, and we've disposed of that skeleton."

"The skeleton was my jealous doubt of you. I'll never forget that you had to tell me I ought to have trusted you, Jenny-Wren."

"I'll never forget that you took the plunge so that you'd be able to help me. It's a much jollier thing to remember," Jen retorted.

"It is. But you're so much jollier than I am."

"Ass!" said Jen. "I'm going to fetch nurse to take you off to bed."

## CHAPTER X

### JOY'S LULLABY

For a few days anxiety hung over the Hall, and everybody went about quietly. Rosamund and Maidlin retired to the far corner of the garden when Ros wanted to talk; Maidlin was never noisy, but Rosamund was apt to forget, and she did not want to be banished to the Manor. Betty's room was too far from Joy's for the voices of the twins to disturb her; the nurses had complete charge and had their own rooms close at hand; and Jen or Mary was always within call.

Joy was as good as her word, and was up early on the day after 'the burial of the skeleton,' as Jen called it.

"I want to see Betty," she said to Jen, directly after breakfast. "I'm going to 'phone to her sister; I want to say I've seen her. It won't do any harm if I just go in and look at her, will it?"

"Not if she's asleep, as she was a few minutes ago," Jen agreed. "I don't think she should see anybody if she's awake. It might excite her or set her questioning. She hasn't wakened up yet enough to realise that she isn't still in the Abbey. I'll ask nurse."

Betty was sleeping, so Joy crept in and stood looking down at her. "Poor kid! I hope she won't have much pain. She's just a kiddy, Jen."

"She's a month older than I am."

"That isn't saying very much. We let you do everything, and you take on all sorts of things, but you're an infant, after all."

"A pushing, forward infant, evidently. All right, Lady Marchwood. You can look after your own household in future. I'll go to the Manor and take care of my mother-in-law."

"Go and play with Rosamund," said Joy; and went to the telephone.

In a few days the shadow was lifted. Chris Carmyle went off to Scotland. Mrs. Shirley returned from her visit to the Manor. Joy and the twins went out with nurse for their first drive, in Kenneth's big car, and the babies paid their first call on their grandmother at the Manor. And Jen had her first real talk with Betty.

For several days she had refused to do more than say a word or two and sit holding Betty's hand for a time. The nurses also had been discouraging about conversation. But at last the embargo was removed, and Betty's questions were answered, the questions she had been trying to ask whenever she saw Jen during the last two days. She knew now, of course, that she was

not in the Abbey, which she remembered only very vaguely; and the nurses had told her she was in Lady Marchwood's house. The news had seemed to distress her, and it was in the hope of satisfying her that Jen was sent for and told she might have a few minutes' talk.

Betty, under orders to lie very flat and still, stretched out her hand wistfully. "Jenny-Wren! Tell me! I'm in the house where we had tea, I suppose?"

"That's it, old chap. Don't you like your room? We're going to carry you to the window in a day or two, and you'll look out over the rose garden."

"It's lovely! So pretty. But I shouldn't be here, Jen. Why did you bring me? Wasn't I in the Abbey?"

"That wasn't convenient for the nurses. It was poky and dark," Jen explained, holding her hand comfortingly and sitting on the bed. "Don't you remember how we carried you through the garden on a stretcher? It was quite a triumphal progress." She spoke lightly, but in her heart she hoped Betty would not remember that journey too clearly. It had been a trying moment for everybody, and terrible for Betty and Jen.

"I don't remember much about any of it. It's all rather misty. I was very ill, wasn't I? I don't see why I don't remember."

"You were, rather," Jen agreed. "I was frightfully upset about you. But you were very brave, and such a good patient. Dr. Cairns is awfully bucked over the way you're going on."

"I like him; he's so gentle. Everybody's more than kind. I've been an awful nuisance to you all."

"Delighted, I'm sure!" Jen said lightly. Then she went on more seriously, "My dear chap, we'd all do anything to get you right again. We aren't used to having our visitors half killed at our very gates. It's been a horrible shock to us. And we keep remembering that if it hadn't been you it would have been Ros and Maidie. Somebody had to pay for it when they crashed just under your car. It was all because Maidie couldn't run over a silly hen, you know. She barged into Ros and brought her down, and you came round the corner on top of the mess. If your man hadn't stopped and run into the ditch—well, we daren't think about that! We're going to take care of you till you're fit again; we all feel that."

"But I oughtn't to be here in the house," Betty said restlessly. "It isn't fair to her, the other Lady Marchwood; the one who's lost her husband—the mother of those pretty babies. She doesn't want me here. Jen, take me back to the Abbey again; I wasn't in the way there. I can't rest here for thinking about it. I don't want to be a nuisance to her, Jen."

"Just wait a sec, old dear," Jen said gently, and rose. "There's something I have to do. I'll come back and talk it out with you in five minutes."

She slipped out of the room and went racing down the corridor to look for Joy. She found her sitting in Mary Devine's study, discussing business letters which had been awaiting her attention for weeks. Mary's typewriter was uncovered, and she was busily writing shorthand from Joy's dictation.

"Joy, I want you. Just for five minutes! Can Mary spare you? I want you badly."

"I'll go on with these letters," Mary said quickly.

"If you want me badly, Brownie, I suppose you'll get me. You're rapidly developing into a spoiled child who expects to be given everything she wants," Joy remarked. "What is it now? Am I to come with you?"

"You're to come and reassure Betty. She's taken it into her head that she oughtn't to be here—that she's in the way—that she's being a nuisance to you—and she can't rest——"

"I'll come," said Joy.

"It's natural, poor kid," she said, as she took Jen's arm, for she still went upstairs slowly. "You'd probably told her how things are here and that it's not an ordinary time. And when one's ill things look exaggerated and skeletons seem real. I can understand Betty's feeling from my own experience."

"It's the only way to understand. Theory's no good."

"No, but instinct is. You have that gift; I haven't."

"Mary says it isn't instinct, but intuition. Instinct's the wrong word. Instinct is when you're hungry and you go and eat an apple; or when a mosquito bites you and you squash it."

Joy stared. "What are you talking about?"

"Well, it's instinct when you hug the twins."

"I should hope so!" Joy turned along the corridor to Betty's room.

Betty lay gazing out at the trees and sky, which were all the view she could see. The big sunny bedroom, with its wide windows and white walls and pretty green curtains, was a great improvement on the barely-remembered dark little room, with its long, narrow lancet windows and stone walls, in which she had first awakened. She loved her new room, and the nurses had been emphatic in their approval of the comfort surrounding them.

The door opened, and she turned eagerly to welcome Jen again. Then a startled cry of unbelief broke from her, at sight of Joy standing in the doorway. There was no doubt who she must be. The dress, and the wistful look in the brown eyes and the sadness of the grave lips, as well as the shining bronze hair which Betty had already seen on the twins, were sufficient introduction.

"Oh, how good of you to come——!"

Then Joy bent over her. "My dear, we're all so glad to have you here. It's much easier for us than to have you in the Abbey, as well as much nicer for you. We can come to see you here; and poor Jenny-Wren isn't wearing out her legs running between you and me any more."

"My legs are all right, thank you," Jen said indignantly, sitting on the bed again. "Speak for yourself, please!"

"I'm so sorry it happened," Betty whispered, gazing up at Joy in rapt admiration and delight.

"So are we, frightfully sorry, for your sake. But since it did happen, we're glad to have you here. I know you're worrying because you think I don't want people staying here just now, but——"

"Jen gave me away," Betty's eyes sought Jen's face.

"Of course I did. It was no use my saying anything. Joy had to tell you herself."

"I'm glad to have you here," Joy said emphatically. "Get well quickly and come down and learn to know us all. If there's anything you want, I shall think you're very unkind if you don't ask for it. I can't promise you anything very exciting or amusing in the way of company or entertainment. We're feeling like taking things quietly for some time. You'll understand that. But we're quite a nice sort of family, and we want you to feel you're one of the family just as soon as you're ready for it."

"You are kinder than kind!" Betty whispered unsteadily.

"Isn't there something I can do for you?" Joy asked. "I'll go away and leave you with Jenny-Wren, if that's what you'd like best. But I'd like to help, too."

Betty's face lit up in a shy smile. "But you have helped. I can enjoy this lovely room now. I felt guilty before. And you could tell me one thing. I was going to ask Jen. I heard somebody singing this morning, out in the garden; who would it be? It was a folk-song, but I couldn't remember which, and I couldn't catch the words."

"Oh, that would be Maidlin! She's going to have a voice some day. But we warned her not to disturb you," Joy explained.

"She's a careless kid," Jen said severely. "But she sings without thinking. She was wheeling the twins in their pram on the terrace."

"It didn't disturb me. I liked it. Please ask her not to be careful any more!" Betty pleaded. "I love music almost more than anything, and her voice was beautiful, so rich and deep and true."

"It isn't bad," Joy tried to speak lightly, but her tone betrayed her pride. "We shall hear something of Maidie some day. She's my eldest daughter, you know. I adopted her three years ago. Her grandfather in Italy left her big estates; I couldn't leave her to be brought up by that woman in the Abbey,



who is her mother's sister! Maidie's doing me credit. I'll tell her to sing for you, if you'd like it." She looked down at Betty doubtfully. "Are you really keen on music? Would you like me to play to you now and then?" she asked diffidently. "You'd hear the piano if we left your door open."

"Oh—Joy!" Jen cried delightedly. "Would you really?—Betty, her music's topping!"

"I'd love it above all things!" Betty whispered fervently. "Would you really play to me?"

"We shall have to ask nurse. It would be something I could do for you, and I'd like to do it."

"The very best thing for her," nurse said promptly. "Until she can sit up and read, the time is bound to pass slowly. If she loves music it would be a great help if your ladyship would play to her."

"Good for the twins, too," Jen said eagerly. "They've never heard any music yet.—I'm not being silly!" indignantly, as Joy laughed. "If they're used to it from the time they're five weeks old, it will work into their subconscious minds and they'll grow up musical geniuses."

Joy laughed again. "Subconscious minds! Poor little scraps! Let their conscious minds have a chance first, Jenny-Wren!"

"I don't believe it," Jen said stoutly. "Their subconscious minds are deepest. I expect they begin to grow first. I'm sure you can make impressions on them from the very beginning. If ever I have——" she stopped herself suddenly. "Of course, the twins have been brought up on Maidlin's singing from the very first week," she went on hurriedly, conscious of Joy's eyes searching her face keenly. "It's rather rude to her to say they've never heard any music! Still, your piano may as well deepen the good impression, Joy. Won't you start as soon as you've done with Mary?"

"Mary has enough work to go on with. Are you tired, or shall I play to you now?" Joy bent over Betty.

"Oh, I would like it, please!"

"You angel!" Jen whispered fervently, as Joy nodded and left the room. "We haven't dared to ask her to take up her music again, partly because of you, but partly because we felt she'd get more good out of it if she didn't feel we'd tried to shove her into it. Music used to be the biggest thing in Joy's life; if her feeling for it could wake up again it would do more to make her happy than anything in the world, except the twins. If we can get her to the piano for your sake, Bets, she'll soon be composing again, and then she'll begin to feel there's still something to live for. Oh, how I bless you for asking her to play!"

"But I didn't know. I want it, for myself," Betty remonstrated. "Jen, isn't she beautiful? And so brave! You'd never believe—how long is it?"

“Only a month since we knew for certain. The twins are five weeks old. She has very bad times,” Jen said, her voice full of pity. “But I’m the only one who sees them. She’s pulling herself together and beginning life again in a way we didn’t dare to hope for. Having you here has helped; oh, yes! You’ve really helped! She’s thinking of you and not only of herself.”

Then she sat quietly, and Betty lay clasping her hand and listening enthralled, as the sound of Joy’s piano crept up through the quiet house.

“Thank you, ‘Traveller’s Joy!’” Jen leaned over the piano. “Betty’s fallen asleep. It isn’t that she didn’t enjoy the music. You made her very happy, and I hope you’ll do it again. But she was tired with the excitement of seeing you; and the music was so soft and far-away; and you were so tactful and played lullabies! She just loved it all.”

“I’d forgotten Betty,” Joy looked up with startled eyes, roused suddenly from a dream. “I’m afraid I was playing for myself, though I began for her. I lost myself, and forgot everything. That lullaby was a funny little thing I made up when I was fifteen and a kid at school just chosen to be May Queen; and a member of the musical society. They asked me for something for the school magazine, and I gave them that lullaby. It was supposed to be for Joan’s kitten, who was called the curate, because he was black with a tiny white collar under his chin. The girls rather liked ‘The Curate’s Lullaby’! I haven’t played it for years, but it came back to me suddenly.”

She rose and went quickly to Jen, and kissed her. “Jenny-Wren!”

“What’s that for?” Jen demanded.

“Oh—nothing! You’re such a kid to be married, that’s all.”

“You’d better go and see if your music has upset your family,” Jen retorted. “It would be awkward if they couldn’t stand your piano. You’d have to choose between them.”

Joy laughed. “They’ll grow used to it. They’ll hear quite a lot of it, now that I’ve started.”

“That’s a good thing! It will keep you out of mischief. You won’t have time to go raking up skeletons,” Jen said scathingly.

## CHAPTER XI

### BETTY GETS BETTER

Mary Devine moved away from her typewriter and sat waiting for Joy to come. At the sound of the piano, out in the big entrance hall, she looked startled.

“The very thing we were wanting! I wonder how Jen has managed it?” There was no need to ask who was playing.

Mary sat down by the window and took up her own manuscript. “Joy won’t think about business letters for some time. I *am* glad! The music will do her more good than anything. I wonder what has worked the miracle? She’s completely changed in the last few days. A week ago she was an invalid, and inclined to be exacting and spoilt; however much we loved her, we couldn’t help seeing that. Now she’s almost herself again. I wonder what did it?”

She could not fix her attention on any work, even her own. The change in Joy, and the music Joy was producing, filled her thoughts. She gazed out across the lawn, her eyes dreamy.

Sooner than she expected the door opened and Joy came in. “Ready for me, Mary-Dorothy? I just ran up—not literally; don’t look so reproachful. I crawled. Does that make you happier?—to see whether my children and my piano were going to be friends, or whether the babes objected to music. Nurse says she believes they were listening and that they liked it! I don’t really think it’s true, but it’s what she said.”

“Oh, but they’re sure to have your love for music born in them!” Mary protested.

“Maybe; I don’t know. Mary, I’m going to tell you something. The letters can wait,” Joy said abruptly. “You’ll never hear about it from Jen. But it’s a thing you’ll understand.”

She sat down by the window, and while Mary gazed at her thoughtfully she told how Jen had come to her for comfort and had been driven away unsatisfied, and told what had led to the trouble. “I failed her. She needed help, and I refused it. Mary, I can’t forget. After all the years we’ve been friends! And though she says so little, she’s missing Kenneth all the time; I ought to have remembered that. I thought only of myself.”

“But you were still run down and ill!” Mary urged. “Jen would understand that.”

“She understood all right. When did Jen ever fail to understand? She made allowances for me, just as you’ll do; but I can’t make them for myself. I’ve always been wrapped up in myself,” Joy said restlessly. “The first time I was shaken up was when I ran over Jenny-Wren on my motor-bike and nearly killed her. I vowed then that if she recovered I’d never think about myself again. But one forgets; you know how it is. Now it’s happened a second time. I hurt her frightfully. I *made her cry*. I hope I shan’t forget this time.”

Mary stood gazing down at her, her face tense. “The same thing happened to me. I’ve never told you; and, of course, she never would. I failed her when she needed help. I haven’t forgotten. It’s one of the things that wakes you up. You won’t forget, Joy; you didn’t forget that first time. It was only while you were ill and slack and run down that you were buried in yourself. You’re not like that all the time. And it took far less to bring you back. Jen’s breaking down and crying was enough; that other time there had to be the terrible fear for her life, as well as your being sorry.”

“I was afraid all right when she cried that morning before the operation,” Joy said unhappily. “I’d never seen her go to pieces before. Oh, I was frightened, I assure you!”

“She was over-tired. And she’d been really unhappy about your feeling; I knew that much,” Mary said quietly. “But she never doubted you, Joy. She did understand.”

“I doubted *her*. That was the trouble. How did you fail her, Mary? What do you mean? She never told me.”

“No, she wouldn’t. It was when she heard suddenly of her mother’s death,” Mary said hurriedly. “I was aching to comfort her, but I didn’t know how. She had to turn to Nancy, who fortunately was here. I felt so badly about it that I was nearly ill. She needed help, and I hadn’t a word to say.”

“But why not?” Joy asked, puzzled. “You’re ten years older than she is! Couldn’t you think of anything?”

“I sometimes wonder if I am! I had to begin to ask myself ‘why not’? I hadn’t thought about why things happen. Nancy had, and she was able to help Jen tremendously. It’s—extremely useful!—to have to ask oneself questions now and then.”

Joy’s thoughts characteristically turned at once to her own problems. “I asked myself a good many questions, when I found how badly I’d hurt Jenny-Wren; whom I care for more than almost anybody else! And I found I was a self-centred pig,” she said restlessly.

Mary gave a little laugh. “‘Traveller’s Joy,’ it’s not as bad as all that. You give great pleasure to heaps of people. Were you playing for Jen just now? It was so jolly to hear you again!”

Joy's face lit up. "No, it was for Betty," she said eagerly. "Such luck, Mary-Dorothy! She's keener on music than anything, and it's the one thing I really can do well for her! *Isn't* it luck? I am so glad about it!"

Mary looked at her eager eyes. "I'm glad too. That really is something to be glad about. How did you find out?"

"I went to speak to her, because Jen said she was worrying about being here. She asked about Maidie's singing; she'd heard her in the garden; and said she loved music."

"So you offered to play for her. I *am* glad!" Mary said warmly.

"Now let's get those tiresome letters done," Joy spoke with new energy. "I want to feel they're off my mind."

"It *is* luck about Joy and Betty and music," Jen remarked to Mary, during the afternoon, when Joy and Betty were resting. "It's just as much luck for Joy as for Bets, though Joy isn't thinking of herself. But it's going to do her quite as much good as Betty."

"I saw that. She's different already. She's rejoicing in finding a way she can help. It may be more than 'luck,' though," Mary observed. "It looks to me more like what Nancy called guidance; love directing everyday events, through our own deeds. Betty's coming here to see you has been all the help in the world to Joy. It has roused her and made her forget herself, exactly in the way we wanted; Betty's need, and yours, Brownie. You made a tremendous impression on Joy by bursting into tears that morning; it gave her a real fright."

"Who told you?" Jen asked indignantly. "*I* never meant to! Joy herself? She is a sport! I didn't do it on purpose; it wasn't part of a dark deeply-laid scheme! I was tired, and I howled on my bed; that was all. And when I say 'luck,' it's merely a figure of speech, Mary-Dorothy. I mean a very great deal more than that."

Rosamund and Maidlin came home from school that afternoon to find Joy at the piano.

"Yes, it means that Betty's getting on nicely," Jen informed them. "But it doesn't mean you're to shriek about the house as you usually do, Ros. The music is part of her treatment. But we shan't love you if you're noisy."

Maidlin leaned on the piano, listening until Joy's lullaby came to an end. "That's something sleepy, isn't it?" she asked.

Joy laughed. "You always know, Madalena. It was something sleepy. I'm going to make up slumber-songs for the twins."

"Cheers! We'll have them published, and the kids will be famous before they can speak," Rosamund said exuberantly.

"Joy, Miss Macey's awfully nice. She says Ros may keep me company on the platform when the princess comes. We can't have all the Queens, but

she says we may have two. So I won't have to be all alone."

"Funker! Maidie, you are a baby!" Joy remonstrated, looking up at her adopted daughter with amused eyes. "Did you *ask* Mackums, Maidie?"

"Did you tell her you were afraid to do anything alone?" Jen asked.

"Yes, that's what I said," Maidlin reddened. "She knows; she was nice about it. She understood."

"It was jolly decent of her," Jen observed. "I suppose she hasn't had hundreds of girls in the school without knowing all about the queer, shy ones. But I guess you're one of the queerest, Maidie."

"Oh, I don't know," Joy spoke up quickly in Maidlin's defence. "She's only a kid, Brownie. It would have been an ordeal. She's much younger than sixteen, really. Why shouldn't she have Rosamund to back her up? Ros will love curtsying to a princess. And they'll look topping together; Rosamund's crimson train is such a jolly contrast to Maidlin's primrose and green, to say nothing of their own colouring—England and Italy!—yellow hair and black. Mackums has an eye for colour and effect. The princess—bless her!—will love them, and will go away talking about 'charming picturesque little maidens;'—what?"

"I hope she's not as soft as that. If she is, I hope they won't let her make a speech," Rosamund jeered. "We should all be sick."

"What a picture! I hope you'll manage to restrain yourselves till she's gone," Joy said, laughing.

"It's Maidie's lack of backbone that troubles me," Jen said severely. "She must pull herself together and develop some pluck."

Maidlin looked unhappy. "Some day I will, Jenny-Wren."

"It's time you began!"

"She'll have pluck enough when she needs it," said Joy. "It's there all right. It's only buried. It shows at times, doesn't it, Maidie? She was plucky the day she was crowned, Brownie."

"Yes, and how bucked we all were! You'd never looked so proud of her before. But she hasn't kept it up," Jen scolded.

Maidlin looked unhappily at Joy. "Joy, are you sorry? Would you like me to do this all alone? I will, if you really care," bravely.

"I think it's jolly for both you and Ros, if she can take part," Joy said promptly. "She wouldn't want to be left out. If it were anything important that you had to do alone, or if Ros weren't here, of course you'd do it and you'd have all the pluck you needed. We'd show Jenny-Wren, wouldn't we? Don't rag her, Jen. It isn't a thing that really matters."

Jen said no more. But Joy's words remained in Maidlin's mind. Joy's confidence in her real, if unused, courage comforted her at the moment, and later spurred her on to a big effort.

At first Betty knew the younger girls merely as voices. Her glimpse of them in the road had been too brief and confused to have left any picture on her mind. She asked what they were like, and was told Rosamund was fair and tall, and Maidlin dark and small. Beyond that she knew Maidlin as a rich, sweet contralto voice, and Rosamund as a clear penetrating command which rang out below her window every morning,—“Come *on*, Maidie! We’ll be late!”

Presently her bed was moved to the window, and she saw the girls continually in the garden; Rosamund with two long yellow pigtailed flying as she raced across the lawn, always in a hurry; Maidlin with a thick black plait and wearing bright pink or yellow frocks. In the evening they did their prep. out on the grass under the trees; a small summer-house smothered in climbing roses was their favourite spot, and Betty looked right across at it. They carried out chairs and a low wooden table when writing was necessary, but otherwise Rosamund worked swinging in a hammock between two big oaks; Maidlin preferred the wooden steps of the little chalet.

During the day the rest of the family often encamped on the same spot, with the two cradles and nurse, and chairs for Joy and Mrs. Shirley, on big rugs spread on the grass. Betty knew them all by sight long before they were allowed to come into her room. She saw Lady Marchwood from the Manor come to spend the afternoon, and be welcomed by Jen and brought to sit with Joy and the babies. She loved the look of gentle, delicate Mrs. Shirley, and when the old lady came to see her in her room they were friends at once.

Mary Devine was the first visitor after Joy. Betty smiled shyly at sight of her. “You gave me tea on the lawn when I came to call! It seems so long ago. What a nuisance I’ve been, haven’t I?”

“No; on the whole, I think you’ve been a help,” Mary sat down beside her, and, colouring shyly, laid a fat story-book with a gay cover on the bed. “Jen told me to bring you this. I didn’t want to, but she said if I didn’t she’d bring it herself and tell you you must read it. At least, I can assure you I won’t be a bit hurt if you don’t. I don’t see why you should. It’s only a girls’ story.”

“Oh, but I love school stories! Who doesn’t?” Betty cried eagerly. “It looks heavy; that’s the only trouble. As soon as ever they’ll let me hold it I’ll love to read it.”

She looked at the name under the title—“Mary Dorothy Devine.” “How frightfully swish! You Abbey people can do everything. You provide your own music for your visitors, and apparently you write your own books. Are there any more? I know I shall want more, Miss Devine.”

“The next isn’t printed yet, but I have a typed copy,” Mary admitted. “But, really, Miss McLean——”

“Betty!” Miss McLean pleaded.

“Then you must be one of the family and call me Mary-Dorothy,” Mary retorted. “They called me after a country-dance. When Jen told me to bring you my book, Joy was kind enough to say you might like something not too brainy when you first started reading,” she said, smiling. “She tried to qualify it hurriedly, but that was how she put it; something light and not too brainy. So now you know what she really thinks of my work.”

“Too bad! What did Jen say?”

“That if Joy lived to be a thousand and one she wouldn’t ever write a book at all, let alone one that would come within a thousand miles of mine,” Mary said promptly. “It was a truly Jen-ish remark, just as Joy’s was really Joy-ish. The book’s only a story, but it may amuse you for a day or so, before you’re ready for brainy reading,” and she smiled again.

“I’m afraid I don’t read brainy books,” Betty confessed. “This sort of thing is far more in my line. I know I will love it.”

A few days later she urgently demanded the manuscript of the second book. “This one’s topping. I want more! I’d have read the first one in a day if I’d been allowed to, but nurse confiscated it time after time, because my arm ached with holding it. Oh, that will be ripping to read!” she cried eagerly, at sight of the typescript, in which only a few chapters were fastened together. “I can hold a little of that at a time! I shall fly through that. Aren’t there any more, Mary-Dorothy?”

“Not yet,” Mary said severely. “So many things keep happening in this house that I have no time for writing.”

“One for me!” said Betty. “I’m gladder all the time that it happened. I love this place so much, and all of you. Elizabeth and Margaret come to see me every day and I’m watching them grow. I never saw so much of wee babies before; I used to think I didn’t like them! Lady Marchwood plays to me whenever I want music, and that’s all the time, except when I’m reading your books.”

“And what does Jenny-Wren do?” Jen demanded from the doorway.

“She just exists. That’s all she needs to do,” Betty said laughing. “She helps by just being here. And she talks.”

Jen groaned. “You wretch! Chatters all the time, I suppose. Don’t tell Joy she said that, Mary-Dorothy! Joy’s told me for years that I talk *all* the time!”



## CHAPTER XII

### A BREAK IN THE FAMILY

Betty's introduction to Maidlin and Rosamund was postponed for some days. To Jen's surprise Maidlin developed a curious shyness about Betty and seemed to shrink from seeing her.

"What are you afraid of, Primrose? What's the matter?" Jen asked severely, when Maidlin began to hang back as soon as a visit to the invalid was proposed.

"I don't want to. I won't know what to say."

"You silly kid! I was going to let you see her because I thought you wouldn't talk too much. I know Ros would chatter reams, and Betty might not be able to stand it. But a mouse like you couldn't hurt her."

"I don't know," Rosamund remarked. "I'm not sure that I should know what to say either. I feel rather bad about her. After all, it was our fault. We can't pretend we didn't smash her up, and just say nothing about it. I know how Maidie feels. I feel a bit queer about it myself."

"You silly infants!" Jen said indignantly. "Betty isn't blaming you for the accident! What an idea! You'd better come at once and let her tell you so."

"No, thanks. We'll wait a little longer," said Rosamund firmly. "She has plenty of people buzzing round her, with you and Joy and Mary, and the twins and all the nurses. She doesn't want us as well."

"I shall tell her what silly goats you are," Jen warned them.

"That won't make us any more keen to see her," Rosamund retorted.

"Betty says you're a pair of silly owls," Jen informed the girls that evening. "And you aren't to dream of coming to see her till you really want to."

Maidlin looked relieved. "That's jolly nice of her."

Rosamund said suspiciously, "How much of that message did she send? A good deal of it sounds much more like you, Jen Marchwood."

"Some was Betty and some was me," Jen told her.

"I thought so. Vile grammar for Lady Marchwood!"

Jen shrugged her shoulders and left the girls to their prep.

"Joy, how long is nurse staying?" Jen asked one evening.

Joy looked at her quickly. "Three months; I arranged that, so that I'd have plenty of time to find permanent help. She's booked for another case at the end of August. Would you like her to stay longer?"

“It’s jolly to have her here. Something might go wrong with the twins, and we’re all so inexperienced. Aunty Shirley couldn’t help, and the rest of us are such infants where babies are concerned. Don’t you feel an infant when you handle Elizabeth and Margaret?”

“I did. I’m growing more used to them now. They evidently aren’t made of eggshell, as I thought at first. But if anything went wrong with them, I should be in a panic at once. We’ll find another experienced nurse, of course, Jenny-Wren.”

“I like her so much,” Jen remarked, referring to the present nurse. “She’s so motherly. I love to have her here.”

“That was what Joan said. She was Joan’s nurse when Janetta was born, you know. Perhaps we could persuade her to come back later on, Brownie.”

“Oh, I’m sure she will, if she’s asked. I’m going to talk to her.”

“And I’m going to write to Kenneth, if you haven’t done it already,” Joy said unexpectedly.

“I am writing by this mail. But you aren’t to tell him to hurry home. There’s no need.”

“That’s precisely what I am going to do, as you know very well. You want him, and you’re going to have him. My business mustn’t keep him away from you just now.”

“There’s no hurry. I wish you’d let me and my husband arrange our own affairs!” Jen protested, in an injured tone.

Joy smiled. “You’re going to find me a regular bully of an elder sister. You didn’t know what you were in for when you got yourself related to me, Brownie!”

“If Ken comes home, I shall leave you and go and live with him at the Manor,” Jen warned her.

“That’s where I want to see you; in your own house, with him to make you behave yourself. You need looking after. He’ll come home as soon as he gets my letter, so you can be getting the house ready.”

“No, he won’t. He’ll finish his business. But he won’t waste time over it. I’ve told him he’s to finish it. He’ll pay more attention to my letter than to yours.”

“I doubt it. And he wouldn’t have wasted time in any case. I think he’ll come right home,” said Joy.

“I shall feel fearfully bad if he does. For, don’t you see, he’ll only have to go back again, silly?” Jen said vigorously. “He must see to things out there, both for you and himself. I don’t want him to need to go back after—once he’s come home.”

“I dare say he’ll be able to hand everything over to some one in Nairobi, so long as he’s on the spot to arrange it himself,” Joy observed. “It may not

take him long. Don't you want him home, Jenny-Wren?"

"Ass!" was all the thanks Jen gave for the proffered sympathy. "Don't be sentimental! Of course I want him! What's the good of talking about it?"

"None. Here's Margaret for you to nurse," said Joy wisely.

Jen clasped Margaret Joan and sat hugging her and whispering secrets into the tiny reddish curls, while Joy, carrying Elizabeth, went to talk to nurse.

Betty's introduction to Maidlin and Rosamund came unexpectedly.

She was lying gazing out of the window about five o'clock one afternoon, Mary's second book, which she had just finished, by her side.

The door was thrown open, and Maidlin stood there, her face white, her black hair untidy after the ride home from school, her scarlet tam still on her head.

"Please, may we come to you? We must have somebody. Ros is in dreadful trouble, and there's no one at home. Jen's at the Manor and Mary's gone to Wycombe shopping, and Joy and aunty and nurse are out in the car. There's nobody to help," the words poured out in a breathless stream. Trouble for any one she loved broke through Maidie's reserve, and for Rosamund she would do or dare anything.

"What's the matter? Please do come to me! Is it something to do with school? I'm all right, nurse. It won't hurt me," Betty urged, as the day-nurse came forward, frowning, to shield her patient from this excitement.

"No, it's a letter. It's about her mother," and Maidlin fled.

Betty heard her pleading, "Come and tell her, Ros! It will help, I know it will. The others may not be back for hours. Come on, Ros! I've told her, and she's awfully jolly. You'll want to talk to her."

Then Betty found Rosamund facing her, with dazed eyes and frightened face, a letter in her hand.

Betty held out her hand. "Come and tell me, Ros! I know you quite well. What's the matter? Is it bad news?"

"It's about my mother," Rosamund sank down on the bed and spoke breathlessly, in a bewildered way which told how great the shock had been. "She's in Ceylon. I haven't seen her for six years. But I thought she was all right. This letter's from her, and she's ill; they've been trying not to tell me, hoping it was nothing much. She's worse, and she's coming home at once for treatment from a famous doctor in Switzerland. She's coming by a fast boat that was to start a few days after the one that brought this; she may arrive any day, quite soon after the letter. She's travelling with friends who are coming home to see their son, who is ill in London; she'll wire from Marseilles, and she'd like me to meet her at Southampton. The wire may come at any moment."

“Then you’ll be *going away*, Ros?” Maidlin whispered. The thought was incredible. To say good-bye to Rosamund?

Betty looked at them, guessing something of the shock this crisis had been.

“I wish Jen was here!” she thought desperately.

Rosamund sat looking down, her lips working. Then she looked up at Maidlin, her eyes still frightened.

“Somehow I’d forgotten this wasn’t home! I’d forgotten I’d have to go away. I supposed I should go some time, but father’s always said he didn’t want me to go out to them there, and there seemed no chance of their coming home for a long while. And Joy’s been such a brick! It has seemed like home.”

“But your mother?” Betty asked gently.

“She needs me. She wants me to look after her. There’s no one else. I’m going to do it,” Rosamund said breathlessly. “You forget a little in six years; I was a kid of eleven. But I *want* to take care of her. It’s only—only—all this, Joy, and Maidie, and Jen, and Mary, and this dear place,—they all seem so much more *real*! Mother and father have been only in letters for so long. I *want* to go to help her! But I feel torn up by the roots. I hadn’t thought of going away from here, not for ages.”

“I can’t do without you,” Maidlin said simply, and sat in helpless misery, staring at Rosamund.

Betty looked from one to the other and realised their tragedy in some degree. Maidlin relied on Rosamund and counted on her help for every moment of the day. But Rosamund, who had been thought by every one to be a tower of strength and resolution, was breaking down under the strain of imminent parting from everything that had made her life happy for years.

In a dazed way Rosamund voiced her feeling. “I’m lost. I feel as if everything—all these things round me, you people, and the places I’ve known—had been holding me up, and as if now I’m falling into space. There’s nothing underneath me. There’s been Jen, and Joy, and you, Maidie, and Mary—and school, and the girls—and everything that’s made up life. If I lose it all, and go away, to strange people and strange places, and perhaps even to strange countries, what shall I have to hold on to? There’s nothing left. I *want* to go and help mother; but I feel it won’t be myself that will go. I shall stay here with Maidie and Joy. It will be a strange person who goes away from here.”

“I can’t go on living without you,” Maidlin said hopelessly.

Betty lay staring from one to the other. “Rosamund, you’re talking nonsense,” she said gently at last. “You aren’t used to the idea of a big change yet, that’s all. It isn’t the things round us that matter; they aren’t us;

it's what's in us that's important, and you'll take that with you wherever you go. You haven't thought of that. If there's nothing inside you—if your whole life has been in outside things—then you will feel lost when a big change comes. But that isn't so, I'm sure. Be a sport and pull yourself together and face up to this! Your mother's ill and needing you, Rosamund.”

Rosamund looked at her. Then she walked to the window and stood staring out, her back to the bed.

Maidlin looked at Betty. Then, at the sympathy in Betty's eyes, she dropped on her knees by the bed and hid her face. Betty's arm went round her and pressed her shoulders silently.

Rosamund turned from the window, squaring her shoulders as she faced a new life.

“I'm sorry. I was behaving like a kid,” she said steadily. “You were about right; I have lived only in outside things, without thinking much; I've had an awfully good time for years. But it hasn't been solid; there hasn't been much behind it. It's been too soft and easy, I suppose; Joy has been such a dear. We've had everything, and we haven't had to worry about a thing. Of course, it couldn't go on. I had to be pulled up some time. There *must* be another part of me besides the silly school kid who takes everything and does nothing for anybody! Now's my chance to show it. I won't go to pieces any more. I'm going to see mother through this illness till she's well and strong, and then I'll look after her so that it doesn't happen again. Perhaps”—she caught her breath—“perhaps I'll come back here and see them all again some day.”

Maidlin, kneeling by the bed, was crying brokenly. “Ros! Oh, you mustn't go! I want you; I must have you, Ros!”

“Can't you comfort her?” Betty asked anxiously.

Rosamund was looking down at Maidlin with quivering lips. It seemed as if she would break down too. But the habit of years was too strong to be swept aside by any crisis. For three years she had strengthened Maidie, thinking of her before herself; and the fact upheld her now.

“Maid, old girl!” she knelt and put her arms round Maidlin, who clung to her and sobbed again. “We must face up to this. I have to go away, into everything strange; I'm in a frightful funk about it inside me. You have to stay here and go on alone. It's rotten for both of us, Maidie. We mustn't howl, and make it harder for the other one. You wouldn't want to make things worse for me, Maid? No, of course not; and I'd hate to make it harder for you. We have to remember one another. And there's something else I'm remembering, Primrose. Think how plucky Jen was when she lost her mother! And how splendid Joy has been about Andrew! Now it's our turn; we mustn't funk and let them think we're rotters. It was worse for them, for

their people had died. I'm *sure*, sure as I can be, that I shall come back and see you all again. I couldn't be leaving this place, and all you folks, and the house, and the Abbey, for ever. When mother's better she'll want to come and see the place where I've had such ripping times. Maidie, we must be sports, as Jen and Joy were."

Maidlin was quieter, listening and taking in every word. Betty nodded in warm approval to Rosamund.

Rosamund said urgently, "We'll go into the Abbey and talk about it, shall we? It will help, Maid. At first I couldn't bear it, but I'm beginning to see—well, I feel this! There's no choice; I have to go; and I *want* to go, to help mother. So I'm going without grousing; see? And you're going to stay here; you *want* to stay here, with Joy and Jen and the twins. So you aren't going to grouse either. We can't pretend to enjoy having everything broken to bits like this; I shall be lonely among strange people, and I shall miss you all horribly; and you'll be lonely without me. But we aren't infants. We're going through with it, if not without funking, then with as little funking as we can! You're going to pull yourself together, Primrose, and not weep any more, for it makes things beastly hard for me when you do."

"I'm—sorry!" Maidlin choked and swallowed a sob. "I—won't, Ros."

"Of course you won't, any more. We had a shock when we heard the news, but we're getting over it now," Rosamund said sturdily. "Maidie, come into the Abbey and talk it over! Betty'll tell the others; won't you?" Her eyes sought Betty's in urgent pleading. "I feel as if I couldn't bear to tell Joy and Jen. Won't you help us?"

"Of course I will. I'll ask them to come up here as soon as they come in, if it will help at all," Betty said eagerly.

"Thanks awfully! It will help a lot. Come into the Abbey, Maid! We always take refuge in the Abbey when things go wrong," she said briefly, to Betty. "It's sort of comforting. Come on, Primrose!"

They fled, and Betty saw them racing across the lawn to hide themselves in the ruins.

She lay thinking over these new friends and their trouble, more interested in their very real difficulties than she had been in those of Mary Devine's story-book girls.

At the sound of a car she looked out anxiously to see if it were Mary or Joy returning. It was Joy's car, and Mrs. Shirley and the twins and nurse were set down at the front door. Joy was not there.

Betty turned anxiously to her nurse. "Please ask where Lady Marchwood is! She hasn't come back with the others."

The nurse returned presently to say that the party had called at the Manor and had brought Jen home, but that she and Joy had left the car at the

Abbey gates and were walking home through the ruins and the garden.

“Then I can’t help,” Betty said restlessly. “They’ll meet the girls. I’m sorry; I wanted to save Rosamund a little,” and she lay wondering what was happening in the Abbey.

It was the first time Joy had walked through the ruins since her illness. She and Jen were crossing the garth, Jen pointing out the spot where she had found Ros and Maidie sleeping in the cloisters on the night the twins were born, when down the winding refectory stairs a small figure came flying, and Maidlin stood panting before them.

“Ros has to go away,” she said breathlessly. “There’s a letter from her mother. The telegram may come at any time. Joy, *Ros is going away!*”

The despair in her voice went to Joy’s heart. She held out her arms, and Maidlin sprang into them. Then Maidie drew back, with equal swiftness.

“It’s worse for her. We mustn’t think about me and you. We’ll still be here. Ros will be all alone. It’s awful for her. Come and be nice to her, Joy!”

“Where is she? Where did you come from, Maidie? And where has Jen gone?”

“To find Ros, I expect. We were in the pulpit, where I used to hide,” Maidlin said eagerly, drawing Joy towards the refectory steps. “Ros said we’d go up there to talk, for fear tourists came. Then we saw you and Jen through the crack in the wall, and she said we’d better tell you. Betty had promised to tell you for us, because Ros said she couldn’t bear it. So I thought I’d do something to help her, and I ran to tell you. She’s feeling rotten about going away, Joy.”

“She’ll manage all right,” said Joy, with her usual lack of insight. “Rosamund makes friends easily. But I don’t understand yet——”

They entered the refectory, to find Rosamund at the foot of the pulpit stairs, explaining the situation to Jen.

“So, you see, I have to go as soon as the telegram comes, for mother can’t be stranded in Southampton alone. Her friends will come right through to town to see their son, who’s ill; I must be there to meet her and see what she’s planning to do. She may want to go straight across to Switzerland to see this doctor—Sir Rennie Brown. She says he’s supposed to be something very special.” Rosamund spoke steadily, her head held high, no sign of tears to be seen; she was resolved not to have another break-down. But there was a forced note in her voice and a tenseness in her manner which made Jen look at her sharply; this calmness seemed hardly natural.

“Sir Rennie Brown? I’ve heard of him somewhere,” said Joy. “Where was it? It was a long time ago. Is your mother ill, Ros? I don’t understand yet.”

Rosamund handed her the letter. Jen drew Joy down on the edge of the big table and they read it together.

Maidlin looked at Rosamund to see if her sudden flight out to the garth had been understood. "You said you couldn't bear to tell Joy," she whispered.

Rosamund nodded. "Jolly sporting of you, Primrose! You're a brick."

Joy looked up. "You'll have to go, Rosamund. You'd better pack and be ready for that wire."

Rosamund's tense face whitened; this brought the parting very near. "Yes, I'd better go and pack," she caught her breath.

"We shall miss you, Rosamunda," Joy said wistfully. "I wish you didn't need to go. It will be queer without you, after all this time. It's a horrid break in the family."

Jen stepped forward and put her arm round Rosamund, who had swayed dangerously. "Steady, Rosie! It's all right. I'm holding you," she spoke clearly.

"Why, Rosamund?" cried Joy.

"Ros! Oh, Joy, it's killing her to go away!" wailed Maidlin.

"That's right, kid. That's better! I thought you were going off, Rosie," Jen said soothingly, as Rosamund, leaning on her heavily, hid her face and broke into a storm of tears.

Jen looked up. "Joy, don't be worried. She'll be all right now. It isn't going to kill her to go away, as Maidie says; but it's hurting her rather badly. She meant to be brave about it and not let us see how much it hurt; didn't you, Rosie? But you upset her courage by saying you'd miss her. You never have understood how much Ros loves you, Joy."

"Can't you stop her?" Joy murmured uneasily. "I shall howl myself in a minute. I can't bear it when strong people like you and Ros collapse."

"Did you hear that, Rosamund? *Strong* people! Buck up, kid! You've had your little weep, and you needed it. We all know it's like tearing up roots for you to go away, and the roots have gone very deep, haven't they? I'd feel just the same myself. But now you're going to be brave and think of your mother and not of yourself," Jen said bracingly. "You wouldn't like to see me and Joy in tears too, would you? Maidie's on the verge, of course."

Rosamund struggled for self-control, her head still bent on Jen's shoulder. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do it again. I thought I'd got over the shock; it was a shock at first. Jen, I am going to play the game. But when Joy said——"

"It was just too much, wasn't it? Didn't you know we'd miss you? Of *course*, we wish you didn't need to go, silly! There's nothing to cry about in that," Jen scolded gently.



“No, I won’t. Give me a hanky, somebody! Mine gave out last time. We went and told Betty,” Rosamund explained incoherently. “We had to tell somebody, and you were all out, and so was Mary. Maidie went to Betty and asked if we might come to her.”

“Jolly sensible of Maidie,” Jen said warmly.

“Maidie’s helped a lot,” Rosamund said eagerly. She turned to Joy. “Do you know this doctor, really? Will he be able to help mother?”

“I can’t think where—oh, yes, I know! Jen—Cheltenham—four years ago, the summer before Ros and Maidie arrived!”

“Cheltenham?” Jen said vaguely. “What has that to do with us now?”

“Karen Wilson and Tazy Kingston, the girls who shared our rooms. Karen was going to be engaged to Sir Rennie Brown’s son——”

“I remember her; the musical girl, with glasses, and lovely brown hair. I wonder if the engagement came off? We said we’d write to them, but we never did, and neither did they.”

Joy turned to Rosamund and spoke quickly. “I was very friendly with Karen over music, and we talked together a great deal. She spoke very highly of Sir Rennie Brown and of the wonderful things he had done. He has a sanatorium in the Alps, very high up, and patients go from all over Europe for treatment. He had been very good to her mother, though he hadn’t been able to save her; and he had saved Tazy Kingston’s mother. I’m sure he’ll be able to help yours.”

“We could give Ros an introduction to Karen, if her mother decides to go there,” Jen suggested. “Karen lived out there; it was her home. She’s probably married to the Rennie Brown boy by now.”

“She’d be a friend for you, Ros,” Joy said eagerly. “I’ll write as soon as you know anything definite. I say, kid! It will be—will it set you off again if I say that?”

Rosamund reddened. “You needn’t rub it in. I know I’ve been going on like a kid. It’s all right. I won’t do it again.”

“It will be rotten having to do without you here, that’s all,” Joy said firmly. “Don’t think Maidie’s the only one who’s going to miss you!”

Rosamund flushed. “I didn’t really think you would,” she admitted.

“Well, I shall, horribly. You and Maidie were my first pair of twins. I don’t like losing one of you.”

Rosamund stood looking down at the patterned pavement of the beautiful hall. “I hate gush,” she said unsteadily. “I can’t say what I want to. But I’ll *never* forget, whatever happens, how good you’ve been to me all these years, and what a jolly time I’ve had here. I might have been a boarder at school all this time. I’m sure no girl ever had a more ripping time or lived in a jollier house. It’s thanks to all of you, and I’ll never forget. Now!” she

squared her shoulders again. “I wanted to say that; I meant every word. But I hate being sentimental; I can’t keep it up! Will you help me to make plans? What shall I do about all my things? What shall I take with me? And what about school?”

Jen slipped a hand through her arm. “Come back to the house and we’ll get to business, old girl. I’ll help all I can.”

“Maidie and I are coming to sit on your bed and decide what you’ll take with you and what we shall keep for you till you know your future plans, Rosamunda,” said Joy, and they went across the garth and through the garden together.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ROSAMUND GROWS UP

For three days Rosamund went about the house and garden, looking at everything with new eyes. During that last week-end she felt almost as if she were seeing everything for the first time, in the light of her knowledge that in reality it might be for the last time. She stood in the pretty lavender and white bedroom whose colouring she had been allowed to choose, and looked round at walls, pictures, furniture in a dazed way, unable to believe she was really going to leave it all and perhaps never return.

The first night after the news came, she sat on Maidlin's bed without a word to say. It seemed so impossible that she might never sit there again. After a long, shy silence she rose.

"It's no use saying anything, is it, Maid? Go to sleep and forget it all. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Rosie," Maidlin whispered.

When Rosamund had gone, closing the connecting door, Maidlin sat up suddenly, a wave of terror sweeping over her; no nightmare, but a real trouble, which had just occurred to her.

"Ros may not be here when that princess comes! It isn't till the week after next; she'll have gone by then. I'll have to do it all alone! I *can't*!"

She flung back the bedclothes, to run to Rosamund for comfort. Then, with a stifled sob, she threw herself down again, burying her face in the pillow.

"I mustn't worry her; it's mean! She hasn't thought of it. Perhaps she won't remember. I mustn't make things harder for her. I must learn to do without her."

And sooner than add to Rosamund's burden, Maidlin faced the thought of the ordeal alone, lying with clenched hands and buried face, as she struggled to be quiet and to find the courage she knew she would need.

By Jen's advice the girls went to school on Monday morning, since no further message had come, and there were no more preparations to make; but only on condition they were sent for at once if the telegram arrived.

As classes were breaking up at half-past twelve, Jen drove up to the school gate in the big car from the Manor, and asked to see Miss Macey. Rosamund and Maidlin were sent for, and came with tense faces to hear the news.

Jen handed Rosamund a telegram. "It's from Marseilles," she said.

Rosamund read it with bewildered eyes. “‘Mother ill on journey. Going direct Marienthal, Switzerland. Can you join her?—Henderson.’”

“Those are the friends she was travelling with,” Rosamund sounded dazed. Then she came to herself. “Mother’s ill. I must go at once, Jen. Can we go home now? I’m almost ready to start.”

“I have the car here. Yes, Maidie too, of course. Do you want to say good-bye to people?”

“*No!*” Rosamund cried sharply.

“Better not,” Miss Macey said gently. “You don’t want to lose time either. Fetch your hats, girls; just tell the rest you are needed at home.”

“How will she go to Switzerland, Jen?” Miss Macey asked, as the two hurried away. “Poor child, she hasn’t thought of that yet.”

“We’ll send some one with her, of course. I or Mary Devine will go. Joy doesn’t know yet; she was out with Mary when the wire came. I left a message and came right off to fetch Rosamund. One of us will see her safely to her mother, Miss Macey.”

“That will be a comfort to her. I didn’t think she looked well this morning; it has been a shock to her.”

“She’s feeling the parting from us all,” Jen agreed briefly.

“How is Joy? The girls tell me she is very well,” asked Joy’s former schoolmistress.

“She’s wonderful. Her interest in things is coming back every day,” Jen said warmly. “At first she took up her music again to please our invalid; you heard of the accident? But now she’s really keen on it; and she’s going back to all her old interests in the village. This morning she’s down there with Mary Devine, visiting all the places—the babies’ home and the girls’ hostel, and the lace factory and the pottery works. She has begun composing again; to amuse the twins, she says.”

Miss Macey laughed. “I hear they are getting on splendidly.”

“Oh, they’re growing fast! Joy has her very bad times, of course,” Jen said gravely, “but she’s careful that nobody sees them. Ros and Maidie don’t even know; they think she’s getting over the trouble nicely! Mary and I know better; but only we see the other side. She *is* getting over it wonderfully. But she cared for Andrew as she’d never cared for any one before, Miss Macey. It was very hard to lose him within a year.”

“We have all felt for her. Every one will want to tell her so as soon as she feels ready for visitors.”

“She’ll be willing to see people soon now, I think.”

“And what about yourself, Lady Marchwood? I haven’t seen you since your very quiet little wedding,” the head mistress said, smiling.

“I don’t like being a temporary widow,” Jen confessed. “But Ken won’t be away for so very long, and there’s heaps to do. I’m living without him somehow! Here come those girls at last!”

“Pat Mercer stopped us,” Rosamund said hastily. “She’d heard my mother was ill, and guessed why I had to go. She wanted to wish me good luck.”

“She was awfully nice, Jen,” said Maidlin, as Rosamund said good-bye to Miss Macey, knowing very well that it was her farewell to school life also. “It’s only two months since Pat’s father was so fearfully ill in Belgium, and Ros was jolly and helped her to pull through. So Pat understood about Ros and her mother.”

Then they were in the car, whirling away into the country. Rosamund gave one look at the school buildings as they turned the corner. “You’ll be going there for a year more, at least, Maid. You’ll feel queer without me at first.”

“I shall die, I think,” Maidlin said, in hopeless despair. “But don’t bother about me, Ros.”

“You’ll get used to it. *I* shall get used to doing without school. I don’t suppose I shall go—I suppose I’ve grown up and left,” Rosamund spoke in a tone of surprised discovery.

“You aren’t likely to go back to school, Rosie,” Jen agreed. “You’re just on eighteen; you won’t start anywhere else. Your job now is to grow up and look after your mother. Of course, you’ll rise to the occasion.”

“I shall try,” Rosamund said gravely, and sat gazing into the unknown future.

She turned to Jen, as they passed the Abbey gates. “Brownie, how do I find this Swiss place? It’s not like Southampton; I was prepared to tackle that. But how do I find this Marienthal? I haven’t the foggiest notion where it is. I can keep on asking, but I’m afraid my French isn’t all it ought to be. I wish I’d swotted a bit more! They’ll be able to speak English, won’t they?” and she began to look anxious.

“Ros, my dear chap, did you really think we’d let you take that journey all alone?” Jen asked gently. “What do you take us for? I or Mary will go with you, of course. You couldn’t possibly do it, Ros.”

“Oh!” Rosamund flushed in sudden gratitude, and her tone was full of relief. “Oh, Jenny-Wren! Oh, what a difference that would make! I was feeling a bit scared.”

“You’re jolly plucky to consider it at all. You ought to say flatly: ‘I can’t go alone. What are you going to do about it?’ Of course, we shall see you through, you silly girl,” Jen said severely.

“But you oughtn’t to. I must begin doing things on my own, if I’m to be fit to look after mother,” Rosamund urged.

“That’s all right; you’re going to do that. But you aren’t beginning with a trip alone across the Continent. You’ve plenty of pluck, Ros, but we aren’t going to ask that of you. We’ll see what Joy says; she hadn’t heard when I came off in a hurry. She was still out with Mary.”

“It would make all the difference in the world to have company,” Rosamund admitted. “It wouldn’t seem like losing everybody all at once. I wish I knew mother a little better!” and her tone was wistful. “I’m very fond of her, of course; but I only know her through her letters. I was eleven when I saw her last; six years is a long time, and people change so.”

“You’ll hardly remember her,” Jen said sympathetically. “But you do remember that you used to be fond of her, Ros!”

“Oh, rather! I cried for days when she went away. So aunty said.”

“The feeling will all come back, the moment you see her. You can count on that. And she’s ill, and you’re good at protecting people. You’ll want to take care of her and do everything for her. You’ll be all right as soon as you reach her, Rosie.”

“Ros *is* good at protecting people,” Maidlin agreed. “I hadn’t thought of it before, but she is.”

“You know that, don’t you? She’s taken care of you,” Jen said cheerfully. “Ros, it’s a horribly difficult time, but that’s chiefly because it’s between two bits of your life, a sort of stepping-stone. You’ll be all right as soon as you’re on the other side.”

“The stone feels a bit wobbly at the moment,” Rosamund tried bravely to laugh, as the car drew up before the big door of the Hall.

Joy came hurrying out, still wearing her hat and coat. “I’ve only just heard the message. Jen, it was good of you to go instead of just ’phoning to school. Ros, you’ll go at once, of course. Jen, I’ve been thinking—some one must go with her.”

“I’ve been telling her that,” Jen agreed, as they hurried into the big outer hall. “She was prepared to start off for Switzerland alone, if we would just tell her how to find it; how’s that for pluck? But it’s not to be thought of for a moment. What do you think, Joy? You’re the only one of us who has travelled; give us your ideas! Mary-Dorothy or I must go.”

“I couldn’t go very well,” Joy began.

“You! Don’t be daft! Your young twins come before your old ones, don’t they, Ros?”

“I don’t think you should go, Jen,” Joy said decisively.

Mary Devine came from the door of her secretary’s office. “I must go, of course. Can you give us any directions? Ros, you must listen carefully and

remember, for I don't know much more about it than you do. But two will be better than one; at least, I'll be somebody to talk to! And no one is likely to run away with you if I'm there."

"Mary-Dorothy, you're a sport," said Jen. "But have you ever been abroad? And do you speak French?"

"Neither. But I've often been told you can always find somebody who knows English. We'll ask when we want to know anything, won't we, Ros?"

Jen looked at Joy. "What about it, 'Traveller's Joy'? You know Mary-Dorothy. You know she's having palpitations at the thought of crossing Europe when she's never been farther than Margate, although she's concealing it like a man. Can't we do anything to help?"

"Don't be silly, Jenny-Wren," Mary said flushing. "We'll manage all right. I'm a little scared of crossing Paris, but Joy can tell us what to do."

"You needn't cross Paris. I'm sure you can go right through," Jen said eagerly.

"Mary, you're a brick, and I believe you'd do it all alone with Ros, if it were necessary," Joy said appreciatively. "But it isn't; we can do better for you than that. You don't know the helpless feeling of landing in a strange country and not understanding a word, and being bewildered by all the clatter and jabber going on around you. We can save you from that, anyway. Fortunately, we can afford anything to make it easier for you. If you'll only go with Ros to be company, so that she won't feel so awful, that's all we want. You shan't have any worry over it."

She went to the telephone, while Jen and Mary and Rosamund watched her eagerly. "I'm going to ring up a travel agency, and ask them to have a lady courier to meet you at Charing Cross. She'll attend to everything for you—Customs, and changing, and all that; you'll only have to go where she takes you."

"Oh, cheers, Joy!" Jen cried in delight. "That does solve the problem! I was going to lie awake all night thinking of Ros and Mary wrestling with French porters and officials and foreign money at midnight!"

Mary's face had lit up in relief. "Is that really possible? It would help enormously. But we ought to be able to manage without that, Joy. Won't it be terrifically expensive? Ros and I aren't babies. We can ask, and we can find out."

"My dear, the money's there to make things easy for you," Joy assured her. "But I'd hate to send Ros off alone with a courier woman. Your job is to cheer her up and see that she isn't lonely."

"I won't be lonely if Mary's with me," Rosamund spoke up suddenly. "Joy, it's more than good of you. You're all taking no end of trouble to help me; I'll never forget what absolute bricks you've been! If we can afford to

have somebody to go with us, I'd like it, for then Mary won't have to worry."

"Your head's screwed on straight," Joy said approvingly. "Run along and finish your packing. Maidie, child, go and help her. Mary must pack her own bag. You want only night things, and a change in case you get very wet on the boat, Mary. If you hand Ros over to her mother or these Henderson people, you can come straight back and have the good of the courier's company. She'll have to come back to London; and she won't want to hang about there. Insist on a night's rest, and then let her bring you back. You'll be able to do with a small suitcase; borrow one of mine, if you haven't the size you need."

"I couldn't go with Mary and Ros, could I?" Maidlin ventured wistfully.

"Maidie, what a——"

"Maidie, you wouldn't leave Joy and me alone?" Jen asked severely. She had seen "silly idea" in Joy's face, and had cut her short just in time.

Joy's eyes softened as she looked at Maidlin's woebegone face. "Maidie, I couldn't do without you both," she said. "You must stay to cheer us up here, Primrose."

Maidlin sighed. "I want to be in two places at once."

"Go and pack, children!" Jen commanded. "I'm coming to help."

"Lunch will be ready in ten minutes," Joy called after them.

Then she turned to the telephone again, and they heard her making arrangements and giving clear, concise directions. "Book seats—first class, certainly—through carriage to Basle, or beyond, if possible. Spiez, on the new Loetschberg route?—oh, good! That's excellent! Charing Cross at five, then. A tall girl with two yellow plaits, wearing blue; and a friend, shorter, and dark.—Yes, I'll tell them the exact spot. Right! That will do. I'm much obliged."

Rosamund came slowly down the wide staircase to lunch, a few minutes later. "I heard your description of me. She won't know me by the plaits; she won't see them."

Joy looked round at her quickly. "Ros! Oh, Rosie! Must you? Do you think it's best?"

Rosamund's pigtails were rolled up over her ears.

"Much the best. People pay more attention to you. If your hair's down you're just a schoolgirl. Perhaps I'll cut it off later, if it's too much fag. Those of the Sixth who aren't bobbed or shingled already, all say they're going to do it when it's time to put their hair up. They can't be bothered with it then."

"Never come back here, if you do," Joy threatened. "Come to lunch. You look very nice, Rosamunda. Does it feel secure?"



“Oh, quite. I’ve been practising. Why shouldn’t I bob? Jen’s done hers.”

“I never did,” Jen said promptly. “It was done for me. I was bobbed; I wasn’t consulted. Keep your hair, Ros; you look most dignified! No porter will cheek you. It’s very sensible to go among new people as a grown-up.”

“That’s what I thought,” Rosamund agreed. “I’m not caring about looks; but I must begin doing things on my own and looking after mother, and it will be easier if people think I’m quite old. As long as your hair’s down, you have to be looked after.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Joy said regretfully. “It will probably make things easier. As for looks, it suits you, my child. You’re a very handsome young woman, let me tell you. I hope your real mother will be as proud of the way you’re growing up as your foster-mother is.”

“That’s just what you’ve been to me,” Rosamund said, a quiver in her voice for an instant.

“Where’s Maidie? Has she seen you? Does she approve?”

“Maidie says it’s all so horrid that one more awful thing doesn’t make much difference,” Rosamund gave an unsteady laugh. “I said it was rather rude of her. But it’s a sign of growing up, and she hates to think of that. Joy!” she said hurriedly, glancing round to make sure Maidie was not within hearing, “what will you do about her nightmares? She must have some one near her at night. You will be good to her, Joy? You won’t laugh at her? I don’t believe it’s a thing you can laugh her out of. She’ll have to grow out of it by degrees.” She looked appealingly at Joy and Jen. “You will remember and understand, won’t you?”

“We’ll see to it, Rosamunda,” Joy promised, much touched.

“I hope we’re as gentle with Maidie as you’ve been, Ros,” Jen remarked. “The way you’ve been patient with her has been just top-hole. I shall sleep in your room at present, if Maidie will let me; and later on, when I’m away at the Manor, Mary will do it. If she won’t have us there we’ll arrange something else.”

“I don’t suppose she’ll let you,” said Rosamund. “She’ll say she wants to think of me in there. But do something about it, or I’ll never be happy about her. When she wakes in the night she’s about nine; or perhaps five! She has to be petted. But she’ll be awfully upset if you speak about it next day, you know.”

“I think we understand. But you’ve known that side of Maidie better than any of us,” Jen agreed. “You haven’t talked about it. You’ve just taken charge and done it. I feel perhaps we haven’t appreciated you quite properly, Rose-of-the-World.”

“Oh, rot!” Rosamund said brusquely. “Here she comes! Don’t tell her I said anything about it.”

“Ros, I’m truly grateful for your real help all these years,” Joy spoke in a quick undertone, her voice full of deep feeling.

Rosamund gave her a swift, shy look. “I’ve been glad,” she said. “I say, Maid! They like my hair.”

“I don’t. I mean, you look nice, but I don’t like it,” Maidlin said heavily.

Rosamund laughed. “I hope mother won’t have a shock. I was *this* high when she saw me last. To find me grown into a maypole, almost as tall as Jenny-Wren, and looking sedate and dignified, may upset her at first.”

“She’ll be glad, though,” Jen remarked. “She’ll feel she can rely on you, and if she’s ill that will be a great relief. You look very capable. I’d rely on you myself.”

“I wish I knew just how bad she is!” and Rosamund’s face clouded. “It may not mean much more than that she felt the sooner she went for treatment the better. Coming to England may have seemed a waste of time; if she’d been poorly, and if her friends weren’t in too big a hurry, it would be only sensible to leave the boat at Marseilles and go straight to Geneva and into Switzerland. It may be only that, Jen.”

“We’ll hope it’s only that. It sounds very likely,” Jen said comfortingly. “You’ll send us full details by Mary, of course.”

“I shall hate saying good-bye to Mary,” Rosamund remarked, as they went to lunch. “She’ll be the last link with home.”

Joy heard the word and her heart warmed in sudden joy. During the hurried packing after lunch she missed Rosamund, and found her bending hungrily over the twins.

“I can’t bear to leave them! They’ll be big girls in no time. Oh, Joy, I could cry, only I hate being a baby!”

“Did you mean it when you spoke of us as ‘home’? Is that how you feel about us, Ros?” Joy asked wistfully.

“It’s the only home I’ve ever had, that I can remember,” Rosamund flashed out at her. “Of course this is home, and it always will be! It’s been the happiest home any girl ever had; and I’ve been the luckiest girl. If I could say a fraction of what I feel, I’d make you understand. I’ve forgotten for years that I had no real right to be here—that it wasn’t my real home, as it was Maidie’s. I never thought about it; everything was so jolly that I just took it all for granted and had a good time. But now that I have to go away I know what I’m losing. If I could have the time here over again I’d show you how much I thank you,” and she hid her face in Margaret Joan.

“You have shown it by the way you’ve helped us all, me and Jen as much as Maidie,” Joy said quietly. “We haven’t—or perhaps *I* haven’t—noticed always how much difference it has made to have you here. But now that you’re going away, I know what we’re losing too, Rosie.”

“Take this kid. I shall drop her,” Rosamund’s voice shook and her arms were trembling.

Joy rescued her youngest daughter and laid her in her cot. Then she held out her arms to her eldest, and Rosamund sprang to her and was clasped as closely as if she had been Maidie.

“I’ve wanted—I couldn’t tell you—Joy, I have cared,” she whispered brokenly.

“Rose, I haven’t understood. Jen told me, but I didn’t believe you cared so much. You were such a tomboy. But I know now that I was wrong. Oh, my dear kid, I don’t want you to go away!” Joy said wistfully. “Everybody has to go and leave me! I shall miss you dreadfully, Rose-of-the-World!”

## CHAPTER XIV MINUS ONE

Rosamund came flying downstairs after a last kiss to Mrs. Shirley, and a hasty farewell to Betty McLean. The luggage was already in the car and Mary was waiting.

"I daren't look at the twins. Kiss them for me, Joy. Good-bye, Jen! See you all again some day, I hope. Joy, you angel, good-bye, and thank you for everything! I'm sure I'll come back sometime. Take care of Primrose!"

With a last hug, Rosamund thrust Maidlin into Joy's arms, wrung Jen's hand, and fairly leapt down the steps and hurled herself into the car on top of Mary.

The little group on the steps waited till the car was out of sight, Maidlin's face hidden in Joy's arms. Then Jen turned from the other two and ran away across the lawn and into the Abbey.

Joy's arm tightened round Maidlin. "Maidie, you must help me," she begged, unconscious that in pleading for herself she was helping Maidlin to pull herself together as nothing else could have done. "I feel I've only just found out what Ros is really like; and now I've lost her. I want her as much as you do, Maidie. Come and sit by the twins under the trees and talk about Ros! I believe you've known her better than I have. Tell me the sort of things she used to do for you."

Maidlin went with her joyfully. With Elizabeth Joy in her lap, she poured out the story of Rosamund's companionship.

"Just like Joan and me," Joy marvelled. "I knew you were good chums, but I didn't notice much more than that. I guessed Ros was doing the elder sister stunt to some extent; but I never realised how thoroughly she'd taken on the job. I have been going about with my eyes shut!"

From her window Betty looked down at them. She had seen Jen's flight to the Abbey, and remembered Rosamund's remark that the Abbey was "sort of comforting." She was lonely, for no one had had any time to spare for her to-day; that was inevitable, she knew; she had been surprised and touched that Rosamund had remembered her and had taken time to say good-bye, in the midst of all her excitement and distress.

Jen came slowly back from the Abbey. "Sorry I faded away like that," and she stood looking down at the baby in Joy's lap. "I was afraid I was going to howl. Thought I'd better get the worst over in private! I must go and talk to Betty; we've been neglecting her horribly. She'll understand; but

it has been hard on her. But I'd give anything not to have to talk to any one. I've a rotten headache. What I'm really aching to do is to sit here with you two and nurse an infant, and perhaps go to sleep."

"Maidie, couldn't you run up and talk to Betty?" Joy suggested. "You could tell her about Ros, as you've been telling me. She'd like it, and Jenny-Wren could rest. She's dead tired."

Maidlin looked from one to the other of them, very reluctant to go.

Jen said yearningly, "Oh, Maidie, *would* you? Would you give me your chair and your baby? It would be kind! You'll find both Joy and me inclined to rely on you now; we need somebody! Won't you take Rosamund's place? It's just the sporting sort of thing she'd do."

Maidlin handed Elizabeth Joy to her. "I'll go, then. But Betty would rather have you. If she doesn't seem to want me I shall come away."

"Wish I could skip up first and warn Bets to want her badly!" Jen murmured, as she cuddled her twin. "But I think Betty will understand. Oh, I am tired, 'Traveller's Joy'! It wasn't an excuse, to give Maidie a job. Somehow, we've all grown very fond of Rosamund lately, and it's hard to let her go."

"I feel mad that I never appreciated her properly," Joy said regretfully. "I didn't give her credit for very deep feelings. Apparently they were so very deep that she couldn't show them."

"I suspect that was about the truth," Jen agreed. "She lifted the lid now and then and let me see what was going on inside; but it didn't happen often."

"You might have given me a hint! I've been blindfold all this time."

"She threatened me with something dire and dreadful if I did. And I did tell you once or twice, but you didn't believe me."

"You didn't manage to make me understand. I'm beginning to be frightened about these children," Joy confessed apprehensively, looking down at Margaret Joan in her lap. "I seem to be unable to understand people properly. What if I don't learn to know my own daughters? And they have only me," and her face grew shadowed. "I need help. Andrew would have understood them. Jen, what if I fail them? I feel I failed Ros in understanding."

"You won't fail these two, old girl," Jen said gently. "They're your own; and you'll watch them grow. Ros was fourteen when she came here; quite another story!"

"I hope I'll be able to give them what they need," Joy said wistfully.

Maidlin entered Betty's room shyly, all the diffidence of her nature very much in evidence. "Jen told me to come and tell you all about Ros. She has a headache; I mean Jen, of course. I said you wouldn't want me, but she told

me to come and see,” and she stood doubtfully by the bed, looking down at Betty.

Betty had greeted her appearance with a cry of welcome. “Oh, do come! Come and talk about anything! I’m tired of reading, and Lady Marchwood hasn’t had time to play to me to-day. I knew how busy you must all be. But you looked so friendly and comfy sitting there under the big beech tree, that I longed to be able to join in. You’ve made a regular camp in front of that summer-house, haven’t you?”

“It’s shady. The sun’s too strong for the babies,” Maidlin explained. “Ros will be nearly in London now. She gave me a time-table, so that I could be thinking about her.”

“They’ve gone all the way to town in the big car, haven’t they? What a nice easy way to start! And how jolly Rosamund looked with her hair up! Didn’t you think so? She ran in here to say good-bye, and she hadn’t put her hat on. I thought she looked tremendously improved, and I told her so.”

“Her hat was too tight,” said Maidlin practically. “She wasn’t going to wear it in the car, and she was going to buy a new one as soon as they got to town. It didn’t fit her with her hair up.”

Betty laughed. “I’m sure it would make a difference. She has such a lot of hair. She couldn’t travel in a tight hat. What are you going to tell me about her?”

Maidlin sat on the window-sill, and waved her hand to Joy and Jen under the beech tree. Then she turned to Betty.

“Anything. There are heaps of jolly stories. What would you like? There was the time I fell into Andrew’s pond next door, and Ros dived after me, and he pulled us both out. And there was the time Ros had trouble with Pat Mercer in the Abbey, and I had to be Queen because if I wasn’t Pat would be, and Ros couldn’t bear that, so she asked me to be Queen. That’s why they call me Primrose. But Pat’s father was ill, and Ros was awfully decent to her, and they made it up, and to-day Pat was jolly to Ros about her mother.”

“Tell me all the stories! And tell me about your being Queens at school. Ros was a Queen too, wasn’t she?”

“She was really Queen for two years. Jen came after her, but she had to go home because her father was ill, so Ros carried on, and Brownie came back in time to crown me. The girls loved Ros as Queen; she was the Rose Queen, and a ripping one.” And Maidlin, fairly launched in praise of her friend, talked on and on, her pale cheeks glowing and her eyes bright, while Betty lay and marvelled at the change in her.

“You’ve done me real good, Queen Primrose,” she said warmly, when the tea-bell called Maidlin out to join the party in the garden. “It’s like

another chapter of Miss Devine's books to hear you talk about school! You will come back another time, won't you?"

"Maidie! Maidie! Come here quickly!" called Jen from downstairs. "Maidie, Ros wants to talk to you from Charing Cross!"

Maidlin fairly tumbled down the stairs. Usually she was nervous of the telephone and refused to use it; but to-day she grasped the receiver joyfully, and heard Rosamund's voice.

"Cheerio, everybody! Is Maidie there? Tell her she mustn't be scared, Jen, for I simply must hear her voice again. Speak up, Maid! Are you there?"

Maidlin looked imploringly at Jen. "Tell me what to do! I must make Ros hear," she was shaking with eagerness. "Why, she *heard* me say it!" as she heard Rosamund laugh.

"Hold it there. Speak clearly and slowly, but don't shout," Jen directed.

"I say, Maidie, isn't this fun? Miss Rawlings asked if I wouldn't like to 'phone to you; she's our keeper-lady, and she's a dear. Knows everything, and has all sorts of nobby ideas. I've bought a hat, a topping little round thing, just the blue of my coat, and quite comfy. The girl said it was 'just the blue of Moddom's eyes,' which was luck. *I* was trying to match my coat; I hadn't realised my coat had been bought to match my eyes! Jenny-Wren chose it for me; tell her she evidently knows a thing or two! I'm sure that girl in the shop didn't guess that 'Moddom's' hair had been up for exactly three hours only; she was frightfully polite, but then you've no idea how dignified and elderly I am. Miss Rawlings thinks it's awfully funny; she looked out for me in plaits, thanks to Joy. She was expecting a school kid; she looked so hard at me that I simply had to explain I'd only grown up at lunch time. She laughed like anything, but she said it was jolly sensible, as my hair would keep so much tidier under my hat, if it kept up at all. I told her it was glued on quite safely, with about fifty hairpins, so she said that was all right, if only they didn't run into my head in the night. And I said I'd jolly well take care they didn't. We're great chums, and the journey's going to be a thousand times jollier because of her. Mary-Dorothy says so too. You'll tell Joy how grateful we both are, won't you? Miss Rawlings is seeing to passports now; she says it will be all right, and we'll be in plenty of time for the boat train. We're to have dinner on the way to Dover. I'm beginning to feel excited, Maidie! When you're getting into bed we'll just be going on board. They want me to have a berth and go and lie down, but I'm not going to waste the journey like that. I have my big winter coat and my rug, and I'm going to walk the deck all the way to Calais. If I'm sick I'll be sick, and that's the end of it; I'd rather be ill on deck than in a stuffy cabin. Mary says the same. But it's going to be a lovely night, clear and no

wind, and there's a moon. I'm going to enjoy it, and I don't see why any of us should be ill. Of course, Rawly won't; she's used to it. She has heaps of funny stories about her journeys and the queer people she's taken across. I'll write some of them down for you in my first letter. She's booked first-class seats for us on the French train, and she'll bully the Customs people, and she knows all the tips for getting hot coffee at midnight. You can *see* the gratitude oozing out of Mary-Dorothy! What have you been doing since I left, Primrose?"

"Joy and I sat under the tree and nursed the babies, and talked about you," Maidlin spoke steadily and distinctly. "Jen went away into the Abbey \_\_\_\_\_"

Jen leant over and took the mouthpiece from her. "I made an ass of myself and cried because you'd gone, Rose-of-the-World. Fortunately, I didn't do it in public. I felt as if I'd lost a bit of the universe."

"How topping of you, Brownie!" Rosamund sounded really touched. "But you mustn't weep. I hate to have worried you so."

"Oh, I shan't do it again! It was just the shock of being minus something. The house feels empty at present; you're such a hefty, noisy lout, Rosie. We miss you all the time. Go on, Maidie! Maidlin speaking, Rose-of-the-World!"

"When Jen had finished crying she came to sit with Joy, because she had a headache. So I went up and talked to Betty, because she was lonely; I told her stories about school, and you, and she said it was just like Mary's books."

As Rosamund's laugh sounded, Joy came in, called by nurse, and took her turn. "Rose, what a topping idea! Where are you? Charing Cross? I say, ring us up again just before you start! Is everything all right? Did the car behave well? She hasn't come back yet."

"Perfect. We had a jolly run. Maidie'll tell you all about Rawly, and my new hat. They say we'll have a perfect crossing, Joy; isn't it luck? And tomorrow morning we'll be in Basle! I can't quite believe it. I shall have lunch with mother! It's all a sort of dream. I shall wake up presently and find I haven't done my prep. and it's time to start for school. Maidie, give my love to everybody to-morrow. And, I say! I was thinking while we came along in the car.—What about you and the princess? What will you do? I forgot all about her. I'm awfully sorry; we might have arranged something. But in all the worry I didn't think. Perhaps Jen could go and back you up. She is last year's Queen, after all! Tell her from me she's to do her duty and dress up for the princess."

Jen and Joy looked at one another. Then they jumped, and stared at Maidlin, and then at one another again. For Maidlin was saying, in a clear,



decisive voice:

“I thought about that days ago, Ros, but I didn’t want to worry you. It will be all right. Jen can’t go; it would look silly, when she’s so big, and now that she’s married. Nobody could pretend she was still at school. The princess wouldn’t understand, and she’d ask questions, and they’d tell her how silly I was. I don’t want that; people would think I was soft, and they’d say it was horrid for you and Joy to have such a baby to look after. I’ll get on all right; you needn’t worry. It would have been *much* nicer to have you; but as I can’t I shall just do it alone. I shan’t have to say or do much. I don’t mind if she guesses I’m shy; I expect princesses are used to that; she’s sure to be nice. But she mustn’t think I’m soft. Jen would look like my nurse. They’d ask where my pram was.”

Jen caught Joy by the arm and dragged her into Mary’s study, and they fell into chairs, helpless with laughter. Maidlin was calling them insistently, however, so they had to stifle their mirth and go out to say good-bye to Rosamund.

“Maid, you are a trump! Of course you’ll get on all right! But I say, I must ring off. Rawly says tea’s waiting. I’ll ring up again before we start. Good-bye, all!”

“Good-bye for the present!” a trio of voices answered her.

“That was nice!” Maidlin said gravely, as she hung up the receiver. “I must tell Betty about that after tea. I do like her, Jen; she’s ripping.”

“She’ll be glad to see you whenever you’ll go and talk to her. I’m sure she’s lonesome sometimes,” Jen said encouragingly, as they went across the lawn to the table under the big tree.

“I’ll play to her after tea,” said Joy. “She hasn’t had much music lately.”

Maidlin was standing leaning on the piano while Joy played, when Jen came in from the garden and stood looking at them. Then sudden decision filled her face.

“I’ll risk it! I believe it’s the right moment. I haven’t Mary to consult, so I must just do what seems right and hope for the best. I did that about Joy, when Betty was so ill; and it came out all right. Perhaps Mary-Dorothy’s right, and we are guided to do the best thing for people, if we’re really fond of them. Anyway, here goes!”

She touched Maidlin’s shoulder. “Come and talk to me, Primrose. Joy will play to Betty for an hour, now that she’s started.”

Maidlin looked startled. “Is it about Ros? Oh, are we going into the Abbey? Is it important, Jen?”

“It’s about Joy. And it’s about you.” Jen did not answer the last question. “Joy’s miles away, making up music for Betty, and it’s the very best thing for them both. She won’t miss you, Maidie.”

## CHAPTER XV

### GOOD-BYE TO "POOR LITTLE MAIDIE"

There were broken columns and fallen gray stones around the cloister garth, the green lawn in the heart of the Abbey where the old monks lay buried. Jen sat on a moss-covered base of a pillar and looked at Maidlin, who stood beside her, wondering what was coming.

"Maidie, have you realised how much Joy needs you just now, and what a big chance you have of making good with her?"

Colour rushed into Maidlin's clear, pale cheeks. "I? How does she need me, Jen? What can I do for her? You do everything she needs."

"I do what I can, because there hasn't seemed to be any one else to do it," Jen retorted. "If Joy hadn't had a real understanding friend beside her through her trouble of these last weeks, she'd have had a bigger illness than she has. But I shan't be able to go on doing it. I ought to be at the Manor far more than I am; I've been neglecting our little mother there, and she's beginning to feel it. Now that Betty's getting on so well, I want to spend more time at home. The Manor has to be my home now," she said sturdily, "and I have to think of it as home. Ken will be back before very long, and I shall go and live with him there; and there will be new things to do and to see to. I can't go on pretending I'm not married, staying here with Joy as I used to do. I've had to be here, until now; and you've forgotten I was merely visiting Joy, haven't you? But the Manor's my real home, Maidie."

"I hadn't thought of that," Maidlin admitted. "It will be horrid if you aren't here, Brownie. We shall have to go all that way when we want to see you, and we'll have to telephone when we talk to you. It won't be the same at all."

"Of course it won't be the same. You'll see me every day; but it won't be the same. That's what we're going to talk about. What are you going to do about it, Primrose?"

"I?" Maidlin looked startled. "What do you want me to do, Jen? What is there to do?"

"Joy will be lonely," Jen said deliberately. "She's going to miss Rosamund badly; we all shall. Betty won't be here very long. I shall be at the Manor. Mary will be here"—Maidlin's alarmed face filled with relief—"and Mary-Dorothy's a tremendous help to Joy. But Mary hasn't yet come quite as close to Joy in friendship as she has to me. Mary comes to my room at night; and I go to hers. Joy hasn't begun that with Mary yet. It may come;

they're very fond of one another. But with Ros gone, and me gone, Maidie, what about Joy?"

"She'll be lonely," Maidlin's face was troubled. "The twins and nurse aren't quite—well, friends for her, are they, Brownie? Do you mean—you don't mean that I——?"

Jen spoke quickly. "Up till now, Maidie, Joy has been like your mother, and it's been jolly for you both. But the time for that is past. She's mother to the twins now, and she needs a friend. Some one must take my place with her. It can't be Ros. It may be Mary-Dorothy. But it ought to be you."

Maidlin sat down rather suddenly on the grass at her feet. "Me, Jen? But I'm only a kid. Joy wants somebody grown-up, who will understand."

She clasped her hands round her knees, shook back her long black plait, and gazed at Jen, incredulous, bewildered.

"Some one who will understand, of course," Jen agreed. "But any one who loves her well enough can understand. You certainly can, if you'll take the trouble. There's such sympathy between you and Joy already."

She was speaking as if to a comrade, not to a child. Maidlin felt the change of tone; her intuitions were quick, and she realised that Jen was no longer speaking to her as "only Maidie." Her colour rose again.

"Jen, Joy's seven years older than I am; and she's married and she has a family. I'm only a kid at school."

"It's been very hard on Joy," Jen remarked. "Joan was her first real companion, but Joan married and went away. I took her place, and Joy and I were real chums. But Andrew came and took her from me, and she gave half her life to him. Now he's gone; and I'm going. And Ros has gone. There's only you, Maidie."

"I'd give everything I have for Joy. I'd do anything for her. You know that, Brownie. But I'm not good enough and not old enough to be what she needs, instead of you and Andrew and Joan," Maidlin burst out.

"No one can ever take Andrew's place," Jen said soberly. "That was something different. He has left a blank that she'll always feel. But you could make up for the loss of Joan and me. It needs only just a little change," and she paused.

"What change?" Maidlin spoke in a low voice, her eyes on the lichen covering the stones at Jen's feet.

"A change in the way you think of Joy," Jen leaned forward and spoke eagerly. "The mother-and-daughter business has been jolly for you both, but it's time it changed into friendship. Maidie, Joy needs a grown-up friend."

Maidlin looked up at her quickly. "In a few years, Jen——"

"And what is she to do in the meantime? You can't depend on me." Jen hesitated, then made up her mind. "Maidie, Ken will be home quite soon. I

haven't told you yet, but Joy has written, asking him to come home."

"Why, Brownie, what's the matter? Why does she want him to come?" Maidlin cried anxiously. "You aren't ill, are you? You *look* quite well, Jenny-Wren!"

"I'm all right. But Joy got nervy. She seemed to think it was a responsibility to have me here, and that she had to look after me. It's silly, but there it is. I wrote and told him not to come till he'd finished his business; but I fancy he'll hurry up and come as soon as he can. Then I shall go to the Manor. You can't wait a few years, Maidie. If you let this chance slip, Joy will find somebody else to be the friend she's needing; Mary, probably. But you have a real chance to take the empty place, if you can sail in and do it now."

Maidlin looked up at her with incredulous eyes. "But could I, Jen? Would I be old enough to be Joy's friend?" All the diffidence of her shy nature made her distrustful of herself.

"I believe you could do it. But it means a change in the way you think of Joy," Jen said urgently again. "Up till now you've depended on her and taken everything from her. It's time you began to give her a little in exchange, Maidie."

Maidlin reddened. "I haven't thought. I've been a baby. It's true; Joy has given everything to me. But what have I to give her, Jen?"

"Just friendship, understanding, sympathy. Those are what she needs, and what she has been giving to you. Now it's your turn. Just a change from a taking attitude into a giving one, Maidie. But it's the change from being a baby into being a real friend."

"You told me, before Joy came home, that I was selfish about her," Maidlin said, hesitating. "Do you mean the same thing now?"

"Just the same; but I used too hard a word. I meant that your love for her was childish, taking everything and taking it all for granted. I want you to change it into selfless grown-up love, that puts Joy first every time."

"Tell me how!" Maidlin leaned an arm across Jen's knee. "I'd love to do it, Brownie. What must I do?"

Jen, rejoicing silently, said gently, "I should *think* it before you try to do anything. It will come more easily if the thought has become part of you. Say to yourself all the time—'Joy needs me. She has nobody else. How can I help her not to miss Andrew?' Keep thinking like that, Maidie. And try always to put Joy and what Joy wants first. Do what she wants and not what you think would be nice."

Maidlin nodded. "That isn't hard. I'll think about it all the time. I hadn't thought that Joy could need me. You and Mary do so much for her. And if there ever was anything we could do, Ros could do it so much better."

“Ros could do a great deal, but there are things only you can do. Little things, Primrose; but all put together they mean so much.”

“Things like not being in the way when Joy wants to talk to you alone,” Maidlin said unexpectedly. “You’d say I ought to go and sit with Betty, so that you’d be able to be with Joy?”

“It would be very jolly of you,” Jen acknowledged.

“I’ll remember. I’m to think what Joy would like all the time. You want her to be able to say, ‘Maidie has some sense. She understands.’ ”

“That’s it,” Jen agreed, with a laugh. “You’re getting hold of the idea. I want Joy to feel you’re somebody she can call on for really useful help, not a kid she has to help all the time.”

“I suppose,” Maidlin was exploring the possibilities of the “new attitude,” “I suppose it means not doing anything that would make Joy ashamed of me?”

“You couldn’t, Primrose!”

“Oh yes, I could. I mean things like being a baby at school, about meeting that princess. If I funk, Joy will say: ‘Maidie’s just a baby. You mustn’t expect too much.’ That means she can’t feel I’m grown-up enough to be her friend.”

Jen’s eyes had widened. She held herself in carefully, however, and said quietly, “I needn’t say any more, Madalena. You know all about it. That’s exactly what I do mean.”

“I’d better get done with school as soon as I can, so that I can be company for Joy,” Maidlin said thoughtfully, a new and fascinating vision rising before her. “If by swotting harder I can get done sooner, I’ll swot for all I’m worth. I never saw any good in it before. I forgot that some day I’d be done with school and be able to stay at home. School’s jolly, and quite all right; but I’d like to stay with Joy and be company. I’ll work as Ros used to do, Jen. She tried to make me, but I only did as much as I had to. French is the worst, because they say I must be able to speak it. Do you think perhaps mademoiselle would talk to me by myself for half-an-hour, now and then? I believe I’d get on more quickly than in class, learning verbs.”

Jen rejoiced. Joy had discussed with her the possibility of giving Maidlin private French lessons, but the idea had not seemed likely to be very successful. She said quickly, her tone as matter-of-fact as she could make it, “I believe you would, too. I’m sure we could arrange that, Primrose. You’d find it would help enormously.”

“But most of all, I mustn’t funk the princess,” Maidlin said seriously. “Joy mustn’t have to make allowances for me any more, as she did that day when you scolded me for not having pluck. She said I was only an infant and you mustn’t tease me. We can’t have any more of that.”

“You’ll do it! You’ll do it all! I never dreamt you would understand so thoroughly, Maidie! Now shall we go home? Joy will be thinking we’re lost. You won’t talk about this to her, will you?”

“No, I don’t think so,” Maidlin considered the question gravely. “If she feels I’m growing up, there’ll be no need to tell her. If she doesn’t, it won’t be any use talking about it, will it?”

Jen smothered a laugh. “Quite true, Primrose!”

“I never wanted to grow up before,” Maidlin confessed. “I hated the thought of it. Ros said it would be fun, but I couldn’t see it. But I feel I want it now; I’m in a hurry to be grown-up! I want to get done with school and be ready to help Joy in all the things she does.”

“You’ll like it. There’s one thing on my mind, Maidie,” and Jen paused at the entrance to the garden of the Hall. “I’ve been thinking I’d sleep in Rosamund’s room till Mary comes home, to be company for you in case you wake in the night. Later on, Mary can take a turn. Do you like the idea?”

“No,” Maidlin said unexpectedly. “I’d rather not.”

Jen looked down at her in surprise. “Why? Oh, do you feel it would be funking? I think that’s going rather far, kid. You can’t help it if you wake in the night.”

Maidlin coloured; her dreams had been a sore point with her, though this was not the first time she had spoken of them with Jen. She was sensitive on the subject and usually avoided it. “I want to stop having bad dreams,” she said briefly. “I think I shall keep on so long as I know somebody’s there.”

Jen looked at her closely. “What do you mean, Maidie? That you used to dream because you wanted Ros to come?”

Maidlin knit her brows. “I don’t know. I think I was frightened and I wanted somebody. If I stop being frightened, I don’t think I’ll dream.”

“That sounds common sense,” Jen said very quietly. “But aren’t you less likely to be frightened if you know I’m there?”

“No! For then I’ll feel I’m a baby and you’re taking care of me.”

Jen looked at her helplessly. “Maidie, how did you find that out?”

“When I knew Ros was there I was frightened and I wanted her to come. I’m going to try with nobody there. It seems sensible,” Maidlin explained.

Jen walked slowly beside her towards the house. At last she said gravely, “You’re right, Primrose, though who or what taught it to you I can’t imagine. I wouldn’t have dared to say it to you; but you know it all already. So long as you relied on Ros you remained a baby and you had baby dreams. Now you’re going to do without her, so that Joy will be able to rely on you and turn to you for help. I don’t believe you’ll ever have those frightening dreams again.”

“I *hope* not,” Maidlin sounded wistful and by no means confident. “I should be *glad* to feel safe.”

Jen’s arm slipped through hers. “It was your baby self that dreamt. We’ve buried the ‘poor dear little Maidie’ side of you for ever. It won’t haunt you any more, Primrose. Here’s just one hint to help you; make the new side as strong as ever you can. Go to sleep thinking: ‘Joy needs me. I’m going to grow up and be strong and help her. And it will be *fun!* I’m in a hurry to grow up.’ If you do that, I don’t believe you’ll have bad dreams.”

“I’ll try,” Maidlin agreed. She paused on the threshold of the entrance hall. “Shall I go and talk to Betty? Don’t you want Joy to yourself?”

“You are a sporting kid!” Jen said warmly. “It would be terrifically kind to Betty if you would. But what about prep.?”

“We didn’t bring our books home. We came in such a hurry. I felt as if prep. would never matter again. I must practise, but there’s nothing else I can do.”

“Ask Betty if she speaks French,” Jen suggested. “You might have conversation with her. She’s lived in Switzerland.”

“I say, do you think she would? That would be much more fun than mademoiselle!” and Maidlin went flying to Betty’s room.

Jen, looking sober, went into Mary’s study and sat there alone. “I’ve indigestion, mentally! To think of that child! She grew years older before my eyes. I hope I did right; I’m sure I did right! But—yes, Maidie? What is it?”

Maidlin was hanging over the gallery rail. “Jen! Jen! Betty can talk French! She says she’ll help me whenever I like. And she knows the place Ros has gone to, and she can tell us all about it. Her sister went there—you know, Jen!”

At that, Jen went hurrying up to Betty’s room. “I say, Bets, you are a trump!” she said warmly. “I knew the Marienthal was where you had been with Meg, but I knew we mustn’t ask you to talk about it unless you offered. It’s jolly decent of you!”

Betty lay and smiled at her, rather wanly. “I didn’t want to talk about it. But I heard you say Rosamund was going there, and I feel I ought to tell Maidie all I can of the place her chum has gone to. You’re all being so plucky, and you’re feeling so bad about losing Ros. I can’t be the only one to funk.”

“Oh, you’re not! I’m the funky person,” Maidlin said gravely. “But I’m not going to funk any more.”

Betty laughed. “Your pluck spurred me on to give up being a coward. I’ll tell you all about the Platz, and the great doctor who tried to help my Meg, Maidie. Shall I tell you in French? Wouldn’t that be a good idea?”

“Ripping! I mean—what’s the French for ‘splendid’?”

Jen laughed, and slipped away to tell Joy that Maidlin's private lessons were arranged for, and that Maidie refused to have company at night, since she was no longer to be a baby.

"Amazing kid!" Joy was nursing the twins. "This is the surprising Maidie we had a glimpse of at her coronation, Jenny-Wren! Singing to the whole school, as calm and composed as you please!" Her face grew sombre as she remembered the terrible close of that joyful day. She hugged the children in her arms, and gave silent thanks for all that was left to her. There might, she knew, have been no twins, and her life would have been empty indeed.

"I fancy it's the real Maidie, just beginning to peep out," Jen said cheerfully, to turn the current of her thoughts. "She has tremendous courage, in her own quiet way, Joy. This is how she took on all the Queen business for Rosamund's sake!"

Joy agreed. "It's there. But she won't use it."

"It has to be drawn out of her. And the thing to do it seems to be need on the part of some one she's fond of," Jen remarked, thinking of Maidlin's eager grasp of the idea that Joy might need her. "She'll do anything for Ros, or for you, once she sees a chance of helping."

"She's a good kid. But she is a baby for her age."

"She *isn't*! Not when she decides to sleep alone! I shall keep my door open to-night, all the same," Jen said thoughtfully. "We mustn't let her try herself too hardly at first."

Rosamund rang up presently, to say good-night and good-bye, as they were just starting for Dover. She promised to wire from Calais, and bade Maidlin think of her during the night.

"I've so many things to think of that I shan't have time to dream," Maidlin remarked to Jen. Then, her fear of the telephone gone for ever, she sat down to talk to Rosamund.

"Ros, Betty knows your doctor, Sir Rennie Brown. He attended to her sister. She says he's wonderful and so kind, and he knows all there is to know. And the place is beautiful, Ros; huge snow mountains all round, and a queer little Swiss village in the bottom of the valley, and a river coming right out of the glaciers. The Platz is on a sort of shelf, catching all the sun, with pine forests all round, and flowers and streams and rocks. There are heaps of English people, both up there and down in the valley, for there are big schools for English girls and boys, and a hostel where business girls live. Betty says you'll love it all, and she sends best wishes for the journey and for your mother. She's been telling me all about it in French, Ros. Yes, truly; don't laugh!—You *are* rude! Oh, you pig! I understood quite a lot, and she told me the words I didn't know. She talked to me for an hour in French, and



she's going to do it every evening.—Oh, she has to go!" with an agonised look up at Jen. "Miss Rawlings says she must hurry. Good-bye, Ros! Come and say good-bye, Joy!"

"Topping about the French, Maidie! Good-bye, Primrose! Good-bye, all!"

Then they turned away, all very grave, for after this Rosamund would speak only through telegrams and letters.

"It's the real good-bye," Maidlin's voice broke. "We won't hear her speak again. It won't be the same. Jen, has she forgotten us already? She sounds awfully excited about the journey, and her new hat, and everything."

"Perhaps that's put on," Joy suggested.

"I don't think so," said Jen. "After all, Maidie, a first journey to the Continent is a very thrilling event; and a new hat *is* a new hat! Ros is on the point of crossing the Channel for the first time, and by night; and then there will be Calais, and French people and talking, and a whole night in the train, and coffee in a new country, and the first sight of the Alps, and forests, and lakes; and beyond it all, her mother! It would be queer if Ros were not thrilled. Try to see it as she does!"

"I should be excited," Maidlin admitted. "I'd hate it, I think; so many new things all at once! But I'd be excited. And Ros loves new things. Yes, of course, she can't help it, Brownie. I do see that."

"But I'm quite certain that behind all her excitement there's a horrid dead feeling, like a lump of lead, inside her when she remembers that she may never see any of us or the Hall or the Abbey again. I'm sure she will come back!" Jen said hastily, as Maidlin looked at her in scared dismay. "But just now she'll feel as if she'd said good-bye for ever. I'm sure the excitement is only the top layer, and there's a horrid shadow behind, which she's trying her hardest not to look at. After all, Maidie, you haven't been sitting weeping because Ros has gone!"

"And thank goodness for that!" Joy said fervently. "I was afraid you would, Primrose. You've taken it very pluckily."

"You've been interested in planning for the future and talking French with Betty; and I saw you playing with the twins," Jen finished.

"But I've been thinking about Ros all the time!"

"And she's thinking of you all the time, silly. You must allow her some surface thrills when she's having so many new experiences. She's as lonely as you could wish, inside her; but she doesn't talk about it all the time."

"Fortunately for Mary and Miss Rawlings," Joy added.

"I don't want her to be lonely," Maidlin said vehemently. "At least, I do. I do, and I don't, Jen."

Jen laughed. “Getting involved, Primrose! We know all about it. Good-night! Think of Ros walking about the deck and being polite to the Customs people!”

“I’ve plenty to think about,” Maidlin said sedately, and shut herself into her own room.

## CHAPTER XVI JOY'S NEW IDEA

"What did you dream about, Maidie-Primrose?" Jen caught Maidlin in the garden, very early in the morning, gathering roses for Joy's room.

"Babies," said Maidlin promptly. "It was nice. I liked it."

"Babies!" Jen looked at her in amusement. "Was it the twins?"

"I don't think so," Maidlin wrinkled her brows in the effort to remember. "I've forgotten most of it. But there was a big baby, a very fine baby, fat, with pink ribbons, in a pram, and I felt as if it belonged to me. I was fearfully pleased about it."

Jen gave a shout of laughter. "You didn't wake up crying about that, then! Maidie, you are funny! Come and tell Joy! She'll say you might have dreamt about both the children, anyway!"

"It wasn't one of Joy's babies," Maidlin said sturdily. "It belonged to me, or it had something to do with me."

"You must have adopted it. Please don't!"

"I was frightfully pleased about it," Maidlin said reflectively. "It was a very fine child."

Jen laughed again. "Did you go to sleep thinking about the twins?"

"No, about Joy, and how I'm going to help her. And about how queer it will be to do without Ros. It will be queer to go to school without her to-day. But I want to go; there's such a lot to tell."

"About Rosamund, do you mean?"

"About her talking to me from Charing Cross; and about her journey, and how she looked with her hair up; and everything."

"You'll be all right," Jen said appreciatively.

When Maidlin came home from school in the afternoon the telegram from Calais was waiting. Rosamund's message said briefly: "Lovely crossing; all enjoyed it. Good-bye!"

"All's well so far," said Joy. "Now Ros vanishes into the heart of Europe. We must get busy with things here at home, Maidie. Come and sit by Betty when you've had your tea. We want to tell you a plan she and I have been making."

"It's a topping idea," Jen remarked. "I'm in it, too; but I must go along to the Manor this evening. You two must amuse Betty for me."

"I must do my prep.," Maidlin said gravely. "Mackums won't excuse it again. When shall we hear any more from Ros, Joy?"

“I should think the next thing will be when Mary comes back and tells us all about it; not for several days, Maidie. We’d better not think about it. What did the girls say about it all?”

Jen went off to visit her mother-in-law, filled with silent amusement. Maidlin was determined to be a help to Joy; it was obvious that Joy was equally determined to help Maidlin through this lonely time.

“They’ll be all right! I’m certainly not needed,” and she strolled through the garden and past the lake in the Manor grounds, with a shiver for the memories that pond recalled.

Sitting by Betty’s bed, with Maidlin on the window-sill, Joy told the plans they had been making during the afternoon.

“I want to do something really big in music. As a kid I always meant to, and I’ve composed at intervals all the way along. But I’ve never done very much, because there have been so many other things. Whether I shall ever do anything worth while or not, of course I can’t say; I shall keep on trying \_\_\_\_\_”

“Your own music’s lovely,” Maidlin said stoutly. “Those new lullabies for the twins are beautiful, Joy.”

“I shall go on, chiefly because I can’t stop. But in the meantime I’m going to start a little music school in the village. The old vicarage is empty, and would do splendidly. I’m going to collect a few girls gradually, poor girls, if possible, who live in surroundings that make it difficult for them to develop musically; I mean, of course, girls who are keen on music already and show some promise. I’m thinking of myself as I was while aunty was the caretaker of the Abbey, with no one to help me and no chance of doing any real good—just messing about and wasting myself. Or of you, with your voice, Primrose. You and I happened to inherit fortunes; but there may be girls as fond of music as we were who won’t inherit anything. I want to give them their chance.”

“It’s a jolly good idea,” Maidlin said thoughtfully. “We may discover all sorts of geniuses.”

“If we produce even one genius, it will be well worth while. I hope it will give a real chance to a number of girls, geniuses or not. It will take time to find them, but they’ll come, as we get known. We’ll have masters come out from Oxford regularly; the village school will be where the girls will live.”

“So that they’ll have woods and country and birds round them, instead of streets and houses.” Maidlin grasped the point at once. “It *is* a topping plan, Joy! How can I help?”

“When your voice is trained you’ll sing to them, and I shall play. I’m hoping you’ll teach them country-dancing; it should be part of a musical

training.”

“Oh!” Maidlin reddened. “Jen or Mary or you must do that!”

“We’ll see. Jen and I may be too busy. I don’t feel keen on dancing. I think I’ll never dance again,” Joy said quietly.

Maidlin turned to her quickly. “Oh, Joy, do you mean it? Ros and I talked about that; she thought you wouldn’t feel like dancing any more, but I hoped you would. Later on, won’t you feel like it, Joy?”

“It’s hard to say what we’ll feel like later on. At present I feel I’ve come up against real things too sharply ever to go back to a play thing like country-dancing.”

“Don’t you feel it’s a real thing?” Maidlin asked anxiously.

“For you, yes; and for heaps of people. But I don’t feel that it matters any more, for me. I feel as if I’ve left it miles behind. But that may pass off,” Joy said hastily, as she saw the distress in Maidlin’s face. “You could hardly expect me to feel like dancing just now, Maidie. I’m only speaking for myself, in any case. I want other people to dance! I want my music girls to learn, and I want you to teach them. Your dancing is so full of music; you’d give them just the right feeling for it.”

“Ros said that once. I don’t know what you mean,” Maidlin objected. “I listen to the music and I dance with it, that’s all.”

“That’s all,” Joy agreed. “But not everybody ‘dances with it’ as you do. You haven’t asked who is to take charge of the music school, Primrose!”

“Who? Oh, not Betty? Oh, what a gorgeous plan!” Maidlin cried rapturously, at sight of the shy colour in Betty’s face. “Then she’ll be here for always! Oh, I *am* glad! I’m glad I didn’t run over that hen!”

“We’d better have the hen for the crest of the music school,” Joy suggested, laughing.

“Maidie, I’m not nearly clever enough. I’ve been telling Lady Marchwood so,” Betty began.

“Oh, but you’ll have to call her Joy, if you’re going to be one of the family! Everybody does!” Maidlin remonstrated.

“You love music and you love girls,” Joy said promptly. “Those two things are necessary. I wouldn’t have any one who wasn’t fond of music. You’ll sympathise with the girls and appreciate what they try to do. You don’t need to play brilliantly yourself, though as we haven’t heard you we needn’t make up our minds you can’t. You can go on studying yourself, for that matter. We’ll give you a matron to do your housekeeping. But I want you to give the right feeling to the girls, to make things homey, and to understand how they feel about their music. I’m certain you could do all that perfectly. If you can be spared from home, we want you here; that is, if you aren’t sick of us and this place, after the way we’ve treated you!”

"I've come to love the place, and every person in it," Betty said fervently. "I don't know about mother. After this illness she may want me at home; she didn't need me before, and she thought I ought to go on with my music. She may need looking after now. But if she can spare me, how I'd love to throw myself into your new venture! I'd give up my whole life to helping to train your neglected little geniuses. It's an idea that would have appealed to Meg, I know."

"It would have appealed to Andrew," Joy said gravely. "I told him how I once felt, all fermenting with the music inside me, and quite unable to do anything with it; making no progress, and all going to pieces because I wasn't using my gift. I'm sure I was a trial to aunty and Joan; and they were angels to me. And Andrew said if we heard of other girls who were like that, we'd help them. He'd like this idea. Maidie, you were another. Do you remember the fearful tempers you used to have?"

Maidlin reddened. "I thought I was fearfully wicked. My aunts told me so. But I couldn't help it. You never thought so, did you, Joy?"

"I thought you were more unhappy than bad," Joy assured her seriously. "I suspected the repressed music in you from the very first. We soon began to set it free, didn't we, Madalena? Now we'll hunt up other restless, difficult girls and hand them over to Betty. I'm getting keener and keener on my music school!"

"I want to begin at once!" Betty wailed softly. "Can't I get up tomorrow? It would be one step on the way!"

"I'm going to do my prep.," said Maidlin unexpectedly, rising from her window-sill. "That's the first thing I have to do. I must begin by getting through school as fast as I can. There isn't time for talking. When I've finished, and practised, will you talk French to me, Betty?"

"We'll talk about the music school," Betty said laughing.

"Topping!" Maidlin said warmly. "My prep.'s maths and compo, and I loathe them both. I'd better get on with them," and she went off sturdily, to shut herself up in the library and work with a determined concentration she had never known before.

"Something like Ros did, just a year ago, in all the fuss of preparing for my wedding!" Joy said to herself, as she went down to play to Betty, after a few minutes with her twins and nurse. "We let Maidie into all that excitement, but we shut Ros out; and she didn't grouse, but seemed to understand that Maidie and I wanted one another, so she slogged away at her prep. all on her own and never once whined about being left out. She was rather a sporting kid; I'm seeing more and more how I failed to appreciate her, now that she's gone."

She sat down at the piano, and Betty lay listening to the music, and dreaming of the village school, with its "restless, difficult girls," whom she was to understand and encourage. Already she began to feel as if they might in time fill the blank in her life; to-night, as she lay, her dreams were not of Meg and the past, but of Joy and the future.

Maidlin was setting out for school next morning when as she cycled down the beech avenue she met a telegraph boy. She turned and rode hastily back after him, giving up all thoughts of catching her train.

Jen met her at the door, waving the telegram. "Isn't Ros a brick! Here's news of her safe arrival. She's sent word at every possible point."

Maidlin read the message eagerly. "Arrived safely. Tired, but all well. Friends met us. Mother better."

"Oh, that's nice! I wonder who met her? How jolly of them, whoever it was!"

"It would be the Henderson people, who were taking care of her mother," Jen said. "I'm glad you met the boy."

"I had to come back. But I'll be late. I can't catch the train now."

"I'll send you down in the car," Jen suggested. "Put your bike away. We'll fetch you too. I don't say we'll do it every day, but it's a long way for you to go alone."

"It isn't far to the station. But, of course, I love the car!" Maidlin admitted.

As Mary set out, Joy had said to her, "If you wire from Dover on your way home, the car shall meet you in town, and you'll be saved the trouble of crossing London," and two days later, in the early afternoon, Mary's telegram arrived.

Deeply thankful for Joy's thoughtfulness, which would not let her feel the car had been merely for Rosamund's comfort, but was equally intended to add to her own, Mary went gladly to greet the friendly chauffeur, Frost. He was an old friend, for he had driven Jen's car when her parents were alive and had been her companion on that always-remembered night when she had called for the first time at Mary's London flat; he had now entered Joy's service, as she had been wanting a man, and the car at Jen's Yorkshire home was no longer in use.

He smiled and handed Mary a note from Jen, and opened the door for her. While he put in her suitcase and awaited instructions, she hastily read the scribbled lines.

"DEAR OLD THING,

"So glad you're on this side of the Channel again. But, I say! You'll be home by three o'clock, and you simply mustn't. Maidie

will feel we've had all the cream off your story; she won't be in till after five. For the same reason I've not come to meet you. You must tell your story for the first time to the whole family at once. So let Frost take you somewhere in town for a couple of hours, there's an angel. Go and see somebody; or go to look at your old flat; or call at the office, and rejoice because you aren't going to spend the rest of your life there! Go to see your publishers; it sounds so swanky! I'd love to go to see my publishers! Or—I know you!—go to Liberty's and enjoy yourself. But don't be too late home; we're aching to hear all about everything. It's only consideration for Maidie's feelings makes us ask you to wait an hour or two.

“Yours ever,  
“JENNY-WREN-BROWNIE.”

Mary laughed and hesitated, colouring as she deliberated upon the various suggestions. Then she gave some addresses to Frost and set out to spend a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon.

The old flat did not attract her, but the office did; and she went in, laden with roses from a florist's, to chat with her former employer and to give rosebuds to each of the girls as she worked. Several were friends, having been for holidays to Joy's hostel in the village; one, Norah, had returned only two months ago, and was overjoyed to hear the latest news from the Hall. She had been in the village when the twins were born and the news came of Sir Andrew's death, so she felt a personal link with the friends of whom Mary had to tell.

Then, very shyly, Mary sought the address to which her MSS. were sent; and felt herself grow hot with amused embarrassment at sight of her book in the showroom. She made friends with the manager and a representative of the firm, and found them pleasant and encouraging over the success of the first book and the prospects of the second, now nearly ready.

Then, deeply satisfied that this ordeal was over, she drove to Regent Street and spent a happy hour having tea in the vaults, which reminded her of the Saxon crypt of the Abbey, and wandering among colours she loved. With a sudden inspiration she yielded joyfully to the temptations on every side, and bought beautiful silk scarves for the household—delicate black and white for Joy, amethyst and blue for Jen, gorgeous gold and red for Maidlin, lavender for Mrs. Shirley, and a very pretty green and brown for Betty. Thoroughly happy, she collapsed in the car at last and bade Frost drive her home.



The luxury of that quiet, swift run through the suburbs and the country, with the knowledge that “home” meant Jen and Joy and Maidlin, and her green study and her loved brown bedroom, in the setting of the gardens and the Abbey and the woods, moved her deeply; it had all come to her so recently and so comparatively late. Joy had been fifteen when her inheritance changed her life from saving and “doing without” to luxury; Maidie had been only fourteen; but Mary had been thirty-two when she was transplanted from her drab business life in town to the busy but less strenuous and much more colourful life of the Hall; and colour meant so much to Mary, in her quiet way. She had never ceased to give thanks for the coming of Jen into her life, and she had an unshakable conviction that it had been no accident.

## CHAPTER XVII

### MARY COMES HOME

“Here you are at last!” Jen was at the door of the car as it stopped. “Come and have tea and tell us everything! We’ve carried Betty out for the first time, so you can tell us all at once,” and she led Mary in triumph to the tea-table under the big beech tree.

Betty was lying on a couch, where she had been all day; Joy’s nurse and her own day-nurse had carried her down early in the morning. Her night-nurse had been dispensed with several days ago. Mrs. Shirley was sitting beside the twins’ cradles. Maidlin, still in her school tunic, eagerly brought a chair for Mary; Joy poured out her tea, saying with a smile, “It hasn’t been made two minutes. Maidie’s only just come in. You don’t look any the worse for your canter across the Continent, Mary-Dorothy.”

“Gorgeous experience for you. Your next heroine will be having a trip to Switzerland.” Jen offered her scones and bread and butter. “Did you have any difficulties?”

“None whatever, thanks to Joy’s kind arrangements. Miss Rawlings was a treasure. We hadn’t a single worry,” Mary said warmly. “But I’m dead tired of trains. How nice this is!” and she looked round at the garden, the roses, the old gray house with its broad terrace, and the twins sleeping in their cradles.

“They haven’t changed much,” Joy said, laughing. “The only big change is in Betty, who’s getting on so quickly that she’s hardly an invalid any longer. And Maidie will soon be talking French like a native.”

“That compliment to my accent is not deserved. It’s more polite than true, I’m afraid,” Betty remarked.

“How did you leave Rosamund, my dear?” asked Mrs. Shirley.

“Oh, aunty! Let her drink one cup before she begins!” Joy remonstrated. “I was trying not to ask her till she’d taken the edge off her appetite.”

“I’m not hungry,” Mary said laughing. “I took Jenny-Wren’s hint and had tea in town. And I bought presents. But you can wait to see those! Rosamund was very well and she enjoyed the journey. The crossing was perfect, the sea like dark glass, with moonlight and stars; Ros walked up and down till she was tired and then she came to sit with me, and she said she was loving every minute of it. The long train journey was tiring, and at first she couldn’t sleep; it had been a trying day for her and her mind was very full of all sorts of things. Miss Rawlings went off to sleep at once, as soon as

she was sure there was nothing more she could do for us; she was most kind all the time. Ros pulled out her hairpins and let her hair down, and took off her shoes and tried to sleep; then, quite suddenly, she came across and sat very close to me, and said she felt a long way from everybody and I was all she had left of home. We cuddled close together and talked for a long time.”

“It was exactly for that moment that I asked you to go with her, Mary,” Joy said quietly. “It was bound to come during the night. She’d have felt worse if you hadn’t been there.”

“She’d have felt awful. She’d have felt all alone. The Rawlings woman simply wouldn’t have counted,” Jen said earnestly. “Joy, it was wise and kind of you to insist on Mary’s going! Somebody had to go, of course; but I feel, if I’d been the one, I might have wanted somebody to turn to myself at two o’clock in the morning. I’m apt to go to pieces then; I do sometimes, don’t I, Mary?”

“You need cups of tea to keep you going,” Mary retorted. “Unfortunately, tea was out of the question for Ros and me. We were spinning through France at I-don’t-know-how-many miles an hour, and it was very joggly. Ros talked a good deal during the night——”

“Did she cry?” Maidlin asked abruptly.

“Not really. She might have done if I hadn’t been there to keep her talking. I can’t tell you all she said, but a good deal of it was about you, Joy, and how good you had been to her, and how much she appreciated it, and how much she loved this place, and how understanding Jenny-Wren had been, and how sorry she was to leave Maidie to fend for herself at school. She felt as if it had been her job to see you safely through, Primrose, and as if she’d had to let you down.”

“I shall write to-night and tell her I’m all right,” Maidlin said hurriedly. “She mustn’t worry about me.”

“She’ll like to hear that. She slept a little, though in the morning she said she hadn’t. But I know she did. I may have dozed, but not much; the rattle of the train never seemed to stop. But we were very comfortable, and in the early morning we stopped at the Swiss frontier, and there were mountains showing through the mist, and hot coffee on the platform—how cold it was!—and Miss Rawlings saw to all the Customs business while we walked up and down and enjoyed the freshness after the stuffy night. Ros was very wide-awake and tremendously thrilled by everything; there was a clock with two faces, one for French time and one for Central Europe; the houses in the little town looked extremely Swiss and the church had a queer spire, and there were pine forests on the hills. Ros grew more and more excited, and when we went a bit farther and came to lovely green lakes, she couldn’t keep from running from one side of the carriage to the other.”

“How very jolly for her, after that horrid night!” Jen said appreciatively.

“The scenery moved her intensely,” Mary said quietly. “I had never seen mountains and lakes and forests before, so I was thrilled too; but at first I was surprised by Rosamund’s delight in it all. I was thinking only of the tomboy schoolgirl. But I remembered her love for the Abbey, and the lavender room she asked for when Joy let her have her choice of colour; and I realised that all the beauty was perhaps calling to her other side, the shy opposite hidden Ros that we didn’t often see. Anyway, she loved it all, and before I left her she was quite reconciled to living for a while among Swiss peaks and glaciers.”

“How condescending of her!” Joy said, laughing.

“It’s jolly to know she likes it,” Maidlin said wistfully. “If only it wasn’t so far away!”

“And the Henderson people met you at the end of the journey, Mary?” Jen queried.

“Not the Hendersons. They saw Mrs. Kane safely into Sir Rennie Brown’s hands and wired to Ros, and then they had to hurry on to London, as their invalid son was very poorly. No, Ros would have arrived without any welcome, and would have had to find her way up to the Platz without news of her mother till she reached there, but for the kindness of somebody,” Mary, said very warmly.

“Oh, who, Mary? Who was the thoughtful person?” Joy and Jen and Maidlin spoke together.

“She told me to tell you she was just Karen.”

“Karen Wilson? And she remembered us? But how did she know?” Joy and Jen spoke breathlessly.

“Apparently she lives up at the Platz a good deal. The rest of her time she spends with Lady Rennie Brown, who is an invalid. She seems to be very friendly with the family, and she speaks of the son as ‘Rennie.’ But I don’t think she’s engaged to him. She doesn’t wear a ring. I was rather puzzled. But she can’t be more than twenty?” Mary questioned.

“That’s about right. No, not more than twenty,” Jen said authoritatively. “It’s four years since Cheltenham, and she was sixteen then. Only four years—fancy! We heard about him; she was half engaged to him, even then. Unless he’s a good deal older than she is, he can’t be a qualified doctor yet, Mary? Does he help his father?”

“He’s studying in London; but in vacations he is always at the Platz, and he works with his father and is getting experience. Miss Karen’s own parents are dead, so she keeps Lady Rennie Brown company, or else lives at the Platz, and gets to know the patients. She told me she tried to cheer them

up and keep them interested in things, as her part of the work; and she plays to them. She's a fine violinist."

"Ripping," said Joy. "That was how she and I made friends."

"She wasn't there when we were there. I'd have liked to see her," Betty said regretfully. "I wish there had been someone to play to Meg!"

Mary looked at her curiously. It struck her that Betty had changed; she was speaking freely of her sister, whom before she had scarcely mentioned. Wondering, but thinking it was probably the result of returning health, Mary went on with her story.

"Karen—they all call her that—had heard from Mrs. Kane about her daughter who was coming, and Mrs. Kane had mentioned that Ros had been living with friends beside a wonderful old Abbey. So Karen says she said: 'You don't mean Joan and Joy Shirley?' and Mrs. Kane said she did, but Joan was now Mrs. Raymond and you were Lady Marchwood. Karen asked about Jenny-Wren, and sent all sorts of messages to you all, and, of course, she felt Ros was a friend at once and she started asking questions almost as soon as she met us."

"What was she like?" Maidlin asked. "Will Ros like her?"

"Are you going to be jealous of Karen, old girl?" Jen asked quickly.

"She wouldn't be so silly; would you, Primrose?" Joy said indignantly.

"I want Ros to have a good time. She won't, if she's lonely," Maidlin said simply. "If this Karen person's nice, it will make all the difference to Ros, since they're nearly the same age. Twenty's nothing."

"I apologise, Madalena," Jen said solemnly. "I forgot you were no longer an infant."

Mary looked at Maidlin as she had looked at Betty. Then, without comment, she returned to her story.

"Rosamund will like Karen. I'll tell you why I'm sure of it. Karen didn't come down from the Platz to meet her because she came from the Abbey and was a friend of Joy and Jen. She makes it her business, while she's living there, to come down to welcome relatives of patients on their arrival and to give them the very latest news of their friends."

"But how jolly nice of her!" cried Jen.

"What a topping idea!" Maidlin said eagerly. "Ros *will* like her, Mary!"

"That must mean a great deal to people, when they arrive tired and anxious," Joy said warmly. "She must be extremely valuable to Sir Rennie Brown, if she has ideas like that!"

"I wish more than ever she'd been there while we were there. Nobody met us!" Betty sighed.

"It is a beautiful thought," Mrs. Shirley said appreciatively. "She has surely known loneliness and anxiety herself."

“I think so,” Mary assented. “Her mother died up there, and she was a lonely child, I fancy. She met us at the train, and told Ros her mother was doing well. She was surprised and amused to find Ros grown up, of course; Mrs. Kane hadn’t led her to expect any one quite so elderly. I gathered, in fact, that Mrs. Kane had been talking about ‘my little girl’; so our very capable Rosamund was something of a shock.”

“She would be. Dear little Ros!” Jen said, laughing. “They’ll need to get used to her!”

“And Mrs. Kane is really getting on well, Mary?” Joy asked anxiously. “Did you see her?”

“No. The excitement of Rosamund’s arrival was enough, and I was only there a night and a day. Ros went to her mother at once, and Karen took me to rest in the guest-house of the sanatorium, where friends of patients are put up; and later she took us for a lovely walk all along the mountain-side, and pointed out the various peaks and glaciers and lakes. We saw the green alp above a pine forest where Lady Rennie Brown lives, beside a wonderful valley of flowers; we couldn’t see the ch  let itself, as it was too far off. And we saw the pass that leads to Italy, and the entrance to the big tunnel where the train goes under the pass; and the big English schools, St. Mary’s and St. John’s, where children can be sent while their parents are under treatment. Karen herself was brought up at St. Mary’s, and she has crowds of friends there, and in the hostel in the village. There’s a big hostel where you can have rooms or furnished flats, and she said you could stay there if you cared to come out to see Rosamund at any time.”

“What a gorgeous idea! Bully! We’ll go!” Jen cried eagerly. “What about it, Maidie?”

“Oh, top-hole!” Maidlin sighed dreamily. “And we’d see it all. Could we, Joy?”

“You’d better hurry up with your French, if that’s how you’re going to spend your holidays,” Joy suggested. “Was Ros upset when you came away, Mary?”

“She was very brave. She felt it, because I was coming home and she’d have liked to come too; one part of her, she was careful to explain. But one big part wanted to stay with her mother, and that part loved the whole place. Betty will have told you how the Platz lies on a shelf, high above the valley. It’s very wonderful, and Ros appreciates it thoroughly. She promised to write a long letter quite soon, but before I left she had only time for notes to everybody,” and Mary opened her bag and handed letters to Maidlin, Mrs. Shirley, Joy, Jen, and Betty.

“How nice of her to remember me!” Betty said warmly.

Mary rose to go into the house to change her travelling costume. "I'm afraid Mrs. Kane is very ill," she said gravely. "They told Ros she had improved since she came there, but Karen told me she had been very ill indeed on the journey from Ceylon and had arrived in a very bad state. Karen didn't say much, but I guessed a good deal from her tone and from her silence. I'm sure she thinks Mrs. Kane's condition is serious."

The others had all looked up in distress.

"Oh, Mary, you don't think——?" Jen began pitifully.

"Poor Ros!" Maidlin's voice quivered. "Oh, Jen, she's all alone!"

"Karen would be good to her if——" Joy began. "But if Mrs. Kane has improved already she may go on and soon be ever so much better, Mary. We'll hope the treatment and the air will do wonders for her."

"It's possible," Mary assented. "Jenny-Wren, hand these round for me. It's obvious which is whose."

"Which is whose!" Jen mocked, tearing open the parcel. "Authoress! What a sentence! Oh, lovely! This is mine! Joy—Aunty Shirley—Maidie—no doubt about yours! Then this perfectly sweet one is for——?"

"Betty, I hope," Mary said, laughing. "You aren't going to bag two, are you?"

"How very good of you!" Betty said gratefully. "I love greens and browns. I'm not going to wear mourning any more, not even gray. I'm going to begin life again, and in earnest, as soon as I'm fit, and not have any looking back unhappily. I'll choose my first frock to go with this lovely scarf, Mary-Dorothy, and I shall think of you all the time I wear it."

"I'm glad; but not because you're going to think of me," Mary said warmly. "Don't waste time on me! What are you going to be in earnest about? Anything definite, or life in general?"

"Both," Betty flung at her gaily. "Both, because life in general will help the definite object. And that's Joy's music school. Joy, you know the point that appeals to me most?"

"No? I haven't an idea."

"It's your saying that the girls in the school will perhaps be unhappy and difficult and restless, because they've a gift for music that they've been unable to develop. I want to give them such a good time and so much music that they'll change gradually and become contented and happy and easy to live with. I want to see it happen."

"Oh, cheers! You'll be an ideal director!" Joy said warmly. "You'll give them such mothering and such appreciation of their music, making them feel it's really worth while, perhaps for the first time, that their whole natures will change, and all the restless feeling of wasted energy will disappear. I know so well how it feels; wanting to do something big, feeling it working

inside, but quite unable to bring it out; all fermenting, and terribly bad-tempered in consequence; and everybody finding fault, because nobody understands. I don't mean that aunty and Joan found fault with me; you never did, did you, aunty dear? But I know I was restless and difficult and no use to anybody, and I had a fearful temper as a kid."

"I have, still," Maidlin said gloomily. "But it was far worse when I lived with my aunts, for they didn't understand and they never tried to. They used to say: 'Drat that Maidlin! She's in a tantrum again!' Joy understood from the first minute."

Joy coloured. It was not often that she had the joy of hearing any one say she had been able to understand.

"You were so exactly the sort of kid I'd been myself, Maidie; but I'd had aunty and Joan to understand and help me. And you were in for the big experience of being an heiress, which I'd just had myself. I simply had to help you through. I could never have looked myself in the face if I'd left you to be brought up by your aunty Ann Watson. Now you and I, each having had some one to understand us, are going to find other girls and help them. But we can't do it all ourselves; there are so many other things for both of us. So we'll hand them over to Betty, and I know we couldn't do better. She'll be a real understanding aunt to them all!"

"But first I want to get through my L.R.A.M.," Betty said quickly. "I'll be far more use to you if I've taken it. I am preparing for it; and the girls will think more of me if I have it. So I'm pining now to start work again. I shall hate to leave this place! But I feel sure I shall come back, to work here with you, before very long."

Mary Devine was listening with eager eyes. "I hope you'll tell me what it's all about. It sounds very jolly."

"I forgot you didn't know," Joy began to laugh.

Jen sprang up. "I'll tell you, old thing! Come along!" and she caught up Mary's handbag and took her arm and led her off to the house. "You'll want to change your shoes."

"To say nothing of having a bath," Mary said, laughing. "Oh, Jenny-Wren, what has happened? Everybody's so much happier! Joy looks just herself; Betty's bright and eager and ever so much better. Maidie——"

"Yes?" Jen asked hopefully. "What about Maidie?"

"She's different. I don't know what it is."

"No, you haven't had time to judge. But you feel she's changed; good for you, Mary-Dorothy! That's your queer intuition. Maidie," Jen said solemnly, "has decided that she *wants* to grow up, so that she can be a companion to Joy, and she's going for it for all she's worth. That's all; but I fancy it's a good deal."



“Brownie, how did you do it?” Mary marvelled. “It’s everything! She’s been holding back, frightened, while a big part of her was trying to develop. Her nature’s been at war, one side pushing her on and one holding her back; and she couldn’t be happy or really well. If you’ve made her want to go ahead, all the parts of her will fall into line and she’ll be the real Maidie at last. You’ve done the biggest thing possible for her. How did you do it, Brownie?”

“Thank goodness, you think so!” Jen said fervently. “I wanted you badly. I was scared of making a mess of things and frightening her, and that would have done real harm. It seemed the only thing to do, so I went ahead and hoped for the best, and she has seemed happier and more placid since. But one never knows what’s going on inside Maidie! I didn’t understand, Mary-Dorothy; I needed you to explain to me why I did it! But I did want to help both Maidie and Joy, and it seemed the best way.”

“It seems to me,” said Mary, pausing at the door, “that you don’t need to know why, Jenny-Wren. You needn’t trouble about reasons. If you feel sure a thing will help somebody, and if you care about her very much, you’re safe to go ahead. There’s something inside you that will keep you straight. It may be so for everybody. I’m sure it is for you.”

Jen looked at her seriously. “Mary-Dorothy, I think that’s rather nice. I take it as a compliment. Thank you!”

“Would you spare me five minutes at bedtime?”

“For coffee in your brown and gold room? Wouldn’t I? I’ll be there, Aunty!”

Mary laughed. “I want to know if you think *I* was right in one thing I did while I was away.”

“Sure and certain you were. But I want to hear what it was. I’ll curb my curiosity till bedtime,” Jen said sadly, and turned back to the group under the giant beech tree.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE TWINS MEET THE HAMLET CLUB

“Now tell me, Mary-Dorothy!” Jen, in pyjamas and dressing-gown, sat in Mary’s big chair by the open window and accepted a cup of coffee. “Hear that blackbird! Doesn’t he make a row? Shall I shut the window?”

“Oh, no, please!” Mary said laughing. “Remember, I’ve spent two nights in French trains! That quiet garden, and the moon on the lawn, and the blackbird in our beech tree, are just the tonic I want.”

“I’ll endure him, then, but he does kick up a shindy,” Jen said severely. “He ought to have gone to bed an hour ago. Now, Mary!”

“It’s something I said to Rosamund,” Mary said gravely. “I acted on the impulse of the moment, as you did with Maidlin. Afterwards I began to wonder if I had said too much.”

“Just like me,” Jen commented. “Was it at two o’clock in the morning? If so I sympathise with you. One isn’t quite accountable for one’s actions.”

“Things are apt to look different next morning,” Mary agreed. “It was that first night, when Ros came close to me for comfort, and we talked. She said she felt lost and alone in the world. Apparently, although we all thought her so capable and self-reliant, and even bossy, she was really resting, ‘held up,’ is the way she puts it, on all of us and all her surroundings here. Torn suddenly from them, she felt herself ‘alone in space,’ she said. I remember how at one time I sheltered myself from the real things of life in a world of dreams. I grew out of that, and lost the need for shelter; but I can imagine how bare and helpless I should have felt if any one had torn my dreams to pieces and left me shivering. The dreams were my shell, and I was like an unfledged chicken. I said that to Rosamund, and she said it was exactly what she felt; as if all her life here had been a happy dream, out of which she had been wakened roughly; as if the dream had been her shell, or shelter, and now she was facing the world, and she felt cold and helpless and very unfledged indeed.”

“Poor kiddy! She’ll win through, but it is hard on her,” Jen said, with understanding. “It was nice of you to tell her about your dreams, Mary, though I can’t see much likeness between you and Ros myself.”

“She saw it. That was all that mattered. And she went on to say that now she felt unsafe; that everything had been taken away from her once, and it might happen again; and how could she ever trust anything to be lasting?”

“Oh, that was because it was two in the morning! Everything seems out of proportion,” Jen said from experience. “Didn’t you tell her to stop talking and go to sleep?”

“No, for I thought it was more than mere midnight nerves. Ros really felt there was nothing in life that could be trusted.”

“Well . . . I suppose there isn’t, is there?” Jen said slowly. “She’d discovered it too suddenly, that’s all. I know how I felt when mother went, so soon after father. But I had Ken, and Joy, and you,” she added. “Ros has all of us behind her, Mary. We’d never let her down. You told her that?”

“I said that. But, in the circumstances, naturally it wasn’t much comfort to her. So I said something more,” Mary spoke quickly and anxiously, playing nervously with her coffee-spoon. “I told her that sooner or later we all find ourselves alone, needing something not in this world at all to hold on to; and that I believed it happened just so that we should reach out beyond the things we can see and find greater help, help that will last for ever, no matter if everything else vanishes. And Ros interrupted me with a little cry; she said that was what she wanted, something to hold on to when everything else went. I’d been feeling I was saying it very badly, for I know so little myself that it isn’t easy to help any one else, and it hardly seems right to try. But it seemed the only way to help her; and it turned out to be just the thing she wanted somebody to say—she said so. She said she felt ‘humans,’ as she put it, might vanish at any time; she’d had to lose all of us, and how could she feel sure of anything or anybody again? So she wanted something more, more than ‘humans.’ I told her everybody did, and I said she knew where to find the help she needed. She cried out: ‘But is it real, Mary? Is it *real*?’ And I said, ‘The only real thing in life, Ros.’ That was all. She lay quiet for a long time, and at last I found she was asleep. When she woke we were pulling up, and there was coffee on the platform, and we walked about and looked at the mountains, and I wondered if I’d dreamt that early morning talk. She never referred to it, and I thought perhaps she had forgotten.”

“I’m sure she hadn’t,” Jen was gazing out at the moonlit lawn. “Ros says least when she feels most. She may never tell you; but I’m sure you’ve helped her. It was brave, Mary-Dorothy. For I know it wasn’t easy for you to speak to Rosamund of such things. She’ll think it over when she’s alone, wandering on her mountain shelf among the glaciers.”

“I hope she won’t be alone very much.” Mary changed the subject gladly. “Karen has heaps of friends; there’s a whole circle of girls for Ros to step into. I saw some of them, though there was no time to get to know them; there was Sally—a pretty, brown-eyed Quakeress!—and Tazy, who is keen on tennis; Anastasia, I believe.”

“Oh, we know her!” Jen said quickly. “She was at Cheltenham with Karen and us. Oh, Ros will be all right! She’ll get on well with Tazy. We won’t tell Maidie too much about the other girls, I think. She’ll be inclined to be afraid Ros will forget her.”

“But Maidie wants Ros to have a good time, and Ros won’t, if she’s lonely,” Mary quoted, smiling, as she took Jen’s cup.

“I forgot,” Jen acknowledged. “That’s the new Maidie. Still, I wouldn’t rub it in about Sally and Tazy, Mary-Dorothy. Karen’s quite enough at the moment!”

Rosamund’s first letters came two days later. There was a whole budget; one big letter—‘Dear All’—telling all her news; and notes to everybody, Joy, Jen, Mrs. Shirley, Betty, Mary, and a real letter to Maidlin.

Mary handed her note to Jen privately during the day, and Jen, surprised and touched, read it eagerly.

“DEAR MARY-DOROTHY,—

“Thank you for your kindness on the journey. You just made all the difference. I don’t know how I’d have borne it alone. And thank you most of all for the things you said to me during the night. You know what I mean. I couldn’t say what I felt; I never can when I feel enough; I can’t even write it. But I do thank you. It was exactly what I needed somebody to say to me. I’ll never forget what you said. I’m going to try to find out the truth of it for myself, for I know it’s one of the things that can only be of use to us if it’s real, and it can’t be real till we’ve found out and made it part of ourselves. You helped me as much as anybody can help any one else; I must do the rest for myself. I do believe there’s help for each one of us, but we have to take it and use it, haven’t we? I’m going to try. I think I shall need help. Karen and the rest are very good, but they aren’t my own people. I shall always feel all you Abbey folk are my own crowd. Mother’s more ill than I thought at first; I dare say Karen told you. I can’t be with her very much just now, but they hope she’ll be stronger soon. I’ve plenty of time to think. Thank you, just awfully much, for what you said, Mary-Dorothy. It was topping of you, for I’m sure you didn’t want to say it.

“With love and thanks, from

“Ros.”

“I’m glad,” Jen said quietly. “You’ll treasure that, Mary.”

“Yes,” Mary agreed, and put the letter carefully away in her desk.

“The new Maidie,” as Jen put it, was much in evidence during the closing weeks of the term. She was working in earnest for the first time in her life, since now she had a reason for working which really moved her. Hitherto she had been slow over her prep., lapsing continually into day-dreams; now, concentrating steadily, she worked better and took a higher place in class, and at the same time found the prep. done more quickly, so that she had more free time at home.

Her French lessons with Betty went on regularly, and shared her spare moments with her singing practice and her play with the twins. Neither Jen, Joy, nor Mary urged her to tennis, so the courts were not used, for Maidlin had always needed to be spurred on to games by Rosamund. In her anxiety to be “company” for Joy, she overcame her shyness and agreed to talk French with Betty out on the lawn, where Betty now lay every day, and did not insist that the lessons must be in private. It cost her an effort, for she was self-conscious to an abnormal extent and was terrified of being laughed at, especially by Joy. But she saw that Joy liked to sit and listen, and to join in the laughter at her attempts to answer Betty’s questions; and having once realised that, she made no further protest.

“It’s good for Joy to laugh,” she said gravely to Jen, when Jen commented on the fact that Joy seemed to be trying to learn French too. “She hasn’t laughed as much as usual lately. If she thinks my French is funny, that’s rather a good thing, isn’t it? It will do her good, and that’s all that matters.”

“You’ve learned a big secret, Primrose,” Jen said, deeply touched, for she knew the shy Maidlin of former days could not be very far away yet.

“Nancy must have been right about Maidie’s dreams,” Mary said thoughtfully, as she discussed with Jen the change in Maidlin one evening. “She was sure that nightmare that came so often was caused by her fear of growing up and her shrinking from change. Maidie says she hasn’t had it since Rosamund went.”

“Now she dreams of babies and journeys,” Jen said laughing. “Much healthier and pleasanter!”

“Journeys? You told me about the fat baby.”

“She dreamt one night that she was starting on a journey to the sea. She’s sure she was going to the sea, and she was very thrilled and happy about it in the dream. Another time she was racing along in an express train, with big windows, like a dining-car, and she was looking out, and she saw a splash of something red, like poppies, beside the line. I said that must be her love for bright colours coming out even in her dreams. I suppose Rosamund’s journey made a big impression on her; she’s dreamt about it several times. Sometimes she sees mountains and lakes, but usually she’s

rushing towards the sea. I tell her I hope she'll stop in time! She doesn't know what she's going to do when she gets there, but she's always very happy about it. She can always tell you the feeling of the dream, you know. It used to be fear, even terror, and she woke up crying; but now she's always pleased, or thrilled; it was 'nice,' or 'jolly.' It must have something to do with her state of health, Mary! She's much better than she used to be."

"She's far happier, although she's continually making efforts she'd have been scared of a month ago. You helped her enormously, Brownie; she knows where she's going now, and she isn't fighting against it any longer. I suppose she has more energy to spare for everything; it was being wasted before. She *has* started on a journey, of course," and Mary knit her brows. "Her journey is from the baby Maidie we knew to the grown-up Maidie who is coming nearer every day, with every effort she makes to put Joy before herself. She's racing along too; queer that it should all be reflected in her dreams!"

"Oh, do you think the dreams mean anything?" Jen remonstrated. "Isn't it just Rosamund's journey she dreams of?"

"I suppose so," Mary agreed. "But she is travelling along at a great rate herself, Jenny-Wren."

"You've a poetical mind that revels in symbols and hidden meanings," Jen teased. "Don't get fanciful, Mary-Dorothy!"

Mary laughed. "I'm glad Maidie's dreams are happy. It's strange that her dream-journeys should please her, for I doubt if she'd enjoy real travelling; at least at first. The strangeness and the constant changes would worry her."

Maidlin sought Joy one day when she came home from school. "Joy, Ros and I were going to give the Hamlet Club a picnic dance. It's nearly the end of the term. Don't you think I ought to carry on with it? I haven't done anything for the club since I've been Queen."

Joy looked at her with amused respect. "Alone, do you mean, Maidie? Wouldn't it be rather a big job for you?"

"They don't expect very much. Buns and cakes are enough, so long as there's plenty to drink. I thought an evening party one Saturday would do; then I could give them lemonade and ginger-pop, and I could order ices. It wouldn't be very much fag. Margia Lane will play; and I'll ask Pat Mercer to M.C. for the dancing. She's bossy; she'll love it. I shouldn't have much to do."

"Most tactful and well thought out," Joy agreed warmly. "Where did you think of having the party?"

Maidlin looked troubled. "When Ros and I talked about it first, before I was crowned, of course we planned to have it here. We knew you'd let us use the lawn. But we never spoke of it again, so I don't know what would be

best. I know we can't have visitors here; and you don't want dancing and music. I wondered if I'd better have it at school? It's not so jolly, and we like to be outside in summer; but every one will understand we can't have people here this year."

Joy looked at her thoughtfully. "Of course, I can't do any entertaining just now, and I'm not feeling very keen on country-dance parties. But there's no reason you shouldn't; in fact, you ought to entertain the club. You're right there. It's a pity to have a dance at school on a fine Saturday. I wonder—I say, Brownie! Come and be consulted! You're the ex-Queen, after all. You ought to help Primrose in this."

Jen stood looking down at her and Maidlin. "Good for you, Maidie! I'll second your efforts. We've been neglecting the Hamlet Club; and, after all, we owe nearly everything to it. What about the Manor? I'll invite you all there, shall I?"

"Oh, Jenny-Wren!" Maidlin cried joyfully. "The girls would love that!"

"We can't have you in the house, for our mother-in-law is *not* well," Jen said decisively. "I think she grows frailer every day. I begin to wonder if Ken will see her again, if he doesn't hurry up. Yes, truly, I'm anxious about her. But there's heaps of room, far away from the house. I'll tell you, Primrose! We'll have the party on the shore of the lake, where Rosamund nearly drowned you once! I still shudder when I pass it; I see you lying on the bank, and Ros in floods of tears. If the Hamlet Club meets there, I shall see dancing girls instead, and that will be much pleasanter."

"Then it will really be a kindness to you," Maidlin remarked. "I'd love a party there, and I know the girls will be crazy for it."

"We'll order buns and lemonade and ices from Wycombe," Jen decided. "You shall collect rugs and cushions, and a few chairs for friends; and we'll wheel Betty along in her chair and let her see if our girls dance as well as she did when she was at school."

"Betty will love it as much as the girls will," Betty said eagerly. "I've been longing to see some of your dancing, but I thought it was quite out of the question."

"And *could* the twins come, in their pram?" Maidlin pleaded. "Oh, Joy, the girls would love that most of all! They're dying to see them; they say we're going to have twin Queens some day, as soon as ever they're old enough! They're planning colour schemes for them already; one mauve and one yellow is the latest idea. They wanted pink and green, but I said they couldn't have pink because the twins have your hair."

Joy went off into a shout of laughter. "Poor babes! All their future planned out at two months and a half! Maidie, I simply daren't let them loose in that crowd! They'd be mauled to bits!"

“Oh, we wouldn’t let anybody *touch* them!” Maidlin cried in horror.

“I’ll think about it,” Joy promised gravely.

“You’ll come and dance, won’t you, Brownie?” Maidlin asked wistfully. “You don’t feel you’re tired of folk-dancing, do you?”

Jen looked at her. “I don’t know that I’ll dance this time, Madalena. I’m not tired of dancing; certainly not! Does Joy say she is? Oh, wait and see how she feels in a year or two! But I don’t know that I care about dancing for myself at the moment. I’ll certainly come to your party, Primrose.”

Jen herself wheeled Betty, in the light chair Joy had provided for her use, through the grounds of the Hall and into the park surrounding the Manor-House. “This is the way I come every day to see my mother-in-law. I’m afraid she’s losing strength slowly; her heart isn’t what it should be. Here’s the famous lake; there’s a fine setting for country-dancing!”

On the farther side of the lake, where Andrew Marchwood had fought for and saved Maidlin’s life, there was a level stretch of turf reaching the full length of the sheet of water. Behind were the trees of the Manor gardens and orchards. Maidlin had spread rugs here and there, a few chairs, and a long table with glasses and plates; cakes and fruit were heaped in bowls and dishes, and vases of roses stood among them.

“It’s a rose dance,” Maidlin explained, as she met Betty and Jen. “As we can’t have Ros here, we’re having roses to remind us of her.”

“And that’s why you insisted on a new rose-pink frock?” Jen asked, laughing. “I didn’t know what was in your mind, but it does suit you, Primrose.”

“These roses in the big bowls are for the girls to take home,” said Maidlin; and she went to greet the first arrivals.

Jen and Betty watched in amused delight as she welcomed her guests, gravely and with great dignity. Her maid of honour, a small child with fair, shingled hair, called Phyllis, came early and was given the task of leading the girls to a corner among the bushes where they could change their shoes. Pat Mercer, a tall red-haired girl from the Sixth, was appointed M.C., and consulted the violinist, Margia Lane, who had played for the club’s dancing for years, as to the programme.

“Maidie’s a charming hostess,” Jen said quietly. “I hope you’re taking notes for Joy, Bets. She’ll be very proud! She loves to see Maidie rise to the occasion, as she did on her coronation day.”

“I want to see Maidie in her robes and crown,” Betty wailed. “Why isn’t she dressed up to-day?”

“Because she wants to dance. Perhaps she’ll show herself to you when she’s robed for that terrifying princess.”



“Is she dreading that very much? She hasn’t spoken of it lately. It’s next week, isn’t it?”

“It’s going to be an ordeal,” Jen admitted. “But she’ll go through it calmly, as she’s doing to-night, and nobody will guess except those who know her very well. Look at her now! Talk of composed dignity! This is our respected head mistress, come to look on. She loves our dances, and she has a regular invitation to come to watch. The girls like to have her; they feel it’s a compliment to the club. She often brings friends with her.”

Maidlin, with her grown-up little air of dignified ease, was welcoming Miss Macey and being introduced to her friends as the reigning Queen Primrose. She led them to seats, and brought a basket of roses and begged them to choose their buttonholes. Then she turned to send Phyllis for Jen, and found Jen behind her.

“Will you talk to Miss Macey, Brownie? I want to start the dancing. It’s to be ‘Nancy’s Fancy’ first,” she explained to the strangers. “Longways for as many as will. It’s a real old village dance, and there are church bells in the B music.”

What the “B music” might be the uninitiated onlookers did not know; but they recognised the “church bells” as Pat Mercer led Maidlin down the middle of the first set.

“Red-haired M.C.s should not dance with Queens in rose-pink frocks,” Jen said, laughing, as she wheeled Betty up to be introduced to Miss Macey.

“I’m so glad to see dancing again,” Betty said eagerly. “Isn’t it pretty?” as the lines of “Nancy’s Fancy” changed to rings for “Jenny Pluck Pears,” and then to squares for “If All the World Were Paper.” “Christchurch Bells,” in two long lines again, was in progress, with its turning couples, little rings, and brisk, cheerful clapping, when round the end of the lake came the big pram, wheeled by nurse, Joy herself walking by the side of her daughters to be sure the enthusiasm of the club was kept in check.

With one accord the dancers forsook their partners and swept down upon the twins.

“Let us see! Oh, Joy, lift them out! How perfectly sweet! What *angels!* Oh, Lady Marchwood, show them to us! Which is which?”

“Stand back, then,” Joy commanded. “Get in single file. Now you may march past and inspect. This is Elizabeth Joy, and she’s the elder. Nurse—oh, Jenny-Wren has bagged Margaret Joan! That’s much nicer!”

“As if I’d let nurse introduce Margaret Joan to the Hamlet Club!” Jen had elbowed her way hastily through the crowd and seized the younger twin gently. “Come on, ladies and gentlemen! Creep up like mice and see the most beautiful sight of the summer! Look at the golden curls! Did any one whisper ‘Carrots’? Lovely red-gold, that’s what it is. All right, Margaret

Joan, don't hit me in the eye! She's waving her paw at you, Pat; she knows you're the M.C. She wants a nice partner. You should see them kick! They're going to be morris dancers in no time. I shall teach them myself. They're going to do 'I'll Go and Enlist for a Sailor' together quite soon."

"I hope not," Joy said, laughing. "Not kick-jumps, I think."

"Kick-jumps! That's exactly what they're so good at. Didn't I see Elizabeth Joy doing kick-jumps in her bath last night?"

"They do beautiful Headington circles with their arms," said Maidlin.

The laughing girls made way for Miss Macey, who came to do homage with the rest.

"Joy, my dear, this is good of you! You have given us a very great treat. It's a great joy to see you again and looking so well. And the babies are little beauties!"

"They were very tiny at first, but they're growing fast. I couldn't keep away," and Joy looked at her former head mistress bravely. "I wanted to see how Maidie would run a party. Everybody seems fairly happy."

"More than happy. Maidie is an excellent hostess. You are training her splendidly. She does you great credit," Miss Macey said warmly, not realising that the Queen was within hearing, anxious to know what 'the girls' said about the precious twins; Rosamund would want to know!

Joy saw her, however. "As to that, I think Maidie's training herself. I'm exceedingly proud of her," she said quietly. "She's doing all her own jobs and taking Rosamund's place as well. I'm really *very* proud."

"Jen, my dear, you hold that baby as if she were your own," said Miss Macey, laughing.

A wave of colour swept into Jen's face. "Oh, I've had heaps of practice!" she said hurriedly. "Margaret Joan and I are good friends. I know all her little ways. So does Maidie. You wouldn't believe how handy she is. She nurses Elizabeth Joy as if she'd had a dozen."

"Come along, girls, and have your peep," said Joy. "We can't stay many minutes. It's nearly tub time."

Laughing, the girls crowded round again, begging to be allowed to touch the tiny hands of the twins, to see their feet, to know if they could laugh yet, to see the deep brown eyes, so like their mother's. Joy let them have their way for a few moments; then she firmly waved them off.

"Please to go on with your dancing!  
Weaving your figures entrancing!"

sang Maidlin's clear voice, and the girls scattered to their lines again.

"Dance 'The Triumph,' because the twins have come to their first party," Jen suggested.

“Or ‘Sellenger’s,’ with them in the middle! Oh, Joy, *do!* Be a maypole for us, with the children!” Maidlin fairly sparkled with delight. “Girls! Pat! ‘Sellenger’s Round,’ for the twins!”

“Maidie! Please, no!” cried Joy in protest.

“Why not? It won’t hurt them or you, and it will go down in the annals of the club as an historic occasion,” Jen said sturdily, and she marched out into the midst of the dancing girls carrying Margaret Joan, who gazed heavenwards in entire detachment from earthly things and waved her little arms at the fluttering leaves, in the wild gestures which Maidlin’s love interpreted as “Headington circles.”

Before Joy quite realised it, she and Elizabeth Joy were swept into the ring of laughing girls. Nurse stood aside, amused and interested, and Margia struck up the tune. The ring swung round clockwise and back again, up to the centre and out, and the twins waved their hands in reply—or so the Hamlet Club declared.

“They’ll surely be dancers after this!” Joy said, laughing.

“They like it. Margaret’s laughing, and Elizabeth looks quite haughty with pride,” Jen asserted. “You’d better take them into retirement again before they get too uplifted. There’ll be no speaking to Elizabeth after this, nurse!”—as they were released from their prominent position and came to lay the babies in their pram again. “She says nurse has never been a maypole! As for Margaret, she thinks it’s all a great joke. She’s fairly giggling with amusement.”

“Is she, now? I don’t quite see it myself,” nurse commented, as she tucked Margaret and Elizabeth up safely.

Joy went for a few words with Miss Macey; and when she turned to follow nurse and the pram, she found “The Triumph” being danced. Jen and Pat Mercer were making an arch over Maidlin and leading her up the middle.

“Don’t dance too much, Brownie! A little’s all right, but don’t go on till you’re tired,” Joy said, in an elder-sisterly tone, as Jen put Maidlin in her place with a courtly gesture and turned to lead away Pat’s partner.

Jen made a grimace at her. “All right, granny! ‘Triumph’s’ nice and quiet. I’m not dancing ‘Goddesses.’”

“You’d better not. You might collapse in tears if you were too tired,” Joy said unkindly.

“You *pig!*” Jen flung at her over her shoulder.

“What does she mean, Brownie?” Maidlin asked, as Joy laughed and walked away, and they went down the middle hand in hand. “You never cry, Jenny-Wren!”

“She’s ragging,” Jen said airily. “She’s a brute. I have been known to lose my sense of proportion and see things all wrong and exaggerated when I’m tired. She’s very unsporting to remind me of it!”

## CHAPTER XIX

### MAIDIE AND THE PRINCESS

“Joy, you *are* decent!” Maidlin said warmly, as she went to bed. “You didn’t feel in the least like dancing, but you came to my party so that it would seem extra special, because you knew I’d be missing Ros. It *was* nice of you!”

“It was a jolly party, Primrose,” Joy bent to kiss her.

“One of the best we’ve ever had. Miss Macey said so. The girls say they’ll always remember it as the dance at the Manor when they saw the twins first. They were so pleased about going to the Manor, too. I’m very much obliged to you and Jen.”

“And to Margaret and Elizabeth, I hope,” said Jen. “They were quite the belles of the ball.”

“The girls can’t stop talking about them. They want to know how soon they can have them for Queens.”

“Not for ten years, at least,” Joy said solemnly. “Go to bed, Maidie, and don’t dream!”

“I dream nice things now,” Maidlin, said with dignity.

“Have you found the sea yet?” Jen teased.

“I was paddling last night, up to my knees. I loved it.”

“Better take her to Margate in August,” Jen suggested.

“You weren’t dancing this evening, Mary-Dorothy,” Jen slipped into Mary’s green study at bedtime. “What was wrong? Don’t tell me you’re tired of country-dancing!”

Mary was filling up her bowls of roses with water from a green pottery pitcher. “I danced once or twice, Brownie.”

“What’s once or twice? You looked on and talked to Betty most of the time. It was jolly for her, of course; but if you were sacrificing yourself for her sake it was quite unnecessary,” Jen said severely. “She was fascinated by the dancing. She didn’t want to spoil your fun.”

“She didn’t. I didn’t care about dancing.”

“Mary, what do you mean?” Jen demanded. She stretched herself in a big chair by the open window, and pointed at the broad sill. “Sit down there and confess! Why didn’t you care? Here,—catch!” She threw a green pillow at her friend.

Mary put it behind her back as she sat down. “It was more interesting to look on. I was watching Maidie. It was worth while; it was a joy to see her

getting on so well without Ros to depend on. And I watched you, and Joy, and Betty's face of delight; and everything. I hadn't time for dancing."

Jen knit her brows and stared at her curiously. "Watching is all very well, and, of course, you *are* a novelist! But we don't go to parties to watch. When did the dances stop being interesting enough to be worth while, Mary-Dorothy?"

Mary stirred restlessly. "I don't want to worry you. Why are you teasing me?"

"Because I want to hear. There's something you haven't shared with me, and I don't like it. *Are* you tired of dancing, Mary? I'm not surprised at Joy, after all she's been through. But what has upset you, Mary-Dorothy?"

"Nothing," Mary said quickly. "I enjoyed the party to-night. But now that you've challenged me I realise I was enjoying it in a new way, from a new angle. It was the girls, and the people looking on and how it was affecting them, that interested me more than the dances."

"Then country-dancing doesn't quite satisfy you?" Jen knit her brows again. "That's what you mean. You like it, but you care more about other things. That's queer, because I've been wondering lately if I were caring less for it than I used to do. But I *do* love it, Mary! And it *is* beautiful!" Her cry was full of revolt against a possible change.

Mary spoke quickly. "Jenny-Wren, you were troubled a little time ago because Maidlin was objecting so strenuously to growing up. She fought against it as long as she could, though she hardly understood what was wrong with her. You mustn't do the same yourself. You're inclined to, you know."

"I? How, please? Haven't I grown up and am I not married?"

"Yes, but remember how you fought against the idea! Only a year ago you were playing cricket with Kenneth Marchwood and Dick Jessop, and refusing to think of anything else."

"That's true," Jen acknowledged. "I did fight. I wouldn't admit that I loved Ken. But the time came when I wanted him. Well, Mary-Dorothy? Do you think I'm fighting again?"

"You sounded like it just now. If your feeling to country-dancing, or anything else, has changed, you must give in and adjust yourself to the new ideas. You can't stifle them. And you can't put back the clock."

Jen thought this over carefully. "Thank you, aunty!" she said mockingly at length. "I'll go into the matter thoroughly. What do you want me to do? Give up dancing because I'm married?"

"Not for a second! There's not the slightest reason why you should. You'll disappoint Maidlin and the whole club terribly if you drop out any more than is necessary."

“Then am I to go to parties just to please the children? *Mary!* You don’t mean that you think folk-dancing’s childish? You aren’t going to be horribly superior, I hope?”

Mary laughed. “I hope not! Oh, Jenny-Wren, I do hope not! Please squash me if you see any sign of it coming on!”

“I shall,” Jen said haughtily. “I shall crush you and bury you in the Abbey, under the cloister garth with the monks. Mary, what are you getting at?”

“That I think presently you’ll find you are enjoying your dancing from a new angle, and in a more grown-up way.” Mary spoke vehemently. “The dancing is all right. It’s beautiful, and the music is jolly; the figures are fascinating, and it’s a splendidly healthy recreation, and one must have some recreation, some way to let oneself go. When I’ve been writing hard, or correcting proofs, as I did all this afternoon, there’s no way I’d rather play all evening than go to a country-dance party. But it *is* play. And there are more important things, *real* things. You’re feeling, without quite realising it, that you’ll have other things to do and that dancing will have to be kept in its proper place; that it can’t be as important to you as it has been, and as it still is to Maidlin and Pat. You’re in for bigger things, real things, Brownie.”

Jen flushed and stared out into the garden, where the late blackbird on the rose arch was telling the world about his third brood of the season.

“You’re hinting that our dancing isn’t quite real, Mary,” she said at last. “That’s fearful heresy!”

“It’s all right as far as it goes,” Mary said, with energy. “But it doesn’t go far enough to satisfy us altogether; not our whole nature, Jenny-Wren. So long as you aren’t fully awake, it may be enough. All that has happened to us here during the last three months, since Joy came home, has been enough to wake any one to the most real things of life. It isn’t only Joy; you, and I, have known deeper moments than we had ever known before.”

“That’s true,” Jen agreed. “Mary, I’m not arguing all this; I dare say you’re right. But I want to understand. We used to be so crazy over the dancing. Were we wrong? Were we childish?”

“We were right, for the stage we were in at that time,” Mary said urgently. “We’d be wrong now. *I* should. Jenny-Wren, I daren’t speak for you; I’m only trying to explain what I believe you are feeling and refusing to accept. If I’m right, and you understand, you’ll stop resenting the change and accept it, and then you’ll be happier. I’ll tell you how it happened to me, shall I?”

“Please do!” Jen said gravely. “I like the way you try always to get to the bottom of things.”

Mary coloured. "When you came into our office that day, I was living in a world of day-dreams which was my real world. It was what mattered to me; it was far more real than the outer world of typing and shorthand. You made me dance; and the dreams became unreal and faded away. Country-dancing was more real, because it was a thing I could do, not merely a thing to think about. It, and you, swept me completely off my feet; it, and you, were the most real things in life for a year or two. And I was much healthier and more normal in every way. I thought I should never change; that I had reached a point where I could always be happy. I used to think I was happy in the old days; but I wasn't, though I didn't know. I was merely satisfied, not wanting anything more, because I had no idea how much I was missing in life."

"I was like that when I played cricket with Ken," Jen interrupted. "I didn't know how very much better being engaged and married could be. I was an awful infant; I see that now."

Mary laughed in relief. "That's exactly how I feel about those days before I knew you. 'An awful infant'; never mind my age! I was satisfied with the little I had. I think I shall never be satisfied again, though now I know I'm happy. But there's so much more to reach out to; life isn't long enough for it all."

Jen nodded. "It's a much more wonderful feeling. But about dancing, Mary! Do you mean you've grown out of that too? And that I ought to?"

"I mean that it's no longer the biggest or the most real thing in life. And it ought not to be," Mary said soberly. "It's beautiful, and it's good, and it's useful; but other things are bigger. I'd rather spend an evening in writing than in country-dancing."

"Well, yes, I suppose you would," Jen admitted. "Your books have taken the first place. That's all right for you; you have your own jolly work and you care most of all about that. But we can't all write books, Mary."

"No, but we can all do some good, solid work that we feel is worth while," Mary said sharply. "Joy will be happier writing songs than merely dancing. And when she's nursing the twins all her dancing days will go right into the background. Joy's up against real things; I feel fairly certain dancing will never mean more to her again than a pleasant way of amusing herself with pleasant people. It *is* that; but it isn't a thing to give the first place in life to, Jenny-Wren."

"I suppose we did do that at one time," Jen mused. "Did we go a bit crazy, Mary?"

"*I* did. It was all so new to me. It was all right for you, while you were a schoolgirl. But—*does* it matter to you as it did, Jen?" and Mary leaned



forward and laid a hand on Jen's knee. "Do you care so much, really? Aren't there bigger things?"

Jen looked at her, and laughed, and surrendered. "Mary-Dorothy, I used to think country-dancing came first of everything. You've shown me its right place. I won't be childish any more. I knew I was caring less, but I wouldn't admit it. I didn't want to give it up."

"I only want you to enjoy it in a more grown-up way," Mary urged. "Then you won't be worried. You *were* troubled because you knew you didn't care quite so fiercely, Brownie."

"I was," Jen admitted. "I felt quite worried about it this evening. I really didn't care whether I danced or not. I wanted to and I didn't want to, both at once. I don't want to give it up altogether; we've had such jolly times! But I do see that there are bigger things."

"I believe almost the biggest thing is to give in to a feeling like that, urging one strongly in some direction," Mary said quietly. "You were worried because you were resisting it. But it comes from deep down inside you, and it won't be refused. So you were restless and uneasy. It's a new side of you pushing into life, Jenny-Wren, and it must have its way. If you want to be happy you must surrender and go forward joyfully. There's always something new ahead; that's adventure! It makes life worth while."

"We can't stay still, playing either at cricket or dancing," Jen said thoughtfully. "I see. I will move on joyfully, Mary-Dorothy. I think perhaps there are adventures ahead of me that are worth while!" And she rose to go to bed.

"I'm sure there are," and Mary kissed her good-night.

When, some days later, Maidlin stepped bravely up on to the platform to greet the princess in the name of the school, Joy came quietly through a doorway at the back of the gallery and stood watching, unnoticed by any save the girls just around her. They filled the gallery, but they were too busy cheering to pay much attention to a stranger. One or two nudged their neighbours and whispered, "Who is it?"

"Lady Marchwood—Joy Shirley—come to see Maidie. Don't worry her. She doesn't want us." The word went round, and Joy was left in peace.

She had arranged this with Miss Macey as they chatted at Maidlin's rose dance. No one was to know of her presence, but she was to be allowed to watch the ceremony from the background. Down in the front of the hall were several old friends, former Queens of the school,—Cicely, Miriam, Marguerite; and other "old girls"—Dorothy, Georgie, Edna, and many more. Joy shrank from meeting a crowd, but she was very anxious to watch Maidlin.

Every one at the Hall had coached Maidlin in her curtsy, her speech, how to manage her train and to present her bouquet. Maidlin had listened patiently, and then had remarked, with a quiver of her sensitive lips, —“You’re making me feel worse about it all the time. You don’t think I’m looking forward to it, do you?”—and had fled to the shelter of the Abbey.

When she came back, grave and composed, but obviously strung up to a high pitch, the subject had been dropped, much to her relief. At bedtime Joy and Jen each apologised separately for her thoughtlessness and assured the victim she would certainly get on all right and there was no need to worry.

“A lot of use it is saying it now!” Joy growled, annoyed with herself for her lack of understanding. “We’ve done the mischief and made the poor kid nervous. I wish it was safely over!”

“I didn’t realise she was still dreading it so much,” Jen confessed. “She’s been so quiet and matter-of-fact about it that I really thought she’d lost her fright. The kid has the pluck of half-a-dozen. She’s in a deadly funk, but she doesn’t say a word but just goes straight ahead.”

One thing, and one thing only, could set free Maidlin’s store of courage, which was great but was very deeply buried. Only need on the part of some one she loved intensely could rouse her true self and enable her to conquer the surface fears which tormented her. Rosamund’s appeal for help when in real trouble had nerved her to the effort needed to come forward as the May Queen. Now Jen’s suggestion that Joy needed her companionship, and that therefore she must leave her babyish side behind, buoyed her up for the new ordeal.

When, as she was setting out for school on the fateful morning, Joy whispered that she intended to be there to watch—“And I shall be so proud, Maidie!”—Maidlin knew that she could not fail.

As the princess stepped on to the platform, a very dignified and regal little figure came forward to meet her. Maidlin’s primrose-yellow train, with its green lining and border, scattered with painted primroses, was held up by little Phyllis, whose white frock was embroidered in yellow and green. Maidie’s white robe reached nearly to her feet and made her look tall; her long black hair hung loose under a crown of yellow roses, and she carried a great shower bouquet of yellow and green.

Her curtsy was graceful, though shy. She offered her flowers, with words of welcome which were almost whispered. The princess, with an understanding smile of sympathy, thanked her and talked pleasantly for a few moments, asking questions which Maidlin answered shyly at first, but presently with greater ease. Yes, there was a Queen every May; she was the twelfth Queen, and was nicknamed Primrose, from her colours; this was the

Queen's silver medal; Phyllis was her maid of honour—"Bride's-maid, the girls call it," said Maidie, with a doubtful smile; and the princess laughed.

The girls in the hall below were watching open-eyed at the amazing sight of "frightened Maidie" chatting with the princess in such a friendly fashion. Joy, at the back of the gallery, smiled and was glad she had come.

When the prizes had been presented, and Maidlin had come forward from her seat on the platform to receive a special prize for music and a special smile from the princess—"For all the world as if they were old friends!" whispered Jen, in much amusement—a concert followed, and the Primrose Queen had to leave her place again to sing the solo which was expected from her. She was never nervous where music was concerned, and the princess clapped in real appreciation of the song and turned to Miss Macey to say—"Surely a voice with a future before it! Is she being trained carefully?"

Reassured by the head mistress, the guest turned to Maidlin to thank her personally for a real treat; and Joy slipped out of the school hall and into her car and drove home. Maidie would be asked to tea with Mackums and the princess, and Jen would bring her home in the Manor car.

"A triumphant success!" Joy reported to Betty under the beech tree. "The child might have been brought up with royalty all her life, from her manner. Her knees may have been knocking together under her robe, but she didn't show it; and she wasn't pale, as usual, but had a lovely excited colour."

"Do you think she'll dress up for me to-night?" Betty pleaded. "I realised I mustn't tease her before the ceremony, but I would like to see her in her robes!"

"Oh, I'm sure she will, once it's all over. Aunty will like to see her too." Joy's face clouded, for Mrs. Shirley, like old Lady Marchwood, was very frail and unfit for any excitement.

"Primrose, I *was* proud of my big girl!" Joy exclaimed, as Maidlin, tired but relieved, stepped out of Jen's car.

"Were you really there, Joy?" Maidie's face lit up. "I wasn't sure. I wished I could see you. Mackums whispered to me that you'd come, but not till nearly the end, and I couldn't find you anywhere."

"I went out after your song. You were quite at home with the princess by that time!"

"She was nice. She was awfully kind, Joy!"

"We want you to be 'awfully kind,' and let Betty see your frock, so don't change, Maidie. Where are your crown and robe?"

"I'll unpack them and dress her," said Jen. "Yes, Betty ought to see one Queen before she leaves the Abbey. You were splendid, Primrose. You

couldn't have done it better with Ros and me and all the other Queens to support you."

"I'm glad if Joy thinks it was all right," Maidlin said wearily, as she allowed Jen to arrange the yellow train and rose crown again.

She sat under the beech tree with Betty, telling all she had felt and all the princess had said, and what they had talked about during tea, while Pat and the other seniors waited on them; and Mary and Mrs. Shirley came out to see the effect of the yellow crown, for Maidlin's May-day wreath had been of white narcissi.

Then, with a sigh of relief, Maidlin went indoors to change into a short garden frock. "I'm glad that's over! But it wasn't as bad as I expected."

"Things never are, are they, Primrose? You always expect the worst, don't you?" Jen asked, in amused sympathy.

"I get on better than I think I'm going to," Maidlin admitted.

"Couldn't you remember that next time, and not be quite so unhappy?" Jen suggested, lifting the roses from her hair.

"I always mean to, but I never do," the Primrose Queen said sadly. Then she added, a triumphant ring in her voice, "*Now* I'm going to write and tell Ros *all* about it!"

## CHAPTER XX

### THE TESTING OF MAIDLIN

Jen fairly danced her way through the Manor gardens to the Hall. She peeped into the nursery, to make sure Joy was there with the twins. Then, radiant and excited, she caught Mary and whirled her into Betty's room.

"Oh, dear people! I must tell somebody or explode! Can you keep a secret till to-morrow?"

"Tell us, Jenny-Wren! Of course we can. What is it? Have you had good news from Kenneth?" Mary asked.

"It's something jolly. Isn't she excited? We won't tell a soul, Jen," Betty promised eagerly.

"It's the next best thing to Ken. Joan's coming home! She's in England already. She's in Sussex, and she's coming here to-morrow!" Jen sank breathlessly on Betty's bed. "It's the best thing in the whole world for Joy! Oh, I am so glad!"

"Joan? Has she left Malta, then?" Mary sounded bewildered.

"They've left the army for good and all, and they're going to settle at Jack's home, not thirty miles from here. We can see Joan every day. Mary, think what it means to Joy!"

"Joan!" Betty sat up eagerly; she was well again and very nearly strong. "She's the pretty girl who was your Queen; I mean, you were her maid of honour; and she came home to The Grange with you after your accident at Cheltenham. Is that the one? She's the image of Joy; her twin sister, isn't she?"

"That's the one. But she's Joy's cousin; there's only a month between them in age, and nothing at all in looks. Mrs. Shirley is Joan's mother," Jen explained rapidly. "Joy's father and Joan's were twins and exactly alike. The Abbey belongs to Joan and the Hall to Joy. And Elizabeth couldn't mean more to Margaret, or your Meg to you, than Joan and Joy do to one another. Nothing in the world can make up to Joy for losing Andrew; but if anything could, it would be having the twins and having Joan at home."

"I'm glad for Mrs. Shirley's sake too," Mary said gravely.

Jen looked serious and agreed. "She's like eggshell. Anything might be too much for her. And so is our mother-in-law. Mary, we must tell Auntie Shirley gently about Joan's coming. We daren't risk surprising her. But Joan wants to take Joy by surprise, if we think it's wise. She's written to me at the

Manor, leaving it to me to prepare Joy or not as I think best. I say, let it be a surprise! What do you think?"

"It won't hurt Joy. She's strong and well," said Mary. "If Joan would like to surprise her, I see no harm in it."

"Right! Then don't say a word, either of you! But I shall be off my head with excitement all day," Jen warned them.

"You seem very gay, Brownie!" Joy commented, an hour later, as Jen gathered roses in the garden, singing as she went. "Reconciled to your married state?"

"I *love* being married; every bit of it, except that I can't have my husband," Jen called back to her. "When I get him, I'll have no complaints to make."

"You sound happy enough! Jenny-Wren, I want to have a tea-party."

Jen dropped the scissors and basket and stood staring at her, a carpet of red and yellow roses at her feet. "Joy Marchwood! You take my breath away! I'm very glad to hear it; it's time you began seeing people. You must be sick of Betty and Mary and me. But it's so sudden! Whom do you want to ask?"

Joy flushed. "I couldn't bear a crowd. But I enjoyed showing the children to the girls on Saturday night. I want to show them off some more."

"Well, I should." Jen was encouraging, but made no further comment. "It's time Elizabeth and Margaret went into society. Their company manners are perfect. You'll love showing them off and hearing from new people how beautiful they are."

"I feel I'm losing something by keeping them to myself when they're so fascinating."

"Exactly! If they were mine I should want to walk up and down Wycombe High Street with one on each arm; or at least I should hold receptions for them every day. Who are to be the lucky people?"

"Cicely and Miriam. We'll ask them to tea in the garden."

"Oh, cheers!" cried Jen, her face radiant at the thought that Joan would be there. "The day after to-morrow, 'Traveller's Joy'? I'll ring up Cicely, and if it suits her we'll write to Mirry."

She came back from the telephone presently. "Cicely's delighted. I'll write to Mirry. Some day soon we'll have a party for the twins, and Elizabeth and Margaret Marchwood will request the pleasure of the company of Richard Everett, aged one and a half; and Mirry's kids shall come, and Marguerite's, if she's in England at the time."

"There will be Janetta too," she murmured to Betty, as Joy wheeled the pram up and down in the sunshine. "But I can't say so to Joy!"

"Janetta?" Betty asked mystified.

“Janice; Joan’s kid, my goddaughter. She’s a year and a half old.”

“Oh, how nice! And is she as much like Joan as the twins are like Joy?”

“The image of Joan, hair and all. They’ll be a lovely trio when they’re growing up. Janetta will be just so much older that she’ll be able to keep Elizabeth and Margaret in order.”

“Unless she allows herself to be bossed, because there are two of them!” Betty said, laughing.

Maidlin came home from school in high spirits after the end-of-term party. “That’s done with for six weeks! And I’ve got the princess off my mind! Now I can really have a good time!”

“Have you been complimented on your manner towards royalty?” Joy asked seriously.

“Everybody was pleased. They think it was all right,” Maidlin answered with equal gravity. “Give me Margaret, Joy. I want to nurse somebody!”

Joy took Elizabeth, and they sat together, talking of the holidays.

“It’s a fascinating idea to think of going to Switzerland to see Ros, Maidie,” Joy said soberly, “and I sympathise with your wanting to go. I’d like to see her myself. But I can’t leave these small people so soon, and I couldn’t take them so far. You’d have to go without me.”

“That would be horrid. I’d hate to be in another country from you and the babies,” Maidlin admitted.

“Mary-Dorothy could go with you, and I’d ask if that nice Miss Rawlings could take you across. But I don’t feel that Jen ought to go. For one thing, Kenneth will be home before very long. He’s had two months and a half now; and the journey only takes a month. He’ll be starting for home any day, and arriving here quite soon. It’s much better for Brownie to stay here and get the Manor ready for him; and she wouldn’t care to leave our mother-in-law, any more than I’d care to leave aunty.”

Maidlin assented. “I don’t think I’ll go without you or Jen. Could we go later on, Joy, if Ros is still there?”

“That’s much more likely. When the twins are a little older, perhaps you and I could go, and after staying with Ros go on into Italy and have another look at your ancestral halls and castles.”

Maidlin had no curiosity about her Italian estate. She had paid a flying visit to Italy with Joy two years before, but it was all too far away to have much interest for her; she would have to be forced to live there before she would realise what it meant.

“I suppose I’ll have to go some time. But I’m not going until you can come too, Joy.”

“I’d like to go with you,” Joy agreed. “Then we must postpone the visit to Ros. But you ought to have some change, Madalena.”

“It will be a change to be here in the garden with you instead of going to school.”

Jen looked up from the letter she was writing. “I’m thinking of going home for two or three weeks;—I mean to Yorkshire, of course! There are things I ought to see to there. Harry could come from Glasgow to meet me if I went in August. All mother’s affairs are waiting for me. There’s heaps to do; but up till now there’s been more to do here. I’m going to borrow Mary-Dorothy from you, Joy Marchwood, and leave you to write your own letters for a fortnight; and Mary will come and write mine. She loves the moors; it would be a holiday for her, too.”

“It sounds like a holiday—writing your business letters!” Joy mocked.

“I shall see that she has plenty of time out on the moors,” Jen said with dignity. “If Maidie likes to come too, she’d see Yorkshire and get a jolly good brace-up, and she and Mary could walk and lie in the heather together.”

“That’s worth thinking about,” Joy said eagerly. “Maidie, you’d like that! And it would do you good. You’ve another year of school to work through. A bracing holiday would be splendid for you.”

“I’d like to see Jen’s moors, and I’d like to go with her and Mary,” Maidlin admitted. “But it would leave you all alone, Joy. We couldn’t do that.”

Jen smiled and went on with her letter.

“Oh, nonsense!” Joy said quickly. “I’d be all right. There are aunty and nurse, and the babes——”

“But it’s to be the new nurse in a fortnight,” Maidlin said hastily. “We couldn’t leave you without any company, Joy. Betty will have gone too; you know she says she’s all right again and it’s time she went back to her mother.”

“We needn’t decide it to-night,” and Jen folded her letter and rose. “Perhaps something will happen to make it all right for you to leave Joy, Primrose.”

When Joy and nurse had taken the twins indoors for baths and bed, Jen went out again to where Maidlin still sat resting under the big tree. She sat down in Joy’s chair.

“Maidie, can you keep a secret, a jolly one? It’s to be a surprise for Joy, so don’t give the show away. Joan is home in Sussex, and she’s coming here to-morrow! They’re going to stay at home now. You know how much Joy thinks of her. She’ll be company for Joy——” and then Jen paused, suddenly seeing this joyful happening from Maidlin’s point of view.

“Then Joy won’t want——” Maidlin caught back the words in time. She rose and stood, while Jen watched her anxiously.



“It’s better for Joy. It’s nice for her. That’s all we have to think of,” said Maidlin breathlessly. Then—“Don’t come, Jen! Leave me alone!” she cried, and fled to the Abbey gate and out of sight.

Jen started up to follow and comfort her. Then she sat down again, her face very grave and full of sympathy. “She’ll need to have it out with herself. Poor kid! She won’t believe Joy can have room for them both. She has tried so hard; and this is the hardest thing yet. But if she can put Joy first—and I believe she will—it will be a tremendous step for her. She has plenty of courage. She’ll come through all right. I wish I could help her; but it’s better not. Not yet, anyway.”

And she went indoors to tell Betty, her face sober and her joy in the great event shadowed for Maidlin’s sake.

But the change in Maidlin’s attitude to Joy had gone deep and had been real. She had accepted in its entirety the thought that Joy’s welfare and wishes must come first; that because she loved Joy she cared more for Joy to be happy than for her own satisfaction. That conviction had taken possession of her innermost being, and she reaped now the benefit of her surrender.

Betty and Jen were talking quietly, while Mary worked at her proofs in her study, and Joy and nurse tended the twins, when Maidlin came quickly across the lawn from the Abbey.

Jen leaned out of the window and waved her hand, betraying no sign of her anxiety.

Maidlin waved in reply, and came running upstairs. She stood in the doorway and looked round to make sure Joy was not there. Then she came in and closed the door.

“Jen, I’m sorry. You’ve been telling Betty, haven’t you? Jen, I’m *not* a baby! I know this is just the time to prove it. I *want* Joy to have Joan, Brownie. It doesn’t matter about me. It was silly to think I could really be company for her.” Her voice was steady till the end, when it broke suddenly; her face was brave, but her eyes were wistful.

Jen held out her hand. “Come here, Primrose! You plucky kid, there’s no need to break your heart. You feel this is the end of all your hopes, don’t you? Silly girl! It’s nothing of the kind. Joy needs you as much as ever she did.”

Maidlin came and stood beside her. Jen, on the window-sill, leaned against the wall and looked at her.

“She won’t need me once she has Joan, Brownie.” Maidie’s voice was tense, but it did not falter.

“And how long do you suppose Joan will be able to stay here? A day or two, perhaps; you didn’t think she was coming to live here, did you?”

“I didn’t know. Where will she live?” Dawning hope showed in Maidlin’s face.

“At Jack Raymond’s place in Sussex, of course. She’ll be thirty miles away from Joy. If Joy needs your company because I’m living half a mile off at the Manor, she isn’t going to stop needing you because Joan’s two counties away. Joan will come here often and she may even stay for a few days. She’ll want to see her mother a good deal. But she won’t be a full-time companion for Joy. Only somebody living in the house can be that!”

Eager light was growing in Maidlin’s face. “Do you really think there’ll be room for me too, Brownie? I thought”—her voice broke—“there was nothing for me to do but to keep out of the way and let them have one another, without me barging in and being a nuisance.”

“You don’t trust Joy very much,” Jen said severely. “Why should you expect her to forget you as soon as Joan comes home?”

“I don’t want her to be kind to me, for my sake,” Maidlin tried tremulously to explain. “That’s babyish. I want to do things for her. I want her to need me.”

“She needs you all right, Primrose,” Jen said gently. “Don’t you worry about that! Joy wants people to depend on, and Joan hasn’t time to hold her up. She has her husband and baby; Jack and Janetta come before Joy with Joan now! I suppose there isn’t anybody, except the twins, who is prepared to put Joy before every one and everything, unless you are. I can’t, you know. There’s Kenneth!”

“I want to. She does come first,” Maidlin said, her voice low and eager.

“I know. I believe she does with you, now. Maidie used to come first, didn’t she?”

Maidlin flushed. “I used to be a baby.”

“You can give Joy something nobody else can give, because all the rest of us have given that first place to some one else,” Jen said quietly. “Joan cares a lot for Joy, but she can’t say Joy comes first, Primrose. Never forget that!”

Maidlin stood staring out of the window. “Thank you, Jenny-Wren!” she said hurriedly, and kissed Jen and fled. But though she cried a little in her own room, the tears were of relief and not the heart-broken sobbing that had hurt her as she hid in the Abbey; and at night she went to bed comforted.

## CHAPTER XXI PLUS TWO

“Where are you sleeping to-night, Jenny-Wren?” asked Joy, as they sat on the terrace in the twilight and Mary handed round coffee.

“You sound as if I were a gipsy!” Jen said indignantly.

“You may be, for all we know. You *say* you’re going to the Manor when you disappear into the gloaming, but we’ve only your own word for it. You may be going to sleep under a hedge, for all we can tell, or up in a tree.”

“I’m not the cat that walked by his wild lone,” Jen said haughtily. “I’m going to my mother-in-law. You can ring me up in twenty minutes and make sure I’m there.”

“Twenty minutes! Are you going to stand by Maidie’s pond and gaze soulfully at the moonlight on the water?”

“That was my intention,” Jen agreed. “I like to creep away from you all and think about Ken.”

“And be properly sentimental,” Mary suggested, for Joy had said nothing, and the shadow had fallen on her face.

Jen threw a cushion at Mary. “You never saw me sentimental yet. I’ll leave all you scoffers. Lady Marchwood senior *likes* to talk about Ken.”

And she took up her coat and her pocket torch, and went off by the track through the shrubbery to the Manor.

“What *is* the matter with you all?” Joy asked suspiciously next morning. “I’m sure Betty’s excited, and Maidie’s pink, and Mary’s hustling round, and Jenny-Wren came out of the woods piping like old times! Brownie, it’s three months since we heard your pipe; what made you dig it up to-day?”

“I remembered it suddenly, and I felt like a little tune, so I piped ‘Chelsea Reach’ to the pond and the ‘Tideswell’ to the blackbirds, and ‘We Won’t go Home till Morning’ to the twins,” Jen said airily.

“And you came across the lawn piping ‘Laudnum Bunches’ like a schoolgirl. It’s nice to hear it again. I’ve been missing it, though I hadn’t realised it,” Joy said wistfully. “You aren’t quite you without your pipe, Jenny-Wren.”

“And here have I been trying to restrain myself for months, because I thought you wouldn’t like it!” Jen said mournfully. “And all the thanks I get is that I haven’t been quite me all the time!”

Joy laughed. “No, you were right, and it was kind, and I appreciate your thoughtfulness. But pipe to us now and then, Brownie!”

“You’ll hear too much of it, if you don’t take care,” Jen warned her. “Any letters for me? Does nobody love me? Oh, well, all the less to answer! I’m going to see if the Abbey’s all right.”

“Don’t you expect it to be all right? Do you think it has run away in the night?” Joy asked scathingly. “Why this sudden anxiety about the Abbey?”

“Because it’s Joan’s Abbey, and Joan will be here to-day!” sang Jen’s heart. To Joy she said merely, “I’m supposed to be taking care of the Abbey. Of course I am!” indignantly. “I promised Joan I’d look after it for her. It’s my duty to inspect it periodically, to see if Dicky Jessop or any other idiot has been writing his name on the walls.”

“In which case you’ll fly at him and shake him, I suppose.”

“I shall slay him. There’ll be instant and final slaughter. See you later!” and Jen waved the pipe and walked away to the Abbey.

As she crossed the Abbot’s garden, where walls and beds were covered with yellow roses, she addressed the refectory windows jubilantly. “Everything’s jolly well all right! Joy wants my pipe; she’s going to be happy again! She’s making music and writing it; she’s going to begin seeing her friends; she has the twins; and Joan comes home to-day! Betty’s nearly well; Maidie’s grown out of her nightmares and is turning into a really useful, jolly person; Mary’s second book is almost ready; and Ken will be home in a month! *I’m* all right! Very much all right,” with a triumphant laugh. “We’ve lost Rosamund, but she’ll come back some day; and she’s learned to love her mother and now says she wouldn’t leave her for anything. All’s well; all’s *very* well! And Joan will be here to-day!” And she walked out on to the cloister garth piping a jubilant morris tune.

Maidlin came from the refectory to meet her. “How nice that sounds, Brownie! I didn’t like to ask you, but we have missed it so. Betty wants to hear it too.”

“Betty shall hear it. Were you dusting the Abbey for Joan, Primrose?”

“I was dusting the cases that hold the Abbey books and dishes. Auntie forgets them, and they look so awful, gray with dust. We couldn’t let Joan think we hadn’t cared about the Abbey.”

Jen agreed. “Topping of you, Maidie. Joy will think we’ve both gone crazy about the Abbey to-day! What did you dream of last night?”

“I was on a ship, sailing along, looking at the shore,” Maidlin said eagerly. “I was pleased about it. I liked it.” She always told the feeling the dream had left, and “I was pleased. I liked it. It was jolly,” were very usual comments now.

Jen laughed. “Perhaps you won’t travel towards the sea any more, now that you’ve sailed on it. Queer how you enjoy dream journeys, when you aren’t at all keen on real travelling! Come round the Abbey with me,

Primrose. And then we'll go back to Joy and wait for Joan. Isn't it gorgeous to think she's coming quite soon?"

"Will she bring Janet? I want to see her again."

"Oh, sure to! Janet will want to see the twins."

They were all sitting on the lawn below the beech tree, Betty on her couch, Jen piping lazily at intervals and talking about lunch, Mary finishing the proofs of a short story, and Joy and Maidlin talking across the twins in their laps, when a big car came up the drive.

Jen sat up, her eyes ablaze. Maidlin's colour rose and she sprang to her feet, clasping Elizabeth Joy. Betty watched them all eagerly.

"Bother!" Joy said resentfully. "Who's this? We haven't asked anybody; they've no right to come. It isn't Cicely's car. Go and send them away, Brownie. We aren't at home to casual visitors. Why—Jenny-Wren!" at sight of Jen's face. "Who do you think it is?"

"I *think* it's somebody rather nice!" Jen rose expectantly. "Oh, 'Traveller's Joy'! Joy, it's *Joan*!"

She caught Margaret Joan in her arms, as Joy, with a strangled cry, sprang up and thrust the child towards her. Then Joy was off, across the lawn, and into her cousin's arms.

"And very nice, too! Nice for mummy, isn't it, Margaret Joan? But you were rather in the way for a moment. It's a good thing Auntie Jen was here!" Jen said maternally, and stood rocking her twin.

"Come on, Maidie!" she said presently. "They've cried over one another long enough. We'll create a diversion and introduce the family!"

Joan's arms were still round Joy, who had broken down entirely in her great surprise and joy. But she saw the two coming, and even as she spoke to Joy she had time to note the new depth of tenderness in Jen's face, and the new maturity in Maidlin's expression—the babyish look gone, so that she seemed a fit elder sister for the child in her arms.

"'Traveller's Joy,' haven't you something to show me? Here are some little people I haven't seen. You aren't going to let Jenny-Wren and Maidie introduce your daughters to me, are you?"

Joy dashed the tears from her eyes. "Joan, where *did* you come from? I hadn't an idea. It's wonderful to have you; you don't know how I've been wanting you, old thing! Oh, is it the children? Yes, you'll want to see them. I'll tell you which is which." She tried in vain to assume an off hand tone. "Isn't it weird to have two?"

"And she's just bursting with pride!" Joan said, laughing. "You wouldn't think it, would you? Hello, Jenny-Wren, you seem to know how to hold a baby! And Maidie too! Introduce me to the Misses Marchwood, please!"

“Elizabeth Joy; she’s the elder.” Joy took the child from Maidlin. “Hold her, Aunty Joan! And this is your namesake and aunty’s, Margaret Joan.”

“Give me both at once!” and Joan held out her arms. “I never nursed twins before. To think they’re yours, ‘Traveller’s Joy’! Oh, *Joy*, aren’t they darlings?”

“They’re quite nice,” Joy admitted.

“They’re the image of Janice when she was two months. She’s in the car with nurse, Jenny-Wren. I brought nurse because I knew I should neglect Janny for the twins.”

Jen swooped down on the car, and returned with her goddaughter. “You and Joy can have the twins. This lady partly belongs to me. I’ll look after her! Come and talk to Betty, Janetta!”

Joan looked at Joy. “Where’s mother? Isn’t she well, Joy?”

“We’ll go in to her at once,” and Joy took her children and put them in their cradles. “Watch them for us, Maidie! They’ll yell because we’ve put them down. We’re spoiling them, of course. But we don’t really spoil them, Joan. They’re being well brought up; nurse trained them well from the very first. Come and see aunty. We keep her in bed during the morning. Half a day is about as long as she can stand,” and she put her arm round her cousin’s waist, as if afraid Joan would vanish as suddenly as she had come, and they went to the house together.

Jen looked after Joan with sympathy in her face. “She’ll find her mother changed. She’ll feel it. But how glad she’ll be that she has come home! Now, Betty, isn’t my goddaughter nice? But isn’t it funny to see a bigger edition of the twins? They’re the image of one another.”

“Mrs. Raymond is certainly the image of Joy,” Betty agreed. She had been looking at the cousins in eager interest. “I remember her quite well.”

“She didn’t notice you. But she will when she comes back. She had to see her mother first.”

“Oh, of course! There wasn’t time for strangers.”

Joan and Joy came back in half-an-hour, and Joan came up to Betty at once. “Forgive my not stopping to speak to you before! You’re the girl who was nearly killed when Maidie wouldn’t run over the hen? Haven’t we met before?”

“Yes, when you came to The Grange with Jen. But I didn’t think you would remember me. I’ve thanked that hen many a time,” Betty said laughing, “Nobody could have had a happier time than I’ve had during my illness. Do you know—can you imagine—just how kind Joy, and Jen, and everybody has been?”

“I’m sure they wanted to be kind, after what had happened to you. Maidie, can you spare me one twin? I can’t tell them apart yet. Joy, their hair

curls more than Janny's did. And the brown eyes are lovely! They've beautiful skins, too. Aren't you *proud*, Joy?"

"She tries to hide it, but she's fearfully conceited about them," said Jen.

Joy laughed, and laid one twin in Joan's arms. "That's Elizabeth."

"How *can* you tell? Or are you just swanking?"

"There's quite a difference," Joy asserted. "Joan, how big Janice has grown! She's getting on splendidly."

"She likes my hair. She tries to pull it out," and Jen shook her mop of curls before Janice, who squealed with delight and grabbed a handful. "Do I look as though I'd come through a hedge backwards?"

"You do, rather. Go and make yourself decent for lunch, Jenny-Wren," Joy said severely.

"Joan, you must keep Joy in order. Don't let her speak to me unkindly," Jen said plaintively. "She bullies me, and she gets all her own way. Speaking as one married woman to another, Joan——"

"Meaning you, Jenny-Wren?" Joan asked mildly. "I can't realise you *are* married. That ring's just a joke. The story of your quiet little wedding was all a fairy-tale."

"You! You aren't married enough to count. What's a week?" Joy jeered. "It's all a mistake. We'll do it over again when Kenneth comes home."

Jen rose with dignity. "I'm completely married! You couldn't marry me any more if you tried ever so. Some day I'll show you how married I am! In the meantime I'm going to brush my hair, or Joy will be offering to do it for me," and she dumped Janice into Joy's lap. "Here, aunty! Take her! She's got a hair-complex. She'll pull yours down. Not married! A fairy-tale! A joke! *I'll* show you, some day!" and she marched away to the house, piping a defiant dance.

Joan raised her eyebrows and looked at Joy incredulously. Joy laughed, but declined to discuss Jen's private affairs in public.

"Never mind, Janetta! Did your godmamma throw you at aunty? Rude girl, isn't she?—Joan, I couldn't have pulled through without Jenny-Wren. She's been the greatest possible help and comfort."

"I'm sure she has," Joan agreed. "Jen would pull me through anything, I believe."

Joan's first visit to her Abbey was paid during the afternoon, with Joy and Jen in attendance. They wandered among the ruins, renewing old memories; while Maidlin, steadily refusing to go with them, sat with Mary and Betty and had her French lesson, playing with Janetta while they talked.

During the early evening, Joan found her alone and carried her off to the Abbey in her turn. "Come and talk to me, Madalena! Jenny-Wren has

bagged my baby, and is putting her to bed; for practice, she says. Fortunately nurse is there to keep an eye on Janny.”

“Jen won’t drop her,” said Maidlin, smiling up at Joan. “She’s very clever with babies.”

“So are you. You handle them beautifully. But you’ve had plenty of chances, haven’t you?—Maidie,” Joan said earnestly, “you don’t know what a relief it is to me to find you such a help to Joy. It used to be that she was mothering you, but that’s all changed. You help her just as Jen and I try to do; and you’re here all the time. I do feel so glad about it.”

Maidlin looked at her, diffident and doubtful at once. “Did Jen ask you to say that to me?” she asked awkwardly.

Joan laughed. “I don’t blame you for the question! But you’ll take my word for it, Maidie?—Jen did not. But she told me quietly that you were trying to fit yourself to take her place when she is too busy with other things, and I can see for myself how well you’re doing it.”

“Jen keeps saying she’ll be too busy with ‘other things.’ I don’t know what things she means,” Maidlin said doubtfully.

“Oh, you can’t tell!” Joan said lightly. “She’ll have to look after her house, once Kenneth comes home. She won’t be able to live here half her time, as she’s doing at present. And in a little while she’ll want to do entertaining at the Manor; have fêtes and tennis-parties, and teas, and dinners! It will be expected of her, and she’ll be a delightful hostess. Joy won’t go in for much of that, for some time, at least. So she’ll be very glad of your company at home. And Jen may find other things still to do.”

Maidlin looked at her, a question on her lips. She checked it, colouring shyly, and said gravely, “I’d much rather be company for Joy at home. But I thought she wouldn’t want me when you came.”

“I can’t be much use. I’ve my own home to look after, and Janetta takes up a lot of time. I came home rather worried about Joy,” Joan explained frankly, “because I felt she’d be left very lonely when Jen went to the Manor to live. To tell you the truth, Maidlin, I counted you as one of the children and never dreamt of depending on you. But half a day has changed that. It seems to me you’ll be a very good companion for Joy. You’re so much older than I expected to find you. I apologise!”

Maidlin looked at her. “I want to help Joy more than anything.”

“You’re going to do it,” Joan said with conviction.

“But I have to go to school! And you’re frightfully busy when you’re Queen. You can’t be slack.”

“Oh, you mustn’t be slack,” Joan laughed down at her. “I know. I was Queen myself once. But Joy will work, too, Maidie; she’s been telling me about her music, and the songs she’s writing; and about the music school



she's planning. It's all splendid news; she's far better than I expected to find her. You've bucked her up tremendously among you. She'll have heaps to do. She'll work, and you'll work; and you'll compare notes at night. She'll need somebody to sympathise and listen and be interested, as Andrew would have done; and neither Jen nor I can do that, except occasionally. You'll be here all the time. You can do more for her now than we can."

Maidlin's eyes were shining. "I'll do everything I can," she said, her voice breaking with eagerness.

When she had gone to bed, and Betty, as a semi-invalid, had retired also, Joy and Jen and Joan sat on the terrace in the half-dark, talking quietly.

Joan turned to her cousin. "How Maidlin has developed! She's a changed girl. The petted baby has disappeared altogether."

"I was feeling there was a change in her. She's much jollier the last few weeks," Joy agreed. "I've wondered sometimes if it's because Rosamund has gone. Maidie was always overshadowed by Ros. Now she's had to stand alone. She's done it well too; she's been really sporting over events at school."

"That may have something to do with it," Jen observed. "She has to rely on herself now. But chiefly it's because she's set her heart on growing up so that she can be company for you, for fear you should be lonely. I didn't tell you at the time; it was after Rosamund went that she decided it was up to her to look after you. But since you've noticed the change for yourself, you may as well understand. She realised that she was no help to you while she remained a baby; she suddenly made up her mind to grow up, and became very eager for it—all for your sake, so that she could be a help instead of a trouble to you."

Joy's face had lit up in surprised interest. It softened as she understood, and she said, her voice full of amused delight, "The dear kid! So that's it, is it? She's improved enormously, Jen."

"She went through all that princess ordeal, bucked up by the thought that you were watching and she mustn't disappoint you, for if you were ashamed of her, or if she funked, you'd feel she was still a baby and you had to make allowances for her," Jen went on. "You may as well appreciate Maidie properly. She's prepared to put you before anything else in the world."

"And she's finding her own real self in doing it," Joan remarked. "You're going to be proud of Maidie, 'Traveller's Joy.'"

"*Going to be!* I'm proud now. I'll go and say good-night to her," and Joy rose.

"Don't let her guess we've been talking about her!" Jen called a quick, low warning.

"No. I'll be careful."

Joy opened Maidlin's door and found the light out. "Shall I come in, Maidie?"

"Joy!" There was rapture in Maidlin's cry. "Joy, don't you want to be with Joan?"

"Plenty of time for Joan! Besides, Joan has to go away soon. But you're here all the time." Joy sat on the bed, in the dim light from the open window; Maidlin always pulled up her blind before getting into bed.

Maidlin's hair lay like a black shadow on the pillow. Joy stroked it back from her face. "Maidie, I've been thinking ahead. Joan will have to go home. Ken's coming back, and Jen will go to the Manor. Betty's going to her own people. Ros has gone. You'll stay with me, Maidie? I must have somebody!"

"Joy! Oh, Joy, I'll never go away!" Maidlin caught her hand and clung to it.

"You mustn't, Maidie, not for a long time; never, unless some nice young man——"

"Joy!" Maidlin's voice was sharp with protest. "There couldn't be anybody I'd like as well as you, Joy!"

"I used to say something like that, not so very long ago," and Joy fell silent, as she did when the truth bore down on her too heavily.

Maidlin kissed the hand she clung to, in silent sympathy. Joy stroked her hair, and presently bent and kissed her. "I want to keep you, Maidie. When the others go, I shall need you badly."

"You'll always have me, Joy. I'll never go away." And Maidlin slept happily that night.

## CHAPTER XXII

### JEN'S VALENTINE

Maidlin's letters to Rosamund were as voluminous as those she had written to Joy during Joy's African tour. Her natural reserve, in writing as in outward expression, broke down before the impelling force of her love and her friend's need. Rosamund was lonely in Switzerland, wanting news of everybody. Maidlin wrote pages of detailed description, telling all about school and home.

From her letters Rosamund heard of Joan's visit; of the Yorkshire holiday on the moors with Jen and Mary; of the beginning of the new term, and of Maidlin's promotion to the Sixth. She heard of private French conversation with mademoiselle, since Betty had now left the Hall, and she marvelled at the change in Maidlin and the vanishing of her shyness. She heard of events at school, and of Kenneth's return to the Manor, which meant the final departure of Jen from the Hall. She heard how Jen had come primly to call and to leave cards, as she had threatened to do; and of Joy's indignation.

Sadly, Maidlin told how Mrs. Shirley had died in her sleep one night, and how Joy and Joan, in the midst of their sorrow, had rejoiced that Joan had come home in time, and that Mrs. Shirley had had the joy of seeing her and Janice once more. The next letter told that old Lady Marchwood was seriously ill, and very soon she too passed on, and left a blank at the Manor also.

"Joy and Jen are called 'the elder Lady Marchwood' and 'the younger Lady Marchwood' now," Maidie wrote. "It's a pity it happened just now, for it means Jen can't come to the Hamlet Club's Christmas party. But Brownie says she'd only have looked on if she had come, as she doesn't feel like dancing at present; I don't know why. Perhaps she'll want to dance again by the time she's out of mourning."

During the Christmas holidays Maidlin told of the gathering of "Hamlet Club" babies at the Hall, for the second birthdays of Janetta Raymond and Richie Everett, which fell on Christmas and Boxing Days. She told with much detail of the Christmas and New Year parties of the Hamlet Club, and of the mumming play performed before the club by a few of the members, and repeated before the whole school at the beginning of the spring term. Then, all the festivities over, Maidlin settled down to work, with a promise from Joy that she should leave school in July if she took a good place in the

exams. With that hope before her, Maidie threw herself whole-heartedly into her work, and her letters to Rosamund were not so long for some weeks.

On St. Valentine's Day the Manor rang up the Hall very early in the morning, and Kenneth's news sent Joy and Mary hurrying joyfully through the gardens to the Manor, while Maidlin went off to school full of happy importance, to spread good news of the Brown Queen through the Hamlet Club.

In the evening, as Maidlin was setting out to see Jenny-Wren and the small Valentine she had, as she said, presented to the Abbey, there came a telegram from Rosamund to Joy.

"Mother gone. Coming home. Rosamund."

"It's not a surprise," Joy said gravely. "I thought that was coming. Mary, wire to Ros to come as fast as she can." Then her face lit up. "Mary, the kid turns to us at once when she's in trouble. She wires to *me*. And this is 'home.' She isn't forgetting us. That's jolly, isn't it?"

"I'm sure this will always be 'home' to Rosamund, and to all of us," Mary said quietly.

"When Ros was chosen Queen she came rushing to tell me," Joy mused. "Now, when she's lonely, it's the same. I'm very glad and thankful," and as she went with Maidlin to see Jen and to tell her this latest news, there was quiet, deep rejoicing in her heart that Rosamund should care so much.

Rosamund arrived two days later, tired out with her twenty-four hours' journey; so weary, indeed, that for the last few miles she had been a prey to doubts concerning her welcome. The car could not meet her in town, as she did not give her hour of arrival in London. She wired from Charing Cross her time of reaching Wycombe, and the car was at the station, with Maidlin on the platform.

"Maidie! How topping it is to see you again!"

"Ros! Oh, Ros, it's lovely to have you back! It was nice of you to come so quickly!"

"Is it all right for me to come, Maid? I've been thinking it's rather cheek. Joy may not want me. But I had nowhere else to go. And her telegram said \_\_\_\_\_"

"Why, where else could you go, Ros?" Maidlin's face showed such bewilderment that Rosamund said no more.

"I wanted to come. No other place would have been the same. How's everybody, Maid? Tell me all the news!"

"I can't," Maidlin's eyes sparkled. "I promised Joy faithfully that I wouldn't. She wants to tell you herself. But I wanted to come to meet you. Oh, everybody's quite all right, Ros!"

Rosamund looked at her searchingly. “You are, anyway. And it’s evidently good news; you look quite pink, Primrose! Have you gone in for matric. and passed? Or have the twins cut their first teeth? Has Joy started the music school? Or has Mary written a novel?”

“The music school’s all right. It’s going to be fun,” Maidlin tucked Rosamund up in the car. “Betty’s working hard for her finals, and she’s going to be the director of the school. She’s in town, and she comes here for week-ends. Her mother and father have moved to London, and she lives with them and swots at music. She’s splendidly well, and she says she blesses me and that hen every day, because she’s found something to work for and it’s so gorgeous to be really keen, after the way she felt for a year, after her twin died. Her playing’s beautiful, and you should hear her sing Joy’s songs! Three of them are going to be published, Ros! Isn’t it thrilling?”

“I say, that’s top-hole!” Rosamund said joyfully. “Then Joy really has begun to work in earnest! Jen always said she would do something good in music some day.”

“The songs are *very* good. Everybody says so.”

“But I thought you weren’t to tell me, Maid?”

“Oh, *that!* That’s all right. I may tell you about Joy’s songs!” Maidlin said mysteriously.

“Is there something more? Something bigger than the songs?” Rosamund marvelled. “I say, you have been keeping secrets from me! You pigs!”

“Oh, but we didn’t know. *I* didn’t! Tell me about your journey, Ros!” Maidlin pleaded. “It is so difficult!”

Rosamund laughed. “We’ll be home in ten minutes. I suppose I can wait!”

As the car drew up before the steps of the Hall, she leapt out and ran up to Joy on the terrace.

“Joy, was I right to come? There wasn’t another place on earth I cared about. I was so lonely; there was just one thing I wanted, to come back to you all. But in the train last night I realised I hadn’t any right to take it for granted you’d have me; and I’ve been feeling awful ever since. There’s no reason——”

“Rose-of-the-World, you’re tired, or you wouldn’t be so silly,” Joy interrupted her firmly. “There *was* no other place for you to go. You were right. Why did you let yourself doubt us? Rosie, dear, you don’t know how happy it made me that you turned to us and called this house ‘home.’ Don’t think once more about it. Your own lavender room’s waiting for you, and we’re all more than glad to have you with us again.”

"Then that's all right," Rosamund tried to be matter-of-fact, but her voice shook. "I suppose I was nervy. It's gorgeous to be back! I hugged Maidie at the station. Where are the twins? They must be huge by now! Oh, there's Mary-Dorothy! It is heavenly to see you all again! But where's Jenny-Wren? I thought she'd come along to welcome me. I want to thank her for what she said when she lost her father. I remembered, and it helped me; for it was the same with mother. It was so *much* better for her. She's well now, and she could never have been anything but ill here. I'd have done anything I could to make her well; the only way to do it was to let her go on to something better, so I can't be too sorry about it. It was Jenny-Wren who made me see that was possible. I want to thank her. Where is she, Joy? Didn't she care enough to come to see me?"

She looked round in wonder at the radiant faces; Mary was smiling, Maidlin pink with strong, suppressed excitement and delight.

Joy's eyes were like stars, as she answered:

"You must come to see Jen. Oh, Rosamund, Jenny-Wren has her first son; a little Valentine for the Abbey, she says! Are you too tired to go? She wants to see you dreadfully."

"Tired!" Rosamund's hat and coat were flung aside and she held out her hands to Joy and Maidlin. "Come along!"

"Brownie with a baby!" she panted, as they hurried through the shrubbery and past the pond to the Manor. "Is she pleased about it? A boy? What fun! Our first boy! Is he a nice kid? When was it? A Valentine baby?"

"The day your wire came. We were all so excited. It was the final touch of good news to hear you were coming home, though we were sorry for the reason. He's a beautiful baby, big and strong and fine; Jen says he's going to be a morris-dancer, because he kicks so hard."

"Brownie loves him," said Maidlin. "She says she's stunned to find he's such a real person, Ros. He knows what he wants, and he has quite a will of his own already. Our nice Nanny, who was the twins' first nurse, is his nurse too. Isn't that jolly?"

"Elizabeth and Margaret are no longer the chief excitement," Joy said laughing. "Jen's boy has put my girls quite into the background. Just like Jenny-Wren!"

"She says she's going to have lots more, all boys," Maidlin observed. "She says having babies suits her."

"What's he to be called?" Rosamund demanded. "Kenneth Junior?"

"Come and ask his mother!" and Joy led the way up to Jen's room.

"Rosamund! How nice of you to come so quickly! Come and see my funny big boy!" cried Jen, and uncovered the yellow-haired baby in his cot at her side.

Rosamund kissed her. "I hear he's only the first of a whole morris side, Brownie! Oh, what an angel! He's huge!"

"I hope the rest will come along in time," Jen said, laughing. "We must find partners for Elizabeth and Margaret and Janice! They'll do 'The Old Mole' together nicely. This is first man!"

"What's his name, Jenny-Wren?"

Jen's eyes met Joy's. "Our little Andrew," she said; and Joy knelt and kissed her.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.  
[The end of *The Abbey Girls at Home* by Elsie J. Oxenham [Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley]]