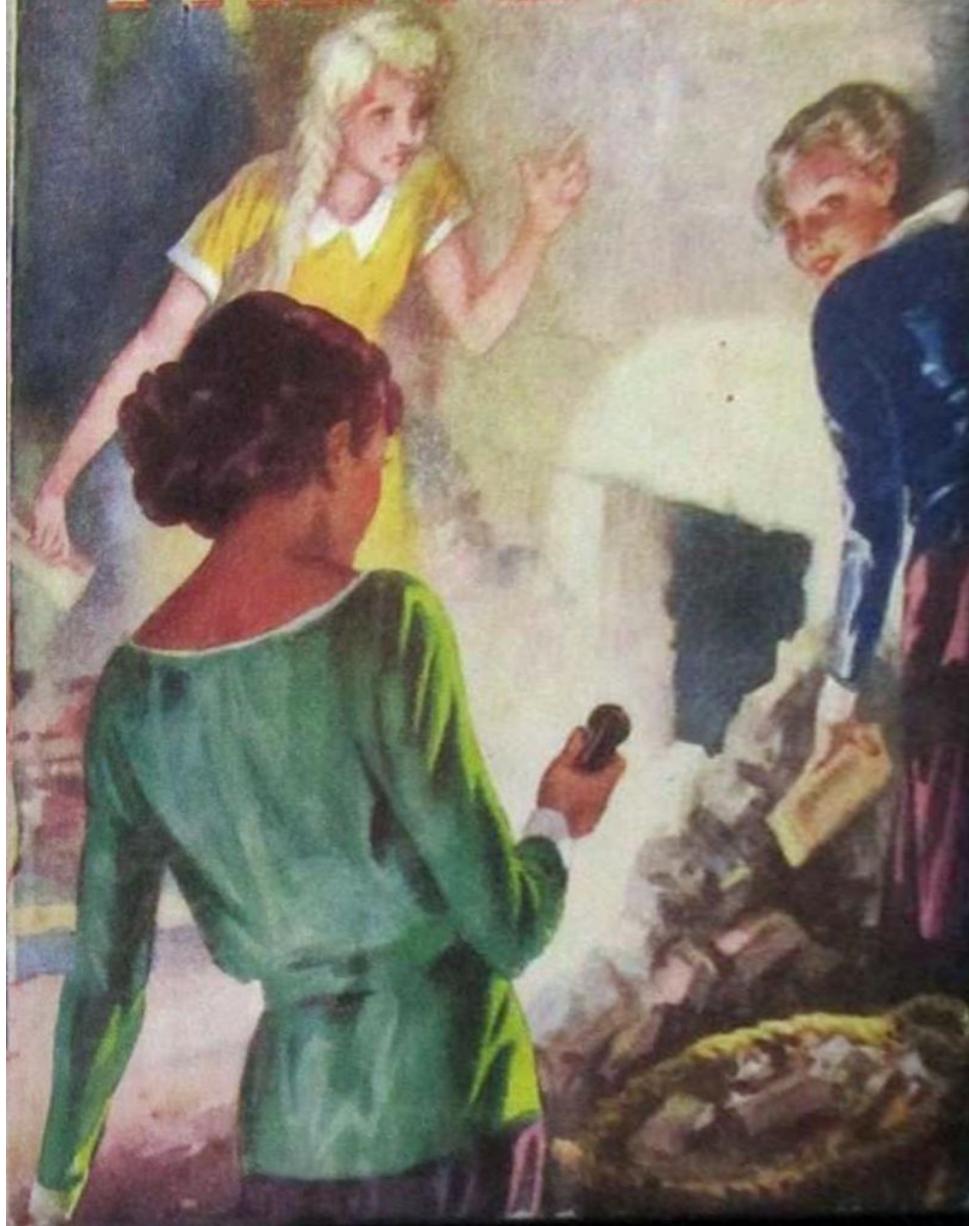


SECRETS OF THE ABBEY



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SECRETS OF THE ABBNEY

by
ELSIE J. OXENHAM

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TO
DORITA FAIRLIE BRUCE
with thanks
for all the pleasure
her DIMSIE, PRIM, and NANCY
have given to me and so many others.

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CHAPTER ONE

JOAN'S MAID-OF-HONOUR

"Joan! It's too marvellous for words! Do you really mean you'd have *me*?" Jen, just arrived at school for the summer term, pushed back her yellow plaits and gazed up at the May Queen with wondering eyes. "It's just terribly good of you, Joan!"

"I'm afraid it isn't," Joan said, laughing. "To be quite honest, Jenny-Wren, I'm thinking about myself as well as you. I really want you, so it isn't good of me at all."

"Oh, but that makes it perfect! I'll just love to be your maid! I thought you'd want somebody much older, now that Muriel's the new Queen; she was in your form and she did everything with you. I'm such a kid; I'll be no use to you."

"Fourteen isn't such a kid as all that," Joan said. "I shall expect a lot from you. I shall make use of you in all sorts of ways."

"Oh, I do hope you will! I wish I'd known last term! I'd have been thinking about it all the holidays!"

Joan laughed. "We were sure Muriel would be chosen Queen, but we couldn't say so until the club had really done it, so I couldn't choose another maid. But I'd quite made up my mind to have you, Jenny-Wren."

"I'm sure I don't know why," Jen said humbly. "I should have thought there were heaps of others. What about Beetle? She's keen on you, Joan."

"Beetle? Do you mean the dumpy person who dances so beautifully?"

"Beetle's a much jollier name than Beatrice, isn't it?"

"I shouldn't have thought so," Joan said, laughing.

"She says she'd give an inch off her height to be in the May Day procession, and that means a lot from old Beetle, for she hasn't many inches to spare."

"That's true," Joan agreed. "Perhaps next year's queen will choose Beetle. Or perhaps she'll be the queen herself; you never know! But if that ever happens you'll have to give up calling her by that horrible name. We couldn't have Queen Beetle!"

"It sounds rather fascinating!" Jen said. "You're sure you wouldn't like to have Maid Beetle?"

"No, thanks! I want Maid Jen. My mind's quite made up."

"I can't imagine why," Jen said again. "But, of course, we have been rather-sort-of-friends, haven't we? I didn't think I'd be useful enough to be your maid. You're seventeen; I'm such an infant!"

"Don't worry about that! You're the maid-of-honour I want. But you won't be able to dance at festivals; do you mind that? If you're in the procession you can't be dancing too."

"There's plenty of dancing at ordinary club evenings," Jen said. "And perhaps sometimes the Queens will send their maids to dance, as you did last summer—that day when Jandy Mac maided you, just for once."

"Maided me! What an odd expression! And 'rather-sort-of-friends' is another, Mrs. Wren. Talking of Jandy Mac—will you come to tea with us on Saturday? We'll fetch you and bring you back."

"I'll love it!" Jen's eyes sparkled. "There's a junior team match, but that doesn't matter to me. I'd much rather go to tea at the Abbey."

“Mother wants to see how you look after four weeks on your moors. But you ought to go to the match to cheer Jacky-boy. She’s your chum.”

A shadow fell on Jen’s bright face. “I’d rather not go. Jack understands.”

Joan gave her a keen look. “What’s up? You haven’t had a row with Jack?”

“I couldn’t. We’re pals; we’re married,” Jen said simply. “No, it’s the others. They’ve begun teasing me again about not being in the team. But they can’t say anything now that I’m your maid!” she added, her face radiant again. “That will stop their ragging better than anything. I’m very much obliged to you, Joan-Queen!”

“Glad to have been of service to you! But they oughtn’t to bother you; they know you’re a dancer and a Hamlet Club member, and that you can’t do cricket as well.”

“You’d have thought they’d know, by this time,” Jen agreed. “But the junior eleven isn’t strong this term, and they’ve got it into their heads that I’d be useful. Nora lectured me last night; she’s still games-captain, and she gave me a regular pi-jaw. You see, Jack’s been chosen junior captain, and I’m her chum, and they seem to think I ought to back her up and go into the team for her sake.”

“Does Jack talk like that?”

“Rather not! She knows how keen I am on the dancing. The rest will drop it when they hear you’ve chosen me, Joan.”

“I hope they will. There must be other people who could be worked up to be good enough for the team,” Joan remarked. “They’ve plenty to choose from. We should miss you as a dancer.”

“I should miss the dancing! I’m frightfully grateful to you for saving me!”

“I hope the rest will see that it’s quite impossible to expect a maid-of-honour to give up her duties for the sake of cricket!”

“Oh, I’m sure they will! Jack will understand; she doesn’t plague me—it’s the others. Why did you say—‘Talking of Jandy Mac, will you come to tea?’ What has she to do with me?”

“There’s a letter from her; rather a thrilling letter. No, I won’t tell you what it’s about. You shall hear on Saturday.”

“I shan’t be able to do *any* work!” Jen said. “Is Jandy all right, Joan? She wrote to me at Christmas. Is she still engaged to her cousin?”

“She’s all right and she’s still engaged. Have you a white frock that will do for the coronation? Or do you want a special one? We could put some violet flowers and patterns on the one you have already, if you’ll lend it to us; then you’d match my train.”

Jen looked thoughtful. “I never imagined I’d be a maid-of-honour, so I haven’t thought about it. I know Mother will be pleased, and she’d let me have a special frock. But if it would be all right, I’d rather like to have your colours on my ordinary white dress; then when I wear it for school shows, everybody will know I’m a bridesmaid. And I shall think of you whenever I put it on. Would it matter if my white school frock had violet flowers on it?”

“We’ll ask Miss Macey.” Joan smiled down at her new maid. “I dare say she’ll say it doesn’t matter. You wouldn’t wear a violet girdle for a school show, of course.”

“Oh no! Only when I’m carrying your train. But I could have violets on my frock. And perhaps some day a visitor will say—‘Why has that infant some violet spots on her, when all the rest are in pure white?’ And somebody will tell her—‘Oh, she’s the maid-of-honour to the Violet May Queen!’ And perhaps I’ll hear; just think! I’d be as proud as proud!”

Joan laughed out. “I’ll ask Miss Macey, and if she agrees, I’ll take the frock home and embroider violets all round it.”

"It'll be one of my greatest treasures, for ever and always," Jen assured her earnestly.

"At the rate you're growing, it won't fit you by next summer," Joan said. "Your legs get longer, and your tunic gets shorter, every term. You're going to be a lamp-post before you've finished, Mrs. Wren."

"A maypole! That's much prettier," Jen pleaded. "I can't help it, Joan. Somehow I keep on growing. I'm taller than Jack, although she's my husband. She's terribly annoyed about it."

"You'll be taller than your queen, if you don't stop."

"Oh, I hope not! That would be horrid! I'd spoil the procession if I were as huge as that."

"Don't worry! You're not so very big yet. Jack is just a shrimp. You needn't be upset because you've beaten her."

Joan went off to interview the headmistress on the subject of the white frock, and carried it home in her bicycle-basket when she rode away after school, in company with Joy, her cousin.

"Did Mrs. Wren give her usual shriek, when you broke the news?" Joy asked, as they pushed their cycles up the long hill out of the town.

"She didn't shriek at all. I was rather touched by the way she took it," Joan said. "She was completely overwhelmed; it had never entered her head that she might be chosen. She stared at me as if she couldn't believe it, and then tried to argue that she wasn't good enough."

"I expect you convinced her without much difficulty! Jenny-Wren would kiss your shoes; she'll be fearfully bucked to be your maid. You taught her to dance, and you were her first queen. She can't forget all that."

"The others have been at her again to join the junior team. It's too bad, when she's so keen on dancing."

"They know she'd be a help to the team. Those brothers at home have trained her in cricket, and, unfortunately for her, Nora and the rest are quite aware of it. I heard Nora speaking about it. They want Jen to play for the sake of the school."

"I couldn't say it to Jen," Joan said, as they mounted and rode on, "but she's doing her bit for the school as a dancer. After a year of dancing, she's one of the very best we have. She's a joy to watch, and we'd miss her from our shows and festivals if we had to do without her. Her dancing has something special about it; I don't know how to put it—something radiant and very happy. The older queens agree with me; the last time we all danced together, Cicely said: 'That Jen child is the best of the lot.' It would really let down the club if we lost Jenny-Wren now."

"We shan't lose her. Nothing on earth would tempt Mrs. Wren away from the club, now that you've chosen her as your maid. Even Nora sees that. When she heard Jen telling the news to Jack, she said: 'That does it! We'll never get her now. Oh, well, we must buck the rest up, that's all!' And, by the way, Jen wasn't exactly quiet and overwhelmed then, whatever she may have been when the idea was still new! She came flying across the playground, all legs and plaits, and hurled herself on Jacky-boy and just yelled—'Jack! Jack! I'm Joan's bridesmaid, instead of Muriel; she's the new queen! Isn't it simply marvellous?' And Jack dutifully agreed that it was."

"Muriel is going to have Nesta for her maid. I expect we shall have Nesta and Jenny-Wren as queens some day."

"Nesta's turn first," Joy said. "She's been in the club longer than Mrs. Wren."

"They're only fourteen; there's time enough. Maids-of-honour often grow into queens!"

"There's really no reason why they should," Joy argued. "The girls choose the queen, but the queen chooses her own maid. She might not be wanted as queen by the club."

“No, your Carry wasn’t chosen,” Joan agreed.

“And she won’t be chosen,” Joy said grimly. “But it’s extremely likely that Nesta will, and still more likely that young Jen will have her turn later on.”

“I think so too. The club likes Jenny-Wren. But she’s too much of a kiddy at present. She’s coming to tea on Saturday, to hear about Jandy Mac’s mysterious letter.”

“Did you tell her what was in it?”

“Not a word! I’m saving that for Saturday. Jen will be thrilled,” Joan said laughing. “She’s wildly curious already.”

CHAPTER TWO

JANDY MAC'S LETTER

"And there's a thrilling letter from Jandy Mac! I'm to hear all about it on Saturday," Jen finished telling her news to the slim girl with cropped black hair who was her chum, Jacqueline Wilmot.

"I wanted you to come to tea with me," Jack protested, for she was a day-girl, living in the town. "I haven't seen you for a month, wife!"

Jen, one of the small group of boarders, came from a big lonely house on the Yorkshire moors, where she was the only girl. She had been petted and bullied by her elder brothers, and had revelled in it, but she had reached the stage when she craved for girl friends, and her year at the Wycombe school had been very happy.

"I'll come to you on Sunday, if you'll ask me, Jacky-boy, and if the Head doesn't say I'm going out too often," she said graciously. "Joan asked me first, and she says Auntie Shirley wants to see me."

"Why are those Shirley girls so much alike?" asked a newcomer to the school. "Are they twins?"

"No—cousins," said Jack. "But their fathers were twins and were just alike; that's why the girls are like that. They've both been May Queens—Joy last year, and Joan's just going to abdicate. The new queen is Muriel Bayne. Jen's almost one of the family at the Abbey; that's where the Shirley girls live. You heard her call Joan's mother Auntie Shirley, but she isn't any relation at all."

"I've stayed with them, and Mrs. Shirley's such a dear," Jen argued. "I asked her if she'd mind being an extra aunt to me, and she said she'd be delighted. My aunt who used to live in Wycombe has moved away, so Mrs. Shirley offered to be a relation in her place."

"You're jolly lucky to have the Shirleys so keen on you," Jack remarked.

"I know. I can't think why. I love going to stay at the Hall."

"Jack said it was an Abbey," said the new girl.

"It's both," Jen explained. "Joy inherited a lovely old house called the Hall, and that's where they live. But in the grounds there are some marvellous ruins of an old Abbey; and it belongs to Joan. Joy's grandfather left it to her because she loved it so much. I stayed there this time last year, when one of the boarders had diphtheria and the rest were in quarantine; I hadn't been near her, and Joan and Joy were absolute sports and took me home with them, so that I shouldn't have to go into the infection. That somehow made us friends, and they've been terribly nice to me ever since."

"And who's the other girl; the one with the queer name?"

Jen stared. "I don't know. Whom d'you mean?"

"Somebody there's a letter from. Jack seemed to understand."

"Oh, Jandy Mac! Her real name's Janice Macdonald. She lives in Australia, but she was here for a term last summer; she was adopted when she was a baby by Joy Shirley's uncle, who had gone out to Australia to live. He died and left his money to Jandy. So she's almost a cousin of the Shirleys, and last summer Joy adopted her as a cousin too, and they're all awfully fond of one another. She writes to Joan and Joy, and I had a letter at Christmas too."

All the girls know Jandy Mac; if the thrilling thing she's been writing about isn't private, they'll want to hear about it."

It was Jen's first question, when she jumped into the little car on Saturday afternoon. "Now, Joan! What about Jandy Mac? What's in her letter?"

Joan and Joy tucked her in between them, and Billy, the young chauffeur, took the car cautiously into the traffic outside the big gates.

"This is the way we took Jandy home last summer. How thrilled she was!" Joy remarked.

"Wait till we're safely home, Jenny-Wren," said Joan. "If you get excited and jump about we'll all be upset in the middle of High Street."

Jen sighed. "I've waited since Thursday! Is it something very thrilling, Joan?"

"Not too bad," Joy teased.

Joan took pity on her maid-of-honour. "Jandy's coming to see us, Jenny-Wren. She's having a trip home this summer, and she's coming here."

"Oh, marvellous!" Jen shouted. "Oh, gorgeous fun, Joan! Will she stay at the Abbey? Oh, couldn't we have her at school? I'm sure Miss Macey would ask her!"

"You won't get the chance, my dear kid. Jandy Mac's coming to us," Joy said. "She's invited herself. She wants to see my trees in fancy dress again."

"Fancy dress? Oh, the red may and the lilac and the laburnum—yes, of course! They do look like a fancy-dress ball. Well, she'll come to see us at school, won't she?"

"I'm sure she will," Joan agreed. "But we thought perhaps you could come to see her. We'd take you down to school every day and see you did your prep."

"Stay with you, do you mean?" Jen's whoop startled the passers-by on the pavement.

"I said you'd better not tell too much till you had the Wren safely out in the country," Joy grumbled. "That small dog looked as if a bomb had gone off at his heels."

Joan explained. "We thought of asking you for the long week-end at Whitsun, Jenny-Wren, and then begging the Head to let you stay on for a little while, as that's the time Jandy will be here. Miss Macey hasn't forgotten last summer; she knows that Jan was specially chummy with you. I believe she'll let you stay."

"Oh, glory! Jam for me!" Jen chuckled happily. "Oh, what a terribly lovely term!"

"Jen Robins! Is that the result of the holidays?"

"Oh, I'm sorry! No, it isn't," Jen protested. "The boys hoot if I say 'terribly lovely.' It must be just me myself, I'm afraid."

"I don't wonder they laugh," Joan remarked. "It sounds terribly silly. I should forget it, if I were you."

"I'll try. But I had to say something out of the way, Joan," Jen pleaded. "It's such a very—very unusual occasion! Jandy isn't married yet, is she?"

"She's going to be married at Christmas; that's summer in Australia, you know. So she's coming to see us, and her relations in Scotland, before she goes to the South Seas with Alec."

"Funny to think of Jandy Mac as Mrs. Fraser! She's only a kid," Joy exclaimed.

"She'll be nineteen and a half by the time she's married. And she's very fond of her cousin and very anxious to go and live in the South Seas," Joan said.

"Is she going there?" Jen asked eagerly. "I shall ask her to send stamps to Jack. We've had heaps from Sydney; I'm glad she isn't going to live in Australia."

"I expect it's for the sake of Jack's stamps that she's decided to live in Samoa," Joy mocked. "Don't tell Mrs. Wren any more till she's safely at home, Joan."

"Oh, is there something more? What more is there to tell?" Jen gave another shout.

“You’ve heard quite enough to go on with. I want to read you the rest in Jandy’s own words,” Joan told her.

Jen’s eyes shone. “How wildly exciting! All right, I won’t ask. You’ll read me Jandy Mac’s letter. But read it to me soon, Joan-Queen! I don’t know how to wait.”

“You’ll have to stop that ‘Joan-Queen’ after next Wednesday,” Joy said. “It will be ‘Muriel-Queen’ then. You can say ‘Joan-Forget-me-Nots,’ if you like.”

“It’s a bit clumsy,” the victim suggested.

“Joan will still be my queen. She’ll be that for ever, if I’m her maid,” Jen said stoutly. “Does my frock look pretty, Joan?”

“I think you’ll like it. Miss Macey said I mustn’t put too much colour on it, as you mustn’t be conspicuous among the rest of us, when we all wear white for school functions, so I’ve just put a few violets round the yoke, and I’ve made a little white collar with violets all over it, for you to put on the frock when you’re my maid. Then I had an idea that I believe you’ll like, Jenny-Wren. I’ve put white violets round the hem. They don’t show—they aren’t for other people to see; they’re a secret between you and me.”

Jen’s face blazed with appreciation and delight. “Joan! What a perfectly topping idea! You *are* kind!”

“A secret that the kid will immediately give away,” Joy said. “She won’t be able to resist it. She’ll point out her white violets to Jack, and Nesta, and Peggy, and everybody.”

“Oh, no, I shan’t,” Jen spoke with conviction. “The white violets will be a secret between Joan and me.”

“Better not get too sentimental about them, Mrs. Wren, for if you go on at your present rate you’ll grow out of the frock before next summer,” Joan said, laughing.

“I shall have it made longer. Are you going to make a speech when you abdicate on Wednesday?”

“I’m going to repeat Joy’s of last year. I couldn’t improve on it.”

“Oh, slacker! Make up one for yourself! Mine was only two sentences, anyway.”

“Yes, I thought you were rather lazy,” Joan confessed. “Perhaps I’ll say a little more than you did.”

CHAPTER THREE

A MESSAGE FROM UNCLE TONY

“Now read me Jandy Mac’s letter!” Jen demanded, when she had greeted Mrs. Shirley and reported on her holidays, and had admired her violets, blue and white.

“Come into the Abbey. You must hear it there.”

“It isn’t about the Abbey, is it?” Jen shot a wondering look at Joan’s face.

“It may be. We don’t know. Jandy’s very mysterious about it.”

“You’re mysterious too!” Jen cried. “What could Jandy have to say about the Abbey, when she’s been in Sydney for almost a year? Come quickly, Joan! I’m dying to hear what she says!”

Joan led the way across the lawn and through the shrubbery, her red-bronze hair gleaming in the afternoon sun.

The cloister garth lay green and smooth, half in sunshine and half in the shadow of the high refectory on the south. The girls entered the Abbey by the dark tresaut passage and went across the grass to the ruins of the cloisters.

“Here, Jen. Jandy liked this spot,” Joan paused in one wide opening where the pillars of the window were broken away.

“I’ll bring cushions!” Jen dived through a small doorway and brought an armful of coloured cushions, which she arranged on the low wall and on the steps. “Now, Joan! I can’t wait another second!”

A big black mother cat came sedately from the doorway and leapt into Joan’s lap, purring her welcome and tramping gently for a moment before she settled down. A large shaggy kitten, with a fluffy gray coat, dashed away across the garth, followed by a thinner, taller black cat, young and sleek and handsome, and a wild game of hide and seek began.

“The whole family is accounted for!” said Joy. “I back Gray Timmy. He’s quite as quick as the Curate. Read on, Joan! Jenny-Wren’s going to explode.”

“The first part is all about coming here; dates, and the name of the boat, and where she’ll land,” Joan said. “Joy and I are wondering if we could run down to Southampton in the car and bring her back, and save her the journey through London. But the car’s very small and she’ll have luggage.”

“Moral, get a bigger car,” Joy pointed out. “I’m always saying we need one.”

“But after that, Joan? What’s the mysterious part?” Jen pleaded.

“This, Jenny-Wren,” and Joan began to read aloud:

“I’ve a real reason for wanting to come, besides the thought of seeing you all again. I want to show you something—you and Joy. When I came home last autumn I thought a lot about Uncle Tony; our discoveries up in the chalk-pit had brought him back to me so clearly. And I’d seen his home at the Hall, and I’d met you people, his own family—at least, Joy really belonged to him; not just adopted, like me. I couldn’t get him out of my head; it was as if he was trying to come back and tell me something—really very odd! He kept coming into my mind all the time. One day I took out the things he left behind, when he went on that last voyage to the Islands, and went through them carefully. They were given to me when we knew he must be dead, but I was only a schoolgirl and I didn’t think very much about them. There wasn’t much; my aunts gave away all the things like clothes, of course, and he’d never

settled down and had a house or furniture, or anything like that. But there was a box of letters, and any other papers that were found among his clothes were put with them and they were locked up in the Bank.

“I made the lawyers get them out for me, and I went through them. Mostly they were business things, but there were some letters from my mother, written when she expected to be married to Uncle Tony and before she was taken ill. I was glad to see those, and she’d put in quite a lot about me, which was odd to read now! About my first tooth and my trying to walk; all that sort of thing. Fancy Uncle Tony caring to hear about a baby of a year old, when she wasn’t his own kiddie! I was looking through these letters and his letters to Mother, which had evidently been given to him when she died, when I came on an old envelope, creased and soiled, as if it had been carried about in his pocket. On the outside Uncle Tony had written: ‘Given to me by John Miles, of King’s Bottom Farm, who had it from his grandfather, whose father had given it to him when he was dying.’ And the date on the envelope, Joan and Joy, was just one month later than the date on the book we found, which Uncle Tony wrote the day before he left home.”

Joan paused and looked down at Jen, who, on the step below, was gazing up at her with eager eyes, which had grown suddenly startled.

“He must have written it on the ship, on his way to Australia!” Jen exclaimed.

“That’s what Jandy thinks,” Joan agreed.

“The question is—who was John Miles?” Joy said. “We’ve guessed, and Jandy Mac has guessed. I think she’s right.”

“Then you all guessed the same! Who was he? Why can’t I guess? What made you guess? Is there something more I haven’t heard?” Jen’s questions tumbled out in breathless haste. “I don’t see anything to tell you who John Miles was!”

“I’ll read you the rest,” Joan took up the letter again.

“I opened the envelope, and inside there were two sheets of paper. On the back of one Uncle Tony had written: ‘I can’t make anything of this, but old John said his grandfather gave it to him, saying his father had told him it was a bit of the Abbey. It doesn’t look the least like the Abbey to me, but if ever I go home I shall take this map-thing into the Abbey and have another look. I thought I knew the Abbey inside out, but this isn’t any bit of it that I’ve ever seen. I tried to make it fit one day, when old John had just given me the papers, but I didn’t get anywhere; perhaps I or my descendants may find out what it means. It looks to me like a lot of scribbling.’ And that’s all Uncle Tony had to say about it. So I looked at the other side of the sheet and it seemed to be a sort of plan; and then suddenly I saw what it was. I’m sure I’m right, but—of course you’ll loathe me, Abbey Girls—but I’m not going to tell you what I think it is. I’d like to, but I can’t possibly, because we must see if it strikes you in the same way. You do see that, don’t you? If I tell you what I think, you’ll just say—‘Why, yes, of course! So it is!’ You must look at it without knowing my ideas, and then, if you think the same, we shall really know.”

Jen groaned aloud. “Oh, Joan! Oh, I can’t bear it! When will Jandy arrive? Not till Whitsun? I shall dream about that scrap of paper every night!”

“I know. It’s dreadful,” Joan laughed ruefully. “But Jandy’s right. We felt awful at first, but we saw the sense of it.”

“I wanted to cable—‘Tell us at once, you brute!’ But Joan restrained me,” Joy said.

“It’s only four weeks, Jenny-Wren.”

“Four weeks!” Jen wailed. “How can we wait? What do you suppose it is, Joan?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea. There’s one other little point,” Joan went on. “Jandy looked at the second paper in the envelope, and it had more scribbles on it, and at the top was written the one word—‘gate.’ Jandy says—‘It doesn’t look like any sort of gate. I’ve ideas about this too, but they’re so vague that I’d rather keep them to myself. But I’m bringing both the bits of paper home, to hear what you think of them. You can be puzzling over “gate” till you see me.’ And that’s the whole of the letter, Mrs. Wren. Now are you in a hurry to see Jandy Mac?”

“Hurry! I shan’t be able to eat for four weeks!”

“There’s the tea bell,” Joy grinned. “What about it, Jenny-Wren?”

“Oh, well! I could manage *tea*,” Jen admitted. “We’d better not keep Auntie Shirley waiting.” She sprang up and stood gazing about the garth.

“What are you seeing, Jenny-Wren?” Joan asked. “My white-robed monks? I often feel I’m seeing them.”

“No, it was Lady Jehane,” Jen’s voice was hushed. “I don’t mean that I saw her ghost, but when I look at the garth I think of her, just as you think of the monks. She’s very beautiful, and very young, and she has long golden hair and lovely Tudor robes—blue, I think—open in front to show a rich under-dress, and she wears a little cap or hood, coming down round her face, as she has in the picture on her book. She’s coming to speak to Ambrose, and he’s watching her and loving her; he knows he can never marry her, but he loves her just the same. When she goes away, he retires to his cell and writes some more in her book—the book that we found among the Abbey parchments.”

“Ambrose’s thoughts weren’t where they ought to have been,” Joan said laughing. “And I’m not at all sure that Jehane would have been allowed in the Abbey.”

“Oh, she must have been here! The whole place reminds me of her!” Jen protested.

“If she met Ambrose very privately, to ask him to hide her jewels from her stepmother, it can’t have been in the Abbey,” Joy said. “There must have been far too many monks about. I expect he went through the tresaunt to her garden, which is what we’re going to do, dear people, this very minute! I want my tea.”

“Good-bye, dear old Ambrose! We’ll leave the Abbey to you!” Jen said. “I wonder what became of you when the Abbey was broken down? If only we knew what happened to you and Jehane!”

“I’m afraid we’ll never find the end of that story, Jenny-Wren,” Joan said.

CHAPTER FOUR

JANDY'S MAGIC TWIST

Joy laughed and began to gather up the cushions. "Now you know why Joan wanted you to hear the letter in the Abbey," she said.

"Yes, of course. It's Abbey business. Oh, I wonder what Jandy Mac thinks the map-thing is!"

"What about John Miles, Jen? Who do you suppose he was?" Joan asked, as they crossed the garth. "We can only guess, of course."

Jen looked puzzled; then she gave a shout. "The old man who told Uncle Tony about the Monks' Path! Is that what you and Joy think, Joan?"

"King's Bottom Farm is in a hollow running out from the hills, a little way beyond that chalk-pit. There's a legend that Charles II. hid in a chimney there, when he was escaping; he must have passed our Abbey, you know," Joy said.

"I wonder he didn't take refuge in the Abbey! He'd have been safe there," Jen cried.

"I'm afraid he wouldn't. The men who were after Charles wouldn't have respected the Abbey," Joan said. "And it wasn't a holy place any longer, in his day. It was in olden times that the Abbey was a sanctuary. It wasn't even an Abbey in Charles's day."

"Perhaps His Majesty did hide in it," Joy suggested. "But he wouldn't stay; he was in a hurry to get to France. He's supposed to have hidden in several places about here, and King's Bottom Farm is one of them. I expect John Miles was the man who told Uncle Tony about the path. Pity he didn't tell a little more while he was about it!"

"I don't suppose he knew any more," Joan argued, as she locked the garden gate. "It was his ancestor who drew these scribbles that have thrilled Jandy so much—his grandfather's father! It goes back a long way."

"How many greats would that be?" Jen pondered. "Those bits of paper must be more than a hundred years old, I should think."

"Oh, rather! They go back more than a hundred years," Joan assented. "But the Miles family were living at King's Bottom two hundred years ago, and even in Charles II.'s reign, you know."

"Couldn't you ask at the farm? Isn't the family living there still?" Jen cried, ablaze with a sudden idea.

Joy laughed. "Too late, my child! We thought of that. The family moved away ten years ago. A son went to America and did well, and the rest went and joined him. The present people don't know anything about the Miles clan, but they're very keen to believe that Charles slept in their chimney. They think they could make money out of Charles, by charging twopence to see the hiding-place. Unfortunately they can't prove it."

"Horrid creatures!" Jen said. "They won't know or care anything about the early history of the Abbey!"

She looked up at Joan wistfully. "I suppose I couldn't hope for something?"

"What's the matter?" Joan asked laughing. "You sound very sad! What is it that's past hoping for?"

"You couldn't arrange things so that I'd be here when Jandy Mac arrives? She'll show you those bits of paper, and if I'm not here——"

“You’d like to add your guess, and see if it’s the same as Jandy’s,” Joy said. “Seems only fair you should have your share. You’ve been in the whole business all along.”

Jen’s face lit up, and her eyes, which had been fixed hungrily on Joan, flashed a look of gratitude at Joy. “Joy, how lovely of you! I knew Joan would understand, but I never thought you would.”

“Horribly rude of you!” Joy said lightly, but she had reddened, half from pleasure and half from a guilty sense that Jen had not had much reason to look for sympathy from her.

“Oh! I didn’t mean that!” Jen cried, in quick dismay.

Joan interposed. “We’ll try to arrange that with Miss Macey. We must have you here when the great moment comes, Jenny-Wren. But for you we might never have found—oh, heaps of things!”

“The Abbey plate and treasures—and the cave—and my Uncle Tony’s note-book—and the story of Jehane and Ambrose,” Joy said. “All those discoveries came through Mrs. Wren. If there’s another going to happen we couldn’t leave her out.”

“I’ll make Jandy keep her documents till we can get hold of you, Jen,” Joan promised. “I mean it; we won’t look at them till you’re here with us.”

“Oh, cheers! Oh, good! That’s marvellous, Joan!” Jen gave a little skip of delight. “I didn’t like to ask you to wait even a few minutes for me.”

“I guess Jandy Mac would insist on waiting for you,” Joy said.

“I hope Jack and Nora haven’t been teasing you any more about cricket, Jen?” Joan asked, as they went in to tea.

Jen’s face clouded. “Not Jacky-boy; she knows better. Nora looks at me as if I was a frightful slacker, whenever she speaks about the junior eleven.”

“But why?” Joan frowned. “It isn’t fair. The junior team’s very good; I heard Nora say so. She doesn’t need you.”

“She thinks it would be better still with another bowler. I heard her say *that*,” Joy remarked. “Apparently Mrs. Wren has been tactless enough to give away the fact that she’s something unusual in the bowling line; or she could be, if she liked. Nora feels sore because she can’t use her.”

Jen reddened. “It was mad, but I didn’t think. I was watching Jack at the nets, the day before yesterday; we hadn’t begun work, and there was extra cricket practice for people who weren’t being interviewed about classes for this term. I took the ball, as Jack couldn’t get anybody to bowl to her, and—well, you know that twist Jandy Mac taught me last summer, when we stayed with you in the hols?”

“I know. She said you got it jolly well. So you haven’t forgotten it since last August?”

“The boys were at home these holidays and I tried it on them,” Jen confessed ruefully. “They were frightfully impressed, and they made me work at it till I could be fairly certain it would come off every time. Jacky-boy couldn’t do anything with my balls—said they were almost unplayable till you got used to them; and, of course, in a match against outsiders the other team wouldn’t have time to get used to them. Jack was groaning because she couldn’t have me for this term’s matches, and—and Nora came along and heard her.”

“And she joined in the lamentations, I suppose,” Joy added.

Joan looked troubled. “I do hope——! Jack has good bowlers among the juniors, hasn’t she?”

“Only Doreen and Mary, and Mary’s wrist crocks up now and then. And to-day I heard a frightful rumour about Doreen.” Jen’s face was tragic as she looked up.

“What has Doreen been doing?”

“It’s what she may be going to do! There’s a chance that her people may move, all in a hurry, and go right away, to Manchester. Her father’s been moved to a job there, and if they can sell their house in Wycombe the family will go and live with him; and somebody has been looking at the house and seems likely to buy it. If that happens and Doreen goes away, Jack’s going to be in an awful hole, with only Mary’s crocky wrist to rely on for her bowling.”

“Wouldn’t they leave Doreen as a boarder for this summer, as she’s started the term?”

“She says her mother wouldn’t leave her behind,” Jen said gloomily. “We thought of that; we asked her to stay, for the sake of the team. And she said—oh, she said something dreadful! I simply can’t tell you what she said.”

“Said it would be simpler for you to give up your dancing for the sake of the team, than for her to give up her family for three months. Was that the dreadful thing she said?” Joy asked.

Jen gave her a startled look. “Did you hear her? Where were you?”

“I didn’t hear her, but it’s easy to guess. It’s the obvious thing for Doreen to say. Jack must train another bowler, that’s all. It’s too much to ask you to leave the Hamlet Club.”

Jen sighed. “I’m glad you think so too. But I feel horrid about it. Isn’t it dreadful, Joan?”

Joan’s face was grave. “I’m terribly sorry about it, Jen. It spoils your jolly feeling.”

“That’s what I mean. I’ve loved the club and the dancing so much, and everything’s been so perfect. It won’t be quite perfect if I know the rest are feeling I’m a slacker. You don’t think so, do you, Joan?”

“There’s not one scrap of the slacker about you, kid. But I’m very sorry this has happened. It’s going to spoil your feeling for the dancing, if Doreen goes and Jack really needs you.”

“Jack’s being jolly decent about it,” Jen was sturdily loyal to her chum. “She knows she can’t have me. It’s Nora.”

“Nora’s responsible for games. Jack has only to do her bit with the best team she can find. Nora will be worried,” Joan admitted.

“Can’t blame her,” said Joy. “If she’s discovered that there’s a descendant of Jandy Mac’s magic twist in the school, it’s no wonder if she grouses because she can’t get hold of it. You shouldn’t have let her know about your brilliant bowling, Mrs. Wren.”

“I was an idiot,” Jen sighed. “But Jack wanted a game. I never thought it could matter.”

“Oh, cheer up! Doreen hasn’t gone yet! Couldn’t you get hold of the people who want the house and tell them the drains will give them scarlet fever and the cellars are damp?” Joy suggested.

“Don’t worry too much, Jenny-Wren,” Joan advised. “You won’t dance well unless you’re happy.”

“Oh, I shall forget as soon as I begin to dance! I’m like you; I don’t think of anything else, once the tune starts.”

Joan laughed. “I’m glad to hear it. I shouldn’t like to see you in a set with a face as worried as yours was just now.”

“You won’t. You needn’t be afraid of that!” Jen said vigorously. “I couldn’t dance and worry at the same time!”

CHAPTER FIVE

THE END OF A HAPPY REIGN

It was a proud and happy day for Jen when, wearing her violet girdle and embroidered frock, she went into the dressing-room to see that her queen was ready for the May Day ceremony.

The elder queens were there, already in their robes and crowns, each with her maid-of-honour wearing her colours on her frock and girdle. Miriam, the first queen, was in white, with forget-me-nots on her train, and was attended by her little sister Barbara. Cicely, the gold queen and the President of the Hamlet Club, had Peggy Gilks to wait on her. The strawberry-pink queen, Marguerite, had Edna Gilks as her maid, and Joy, in bright green, had Carry Carter.

"You know your duties, don't you, Violet Maid?" the President smiled down at the new maid-of-honour's radiant face.

"To take care of Joan," Jen said promptly.

"You've a high ideal!" Marguerite said laughing. "Most maids would have said—'To carry my queen's train,' or something like that."

"Oh, I shall do that! But my job's to take care of Joan and see that everything's all right for her. Is your crown comfortable, Joan?" Jen asked earnestly. "I'm sorry I wasn't here to put it on for you, but Miss Macey stopped me, and I knew you had Joy."

"It's all right, and anyway I shan't be wearing it for very long," Joan said, laughing.

"I hate to see you wearing those faded old flowers! But Joy will put on your forget-me-nots and then you'll look quite marvellous."

"I don't expect to do that! Is everybody ready? Don't collapse with nerves, Muriel!"—sternly, to the new queen, who was looking white. "Your robe's lovely and the blue suits you. Jen and I will come to fetch you in about two minutes, when I've done my bit and got rid of my old wreath. Sorry we have to leave you alone; it's always a trying moment for the new queen. Shall I lend you Jenny-Wren, to take care of you?"

"Nesta will hold her hand," Jen said, gathering up the violet train. "I'm getting scared, Joan! Couldn't we start? It's rather awesome to have to lead the procession!"

"Some day perhaps you'll be queen, and then you'll have to do it yourself, Mrs. Wren," said Joy, preparing to follow.

Joan, crowned with dying flowers, led the way up the long hall, her train carried carefully by Jen, who, suddenly and most unusually shy, did not raise her eyes from the violet robe. A small girl followed, carrying the forget-me-not crown on a white cushion, and then came the former queens, led by Joy. The dancing girls had made two lines, and were kneeling and clapping and shouting their welcome. Jen's knees were shaking, as she thought how odd it was to be out here, a part of the procession and no longer one of the crowd. It was a nervous position but a glorious one.

"It was marvellous of Joan to choose me!" the thought rang in her mind. "What a long way it is to the platform! The hall never seemed so big before. Suppose I drop the train—or my stockings come down—or—or suppose I laugh, or sneeze, or something awful?"

The hall was not so very big, after all, and before Jen had time to laugh or sneeze Joan was stepping up on to the platform. While the rest of the queens took their places, with Joy on the

left hand of the central throne and an empty seat on the right, Jen knelt and arranged the violet train in beautiful folds.

Joan smiled down at her maid. "Don't bother too much, Jenny-Wren. We'll be going down again in a moment, to fetch Muriel."

"Oh, but it must look nice," Jen argued, rising to stand behind the queen.

Joy stepped forward as Joan knelt, and lifted off the faded crown and laid the thick circle of forget-me-nots on Joan's red hair. As the dancers sprang to their feet and cheered, and the girls in the gallery shouted, Joan rose and stood bowing, and then begged for silence with a wave of her hand.

"I do thank you all very much," her voice rang out bravely and clearly. "It's been a very happy year for me, and I haven't noticed that any one else has been particularly miserable, so I hope we can say all has gone well——"

There was a laugh from the hall, for her reign had already been voted one of the best the school had known.

"Thank you all again. I'm sure the new queen will have a happy time too, if you're as nice to her as you've been to me."

Then, with a warning look at Jen, Joan came down the steps and went to fetch her successor.

Jen lifted the train again and followed, down the long hall and up again, as Joan led Muriel to her throne. With Nesta, the new maid-of-honour, she knelt on the dais when the crowning was over, and arranged the folds of the violet train while Nesta spread out the blue one; then both maids sat at the feet of their queens to watch the plaiting of the maypole and the morris and country dances which followed.

"Are you sorry you aren't dancing, Jenny-Wren?" Joan bent and spoke to her attendant, who seemed to be in a dream.

Jen's thoughtful face lit up and she smiled back at her queen. "Not to-night. I'll dance another time. Nesta and I are frightfully bucked to be here. We've both promised old Beetle that if she isn't the queen and one of us ever happens to be it, Beetle shall be the maid-of-honour."

"That's nice of you, though it's looking rather far ahead."

"Oh, I know! I shan't ever be chosen, of course, but I do think Nesta ought to be queen some day. She's been in the club a long while and the girls like her, and she's jolly pretty. She'd love to be queen, and she'd have Beetle for her maid."

"Is that what you were looking so sober about?"

"No, I was thinking. Shall I tell you, Joan?"

"Please do! I wondered if you were criticising 'Chestnut!' It was very good, I thought."

"It was terribly pretty," Jen exclaimed. "But I wasn't really watching; not carefully, I mean. Joan-Queen, I'll tell you. I was thinking about 'gate.'"

Joan's eyes widened. "Jandy Mac's hint? What put that into your head just now?"

"When they did 'If all the World were Paper,' I remembered how Cicely teaches the second figure—'Lead through the gates!'—and I began to wonder what Jandy could have meant. I've thought about it a lot."

"So have I," Joan admitted. "What does your thinking come to?"

Jen shot a quick look up at her. "Could it be something to do with the Abbey gate?"

"I've wondered if it could be. But the Abbey gate looks very innocent, Jen. What could there be to write down on a bit of paper about it?"

"It looks so very much all right that we've never taken much notice of it; at least, I never have," Jen pondered, a far-away look in her eyes again. "It's just the gate into the Abbey, and we go through it to get to the Abbey. We don't even look at it—I mean, I never do. If it's got any secret we should never notice it."

"That's true enough. But what secret could the Abbey gate be keeping from us, Jen?"

"Oh, dozens!" Jen cried. "More secret passages; ways of escape from the Abbey out to the gate-house! Shall we search, Joan?"

"Not till Jandy comes and tells us what she thinks," Joan said firmly. "We may be wrong; it may be some other gate. We can't pull our gate to pieces looking for we-don't-know-what, which may not be there! But I do agree that the gate-house has probably been examined less carefully than the rest of the Abbey, just because it looks so obvious and natural. I shall be more interested in it now, thanks to your hints and Jandy's!"

"You won't make discoveries without me, will you?" Jen pleaded. "Even Joy said I must be there!"

"Oh, you must be there! We won't leave you out. But we'll wait for Jandy's papers. They may give us some idea what to look for."

"It's very mysterious!" Jen sighed. "But I like it; I like mysteries, and things to find out. Oh, grub! Come on, Nesta! We must look after our queens. Will you have coffee or lemonade, Joan-Queen?"

"The club will wait on us, Jen. Some of them always bring refreshments to the platform."

"They won't wait on you," Jen was firm on that point. "It's my job to take care of you, and nobody else is going to do it. The club can wait on the visitors, and the other queens, and—and *me*, if they like. But they aren't going to do things for you. Come on, Nesta! Old Beetle promised to be one of the first in the dining-room and to bring tuck out to us. She knew we'd not have a chance, stuck up here!"

With Beetle's help refreshments for the reigning queen and the ex-queen were procured with unusual ease and quickness, and Beatrice rushed off to worm her way through the crowd again, while Jen and Nesta waited on their mistresses. Sandwiches and lemonade were thrust into their hands by the triumphant Beetle as soon as they were ready for them.

"There! Can I get you anything more? Does Muriel like her coffee? Is Joan ready for cakes?"

"Very good, Beetle! You've been splendid," Jen thumped her helper on the back. "I shall tell Joan you're really her assistant maid. You're better at fighting through a scrum than any one I know."

"Oh, I can always get through a crowd!" Beetle, who was short and stout and extremely good-natured, pushed back her hair from her hot face. "I go underneath, and I'm there before anybody's noticed me. I was afraid I'd spill the drinks, but I said—'Make way for the Queen's coffee!'—and somehow everybody did."

"They didn't want it spilt on their dancing frocks! You've been a brick, Beetle, and we'll tell the queens. Are you having a nice dance-party?" Jen asked, in a maternal tone induced by her promotion to the high places.

"Oh, marvellous! The music's better than ever."

"I know. I felt myself jumping to it all the time, and Joan laughed at me. I watched you, Beetle; you were dancing very nicely. Your step's lovely; I don't know how you do it, when you're so round. Joan says you're very good."

Beatrice was proud and radiant. "Topping of her! Shall I get you some more cakes?"

“Had enough, thanks. You’d better crawl under the legs and get some for yourself, or there’ll be none left.”

“Good old Beetle! She’s a jolly good sort,” Nesta said, beginning to collect cups and glasses.

“It’s been a lovely crowning, Your Majesty!” Jen looked up at the new queen.

Muriel was a quiet girl, who had been greatly astonished by her election. She answered Jen’s remark with real pleasure.

“I’m so glad, Jen. I thought you might feel sad because your queen’s abdicating. I know I can’t take Joan’s place, either in the club or the school.”

“Oh, but nobody wants you to! Nobody would like it, if you did. You’ll be different, of course, but you’re sure to be a good queen. You’ve been Joan’s maid, so you must know all about how to do things.”

“You think the queen should train her maid to be her successor?”

“No, not exactly, for she might not be chosen. But it must be a help to have been maid to the queen. Nesta will know all about how to be queen by this time next year, whether she ever has to do it or not.”

“And what about you?”

“That’s different. Joan won’t be queening any more—reigning, I mean.”

“I expect you know a good deal about it, all the same. Perhaps we’ll have you as queen some day.”

“Not a bit likely. I’m so much newer than most of the girls. I’ve only been here a year; some of them have been in it from the beginning. They’re going to dance again. Oh, it’s morris! There are the sticks; it’s good old ‘Rigs.’ Watch Beetle, Your Majesty! Her step’s jolly good,” and Jen turned to arrange her queen’s robe in its beautiful folds again—for Joan had gone to speak to her mother during the interval—and then settled down at Joan’s feet to watch the dancing.

CHAPTER SIX

TALKING TO JEN

"Now, Jen Robins, we want to talk to you!" Nora and Jack arrived at school together next morning and sought Jen before classes began. Nora's face was determined, but Jack looked troubled.

Jen's heart thumped and then fell like a lump of lead. She had heard a rumour the night before, but had resolutely refused to pay any attention to it, and as usual, as soon as the music had begun, she had forgotten everything but the dancing, even though she was only an onlooker.

"What's up?" she asked anxiously.

"Doreen's sold her house; well, her people have. They're going north at once. Doreen leaves school at the end of this week."

"That's quick work!" Jen stubbornly refused to see Nora's meaning. "But what has it got to do with me?"

"Just this. St. Anne's College Juniors have sent a challenge to our junior team. It came yesterday, but we didn't say anything to you until the crowning was over. They've never challenged our juniors before; they've never been good enough to risk it. But we always play their seniors, and we've beaten them for the last three years. We can't accept this challenge unless we've a real chance of winning; can't have the juniors letting down the school. Now what about it?"

"Well, what about it?" Jen asked desperately.

"Are *you* going to let down the school?"

"I'm not the only person who can play!"

"You're the only one who can stiffen the junior team's bowling so that it's fit to play the College. Isn't she, Jack Wilmot?"

Jack looked unhappy. "Yes," she admitted. "But I don't feel we ought to ask her to leave the Hamlet Club. Nobody's ever been asked to do such a thing before. It isn't my idea, Jen."

"Then what would you do?" the games-captain demanded. "Refuse the challenge? Wouldn't that let the school down?"

"No, I should play," Jack said sturdily. "But I should tell them that our team had lost its best bowler unexpectedly and we couldn't hope to win till we'd trained another. Then I'd tell the team to buck up and play their jolly old hardest, and then I should hope for the best."

"That's what I call sporting!" Jen cried.

Nora turned on her. "Quite so. It's a very sporting attitude. But what about yours? You belong to the school; you could help the school; the school would win, if you played. You won't play, because it would interfere with your own selfish pleasure. As you said just now—what about it?"

Jen had grown white. "I couldn't give up the dancing!" she cried. "Jack, you don't feel like that about me, do you?"

"No, I don't. I've said so. I wouldn't give up cricket, if your club needed me. We can't ask you to do it."

"Nora wouldn't give up cricket either," Jen raged. "You haven't any right to ask me, Nora!"

“You could help the school to win,” Nora pointed out. “Jenny-Wren, I don’t mean to be a brute. I’m sorry about it. But it is such a big thing, and such a chance for the school. It’s a big thing for Jack, too; a challenge from the College Juniors! Jack would be so awfully bucked if we could win, in her first term as captain.”

Jen looked at Jack, whose wistful face betrayed her real feelings. “I couldn’t! Oh, I couldn’t!” she caught her breath. “Joan needs me, Nora!”—with a vain hope that this might carry weight. “I’ve only just begun being her maid!”

“Joan can get a dozen kids to carry her train. We let you have last night, because we knew how keen you were,” Nora urged. “We didn’t worry you till it was over. But now—why, Joan may not need you as her maid again until the autumn! It’s not as if she was the queen any longer. If we were trying to take Nesta away, I could understand Muriel grouching a bit. But Joan’s out of it now; you’ve nothing to do for her unless there’s a procession of queens, and there isn’t likely to be another before the fête in the autumn.”

But Jen took her new duties more seriously. “It isn’t only carrying her train. I meant—I *mean!*—to help her in all sorts of ways. And there are the summer parties; we always dance in Darley’s Barn and on the lawn at the Hall. I’d miss all those. It means being out of the club for the whole summer term. Nora, I couldn’t bear it; really, I couldn’t!” she pleaded.

There was a strict rule in the school that none but seniors could belong to both the Sports Club and the Hamlet Club. Juniors were expected to choose between games and dancing, and seniors usually found that their work took up too much time to allow of more than one big outside interest. The two clubs mingled to a certain extent; the dancers held open evenings, when outsiders might come and try how much they could do and be helped and pulled through easy dances; and a certain amount of play was expected at school even from the Hamlet girls. But juniors might not be members of both the clubs and were not allowed to take both games and dancing seriously.

Jen had come up against the difficulty very early in her school career, when her friendship with Jack and her own love for cricket had drawn her in one direction, while the fascination of the music and figures of the country dances and all the colour and romance of the crowning of the Queen had pulled her irresistibly in the other. Romance and colour had won, but she had kept a secret hope that if her cricket did not fall too hopelessly below standard she might as a senior be able to make time for both. It was partly with this idea and partly from sheer interest and enjoyment that she had practised so hard with Janice during the last summer holidays, when chance had thrown them together at the Hall for some weeks; but she had never dreamed of the difficulty in which she was going to place herself, and she regretted bitterly the impulse that had led her to betray her prowess to Jack.

“I’m not asking you to give it all up, Jenny-Wren,” Jack said hurriedly, conscience-stricken by the look in her friend’s eyes. “It would be rotten for you, and we couldn’t expect it. I’ll try to buck up one of the others; I’m no good as a bowler myself, but one of them must have a shot at it.”

“There’s no time,” Nora retorted. “By the end of the term you may have trained somebody, but for the match with the College that’s not a scrap of use.”

“Perhaps Mary’s wrist will keep all right.” But Jack did not sound hopeful.

“You told me yourself you could never depend on Mary. Well, Jen, I can’t say any more. You know how I feel. You’d better think it over.”

She went off to join a group of seniors who were just coming in. “I say! Have you heard about St. Anne’s? They’ve a junior team this year, and they’ve sent a challenge——”

Jen and Jack looked at one another. "I'm terribly sorry, old chap!" Jack began.

Jen bit her lips for one moment. Then her head went up. "As Nora said, I shall have to think it over. And I must talk to Joan. Just now it seems a perfectly horrible idea and quite impossible. I shall ask Nesta what she'd do; she'll know how I feel. No, I shan't, because I know already. Nesta would say: 'Oh, what rot!' And that's how I feel too. But—there's something ugly in my mind. Jack, Nora said, 'Selfish—your selfish pleasure.' That was a simply beastly thing to say to anybody!"

"Yes, it was." Jack tucked her friend's hand under her arm. "But Nora doesn't understand. She doesn't care for anything but games. I know how you feel, Jen, and I don't think you ought to do it. You're so fearfully keen, and—and it means such an awful lot to you! I expect you feel it doesn't matter so very much if we lose the match, so long as we're sporting enough to take up the challenge and do the best we can?"

Jen squeezed her arm. "It was when you said that to Nora that I began to wonder if I could bear to do it. I'd like to be in a team with you for captain."

Jack reddened. "I haven't said a word about how much I want you, because it didn't seem fair. I think it's brutal to ask you. But if we could have you, it would be the most marvellous term of cricket I've ever had, and we should win every match."

"You are a good chap, Jacky-boy! We do understand one another; it's a good thing we got married," Jen exclaimed. "Don't say any more about cricket just now. I'll have to talk to Joan, and I don't know when she'll have time. You don't think the whole school will stare at me accusingly because I'm being selfish, do you?" she asked anxiously, as they went indoors.

"No, I don't. They'll understand. And if any of them don't, I'll talk to them! If anybody says 'selfish' to you, you can send her along to talk to me!" Jack said.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TALKING TO JOAN AND JOY

“What’s the matter, Jenny-Wren?” Joan had not forgotten the hints of the first day of term, and she had heard Nora’s news about Doreen and the challenge to the junior team, so she had not much doubt of the reason for Jen’s sombre face. But she did not know yet how much Nora had said.

Jen had been absent-minded all morning and had been reprimanded for inattention. She lifted troubled eyes to her queen’s face. “Joan, it’s just too bad for words. When will you have time to talk?”

“If it’s as bad as all that I’ll make time. The sooner I hear about it the better. Wait for me, just for three minutes!” and Joan hurried away.

She sought the headmistress and begged leave to take Jen out for lunch. The senior form, who were all day-girls, had the privilege of lunching at certain nearby shops and dairies, if their parents wished it, instead of joining in the usual school dinner; the right was not exercised very often, as it was easier to have the meal without changing and going out, and most girls preferred to stay with their companions. But a senior who wanted to talk with a friend would sometimes go out; it was necessary to have company, as no one was allowed to go alone.

“Jen?” Miss Macey raised her eyebrows. “I know you and Jen have become real friends, but must you take her out to lunch? I don’t want that to become a custom, Joan.”

“I’m afraid Jen is in trouble, Miss Macey, and I want to hear about it. It’s difficult in school. I would like an hour alone with her.”

“I hadn’t heard of any trouble. She should have told me.”

“It’s cricket and the Hamlet Club,” Joan explained. “I’m afraid they’re pulling Jen different ways; or perhaps it’s her sense of duty that’s pulling against her wishes. But she hasn’t told me yet; I’m only guessing.”

Miss Macey, too, had heard rumours, through the games-mistress. She gave permission without further questions, only warning Joan not to be late for afternoon school.

Joan hurried back to her waiting maid. “Fetch your cap and woolly coat, kid. We’re going to have lunch at the dairy.”

“Oh!” Jen’s sober face lit up. “Oh, Joan, how marvellous! Just you and me?”

“Do you mind if Joy comes too? We generally go together.”

“No, I don’t mind,” Jen considered the matter quickly, but carefully. “Joy was jolly decent about this mess. She’ll understand.”

“I’m sorry you’re in a mess. Perhaps talking will help.” Joan called to Joy—“Joy! I’m going out to lunch, and Mrs. Wren is coming with me. Care to join us?”

“Yes, I’ll come. It will be a change. What has the Wren been up to?”

“It’s something the others have put up to her, I’m afraid. She’ll tell us when we’re settled,” and Joan led her party to the dairy she preferred.

Jen gave a sigh of pleasure. “This is terribly nice of you, Joan! I love a little table in the corner of a shop! This is a jolly place; I don’t like tables with marble tops and no covers.”

“It’s a good thing something can cheer you up,” Joy said. “You look as if the bottom had fallen out of the world.”

"It has," Jen said simply.

"My hat! What's the row?"

Jen looked at Joan. "You've guessed, haven't you?"

"I think so. But tell us, Jen."

"Nora says I'm letting down the school for my own selfish pleasure." Jen's lips quivered. "Joan, I'm not a baby. I'm not going to howl and make you feel bad. But don't you think it's a bit hard?"

"Oh, I say! How utterly rotten!" Joy blazed. "I'll talk to Nora! She had no right to say that. She's a brute!"

"It was a bit brutal," Joan agreed. "Don't rage, Joy; it won't help. You've heard about Doreen, and the challenge from St. Anne's, I suppose?"

"I've heard; Nora's talking of nothing else. She's frantic at the thought of having to refuse. But she knew better than to say things about Jenny-Wren with you and me and Muriel in the form."

"I knew what she meant, though," Joan remarked. "It's hard on her to have to refuse, of course."

"Jack won't refuse," Jen said unsteadily. "She's the captain of the team. She says she'll play, even if she knows they'll be beaten. She's a sport."

"Nora's games-captain. She'll have to decide, whatever Jack says," Joy pointed out. "Nora won't let the school down by sending a team that couldn't put up a decent show."

Jen looked up. "They think they could put up a decent show if they had me."

"They could, of course. But you've joined the Hamlets. They can't have you."

Jen glanced at Joan. "Tell me what you think, Queen!"

"I think it's terribly hard on us," Joan began.

"Us?" Jen interrupted, startled. "I thought you'd say 'hard on you'—on me, you know. Do you mean that you and the rest would feel bad, too, Joan?"

"Hard on *us*," Joan repeated. "Of course we're in it with you. We shall feel quite as bad as you do; worse, in a way, because if you're brave and give up everything for the sake of the school, you'll feel really glad you're helping, and you will enjoy the cricket, Jen. We shall have nothing in exchange for you, but you'll get those two very big things—the fun of the games and the satisfaction of having played up and been really sporting. We shall just go on missing you all the time, with nothing to make up for you."

Jen's eyes were wide as she gazed at her. "You make it sound different, somehow. I could only think of all I was going to lose. I know it would be the sporting thing to do, but I didn't want to do it. You make it sound as if there might be something in it."

"Some compensations. I'm sure you'll begin to feel that quite soon. There will be good sides to it. You'll love playing up to help Jack."

Jen stared at her. "You sound as if I was going to do it, Joan."

"I don't know, of course. You haven't told us yet what you're going to do."

"Of course she isn't going to do it!" Joy cried. "It would be dreadfully hard on her. Joan, you're not going to say she must clear out of the club, are you?"

"Certainly not. She's going to decide for herself."

Jen's gaze went from one to the other of the bronze-haired, brown-eyed girls, who were so much alike in face and so very different in temperament.

"But you think I ought to do it, Joan?"

“I think you won’t be quite happy, if you don’t,” Joan said gravely. “I’m desperately sorry it has happened, Jen, but I do see Nora’s point of view, and I know you see it too. If you don’t play up and help the school, won’t you feel a little uncomfortable all term?”

“Yes, I know I shall,” Jen said at once. “But I shall feel terribly sick, if I give up our dancing. I’m going to feel bad either way.”

“In that case,” Joan challenged her, “why not decide on the way that will be best for the greatest number of people—that is, the school? The Hamlet Club is only a bit of the school. I believe you’ll feel less bad if you go in with the school—just for this term, of course. Nobody who has refused a challenge merely for her own sake can be quite comfortable. I wish this hadn’t happened, Jen, but since it has I believe you’ll be more satisfied if you’re brave and put the school first.”

“It’s jolly hard on the kid,” Joy said in disgust. “Joan, I never thought you’d side with Nora against the Hamlets.”

Joan looked at Jen. “I’m not. I’m trying to side with one half of Jenny-Wren—the biggest, bravest half, that wants to help the school but can’t quite bear to do it.”

Jen grew scarlet. “After that, I don’t see what else I can do. Joan, you do understand; I didn’t need to tell you. Part of me does want to do the decent thing. But the rest of me feels just sick. I love the club better than anything else at school.”

“Of course,” Joan agreed. “I should feel just the same. It’s how I felt once about school. But, Jen——”

“I know!” Jen exclaimed. “You had a chance to come to school and you were dying to do it, and you let Joy come instead. You put her first.”

“Gracious! Who told you that story? I didn’t think you knew anything about those days.”

“Joy told me, ever so long ago.”

“I wanted her to appreciate you properly,” Joy spoke in a would-be careless tone. “I thought she’d better hear that bit of your murky past.”

“There wasn’t any need for her to know that part.”

“I love that story!” Jen cried. “What were you going to say, Joan? You said, ‘But, Jen’—what else?”

“But will you go on loving the club, if you’ve put it before the school?”

“Yes,” Jen said sturdily. “But I shan’t love myself.”

“That would be very unpleasant,” Joan smiled at her. “Jenny-Wren, we shall miss you terribly, but you’ll have to do it. I was sure of it. Not because of anything anybody else says to you, but because of what’s inside you. You can’t help it. You’re too big and generous and fond of helping people to keep a gift to yourself, when the school needs it. You might try to do it, but you’d never be happy.”

“Because I’d feel I’d been stingy,” Jen mused. “That may be true, Joan. But just now I hate the thought of doing it.”

“Something will make you do it, all the same. And it won’t be because Nora called you selfish, or because I said you were brave and generous.”

Jen reddened again. “That might have something to do with it, all the same, Joan-Queen. If that thing you talk about is inside me, perhaps you’ve helped me to dig it up.”

“Perhaps. But I didn’t put it there. You can’t choose the stingy way, Jen; you just couldn’t do it. You couldn’t be a miser about anything.”

“You do have queer ideas, Joan!” Joy broke out. “The kid’s a born dancer, and she’s one of our best. We’ll all miss her. Why can’t you leave her alone?”

“Oh, I’m not!” Jen cried. “But I’m frightfully keen.”

“Because I’m certain she’ll have to do it in the end, now that she’s been asked. I don’t want her to have a miserable term.”

“But that’s just exactly what I thought I should have, if I chucked dancing for cricket!” Jen cried.

Joan shook her head. “Not you, Jenny-Wren. Don’t worry! You’ll miss the dancing, of course, but you’ll come back to it later on, and it will seem more wonderful than ever. And you’ll enjoy the cricket. You’ll love the feeling that you’ve made Jack very happy and that the whole school is grateful to you.”

Jen sat with bent head. “Do I need to tell Nora at once?” she asked unsteadily.

“I should get it over. It will only worry you until you do. But there’s no need to tell her today, if you want to think about it for a little while longer.”

“I suppose I shall have to do it in the end,” Jen’s voice shook. “But I don’t want to—to feel it’s all settled and done with.”

Joy was gazing at Joan and Jen with dissatisfied eyes.

“Joan, before the kid decides you ought to tell her what we were talking about on the way to school.”

Joan looked at her quickly. “I was just thinking that. Joy, wouldn’t you like to slip back to school without us? Haven’t you things to do for this afternoon?”

“In fact, you want a few minutes alone with Jenny-Wren! Righto! I’ll make myself scarce. Thanks for a jolly lunch,” and Joy nodded to Jen and wandered off.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A CHANCE FOR BEETLE

Jen looked anxiously at Joan. "What does Joy want you to tell me, Joan?"

"Come round here and sit by me, Jenny-Wren."

Jen's face grew startled. "What is it, Joan-Queen? Anything very dreadful?"

"Not dreadful, but it will make things a little harder for you. You know that we've only had one coronation this year, though we usually have two?"

"I heard Nesta say so. Why are there two? I was only here for one last year."

"So you were. I'd been crowned at Broadway End before your first term began. We have a private ceremony in the big hall at Broadway End, just for the Hamlet Club, without inviting visitors or the rest of the school; it's for old Mr. and Mrs. Broadway, Cicely's grandparents, who have been so good to the club. They give the silver medal for the Queen and the big portraits, one for her mother and one to hang in the school hall, and they've shown their interest in the club in heaps of ways. They like to watch the dancing and the crowning, but they couldn't come to school, so they entertain the club and are introduced to the new queen. They went away to the South of France soon after Christmas and have only come home this week. We've just heard from Cicely that they don't want to miss what they call—'Our usual spring-time treat,' so we're all going there next week to repeat the crowning ceremony and the dances. I was going to tell you, but I had to arrange it with Muriel first; she's the all-important person! Now what shall we do, Jenny-Wren? Will you put off making up your mind about cricket until the show at Broadway End is over?"

Jen gave a little gasp. "I won't be there! I won't be your maid any longer! I'd forgotten—oh, Joan! I don't think I can bear it!"

Joan was glad they were in a corner and that she had made Jen change her place. She flung her arm round her maid and drew her close. "Kiddy, it's jolly hard lines! I feel a frightful brute. I've made you feel you ought to give up the club, but the hardness of it all comes on you—at least, nearly all. I shall miss you terribly. I wonder if you couldn't stay with us for another week and have the Broadway End evening?"

Jen quivered in her arms. "It wouldn't be honest. I shall have to tell Nora. They must answer that challenge, and she won't let Jack accept if the team has no bowler. If I've told her, she'll want me to begin practising straight away. I couldn't do it if I was still being your maid."

"Perhaps Miss Macey would let you be an exception to the rule, for that evening, if I asked her. You don't need to practise to be a maid-of-honour; it's not like learning dances."

"I don't want to be an exception," Jen choked, but spoke with energy and courage. "It isn't fair to try to do both; nobody does. And—and—it wouldn't be fair to your new maid," her voice broke. "You'll need to have a new maid, and she ought to have her share of the coronation. There may not be another procession all summer. She ought to be in it once."

"You plucky kid!" Joan exclaimed, in genuine admiration. "Jenny-Wren, that's what I call being really brave!"

"What d'you mean?" Jen asked indignantly. "It's only sense. It would be frightfully mean to ask anybody to be your maid after all the fun was over! There'd be nothing in it for her. I say, Joan, if—if I do go in for cricket, will you have good old Beetle instead of me?"

“Of course I will! The least I can do is let you choose your successor. But I will *not* call her Beetle! Think of a queen attended by a beetle!”

“It sounds like a fairy-tale. The beetle would turn into a prince and marry you. Perhaps you could call her Bee, and then sneeze or choke; she says Beatrice sounds so stately that people would laugh, because she’s such a dump.”

“She’s rather like a stout useful bee. I might manage to call her Maid Bee,” Joan conceded.

“She could have my girdle; it was rather long for me, so I expect it will meet round Beetle. And I’ll give her the collar you made for me, though I’d rather not,” Jen said heroically. “But my frock wouldn’t be a scrap of use; it wouldn’t fasten on her, so I can keep that. I’m glad you put the violets on it in white.”

“I’m sure your frock wouldn’t fasten on Beatrice,” Joan agreed. “She can wear her own white frock. I notice you’ve changed your tense, Jenny-Wren. Are you going to be a hero, for the sake of the school?”

“Changed my tense?” Jen looked up in bewilderment.

“You changed from ‘could’ to ‘can,’ as if you really meant it to happen.”

Jen quivered. “I know quite well I shall have to do it. I’ve known all the time. But I don’t want to have the thing settled and know I’ve done it. Do you understand, Joan?”

“Of course I do, dear kid! But I feel you’d be wiser to get it over. Tell me when you’ve spoken to Nora and Jack, and I’ll explain to the club.”

“Thank you, Joan,” Jen’s tone was subdued. “That will—would—help! Don’t let them rag me about it.”

“They won’t want to rag you. Will you tell Beatrice, or shall I?”

Jen quivered again. “She’ll love it. But she’ll be sorry to take the job away from me; Beetle’s a jolly good sort. I’d like you to tell her, please. You must ask her to be your maid.”

“When you give the word, then, Jenny-Wren.”

Jen hid her face against the elder girl’s arm. “You’d better do it at once. I know there’s no help for it; I shall have to do it. It’s no use messing about and keeping people waiting. I’ll speak to Jack this afternoon. You’d better tell Beetle.”

“That’s sporting and plucky, Jen. I knew you would.”

Jen raised her head suddenly. “Joan, it won’t make any difference? You won’t feel you have to ask Beetle instead of me, when Jandy Mac comes? I can be there when she shows you her papers and you talk about ‘gate,’ can’t I?”

Joan laughed, and her arm tightened round Jen. “What an attack of nerves! Jenny-Wren, team or Hamlet Club has nothing to do with the Abbey and Jandy Mac’s theories. If there are any more discoveries to be made, we shall want your help. Of course it makes no difference.”

Jen sighed in relief. “I’m a silly! Just for a moment I was frightened. I don’t think—well, I *know* I couldn’t bear to have Beetle helping you and Jandy Mac in the Abbey.”

“Anxious person! Beetle won’t be invited. We ought to go back to school, my child; if we’re late we won’t be allowed out for lunch again.”

Jen sat up and pushed back her tumbled plaits. “I’d better run. I shall have to do my hair, or people will say things. I feel rotten, Joan, but you were right. I’d rather have things settled.”

“It’s the best way and the brave way,” Joan agreed. “You’ll have a tremendous welcome when you come back to us, Jenny-Wren. You aren’t by any chance a shining light at netball or hockey, are you?”

“I’m rotten at both, and I’m going to stay rotten!” Jen exploded.

Joan laughed. “I don’t believe it. You couldn’t be rotten, or even moderately bad, at any game. Look at the way you can run! But you needn’t be a star performer at them all.”

“I’ll take jolly good care I’m not!” Jen vowed.

CHAPTER NINE

JACK HEARS THE NEWS

“Jacky-boy, will you have me in your team?” Jen crept up to her chum, and spoke in a subdued tone very unlike her usual cheerful shout.

The shout came from Jack, who whirled round, her face ablaze with delight. “Jen Robins, do you mean it? Are you going to play for us? That’s the noblest deed I’ve ever known!” and she clutched Jen’s hand, as if to hold her to her word.

Jen laughed shakily. “I’ll play up properly, Jack. I won’t grouse about the Hamlets. But you know how I feel.”

“Of course I know! I’m terribly bucked, Jenny-Wren, and I’ll be no end proud to have you. It’s for the school, not for me; I understand that all right. But you’ll be the most tremendous help, and we’ll have a marvellous term and win everything on the map. You’ll play on Saturday week against the Upper Fourth? They’ve made up an eleven to play against us, and lots of them are almost good enough for the senior team; they’ll be in it when they’re Fifth. We shall have a job to beat them; they’re bigger than any of us.”

“We’ll beat them!” Jen’s eyes filled with the light of battle. “Cheek of the Upper Fourth to challenge a school team, even juniors! We must wipe the field with them, Jack.”

“Oh, cheers!” Jack cried. “With you to buck me up, as well as bucking up the team, we can do anything!”

“There’s one thing I’m very keen on,” Jen caught her chum by the arm and spoke earnestly. “Jack, you’re to choose the most likely person and let me teach her that special twist of Jandy’s—you yourself, if you like. Anybody could learn it; I just happened to be at the Hall with Jandy Mac, and I was keen, so she made me practise. The team ought not to depend on one bowler; my wrist might go like Mary’s, or—or I might change my mind about the Hamlet Club!”

Jack eyed her anxiously. “But you won’t, Jenny-Wren? You’d break my heart if you gave us up now.”

“Not for this season. I’ve promised. But I can’t have all my summers spoiled,” Jen’s rueful laugh took the sting out of her words. “I’m not being unkind. I do love our summer dancing out of doors! A sunny evening and a perfect lawn, and long shadows on the grass, and a cool wind after a hot day—and all the colours of the frocks—and Miss Lane’s fiddle sounding through the trees—and ‘Nancy’s Fancy’ or ‘Winifred’s Knot’ just beginning! I’d better not think about it. I can’t promise to give it all up another year, Jacky-boy. So you’d better choose somebody else, and I’ll stand over her till she gets it right.”

“Kath Parker would like to try; she said so, and she bowls a bit already.”

“I don’t mind who it is, but she must be keen. That’s all that matters.”

“I’m no good myself, but I’ll find you somebody. You might be ill,” Jack admitted. “We ought to have someone else.”

“I’m not often ill,” Jen protested. “But anything might happen. I’m glad you see the sense of it. Mary won’t mind sharing the bowling with me, will she?”

“She’ll be jolly glad. She says she’s been worrying so much about being the team’s only bowler that she’s expecting her wrist to go wonky at any moment.”

"That's silly. It's only—help! What's happened?" Jen gasped, and collapsed on the floor of the cloakroom under the onslaught of a stout sturdy body.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Beatrice cried. "I didn't mean to butt into you! Jen, get up! Jen, is it true? We can't do without you, Jenny-Wren!"

"'Fraid you'll have to. Looks as if you wanted to get rid of me altogether," Jen rubbed her bruises. "Joan's told you, has she? She hasn't lost much time."

"She ran into me—no, I mean I ran into her, and she said you said she was to tell me right away."

"Did you knock her down?" Jack asked with interest. "Knowing what a weight you are, Beetle, you ought to stop running into people."

"I didn't knock Joan down. She just staggered a bit," Beetle said cheerfully. "Jen, I didn't mean to bowl you over. I didn't hurt you, did I?"

"Don't talk to me about bowling. It's a sore subject," Jen groaned. "Are you going to take on my job?"

"Is it true that you asked Joan to have me? Jen, it was just terribly sporting of you! You're an absolute dear, and you know how I'll love it. Of course, it's only for one term; I'll retire into the crowd again when you come back. But for this term—and a coronation at Broadway End next week!—it's simply marvellous!"

Jen winced. "I'm glad you'll have one procession," she said generously.

"What's it all about?" Jack asked curiously. Then, understanding suddenly, she cried, "My hat! You don't mean that Beetle's going to be Joan's maid instead of Jen?"

"Joan must have a maid. I shall instruct old Beetle in her duties," Jen said with dignity.

"Gosh!" said Jack. "How funny she'll look!"

"I know," Beetle grinned. "People will laugh and say, 'What a dumpy little maid-of-honour!' But I'll be in the procession, and that's a thing I never dared to hope for."

"You will look odd," Jen admitted. "Joan and Joy and Muriel and Carry Carter are all tall, and Nesta's getting quite big. You'll look dumpy among them. But you're quite nice and jolly to look at, you know, Beetle. It won't spoil the procession to have you."

"Do you think that, really?" Beetle asked humbly. "I've only been thinking about how much I've always wanted to be in it. But I'd be sorry to spoil it."

"You won't spoil it," Jen assured her. "I'll lend you my girdle and my collar with the violets on it."

"Jolly decent of you, old chap," Jack said.

"Do you know what I should do, if I were ever chosen queen?" Beetle spoke impressively. "I shan't be, of course, but if I were?"

"Can't imagine. What?"

"I should choose the gaudiest train I could think of; something that would make everybody turn round and stare. It would be in lots of colours, in stripes going up and down, to make me look taller."

"Sounds simply hideous," said Jack.

"It doesn't sound pretty," Jen protested. "Why would you do it, Beetle?"

"So that people would stare at it and not notice me. They'd be so busy saying, 'What an original train!'—that they'd have no time to say, 'What a funny dumpy little queen!' Blue and green and yellow stripes, I think."

"I hope I shan't be here to see it! The audience will need blue glasses; and I pity your maid, if she has to wear all those colours."

“Did you say there was going to be a Broadway End crowning?” Jack asked. “I hadn’t heard about that.”

“Next week. Isn’t it a bit of luck for me?” Beetle chuckled gleefully.

“Did you know?” Jack turned to her chum.

“Joan told me. She heard this morning.”

“Why didn’t you stay in the Hamlet Club till it was over?”

“Oh well! I thought you and Nora would want to know. I can’t expect to belong to both the Hamlets and the Sports Club.”

Jack looked at her steadily. “Did you do it to give old Beetle a chance of being in the procession?”

Jen reddened. “You sound as if you were accusing me of a deadly crime!”

“Not a crime, only a frightfully noble deed,” Jack said solemnly. “I feel I haven’t ever appreciated you properly.”

“Beetle, butt into her!” Jen cried. “Your arguments will carry much more weight than mine! Spill her—bowl her over—knock her down for being such an ass!”

Beatrice obligingly made a plunge towards Jack, who dashed away into safety.

Jen and Beatrice gave chase, and collided with Nesta and Peggy and Doreen.

“We were looking for you,” Nesta cried. “Jen, it’s simply rotten! We can’t do without you for the whole summer! You’re my partner in heaps of things! I can’t do morris without you. You always keep me right; I must have you to call ‘Left foot!’ or ‘The hey next!’ or ‘Crossover; right shoulder!’ How do you think I’m going to remember everything without you?”

“Good for you to have to think for yourself. If you don’t know by this time when it’s hey and when it’s cross-over, I’m sorry for you, for you never will,” Jen retorted.

“But it’s a beastly shame, Jen,” Peggy Gilks urged. “You’re one of our best dancers; all the queens say so—I’ve heard them. Why should we give you up just for silly old games of cricket?”

“Rot!” Jen grew crimson. “You couldn’t have heard them, for they couldn’t have said it, for it couldn’t be true. I’m one of the keenest, if you like.”

“But you’ll be keen on cricket now, won’t you?” Doreen asked wistfully. “I’m fearfully sorry to be letting down the team.”

“It’s all your fault,” Nesta said indignantly. “If you’d stayed on as a boarder, we needn’t have lost Jen.”

“Look here, old thing, and Peggy too. You needn’t grouse so badly. I’ll come back next term,” Jen took their arms persuasively and pushed them towards the cloakroom door. “After all, Jack’s my chum; it’s ripping for us to have one term doing the same thing, and she’s a jolly sporting team-captain. I’m going to have a marvellous time fighting under her banner, so to speak. You two are maids-of-honour; will you look after old Beetle and tell her what to do?”

“Is the Beetle going to have your place?” Peggy cried. “Beetle in the procession? Oh, hold me up!” and she swooned in Nesta’s arms.

“Joan says we’re not to call her Beetle when she’s a maid-of-honour. She’s to be Maid Bee. You’d better tell the rest. Joan says she can’t have a beetle to carry her train.”

“I don’t blame her,” Nesta agreed. “Oh well! She’ll be funny, anyway, and people will be amused. She can’t help being such a spot. We’ll take care of her, Jen. And we’ll try not to loathe her because she isn’t you.”

“I’ll loathe you, if you do!” Jen said vigorously. “She’s fearfully bucked to be chosen. Don’t go and spoil it for her, you two. I say, somebody lend me a comb! I haven’t time to go upstairs, and I’m simply not decent. I’m quite aware of it, but I’ve been out to lunch with Joan and I haven’t done my hair since the morning,” and she began to unwind her long plaits.

“Did Joan play bears? You are in a bit of a mess,” Nesta obligingly produced a comb.

“*Jen!*” cried Peggy, as a shining yellow veil shrouded Jen from their gaze.

“What’s up?” Jen parted her locks and stared in surprise.

“I never saw you with it loose before,” Peggy explained. “I’d no idea you’d such masses; you make such smooth tails of it. Gracious, what a job you’ll have when you put it up!”

“Perhaps I’ll bob,” Jen said airily, combing out her mane.

“No, don’t. It would be a shame. Did you others know she looked like that fairy-tale person in the tower?”

“Rapunzel, who let men climb up by her hair? I knew; I slept with her, when I was a boarder at the Hall last summer,” Jack said. “But it’s grown a lot in the winter. I won’t let her cut it off; she’ll have the fag of doing up a great fat bun every day. Buck up, Jenny-Wren. The gong will go in a minute.”

“I shall marry somebody else, if I want to bob and you object. I’m sure it would be good grounds for a divorce.” Jen’s fingers flew as she twisted strands of hair at express speed. “There! Do I look beautiful enough for Mademoiselle?” and she flung back her plaits.

“Better than you did, anyway. Come on!” and Jack seized her arm and hurried her away.

CHAPTER TEN

A PUBLIC-SPIRITED ACTION

Nora's reception of the news was more dignified than Jack's, and much more so than her remonstrance with Jen on the day after the coronation had been.

"Jolly good, kiddy!" she said heartily. "You'll stiffen up that team and Jack will be glad to have you. I was sure you'd see it when you'd thought about it. I knew you were a sporting sort."

"That's all very well!" Jack muttered, as the games-captain passed on. "But Nora doesn't understand one scrap what it's meant to Jen to give up her dancing. I know, and I'm a lot more than 'glad to have her!' What I didn't quite know before was what an absolute brick Jenny-Wren could be."

"Good thing you've found out, since you're her chum," said Kathy Parker, to whom Jack repeated Nora's remark and her own comment. "I'm going to make her teach me that twist right away. If Jandy Mac could teach Jen, surely Jen can teach me."

"Doesn't follow," Jack retorted. "I know Jen couldn't teach me to bowl like that! Depends how clever you are."

"Well, I want to learn, just terribly much. Jen always says being frightfully keen is the first thing you need, to learn anything."

"Jen's frightfully keen to teach somebody. If she could say you were as good as she is, she'd go back to the Hamlets on the spot. But you're years away from that," Jack said frankly.

"I know. And I don't want to be too good, because then we should lose Jen. It's going to be marvellous having her in the team. Perhaps she'll get so keen on us that she won't want to go back to the Hamlets."

Jack laughed. "Could you ever be keen enough on country-dancing to give up cricket? Very well then! Don't talk rot. Jen's chosen the thing she likes best, and she's an absolute brick to give it up for the whole summer, just to pull us out of a hole."

The news spread quickly through the school. All the juniors were interested, of course; but so were the elder members of the Sports and Hamlet Clubs, and the matter soon reached the headmistress. She questioned Joan and Muriel, as representing the dancers, and then sent for Jen.

"So you are going to help our junior team this summer, Jen?"

Jen looked up, reddening. "I feel I ought to, Miss Macey. Jack seems to think I'll be some use, and I'm not specially valuable to the Hamlets."

"I'm sure you'll be valuable in the cricket team! I'm sorry it interferes with your own pleasure. I wonder if perhaps"—and Miss Macey paused. "You couldn't go to the dancing regularly, of course, if you are working with the team. But when Joan needs her maid-of-honour, perhaps we could make an exception in your case. That requires no practice and would not take up much of your time."

Jen flushed and spoke up quickly. "Please, Miss Macey, I'd rather not be made an exception of!"

"What a dreadful sentence!" the headmistress laughed. "Why not?"

"The fixtures might clash; there might be a match just when Joan wanted me, and I'd have to let her down. Besides"—Jen stumbled, not wishing to criticise so great an authority as Miss

Macey—"it doesn't seem quite the thing. No one else has ever been an exception. I don't see why things should be different for me."

"But you have made them different," Miss Macey smiled as she explained. "You are an exception already. You are the first girl to give up her own choice of a club for the sake of the school."

"I couldn't help that. They asked me to change. I'd rather not be any more of an exception, please. The others would say things—about trying to get the best of both clubs. I'd rather do the thing properly."

Miss Macey agreed seriously. "You are probably wise. Who will take your place as Joan's maid?"

"Beetle. I mean Beatrice Randall." Jen grew crimson.

"I hope you do mean Beatrice! Very well, Jen; I'm sure you'll make good in the team, and I add my thanks to Nora's and Jack's, on behalf of the school. I understand something of your sacrifice, whether they do or not, and I assure you I appreciate your public-spirited action. There! Quite a little speech, wasn't it?" and the headmistress laughed at Jen's bewildered face. "I won't say anything about it in public; you wouldn't like that, I know."

"Oh, please don't! It would be awful!" and Jen escaped, with burning cheeks.

"Public-spirited action! I never thought of it like that!" she said to herself.

"Hello, old chap! What's made you go pink like a rose?" Jack hailed her in the cloakroom.

"Ass!" Jen flung a shoe at her. "When do I begin to show off at the nets? I warn you, I shall probably be a dead failure, after all the fuss you've made."

"You weren't a failure the other day, when you sloshed my bails all over the place," Jack grinned.

"How are you getting on, Jenny-Wren?" Joan paused in the playground on the following afternoon.

"Not too bad," Jen said sturdily. "I don't always come off—my balls, I mean. But when I do I'm deadly. That's what Jack says."

Joan laughed. "I'm sure, after your first match, you'll say it has been worth while helping Jack."

"I'm frightfully afraid I shan't," Jen confessed. "They've all said such a lot and made such a fuss that I'm sure I shall let them down."

"Not you, Jenny-Wren. You mustn't be nervous. You've heard that we're going to Broadway End on Saturday?" Joan looked at her ex-maid keenly.

Jen winced, but nodded bravely. "I hope it will go off well. Does old Beetle know her job? I've been coaching her."

"I expect Maid Bee will do you credit," Joan said gravely. "I suppose you'd rather not come and watch? I'm sure I could get leave from Miss Macey, and we'd all like to have you."

"Oh, Mackums would let me go! But it's the match, Joan—the Upper Fourth v. the Junior Team."

"I'd forgotten the match. I'm afraid you'll have to do your duty, then."

"Oh, rather! I hope you'll have a jolly good time. I'd have liked to see Broadway End. Nesta says it's a topping house, but not so perfectly marvellous as the Hall."

"That's nice of Nesta. You'll see it another day," and Joan began to make plans in her own mind. "I shall ring Jack up at night, to ask about the match," she said. "I can't very well ring you, but you can send me a message by Jack."

“No, you couldn’t bother Miss Macey, just for me. Are the girls going to take presents to Muriel? Nesta says there are always presents for the Queen at Broadway End.”

“The Queen’s gifts from the club. We don’t do that at school,” Joan agreed. “This is our own private coronation.”

“I’ll send mine by Nesta. I don’t want to be left out.”

“Oh, but that’s trying to do both things!” Joan protested. “Muriel won’t expect a gift from you.”

“I know she won’t, but I want to send something. Then I’ll feel I’ve a part in the whole of her crowning, even if I can’t be there. I haven’t much to send, Joan, but Muriel began collecting stamps last term, and I’ve a few good ones that Jandy Mac sent me for Jack. I told Jack I thought I ought to give them to Muriel this time, as my coronation gift, and Jack thought so too. She says the Hamlet Club has given me to the school, so she’ll let me give the stamps to the queen. But she’s going to ask Jandy to try to get her some more. They’re from the South Seas—Fiji and Samoa and Hawaii.”

“We shall have plenty more when Jandy marries her cousin and goes to live on one of those islands. I’m sure Jack is willing to wait. That will be a real gift for Muriel,” Joan said heartily.

“It’s more Jack’s present than mine, for they were meant for her,” Jen confessed.

“Jack’s very much obliged to the Hamlet Club! But we’ve only lent you for one term, Jenny-Wren. You’re only a loan,” Joan said.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JEN'S FIRST MATCH

"My hat! Have you changed your maid, Joan? Where is Jenny-Wren?"

Cicely Hobart had welcomed her guests to Broadway End and had ushered them into the big drawing-room to change for the ceremony. Returning herself in her white robe and golden train and crown, she stood staring at the round figure of 'Beetle' Randall, who was standing on a chair holding a small mirror, while Joan looked critically at her faded wreath.

"That's all right, Maid Bee. It will be coming off in a few minutes. Joy has my forget-me-nots all ready." Joan turned to Cicely. "Haven't you heard, President?"

Beatrice, a squat little person with short hair, was wearing Jen's violet girdle and embroidered collar with immense pride. She jumped down, picked up the folds of Joan's robe, and stood at attention.

Cicely looked from her to Joan. "You do make a funny pair! Why, Joan? What's the matter with Jen? You haven't quarrelled with your maid, I hope? That was Joy's trick."

"Yes, but it's all been forgotten for years," Joan gave a quick look round, to be sure Joy and Carry Carter, the maid referred to, had not heard. "I'll tell you about Jen later, President. She's a plucky generous kid, and she's been sporting enough to help the school out of a hole. Beatrice is to be her deputy for this term, and she's going to do it very nicely. We're ready; hadn't we better start? Mrs. Broadway shouldn't be kept waiting."

When the crowning and the presentation of gifts were over, and the new queen and her maid had been introduced to their host and hostess, the girls danced for an hour before the queens, and then went to the dining-room for tea. The queens and their maids were entertained in the library by Mr. and Mrs. Broadway, and when all were supplied with tea Cicely brought her cup and sat down beside Joan.

"Now tell me about young Jen. I like that kiddy; it's odd not to see her here."

"I miss her badly," Joan agreed. "My Beetle isn't at all a good substitute, though she does her best. I know she looks a funny little object, and she knows it too, but she just goes on smiling."

"Beetle? How dreadful!"

"They all call her Beetle. I'm afraid I'm catching it; I've tried to resist the temptation and stick to Bee or Beatrice, but 'Beetle' is really rather tempting! Poor Jenny-Wren will be feeling bad at missing this. She wanted to see your house, President. She's been an absolute brick, and very sporting. She's playing in a school match this afternoon," and Joan told of the plight of the junior team and of Jen's choice.

The President listened with brightening eyes; it was a story that was bound to appeal to her. She had once been faced by a difficult choice herself, and in choosing rightly she had had to give up a good deal. But from her right choice had come the Hamlet Club and the May Queens and the school's dancing, and friendships and interests undreamed of at the time—friendships and interests which were to widen and deepen as the years went on, in a way Cicely still could not foresee. She knew what it meant to choose, and with her love for music and dancing and the club could appreciate what the choice had meant to Jen, as few others could do.

“Poor kiddy! That’s the Hamlet motto, of course—‘To be, or not to be.’ She’s come up against it very violently,” she said.

Joan’s face lit up. “I hadn’t thought of that. Tell her some day, President! It will mean more to her from you. I shall try to make it up to her as well as I can. She was afraid I should take the Beetle as a friend in her place.”

“Would she like to come with you and Joy to-morrow, when you come to tea as private individuals, not as queens? She won’t be playing cricket on Sunday afternoon! She could see the house and garden.”

“She’d love it! We could fetch her in the car, on our way. Would you really ask her? It would please her enormously,” Joan exclaimed.

“I’ll ring up Miss Macey before you go. We mustn’t let the kid feel too much left out,” Cicely said.

She came from the telephone presently and nodded to Joan. “If you and Joy will call for Jen and return her safely, Miss Macey has no objection.”

“The Head is very sympathetic towards Jenny-Wren, though she doesn’t want to say too much about it. You’ll tell Jen that you feel she’s being a good Hamlet, won’t you?”

Cicely agreed. “She’s earning her badge. Most of them never think twice about it.”

Joan rang up Jack as soon as she reached home. “Well, Jacky-boy? What about that match?”

“Oh, all right, Joan. But Upper Fourth beat us by ten runs. It was a close game. They’re fearfully bucked.”

“Beat you! What was Jen doing to let them get all those runs?”

“I think she was a bit nervous. The rest made a fuss and kept saying: ‘Go it, Jen! Get them out, Jen!’ It was enough to worry anybody.”

“I should think so! Why did you let them fluster her?”

“I didn’t think,” Jack confessed. “I shall jolly well see that it doesn’t happen again.”

“I hope you will. Jen will feel she’s let you down, and she’ll be upset about it. Look here, Jack! Jen’s done a big thing, and it must have taken a lot out of her. You can’t go through a strain like that and not feel it. Jen’s sensitive; you can see that by her dancing; she’s what people call artistic and temperamental. The cricket may be very good for her, in helping to balance her and bring up her other side, so that she doesn’t grow too far one way. Do you understand all this, Jack?”

“I think so,” Jack sounded a little doubtful. “I know she’s got a side to her that I haven’t got. It makes her much jollier than some people I know, but I won’t say any names.”

“No, don’t. I just want you to remember, and see that Jen has fair play. If they all buzzed round this afternoon, I don’t wonder they put her off her game.”

“She sent down some jolly good balls,” Jack said loyally. “But they didn’t always come off. The Fourth got used to them more quickly than we expected. Jen’s going to practise like fury before the match against St. Anne’s.”

“That’s plucky of her. She won’t be downed by one failure. You must see that she isn’t plagued about it. That’s your job, both as captain and as her pal.”

“Yes, Joan. I’m sorry.”

“She’ll play better cricket because of that something you admit she has—her artistic side, I mean. But at the same time she’ll be more easily upset by failures and more quickly put off her game if anything goes wrong. You must understand and make allowances, and you must see that she gets fair play and isn’t hustled by the rest of your crowd.”

“Yes, Joan. I see that. I’ll try.”

“You’re lucky to get her. When she’s used to it she’ll be a treasure. Don’t make things too hard for her at first.”

“No, Joan. The others said she was thinking about the dancing at Broadway End, but I don’t believe it.”

“Little brutes!” Joan exclaimed. “Poor old Jenny-Wren! I was hoping she’d be a brilliant success to-day; it would have been some comfort to her. I’m sorry your crowd messed up her first game.”

“I’m sorry, too,” Jack said contritely. “She came along and apologised after the match, but I felt sure it hadn’t been her fault.”

“I hope you told her so,” and Joan rang off, and went to tell the story of Jen’s first match to Joy.

“I could shake all that silly crowd!” Joy said indignantly. “I’d like to knock their empty heads together. Mrs. Wren will be in the dumps to-night. I’m glad we’re taking her out to-morrow.”

“She’ll feel better after the President has talked to her. And Jandy Mac will soon be here, and Jen will come to stay. It will cheer her up quite a lot,” Joan said.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CRICKET AND CORONATIONS

Jen's first match had indeed been a severe disappointment to herself, as well as to her new companions. She had hoped to do so well; to justify their hopes; to distinguish herself and give the team new confidence. She met Joan and Joy on Sunday afternoon, looking more subdued than was reasonable on such a joyful occasion, and was much quieter than was natural to her.

"It's terribly good of you to fetch me, and it's marvellous of the President to have asked me," she said, as she climbed into the seat beside Joan. "Is Joy going to sit with Billy? Oh, well, it makes more room!"

"I'm going to direct Billy to all the short cuts, which are much longer than the main road but heaps jollier," Joy explained. "You two can chatter about coronations and cricket."

Jen looked across at Joan. "Did you speak to Jack last night? Did she tell you how I messed up the match?"

"She didn't say anything about that. She told me that the Fourth won and that you couldn't do yourself justice because all the rest kept bothering you."

"That was nice of Jacky-boy," Jen sighed. "I made ten runs, but I only took two wickets. They thought I'd get the lot."

"It's a good thing you didn't get the lot," Joan said laughing. "It wouldn't have been much of a game for anybody else."

"That's true." Jen cheered up a little. "If I was as good as they thought and nobody could stand up to me, it wouldn't be much fun, would it?"

"Nobody would play with you," Joan assured her seriously. "So long as you're an unknown quantity, which may or may not come off, everyone will want to take you on, to see what they can do with your bowling. It's much more thrilling for them, if there's some hope left!"

"But I ought to have got more than two wickets," Jen said honestly. "Somehow I couldn't quite manage Jandy Mac's twist, though I tried fearfully hard. It didn't seem to come off in the match; it had been all right at the nets."

"That often happens," Joan said consolingly. "Ask Joy how she feels when she plays alone at home, and when she has to play before the whole school."

"Ripping, to the first, and rotten, to the second, is the answer," Joy spoke over her shoulder. "You were nervous, Mrs. Wren; that's all. Don't worry! You'll startle them yet."

"I'm going to work at that twist, till I'm a lot surer of it than I am now," Jen said with energy.

"That's the spirit! You'll rattle St. Anne's no end." Joy gave her attention to the road again.

"Don't be upset about your first match, kid," Joan said. "Jack told me the rest had worried you until they put you off your game. It wasn't fair; she'll see that it doesn't happen again."

"It wasn't all that," Jen said sturdily. "I don't believe I was thinking about you and Beetle at Broadway End, as the others said; but I'm afraid I was a bit too sure of myself. They'd talked so much that I'd come to feel I'd only to get up and bowl, and the other team would be all out at once. It isn't like that, you know, Joan."

"No, I suppose not. But practice will put that right. I hate to see you looking gloomy, Jen. It isn't like you."

"Oh, I won't! But I felt bad about meeting you, when I knew I'd failed yesterday. I wasn't a credit to the team or to the Hamlet Club. I feel I let everybody down."

"As to that, I shouldn't worry," Joan said. "The Hamlets don't feel you've let them down; you can be sure of that. Did you ask Beetle—I mean Beatrice! Sorry, but it is so catching!—about yesterday?"

Jen laughed. "I do like to hear you say Beetle! It suits her so exactly. Yes, she told me all about it; I'm glad she's a boarder. I say, Joan, I've discovered something!"

"That's clever. What is it?"

"That it's rather fun to hear how a thing seemed to somebody else, when you know all about it yourself. I mean, I enjoyed yesterday just terribly much, through Beetle—by hearing her talk about it. Do you understand?"

"Through Beetle's eyes. I think I do; it's rather a sporting point of view, and very original," Joan said, with appreciation.

"I don't know about that. It was fun to hear Beetle talk about it."

Joy spoke over her shoulder again. "When you let me have school instead of you, Joan, you used to insist on hearing every tiniest detail, and you said you were getting the fun of it without the trouble of going. You said you were having both—the Abbey and Aunty all day, and school at night through me. You and Jenny-Wren seem to feel alike."

Jen's eyes met Joan's, and found a very great kindness in their brown depths. Her own blue ones kindled in response, as she said, "I'm going to have both cricket and dancing, for I'll get the fun of the Hamlet evenings out of old Beetle. Did you really feel like that, Joan?"

Joan laughed. "I believe I did. It's a great discovery, isn't it, Jenny-Wren? You must make Beetle share it all with you."

"But I want you to tell me about it too!" Jen pleaded. "Did Beetle look very funny? Did people laugh? Did she carry your train nicely? What did the President say? Did the maypole go all right? What were the Queen's gifts like?"

Joan plunged into a description of the afternoon, and it lasted till the car put them down at the door of Broadway End.

Jen's eyes had been scanning the big pillared house critically as they drove up. "It's a nice house, but not as marvellous as the Hall and not so pretty as the Grange at home," she announced. "The Grange isn't as posh as this or the Hall, of course; it's just a big farm-house brought up to date and made respectable and comfy; but it is very homelike and very pretty. This is very—very impressive! It fits the President, doesn't it?"

Joy grinned at her. "I believe you're just one speck scared of Cicely, kid."

"I'm not! But she's grown-up and I'm only fourteen. And you can't say she isn't bossy!"

Cicely came running down the steps to greet them, all her air of authority, which suited her so well as the President, put aside, and only friendly welcome left.

"Come away! I'm so glad to see you. We were feeling so quiet after yesterday's excitement. You're late; have you been wandering round the country to please Joy, or did you lose your way, or wasn't Jen ready when you called for her?"

"She was waiting at the gate, and I don't think we've been lost," Joan said. "I was a little doubtful once or twice, but Joy and Billy said it was all right. But we did come by a round-about route."

"I guessed as much. Just like you, 'Traveller's Joy.' Why did you kidnap my visitors?"

“It was a chance to see the country,” Joy protested. “But I’d rather do it on my own feet than in a car.”

“What a pretty Sunday frock, Jenny-Wren! I don’t usually see you on Sundays,” said the President. “It’s nice of you to come to see my house. Do you want to go all over it and to see the garden?”

“Oh yes, please, if I may. There’s a lot of it to see,” Jen said eagerly, glad that the question of the match and her change of club had been ignored, and unconscious of a telephone talk earlier in the day between Joan and Cicely.

Cicely continued to steer clear of these sore subjects, and conducted her guests over her domain with pride and enjoyment, before leading them indoors to meet her grandparents at tea.

“My father is in Ceylon most of the year,” she explained to Jen. “I go to spend some months with him during the winter, when my grannies go to the South of France or to Devonshire. Grandmother isn’t strong.”

It was plain that she reigned over the house and was the pride and joy of the old people, just as she ruled the Hamlet Club and was the idol of the dancers. Jen’s awe of her faded under the warm friendliness, and yet in a way was increased by this new understanding of the President’s home life.

“I’m beginning to like her jolly much,” she said to herself, as they went in to tea.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE MOTTO OF THE CLUB

Jen did not know quite how it happened, but after tea Joan and Joy disappeared and she found herself left alone with Cicely. Joy went off to hold a conversation with the dogs in the kennels, while Joan sat nursing a blue Persian cat and talking to Mrs. Broadway, and the President and Jen were left together.

"Come into the rose garden, Jen." Cicely led the way and sat down on a bench, where the earliest roses were already showing buds.

"You know how much I care about the Hamlet Club, don't you?" she began.

Jen looked startled. "I do know. You began it, didn't you? We're all fearfully glad you did. Do you mind my going out of the club for a little while? I'd far rather be in it, of course."

"I'm quite sure of that. I asked you to come here to-day so that I could thank you for being such a jolly good member of the club."

"But I'm not!" Jen cried. "I've chucked it up, just for cricket! I thought you'd call me a slacker!"

"Oh no! It was for the school, not for cricket. You decided against cricket a year ago."

"That's true. But I can't be a good member just now," Jen argued. "I'm coming back as soon as I can."

"Do you know how the club came to be started?"

"The girls say the school was divided into two sets and they weren't friendly, till you came and made the outsiders into the Hamlet Club. The school's still divided, but they're friendly now."

"And our badge and motto?"

Jen looked sober. "I've ripped my white cross off my tunic and put on the red shield of the Sports Club. I felt bad about it, but I thought I ought to do it."

"A white cross on a green ground; and our motto—'To be, or not to be; that is the question.' What does it mean, Jen?"

Jen looked puzzled. "Just that—out of *Hamlet*. Does it mean anything else?"

"It does to me, and to Joan, and to Miriam, our first queen, and to Margia, who plays for our dancing. Each one of us has had to make a difficult choice, that meant giving up the thing we wanted most of all, and doing the thing we knew we ought to do. We've had to answer that question—'To be, or not to be.' We've tried to answer it in the right way."

Jen's eyes were eager. "Do you mean when you offered Joan a scholarship to go back to school, and she gave it to Joy and stayed at home as the caretaker of the Abbey? It was her big chance, and she gave it up for Joy?"

"That's what I mean. Margia's choice meant losing a winter in Italy and spending it teaching in our school; and she doesn't like teaching. It was for her sister's sake."

"How jolly decent of her! I've always loved her music, but I'll like it still better now. And what about you?" Jen had forgotten all shyness in her eager interest.

"I didn't want to come and live here. My father wanted me to come, but I liked my school in London and the friends I lived with, and I didn't want to be uprooted. Miriam's choice was about a scholarship which she couldn't afford to hold unless her brother gave up one which he had won. Mirry gave up hers and let him go to a big boarding-school, and she stayed at home

and went to day-school. Now that's enough ancient history! Do you see what our motto really means?"

Jen gazed into a lily-pool for a long thoughtful pause. "That if we have to choose, we must choose the right way. Is that it?"

"Of course. And our badge; the white cross on the green hill—you've seen the Whiteleaf Cross, near Mirry's home. A cross means sacrifice and victory, doesn't it?"

Jen reddened. "President, I'd no idea it meant so much. I'll try to be good enough. It's a lovely badge and motto. But it needs a lot of living up to!"

"You are living up to it. That's why I say you're a good member, and we're much obliged to you."

"Me? I mean—I?" Jen cried. "Oh, do you mean by choosing cricket instead of dancing?"

"By putting the school before the thing you wanted for yourself. It's what we've all tried to do."

"Nora called it—'my own selfish pleasure.' It's true, I suppose," Jen pondered the matter. "But cricket is going to be quite jolly; I shall get some fun out of it, President! It isn't all giving up."

"That's as it should be. We've all found some fun in the things we've chosen. I've found the Hamlet Club, for instance."

"It wouldn't have been born if you'd stayed in London. My aunt! What a good thing you didn't!" Jen cried in horror. "Think of all we'd have missed!"

Cicely laughed. "All I'd have missed too. I've never been sorry, and I'm sure you'll never be sorry. You'll be a dancing member of the club again later on, but you're being a very active member all the time. You're living up to our motto and showing that you're worthy of our badge."

Jen grew crimson. "It's jolly good of you, President. I hadn't understood. I feel differently about it now."

"I hoped you would. We're going to miss you at club meetings, but we all feel you've done the right thing and been very plucky about it."

Jen looked up shyly. "President, why don't you talk to the girls about the badge? I'm sure they don't think about it; I didn't. They ought to know how much it means."

"We can't preach to them. We hoped they'd think it out for themselves."

"They wouldn't mind being preached to by you. It might—might help somebody to choose properly some day."

"But the girls do know, Jen," the President said. "The older members have been told; perhaps it has never been passed on to new girls. At the first real meeting of the club, out in the woods at Hampden, Mirry made a brave little speech and told the rest just what the motto meant to her and me. I was very much obliged to her; I wouldn't have had the courage to do it myself. The club may have forgotten, but they have been told. It's an older part of our plans even than the dancing and the queen; all that came later."

"How odd to have the club without the dancing and the crowning!" Jen cried. "What did you do?"

"We didn't know what to do. But we had our badge and motto, and we were quite sure about what they meant."

"I wasn't told. It was never explained to me," Jen said. "New girls ought to know. May I tell Beetle? She's new—newer than four years, anyway. Isn't the club four years old? I'd like old Beetle to understand, and she ought to, now that she's in the royal procession."

“Beetle?” Cicely asked laughing. “Is that the small round person who has taken your place? Oh, tell Beetle for me, please! I’ll be grateful to you. Tell any one else who is too new to have been at that first meeting, but don’t talk about it to people who aren’t Hamlets. It’s supposed to be the club secret.”

Jen looked up eagerly. “Couldn’t you have a solemn ceremony, when anybody joins the club, and tell her the secret meaning? It would be terribly thrilling!”

Cicely laughed again. “An initiation ceremony! We’ll think about it, but it hardly seems important enough for that.”

“It’s the most important part of the whole club!” Jen cried reproachfully.

“Is it? Well, perhaps it is,” Cicely looked at her small member thoughtfully.

Jen reddened. “I’m awfully sorry! It was frightful cheek of me to say that. You know all about the club. But I do feel it’s an important part. The dancing and the queens are jolly good fun, but that motto matters to what we do outside the club. That’s what I meant. Am I being fearfully cheeky?”

“Not cheeky one scrap,” Cicely said cheerfully. “Come and find Joan; she’ll be wanting to go home. Perhaps I’ve been forgetting the deeper side of the Hamlet Club, in all the thrills of the coronations and of teaching new dances. Perhaps by being a good member and choosing rightly, you’ve brought me back to the real meaning of things. I’ll need to think about it. Anyway, thank you, Jenny-Wren! I consider you a worthy member of the Hamlet Club!”

“What’s up, Jenny-Wren?” Joan asked, as they drove back to Wycombe in the dusk.

Jen crept close to her and whispered the story of her talk with Cicely. “Wasn’t it lovely of her, Joan? I do like her—much better than I did before. I’ve always been just a wee bit scared of the President; lots of the kids are.”

“There’s no need. She’s one of the very best, and very kind,” Joan said.

“I know that now. I hope she didn’t mind what I said. I had a sudden ghastly fear that I was telling her what she ought to do—the President! I went all hot and cold, both at once.”

“She thanked me for bringing you to-day, and I know she meant it, by the way she said it. So I shouldn’t worry, Jen.”

“She seemed to think I could be a good Hamlet by playing good cricket.”

“Of course you can, you dear silly,” Joan scolded. “Don’t you see that you’ll bring credit to the club?”

“I hadn’t thought of that. I shall work harder than ever at Jandy Mac’s twist.” Jen’s resolute tone was much happier than it had been, and Joan was grateful to the President for the change she had brought about.

“We’re all going to be proud of you,” she said.

Jen crept closer to her. “I’ll try very hard, Joan.”

“Cold, kiddy?”

“No, not a scrap. Jolly pleased with everything.”

Joan laughed. “Couldn’t be better. I’m glad!”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE MANTLE OF ELIJAH

The junior match came to an end, as the last tricky ball went down the pitch and found a middle stump. St. Anne's batsman walked gloomily away, and the Wycombe girls went wild.

"Jen Robins! Jen Robins! Cheers for Jen! Seven wickets! Oh, jolly good! Here, let's get hold of her!"

"There was no letting down this time, old chap!" Jack cried, radiant both for her friend's sake and on account of the victory. "You came off jolly well to-day!"

"Don't let them do it!" Jen fled to her for protection.

But Jack was no safe refuge. "Up you go! Let everybody see who did the good work!"

"Deadly work, I should say," cried the captain of St. Anne's team, laughing ruefully, as Jen was hoisted aloft by eager hands and carried on high to the pavilion. "Tell us how she did it! I remember watching a match last year, between our senior team and yours, at the Hall—when you were all parked there because of drains or something—and there was an Australian girl in your team who bowled just like that, and ours went all to pieces, just as we did to-day. Is this her sister? She's not a scrap like her; the Australian girl had dark hair."

"No, this is Elisha," Jack said solemnly.

"Elisha?" queried the captain, completely puzzled. "Come into the school for tea. I want it, after this sad occasion, and I'm sure you do. What do you mean by Elisha?"

"You know! Elijah's cloak fell on Elisha, and he was able to do all the things Elijah had done."

St. Anne's captain gave a shout. "I do know! But where's your Elijah, and how did she manage to pass on her mantle to this kid?"

"She went back to Australia, but before she went she taught Jen Robins, and Jen's been practising like fury. She doesn't always come off, but she managed it to-day."

"I should say she did! She's a terror; we couldn't do a thing."

"She wanted to stay in the Hamlet Club and spend her summer at country-dancing, but we couldn't let her be wasted like that."

"Stars, no! She's worth a lot to the school," the girl from St. Anne's agreed heartily.

"There's Miss Macey going to congratulate her," Jack said, as they reached the school building. "I wonder what she said. Just look at Jen's face!"

"Said she was glad Elisha had taken up cricket, I guess," St. Anne's captain grinned.

Miss Macey had said more than that, however. She had come in her own car to watch the first big junior match of the term, and she drove away before tea, leaving the girls to come back in their motor-coach with the games-mistress. As the excited crowd of team and friends drove homeward through the lanes, Jen announced that she must be allowed to sit with Jack, as she had something to tell her, and she was promptly hustled along to the captain's seat.

"I told St. Anne's captain you were just like Elisha," Jack grinned. "Elijah's mantle, you know. She remembered seeing Jandy Mac last summer."

"I hope they won't all call me Elisha! I say, Jack, did you notice that Joan wasn't there? It was the only thing I was sorry about. She'd promised to come."

"I didn't notice. I'm glad you didn't let it upset you."

“I knew something must have stopped her. I didn’t worry, for I knew she couldn’t have forgotten. I’d made up my mind I wouldn’t let you down again. What do you think had stopped Joan?”

“Can’t imagine. Has Joy gone wandering and got lost?”

Jen laughed derisively. “They’ve had a telegram from Jandy Mac. She’s arriving at Folkestone this evening; she came overland from Marseilles with some friends, instead of sticking to the boat to Southampton. They didn’t expect her for days yet. Joy has gone in the car to London to meet her, and Joan’s flying round getting things ready, so she couldn’t possibly come away this afternoon. And—this is what Miss Macey said to me after the match—Joan had phoned to ask if I may go for the week-end! Mackums is going to send me in her own car, as soon as I’ve changed. Isn’t it simply marvellous? I’ll be able to tell Joan about the match, and I shall see Jandy Mac to-night! I’ll be there when she arrives! It’s what I’ve hoped would happen, but I was afraid something might go wrong. It’s lovely of her to come on a Saturday night!”

“Lucky you!” Jack said enviously. “Oh well! I won’t grudge you your luck to-day. You’ve done a spot of jolly good work for the school. I’m glad I thought about Elisha. I shall call you that in future.”

“Then I won’t be married to you any more. And I won’t play for you again. I’ll put off Elijah’s mantle and be a maid-of-honour and enjoy myself.”

“I won’t do it!” Jack promised hurriedly. “I’ll never say it again—while you’re here, anyway. Shall you tell Jandy Mac she’s called Elijah?”

“Shouldn’t wonder if I did. It will be gorgeous to see her so soon!” and almost before the coach had stopped Jen had leapt out and was racing away to change, without time for congratulations from anybody else.

She found her suit-case packed by Matron and waiting for last oddments to be put in. In a very few minutes she had carried it down to the front door, where Miss Macey’s car was waiting. She sank on the cushions with a sigh of pure happiness, ready to be whirled away into the country and over the hills.

Two excited faces appeared at the window, and Jack tugged at the door. “We’re coming with you, just for the ride. Mackums asked if we’d like to go. It’s all right—we won’t be in the way. We won’t get out of the car.”

She sprang in, followed by Beatrice, who hurled herself on Jen. “Jolly good, old girl! It was a topping match, and you were simply marvellous. I expect you’re glad you’ve changed from the Hamlet Club now, aren’t you?”

“Um! No, I couldn’t say I’m glad, Beetle, but the match was rather thrilling,” Jen admitted. “Nice of you kids to come!”

“We want to talk about the match,” Jack explained. “When you come back on Monday you’ll be full of Jandy Mac and you’ll have forgotten about being Elisha. Mackums is a jolly good sort to think of it. She’s phoned my people to say I’ll be late home, so they won’t worry. It’s a decent car, isn’t it? Little but good, like old Beetle here.”

Beatrice flung herself upon her to avenge the insult, but Jen intervened.

“Don’t be an ass, Beetle! It was a compliment. If you fight I shall put you out in the road and you’ll have to walk back.”

Beetle subsided with a grin. “All right! Talk about the match. I want to hear all about it.”

“This is where we say good-bye!” Jen cried presently, as the car took them up the long beech avenue to the lighted doorway of the Hall. “Sure you’ll get home safely? You’ll keep an

eye on them, won't you?"—to the chauffeur. "I don't consider they're to be trusted alone. Oh, here's Joan! I do hope Jandy Mac hasn't arrived! Good-bye, you two; give me my case—now clear out! Oh, Joan, am I in time? Jandy isn't here yet, is she?"

"It's all right, Jenny-Wren. We don't expect her for half an hour." Joan took the suit-case. "Who was in the car with you?"

"Only Jack and the Beetle. They came to take care of me, for fear the man kidnapped me and I was never heard of again; that's what old Beetle says."

Jack's head appeared at the window of the car, which had been turning in the drive. "Joan!" she shrieked. "Joan! Ask Jen her new name! She's called Elisha; ask her why!" And she disappeared into the car with surprising suddenness.

"I expect Beetle hauled her down. I hope she's sitting on Jack's head," Jen said bitterly.

Joan laughed. "Elisha? Oh, I don't need to ask why! Miss Macey told me about the match. I'm so glad, Jenny-Wren! I want to hear all about it, but I know that the magic twist came off this time. The Hamlet Club will be proud of you."

"Old Beetle seemed a bit bucked," Jen admitted. "I didn't think the Hamlets would care. You won't call me that silly name, will you, Joan?"

"I shall not! But we'll tell Jandy that her mantle seems to have fallen upon you," Joan promised. "She'll be bucked too, I know."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

JANDY MAC ARRIVES

“Jan! Jandy! Jandy Mac! How lovely to see you again!” Joan and Jen rushed down the steps to meet the car.

“Joan, old girl, it’s lovely to be back! You look just the same; I told Joy she hadn’t grown up a scrap. Hi, Jenny-Wren, is that you? I hoped you’d be here; Joy thought you’d come. You’ve grown, my child! You’re going to be a tall hefty young woman some day.”

Janice, tall herself, and pretty, with short wavy hair and dark eyes, sprang out eagerly, hugged Joan, took Jen by the shoulders and looked her up and down, and then glanced round quickly.

“Where’s Aunt Shirley? And the rest of the family?”

“Mother’s here,” Joan said laughing, as Mrs. Shirley came to the door. “Who are the rest of the family? The cats?”

“Rather! The Mother Superior and Gray Timmy and the Curate,” Janice had thrown her arms round little Mrs. Shirley. “Look, Aunt Shirley! I’m an engaged lady; see my ring! Wasn’t Alec extravagant? He would do it; he said I must have a ruby ring, because my hair is dark.”

“Let us see too!” Joan and Jen came to look. “Oh, Jan, what a beauty!”

“He must like you quite a lot,” Jen remarked.

“He says he does. He wouldn’t give me my ring till he’d saved up enough to get a good one. It’s just a little stone; he’s only a poor sailor-boy! But it’s real. Of course, there aren’t seven rubies! I can’t compete with you Abbey Girls. Yes, I saw it,” as Joan flung out her right hand and showed a gold ring with seven small sapphires, and Joy, following them in, pulled off her glove and showed hers also. “Do you wear them all the time?”

“I do, except at school,” Joan said. “I love mine and I’m so very proud of it. Joy doesn’t wear hers quite so much.”

“As for the cats, you’ll have to go into the Abbey to see them,” Joy said. “The Curate still lives with us, when he isn’t out paying calls; he spends most of his time wandering. He’s exactly like me—‘The Wild Cat who walked by his Wild Lone, through the Wild Woods, waving his Wild Wet Tail.’ He condescends to come here for meals, and now and then he sleeps at home. But the Mother and Timmy live in the Abbey. You shall see them to-morrow.”

“Hasn’t she had any more children?”

“Oh, heaps! Two families!” Joan said laughing. “But we have to find homes for them. We’d be overrun with cats instead of with mice, if we kept all her children. I gave the last one to the new queen at her crowning; he was black and sleek and beautiful, and Muriel said she’d like to have him.”

“Is she the nice girl who was your maid? And how does Timmy like the little adopted brothers and sisters?”

“Simply loves them. They have the most gorgeous games, chasing and rolling one another over, as soon as the babies learn not to be afraid of him. He’s so big, and so very shaggy; when he gallops about with all his long hair waving, it’s enough to terrify any baby. But they get used to him, and then they enjoy jumping on him and being rolled over. He’s heart-broken when they go away, until he forgets.”

"Which he does in half a day," Joy said. "It's a sad life for him, always losing his playmates."

"There are always plenty more. He's delighted when the next one grows up and the games begin again."

"What about the match, Jenny-Wren?" Joy interrupted, remembering suddenly that she had not heard about the afternoon. "I'm all out of date. What happened? Did your balls come off to-day?"

"The bails came off all right," Jen grinned at her and then glanced at Janice.

"Seven wickets," Joan said. "She's the heroine of the hour and the junior school is off its head with joy. She's a credit to the Hamlet Club, and Jacky-boy calls her Elisha."

Joy gave a shout. "Oh, good! Your mantle has fallen on her, Jandy Mac! She found it rather heavy at first, I'm afraid. Cheers for Jenny-Wren! Did they carry you round the field, kid?"

"They tried to," Jen admitted. "It was a jolly fine match."

"Seven wickets is jolly good. The hat-trick and all the rest of it, I suppose? What did St. Anne's say about it?"

"They didn't like me very much. They remembered the match here last summer, when Jandy Mac rattled down their wickets. They asked if I was her sister."

"And Jack said you were Elisha!" Joy laughed again. "Jolly smart of her!"

"But I don't understand," Janice protested. "Somebody must please explain. Why is Jen playing cricket? I thought it wasn't allowed."

Jen looked at Joan, and reddened. "I'm out of the Hamlet Club for this summer. I chose cricket instead of dancing."

"I'll tell you all about it, Jan." Joan picked up the suit-case and went towards the wide staircase. "Come and get ready for supper. I'll tell you all the news."

"But isn't she going to show us those bits of paper?" Jen cried. "Never mind about cricket! We want to see those mystery papers! That's what I'm here for!"

"I thought you came to welcome me!" Janice complained. "What a blow! There's nothing like being frank."

"Oh well! It's just marvellous to see you again," Jen conceded. "But don't waste time talking upstairs. Matches and cricket don't matter; we want to see your papers! You said yourself that was what you were really coming for."

"I never did! I came to see everybody once more before I marry and settle down on a South Sea Island. The papers are safely packed in my case, Jenny-Wren. Did you think I'd carry them in my hand-bag?"

"I should have, so that I could look at them on the journey."

"I've looked at them on the journey several times. You shall see them when I've unpacked."

"Not till after supper," Joan said firmly.

"Well, don't be too long unpacking!" Jen implored.

"My little room, I hope?" Janice asked, as she followed Joan up the stair.

"If you like. It's ready; we prepared a big room as well, and we think you ought to have the big one, but if you'd feel more at home in the tiny one you've always had, you're welcome to it."

"I should; thanks for understanding! I've dreamt of my little room and the view from the window over the lawn. This is nice! It's lovely to be back," and Janice looked round the small

room happily. "You're sure I haven't turned you out this time?"

"I'm in my own room, of course. I only slept here last summer so that the school could have all the larger rooms. Jen is next door to you, in the room she used to share with Jack and Della. It's always called 'Jen's room,' and this is known as 'Jandy Mac's room.' Jen has been here several times since last August. Jan, that kid has been such a brick!"

Joan sat on the bed and spoke earnestly, telling the story of Jen's choice. "That twist on the ball, which you taught her last summer—Jack found Jen could get middle stump almost every time—she'd practised with her brothers at home. The school was in a hole—a challenge from a big college to the junior team, and their best bowler leaving suddenly. The reserve bowler had a weak wrist and couldn't be relied on. Jack and Nora, the junior and senior captains, put it up to Jen that she ought to help the school. It meant giving up the Hamlets; she's sporting, and she refused to be made an exception to the rule. You know how she loves music and dancing, and how good she is already! And I'd just chosen her as my maid, in Muriel's place. She threw it all up and plunged into cricket, to help the school. To-day was the big match with the college, and Jen took seven wickets."

"I always loved the kid," Janice said soberly, as she hung up her travelling-coat. "It was a jolly decent thing to do. Did she feel very bad?"

"At first I'm afraid she did. She's plucky and she doesn't say much, but she looks wistful when there's any dancing going on. To-day will have been some comfort to her; she feels it has been worth while."

"Couldn't they have let her play for the sake of the school and still go on dancing?"

"She didn't want that. She said nobody did both and she didn't see why there should be any change made for her."

"Your maid, too! She'd feel sore about having to give that up."

"It made it harder," Joan agreed. "I wouldn't have chosen her if I'd known what was going to happen, for it meant she had more to give up. She had the school coronation, but for the other one, at Broadway End, she played in a school match and handed over her duties to the Beetle. You'll have to meet the Beetle; she's my stop-gap maid. You'll remember her when you see her; Jen says nobody could help remembering Beetle!"

"Can we do anything to make it up to Jen? I feel she's behaved awfully well."

"We all do; but she doesn't like us to talk about it. We have to be careful what we say. You're going to make up for a lot by letting her share in this business about the Abbey. She was desperately afraid, for a moment, that I'd forget her and she'd be left out. She was overjoyed when I said we wouldn't do anything without her."

"We couldn't, of course. She was in the other adventure so very thoroughly. But there may be nothing in it," and Janice knit her brows. "You shall judge for yourselves after supper. Of course we must have Jenny-Wren's opinion!"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

JANDY'S MAP

"Now what do you think they are?" Janice spread her two pieces of crumpled paper on the table in the library.

Three heads bent over them, one yellow, two dark red, and there was breathless silence as Jen and the Abbey Girls scanned the lines and markings, which seemed mere aimless scribbles.

The papers had been shown first to Mrs. Shirley, but she had handed them back to Janice with the remark, "I can't make anything of them. Let the girls try what they can do. Joan will tell me what you think of them. Don't let Jen sit up too late; she's had a tiring day." And, tired herself with the excitement of Jandy's arrival, she had gone to her room to rest.

"Seven wickets! Send the heroine to bed early!" Joy grinned.

"Go to bed early yourself! You've been to London," Jen retorted.

Joan intervened, as she so often had to do. "Joy, you're good at maps. What do you make of this? It's much bigger than the other one."

"Isn't it supposed to be a bit of the Abbey?" Jen asked. "It doesn't look very much like the Abbey."

"John Miles's grandfather said it was the Abbey. That's what Uncle Tony has written on the back of that one," Janice agreed.

Joan turned over the larger sheet and read Tony Abinger's note aloud. "He couldn't make anything of it," she said.

"Doesn't help us much," Joy frowned.

"Let's have another look!" Jen pleaded. "Haven't you any ideas, Joan?"

"You're the one for ideas, Mrs. Wren," Joy said. "What do you suppose you're here for? Don't let us down! We have the utmost confidence in——"

"Joan!" Jen interrupted ruthlessly. "Joan, perhaps it's a silly idea, but could those short cross-lines be steps? I saw something like them in a book about buried treasure; it had a plan of a cave, and the steps leading down to it were just like those."

"Steps!" said Joan eagerly. "Let's look, Jen!"

"Jandy Mac thinks they're steps," Joy cried. "Look at her face! It's like somebody saying: 'You're getting warm!' in 'Hunt the Thimble.' Steps it is, I bet!"

Joan glanced up at Janice, whose dark eyes had gleamed in response to Jen's suggestion. "Are we getting warm? No, don't tell us; we'll see if our guess is the same as yours. Steps! Now, children, don't tease me for one moment!"

She sat down with her elbows on the table and stared at the paper between her arms. Jen hung over her shoulder, scarcely breathing in her excitement. Joy sat on the table, swinging her legs, and waited.

"Joan will solve the problem if it can be done. Why should I rack my brains?" she said. "Apparently Mrs. Wren has given her the clue. Jandy Mac's face seems to say so. We shall soon know——"

"I've got it!" Joan gave a shout. "If those are steps—and these long lines are perhaps paths or passages leading to the steps—then this is—but it can't be! Jan, that would mean——"

“It’s the old church!” Jen’s shriek cut her short. “It’s a plan of the old church! It is—*it is!* I know it can’t possibly be, but it is, all the same!”

Joy snatched up the paper. “Oh, rot! *We* found the old church! John Miles had never been there; how could he draw it?”

“It was his grandfather’s father who drew the thing,” Janice reminded them. “It wasn’t your John Miles.”

“But nobody had been in the old church! It was buried for centuries,” Joy protested.

“*It is* the old church, all the same!” Jen cried. “Look, Joy! Down this long passage; it must be the way from far up on the hill. John Miles—I mean his ancestor—must have found it and not have told anybody. It’s not impossible, Joy. Down the long tunnel, down the steps, and this is the little old church. It must be! Those spots are the ancient pillars, that Joan’s so keen on; count them—the number’s just right. This square thing is the Abbot’s tomb. That round hole in the corner is the holy well, where Dicky fell in and Miss Macey jumped down to see if he was dead. It’s all there; John Miles’s ancestor *had* been in the underground church! We weren’t the first, after all!”

Joan and Joy scanned the paper carefully. There seemed no doubt of the facts; as a rough but fairly correct plan of the Saxon church, all the unintelligible markings were explained.

Joan looked up at Janice. “That’s what you make of it, Jan?”

“I’m sure it’s the old church. Of course Uncle Tony didn’t recognise it, for he had never seen it.”

Joan nodded. “The man who drew this must have stumbled on the entrance when he was out on the hills. There’s nothing impossible in that. I wonder why he never told anybody?”

“Perhaps he used it,” Joy remarked. “He may have had good reasons for keeping it to himself. There are odd stories about that family; they were very well off at one time—had more cash than they could possibly have made out of the farm, but they lost it again. Our John Miles used to put money on horses, and he lost a lot. Perhaps his family made it in some mysterious way that needed an underground hiding-place. The Abbey tunnels would be jolly useful.”

“The very place,” Jen said eagerly. “Smuggling, do you mean, Joy? But we’re a long way from the sea.”

“The smuggled goods had to be taken secretly through the country,” Joy said. “Or he might have been receiving stolen goods from highwaymen; I’m sure our hills were infested with robbers in those days. There might be lots of reasons why an unsuspected hidie-hole would be useful.”

“That sounds likely enough,” Joan was gazing at the paper again. “I’d rather not know exactly; it’s a chapter of Abbey history, if it’s true, that I don’t want to explore. I liked to think we were the first to go into the old church.”

“Oh, but you weren’t, so you needn’t worry,” Joy pointed out. “Dick and Micky Clarke were there before you, so you can’t feel romantic about having been the first to disturb the peace, or the dust, of centuries, and all that sort of thing. Dick was the bold pioneer, but it seems as if John Miles’s ancestor had been there before him.”

“Call him Old Miles,” Janice suggested. “It will save time, and we don’t know his name. Just be thankful that he didn’t notice that cave in the side of the tunnel, where the Abbey books and plate were found! Those would have been real treasures for him.”

“He’d have sold them, and we should never have known about them,” Joan agreed.

“Or the jewels!” Jen gave another of her squeals of excitement. “Suppose he’d dug up Lady Jehane’s jewels!”

“He hasn’t put ‘Jehane III.’ on his map,” Toy remarked. “He must have seen it on the wall.”

“He’d think it was the site of a grave,” Joan said.

“My hat!” Jen cried. “Suppose he’d dug and found rubies and pearls and emeralds and sapphires!”

“Then we should never have seen them,” Joan said laughing. “We’ve a lot to be thankful for, as Jandy says. I don’t suppose Old Miles found anything to take away. You need to remember the state of the Abbey in his day. Used as farm buildings—just some old walls and rooms, filled with hay and straw; apples stored in the chapter-house; a wall across the garth—ghastly! It would seem to the Miles ancestor only an old broken-down pile of sheds and barns.”

“It’s difficult to believe, when it looks so stately and beautiful and dignified now,” Janice said.

“You’ve my grandfather to thank for that,” Joy remarked. “He saw what it was and what it could be made into, and he took on the job and got busy about it.”

“We won’t forget, you can be sure of that,” Joan assured her. “I thank Sir Antony often, in my heart. But if you try hard, perhaps you can forget our neat garth and tidy cloisters, and see it as it must have been when Old Miles found it, half buried in farm rubbish. The old church, underneath it all, would be a marvellous hiding-place. What about the other map, Jan?”

“You haven’t finished with this one yet. What do you make of that, Abbey-Girl?” Janice pointed at a big cross on the sheet of paper.

Joan knit her brows. “I saw it. What do you suppose he meant by it? There’s nothing in that corner of the crypt.”

Jen was leaning over her shoulder again. “Which corner is it? Oh, I see! On the right of the well. There’s nothing there but a heap of rubbish.”

“Why should he mark a rubbish-heap on his map?” Joan asked thoughtfully.

“You haven’t had the rubbish shifted, then?” Janice suggested. “When I was here you had just discovered the old church and you were going to have the place tidied up.”

“It hasn’t been done. The rubbish is still there. I’ll tell you how it happened,” and Joan explained quickly. “The man from London—the expert who comes to inspect the ruins once a year—came and saw it and was fearfully thrilled, but he told me not to have anything done till he could be here to superintend, for fear of damage being done to the Saxon parts of the crypt. Then he had another very big job, and then he had an illness, and he went on a voyage to recover, and when he came back all his work had piled up and he had heaps of arrears to get through. I heard from him about a month ago, and he said he’d soon be able to fix a date and explained why he was so late this year. He said he hoped we had made no alterations in the old church, and I told him we had left it just as it was. The rubbish is only bits of brick and stone, and it’s all in one corner, in nobody’s way. He wanted to examine it carefully, to see if there were any Saxon markings on any of the pieces, or any signs of when they had been worked.”

“Old Miles seems to have been as much interested in the rubbish as your expert, to judge by that cross,” Joy said, scanning the paper carefully.

“Why should he mark the rubbish on his map?” Joan asked again, frowning over the problem. “What do you think, Jan?”

“Perhaps there was something hidden behind it!” Jen gave a shriek of wild excitement. “Perhaps he wanted his son to know where to look! Perhaps it was his hidie-hole and he’d buried his treasures in that corner! Oh, Joan, when can we go and look?”

“There’s a lot of ‘perhaps’ about all that, Jenny-Wren,” Joan began, glancing up at Janice. “Jan, is that what you’d been thinking too?”

“I thought perhaps he’d found something in that corner and had covered it with the rubbish. It’s like Jen’s idea, only different. What about it, Joan? Will you let us search, or must we wait for your man to come from town?”

“Oh, rot! We couldn’t wait for *him*! It might be weeks!” Joy said.

“We couldn’t! Oh, Joan, you’ll let us search?” Jen pleaded. “We’ll be terribly careful of the old bricks!”

“I’ve been thinking about that pile of rubbish all the way from Sydney, Abbey-Girl,” Janice said persuasively.

Joan laughed. “I simply wouldn’t dare to ask you all to wait! But—one moment, you sillies!” as Joy and Jen broke into whoops of joy. “It will be a long job. We shall have to be very careful. We can’t fly at that corner and dig it to bits and fling the stuff about, as we did up in the quarry.”

“We’ll be just terribly gentle!” Jen promised. “It will be marvellous! When can we begin?”

“Not to-night,” Joan said ruthlessly. “And not to-morrow morning.”

Janice knew the customs of the family, and agreed. Mrs. Shirley’s wishes ruled the house; Joan and Joy accepted her decisions on every point; there would be church for everybody in the morning.

“But in the afternoon, Joan?” she coaxed, as Jen’s face fell. “Your mother wouldn’t mind if we went into the Abbey on Sunday afternoon, would she?”

“It would be a frightfully holy thing to do, to go and dig in an old church,” Jen urged.

Joan laughed. “I’ll talk to mother. Will you lend me the map to show to her again, Jan? She’ll be interested; I think she’ll want us to find out if there’s anything hidden in that corner.”

“But hasn’t Jandy Mac got another map? Weren’t there two?” Jen cried.

“Isn’t one enough, Elisha?” Janice teased. “There isn’t much on the other one.”

The girls bent over the second plan, which was inscribed ‘gate,’ as Janice had told in her letter.

“Doesn’t look like a gate,” Joy murmured.

“You’re in too much of a hurry, ‘Traveller’s Joy.’ It might be anything,” Joan said.

“Is it something to do with the Abbey gate, Jandy Mac?” Jen asked. “That’s what we thought.”

“It’s the only gate I can think of,” Janice agreed. “But I can’t see any connection.”

“It’s just a square, with some squiggles here and there, and a long streak coming in at one corner,” Jen said, in keen disappointment. “No steps or anything to help us. The other’s much more thrilling.”

“But if it’s a plan of some place, that streak, as you call it, might be the path leading to it; it’s quite like the way the tunnels are marked on the big map,” Joan said. “Then the squiggles, to use your delightful word, might all mean something. I’m afraid we can’t make much of this one yet, Jan. As Jen says, there seems no clue at all. Perhaps something will help us. I’ll show the big one to mother. Jenny-Wren, hop off to bed! It’s nine o’clock. Don’t dream about heaps of rubbish!”

“She’ll be taking wickets in her sleep,” Joy said. “Glad my room’s across the corridor! If you hear her bowling at her furniture or smashing crockery, fetch Joan to cope with her, Jandy Mac. Don’t come and disturb me!”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE HOLE IN THE WALL

"I thought you didn't have tourists in the Abbey on Sundays, Joan?" Janice asked, as with Jen and the Abbey Girls she crossed the garth on Sunday afternoon. "Can't I hear voices at the gate?"

"Right in both, Jandy Mac. You can hear voices, although the Abbey isn't open to visitors. The voices are a reading party from Oxford, who asked if they might come this afternoon. I gave them leave, of course. But they won't bother us; Ann Watson will see to them."

"We'll make them help us dig," Joy suggested.

"Oh no, please! We don't want anybody but us!" Jen cried.

Joan laughed. "They won't interfere with us. Come and look at that rubbish-heap," and she led the way down into the old church.

"*Now!*" Jen's tone was full of suppressed excitement. "What shall we find behind all that?"

She pointed dramatically at the rubbish piled against the wall, in the darkest corner of the crypt, and looked up at the elder girls with eager eyes.

Joan carried a big lantern, borrowed from the gardener. "We can't hold torches while we're working. There! That gives quite enough light. Now we'll lift away the bricks and put them in the other corner; pile them carefully on that big tray, Jen and Joy; don't take it for granted that anything is rubbish."

The big tray and a couple of baskets were filled and carried and emptied several times before there was much difference to be seen in the heap against the wall. But gradually the pile grew in its new position and disappeared from its former one, and the girls began to see some results of their labours.

"My back's simply broken!" Joy moaned. "I wonder if it's really worth it? It will be an awful sell if we find nothing, after all this fag!"

"I'm dead," Jen agreed, but went on sturdily lifting broken bits of brick. "Isn't it a good job we changed? Miss Macey wouldn't have liked me if I'd taken back my Sunday frock all smothered in dust."

"It is a messy job," Joan agreed. "I feel I'm swallowing chunks of brick-dust."

Janice switched on her torch and surveyed the lessened heap.

"We've done a lot," she said. "It's much smaller. I say, Joan! There's an odd blackness down there. What is it, do you think?"

Jen and Joy dropped their baskets and sprang to her side. "Where? What? Are we going to find something, Jandy Mac?"

"Even if it's only an odd blackness!" Joan said. "What do you mean, Jan?"

"There—down there. Do you see?"

"It's an opening!" Jen shrieked. "A hole in the wall—behind our rubbish! Oh, Joan, it is—*it is!* We are going to find something! It has been worth while, Joy!"

"It's a door, low down in the wall," Joy shouted. "Old Miles must have found it and covered it with the bricks! I bet it's where he buried his ill-gotten gains; that's why he marked it on his map. And his family never found it; they didn't know what bit of the Abbey it meant!" She was kneeling and lifting away the remaining stones in feverish haste.

“Bring your basket, Jen,” Joan commanded. “Be careful, Joy; the doorway, if it is one, won’t disappear after all these years. Don’t damage the bricks.”

“They’re not a scrap old,” Joy said. “Your man won’t find any Saxon markings on these. They belong to Old Miles’s period of architecture. But we’ll treat them like eggshell, to please you. There you are, Mrs. Wren! That’s enough for you at one time. Lift them out as if they were rubies!”

Janice laughed and came to help. “There’s no door here,” she said. “But there’s certainly an opening.”

“There!” Joy cried. “We can see all there is to see now.”

“It isn’t much,” Joan observed.

The four girls turned their torches on the low black opening at the foot of the wall, and stared at it and then at one another.

“Feels as if something might come crawling out,” Jen murmured, with a shiver of excitement.

“A ghost, do you mean? The wraith of your chum Ambrose, the lay-brother?” Joy asked.

“No, a ghost would glide. I meant a crawly thing, like a crab, or a huge earth-worm.”

“You dreadful child!” Janice said laughing. “I’m sure Joan doesn’t allow crabs or earth-worms in her Abbey.”

Joan peered into the hole. “There is something here, though. No, it’s all right,” as Jen gave a squeal. “It’s not alive, but it’s rather thrilling. It’s a step.”

“A step, Abbey-Girl?” Janice cried.

“What sort of a step, Joan?” Joy pressed forward to look.

“It’s a stair, going down into the heart of the earth!” Jen shouted.

“It’s the first step of a stair going down,” Joan agreed. “It looks like another entrance to the old church. I wonder where it comes from?”

“A cellar, I should think, since it goes downwards,” Janice remarked.

“I’m going to see,” Joy announced. “Can I squeeze through that hole?”

“Oh, let me go! I’m much the littlest!” Jen danced in her eagerness. “I can get through that hole better than you, Joy!”

“You’re not so very little,” Joy retorted. “You’re getting to be a hefty person, Jenny-Wren. Besides, you’re our visitor; we couldn’t possibly let you go first. Suppose the earth-worm got you, and we had to break the news to Miss Macey?”

“There isn’t any worm! Let me go first, Joan!” Jen pleaded.

“Certainly not!” Joan said firmly. “As Joy says, it’s a job for one of us. I ought to go, Joy; it’s my Abbey.”

“Don’t swank,” Joy said severely. “Your Abbey is built on my land. I’m not at all sure that you can claim this as part of your Abbey. Anyway, I’m the explorer for the family. The only question is, can you shove me through that hole, or will we need to knock out a brick or two?”

“What about me?” Janice demanded. “Why shouldn’t I have the chance to go first?”

“Because of Cousin Alec,” Joy explained. “You’re an engaged young lady. If you never came up again we should have trouble with Mr. Alec Fraser.”

“That’s true,” Janice admitted. “But I hope you don’t expect to stay down there yourself, do you?”

“No, I don’t believe in Jenny-Wren’s earth-worm. I suppose she means some sort of dragon out of a fairy-tale,” Joy was eyeing the dark opening with much curiosity and speculation. “The question is, how to do it?”

“I’m sure there’s an old yarn about a ‘laidly worm,’ meaning ‘loathely.’ That’s the kind of beast I mean. I just hope you’ll meet him in the dark, Joy Shirley,” Jen said amiably.

Joan looked at the hole with a touch of distaste. “Do you think you’d better, Joy?”

“Oh, my dear girl, we must know where that hole leads to!” Joy protested. “None of us could sleep to-night unless we knew.”

“We’d be imagining all sorts of things coming through that hole,” Jen added.

“Jenny-Wren, be quiet! Nobody will dare to go down, if you keep on like that,” Janice remonstrated laughing.

“I’m going down all right. The only question is—how?” Joy said.

“How do you mean? Do you want to go head first?” Jen asked.

“No, backwards! It’s the only way I can edge myself through. Like getting out of a window and going down a ladder.”

“When the house is on fire,” Jen agreed. “Of course, Joy. It’s the only way you could get through.”

“Hold my light, then, infant!” and Joy thrust her torch into Jen’s left hand, so that she held two.

While the others watched anxiously, Joy lowered herself carefully into the opening, feeling with her feet for another step below the one they had seen.

Joan held out her hand and knelt beside the hole. “Hang on to me. And Jandy Mac—that’s right. If there are no more steps we’ll haul you up again.”

“There’s another—and another.” Joy’s head went lower in the darkness. “It’s a stair all right. I wonder how far it goes?”

“Not likely to go far. We’re a long way down already; first down to the tunnels, and then down to the crypt,” Joan said.

“Feels like the centre of the earth,” Joy remarked, her head level with the floor. “Just the place for Jen’s earth-worm.”

“I don’t really believe in the dragon,” Jen said, holding the torches steadily. “But it looks just the place for rats.”

Joy screamed and kicked violently in the darkness. “You little horror! What a ghastly idea! I say, Joan, I’m at the bottom. It doesn’t go any lower.”

Joan’s rebuke to Jen was forgotten. “Oh, Joy, good! Are you sure?”

“Give me a torch—two torches. Leave that bad Jenny-Wren in the dark; serve her right.” Joy drew herself entirely into the tunnel and crouched and flashed her light about, while the other girls waited breathlessly. “It’s a passage,” she called presently. “Low, but not really difficult. Quite dry and clean—rather like the other tunnels. Seven steps down; it would be seven! Seven seems to haunt us. Are the rest of you coming? I’m going to see where this passage leads to.”

“Wait for us! Joy, if you don’t wait, I’ll—I’ll——”

“Shut up, Jenny-Wren! We’ll all go,” Joan said. “Wait for us, Joy; we shall have to squeeze through the hole. We can’t come very quickly.”

“Leave Jenny-Wren behind,” Joy suggested.

“I wouldn’t dare,” Joan said laughing. “You go next, Jan. Then you can hang on to Jen, in case she rushes off to find her earth-worm.”

She herself came last, and presently all four girls stood in the passage. Joy led the way, flashing her light about in all directions.

“I wonder which way we’re going,” Joan said at last. “Where’s your compass, Joy?”

“Haven’t brought it. Yes, I know, it’s mad to be exploring without a compass, but I never thought of anything like this. Sorry!” Joy apologised.

“I thought you always carried one,” Janice said reproachfully. “We ought to know which way we’re going.”

“Why does it matter?” Jen asked. “We’re going to find out where this passage goes to, aren’t we? What does it matter whether it’s east or west?”

“Jandy Mac ought to be able to tell us without a compass,” Joy grumbled. “She’s a Scot. I thought Scots always knew the points of the compass.”

“But why? Why should they?” Jen cried.

“Don’t know. But they’re supposed to know; I’ve read that, anyway.”

“There’s something in it,” Janice admitted. “I generally know whether I’m going east or west, without looking at a compass; I don’t know why. But I haven’t the slightest idea this time, Joy. Perhaps my inside compass doesn’t act underground.”

“Not in the centre of the earth,” Jen agreed. “That’s quite likely, Jandy Mac.”

“Well, I want a compass,” Joan said. “Don’t you see, Jan and Joy and Jen? If we’re going due west—and that hole was in the west wall of the old church—we must be going towards the gate-house; and the other map was marked ‘gate.’ There might be some connection.”

“Of course there is!” Jen cried excitedly. “There must be! Oh, let’s go on! Never mind about east or west; let’s see where we get to!”

“Something in that,” Joy said, with a laugh. “I’m going to find the end of this passage, even if it’s ‘east of the sun, west of the moon.’ Full steam ahead!”

“We’ll go a little farther, anyway,” Joan said prudently.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

GUINEAS FOR EVERYBODY

“We’re getting somewhere. Here’s a sharp corner,” said Joy.

“That’s something,” Janice remarked. “I thought we were going on in a straight line for ever.”

“We may not have been. We may have been going round in circles. We shouldn’t know,” Jen argued.

Joan smothered a laugh. “True, Jenny-Wren. But there’s something very definite about a sharp corner. What’s ahead, Joy?”

Joy had stopped. “It widens out into a little room. It’s not exactly what you’d call furnished, but there is something over there.”

The four lights flashed about the dark little place.

“Looks exactly like a cellar,” Jen said. “I am surprised there aren’t any rats.”

“You deserve to have rats running over you in bed to-night,” Janice said grimly.

“Oh, how filthy! I’m sure Joy wouldn’t have rats in the Hall! What’s that queer old box, Joan?”

Joan went to examine the great stone chest, covered with carving, which stood against one wall. “It’s rather beautiful,” she said. “Come and look! See this tracery, Jan; it’s the same period as the refectory.”

Her trained eyes ran over the chest, while the other girls exclaimed and admired.

“What was it used for, Joan?” Joy asked.

“I thought at first it was an old offertory chest, with a slit in the top for people to put in their gifts, but I can’t see any hole anywhere. It must have been a store chest. I wonder why it was kept down here, out of sight?”

“Somebody’s private treasure, of course,” Jen cried. “He didn’t want Henry the Eighth to find it, when he came round smashing up the churches and Abbeys.”

“I don’t suppose Henry did the smashing himself,” Janice said laughing. “The chest is wasted down here, Joan.”

“Yes, I shall have it taken up and put in the refectory.”

“You’ll need a crane to lift it, and you’ll have to expand the passage a good deal and break open the doorway,” Joy jeered. “How are you going to get that thing through, and up? It’s big enough to hold two of us.”

Joan frowned. “I didn’t think of that. How did it get down here?”

“Not by the way we came,” Janice agreed. “Unless they filled up the tunnel afterwards.”

“Or built the cellar round it,” Jen added. “It’s true, Joan! It’s heaps too big to have been brought here by anybody!”

“Too big and too heavy,” Joan admitted. “But it was brought here. It’s nothing like so old as the crypt we came from, nor even most of the Abbey. It belongs to the very last days of the Abbey, after even the refectory was built—Tudor, like the Hall, Joy. Look at the Tudor roses in the carving!”

“It’s true,” Joy exclaimed. “There are stone roses like those on the older walls of the house, just here and there. Somebody must have put the thing here, long after the cellar and the tunnels were made. What’s your theory, Joan?”

"I'm afraid I haven't one. But there's something queer about it. It doesn't look natural, in some way; I don't know what's wrong, but there's something." Joan was gazing critically at the chest, which, as Joy had said, was wide enough to hold more than one person in a crouching position.

"Do you think there's a body in it?" Jen asked, in a tone of awe. "Like 'The Mistletoe Bough,' you know; somebody who hid in it and then couldn't get the lid up again?"

"Taking refuge from his enemies, who were pursuing him through the tunnels," Joy added. "Quite likely, I should say. Can't we get the lid up somehow and look for the body, Joan?"

"I don't expect a body," Joan said. "But I mean to see inside. Look, Joy—and all of you! The top's hinged; there's a line right along the middle. We need only lift half the lid; the rest is fixed. Come and help!"

The lid was not so heavy as she had expected. The four pairs of hands raised it easily, and the light of four torches flashed round the interior.

"Empty, alas!" said Janice.

"No body for Mrs. Wren," Joy sighed. "Perhaps it's just as well. She wouldn't have liked to meet all that was left of her friend Ambrose."

"There's something in that corner; a bag, or something!" Jen shrieked. "Hold my light! I'm the littlest!" and she hurled herself over the side of the great chest and grabbed a pile of sacking from one corner.

"Be careful, Jen!" Joan cried.

"It's only a torn old sack. Nothing in it—wait a moment, though. Something came out," Jen dropped the sack and fell on her knees. "Here, Joan! Are they pennies? Oh, no, they're different. What are they, Joan?"

"I bet they aren't pennies, *or* halfpennies!" Joy said, as she and Janice came to look. "Are they sovereigns, Joan?"

"Gold pounds? Oh, show me; I found them! I never saw a gold sovereign!" Jen shouted.

"Hold that light steady, Joy. I think they're guineas—golden guineas," Joan said, examining the pieces carefully. "Are these all, Jen?"

"Just those six. I can't find any more. It looks as if somebody had forgotten them. Guineas! How thrilling!"

"I'm sure you never saw a golden guinea, Mrs. Wren," Joy said. "Neither did I. What are they doing here, Joan?"

"You've some theory, Abbey-Girl. Let's have it," Janice begged. "These didn't belong to the Abbey, of course. Somebody else has been down here, much more recently. Is it Old Miles? Have we found the remains of his secret hoard?"

"That seems to me the most likely explanation," Joan said thoughtfully. "The guineas have nothing to do with the Abbey. Guineas were made first in Charles the Second's reign, and the history of the Abbey ended with Henry the Eighth. These are at least one hundred years after the days of the monks and probably two or three hundred. But if Old Miles used to receive goods from the highwaymen, who must have robbed travellers up in the hills behind the Abbey, he may very well have hidden them here, if he discovered the place by chance."

"And when he removed his ill-gotten gains for the last time he was in a hurry, and he didn't quite empty the sack he'd hidden them in," Jen leaned on the side of the chest and stared at the guineas. "They'll be pretty when they're cleaned up."

"It's not exactly a fortune; six guineas!" Joy said laughing. "Perhaps they're worth more than twenty-one shillings by this time. What do we do with them, Joan? We could never find

the owners.”

“Even if Old Miles’s descendants hadn’t gone to America, they don’t deserve to have them, if they were stolen goods,” Janice added.

Joan laughed. “As Joy says, they aren’t worth a fortune. I know what we do with them! We clean them up and keep one each, and have them made into brooches. And Mother has the last two. They’re gold; they’ll be very pretty, and they’re curiosities as well.”

“Oh, jolly good!” Jen cried. “Will you really share them round? Oh, that’s marvellous!”

“I didn’t find them; you did that,” Joan pointed out. “They’re in the tunnels of my Abbey, but they’re on Joy’s land, for we can’t still be under the Abbey, after coming all that way. And we found them through Jandy Mac’s map. We’ve all a share in the business, so there’s nothing for it but to share the guineas too. Here you are, Jenny-Wren; here’s your brooch!”

“Oh, take care of it for me till we get home!” Jen pleaded. “What if I dropped it down here?”

“You’d better carry the loot till we get back, Joan,” Joy said. “What do we do now? Sure there’s nothing else in there, Jenny-Wren? No document saying: ‘These were hidden by John Miles,’ just to be quite sure about it?”

“Not another thing. You’ll have to imagine Old Miles snatching up his bag and rushing away, dropping guineas as he went,” Janice was hanging over the edge of the chest and flashing her light about. “What orders, Joan?”

“I want to know where we are,” Joan said resolutely. “There seems no way out of this cellar-place, so I can’t see what it can have to do with the other map, the one marked ‘gate.’ But if I knew we’d been going west all the time and were likely to be somewhere near the gate, I’d feel more sure there might be some connection. What I’m going to do is this: I’m going to wait here while Joy goes back and fetches the compass that she ought to have had with her. That will tell us which way we’ve been walking. Will you go, Joy?”

“Oh, rather! I see the point,” Joy grumbled. “I’ve let you think of me as the explorer for the family, and then I go exploring without a compass. Righto! I’ll fetch the thing. It won’t take long.”

“You go with her, Jen,” Janice suggested. “I’ll wait with Joan. One person shouldn’t stay down here alone.”

“Or go ramping about in those tunnels all alone,” Jen added. “That’s only sense. I’ll go with Joy.”

“Don’t get fooling about, you two,” Joan warned them.

“It is rather mad to send Joy and me together,” Jen acknowledged, climbing out of the chest. “Everybody knows you and Jandy Mac are the sensible ones. But we won’t fool about, really, Joan. I promise.”

“That’s good enough for me,” Joan assured her gravely. “Joy, bring any spare torches or refills you can find. There’s a battery in my room; I know my torch won’t hold out much longer. You might bring some candles and matches too, in case we find any way out of this place and want to follow it, though I can’t see any sign of a door at present. Don’t be too long, or you may find Jandy and me sitting on the chest in the dark.”

“We’ll only be ten minutes!” Joy and Jen set out eagerly.

“Be careful!” Joan called after them. “Don’t hurt yourselves rushing at that door into the crypt. Remember what a squeeze it was to get through!”

“Trust us for that!” Joy waved her hand, and the light of their torches died away.

It was twenty minutes before they came hurrying back, armed with compass, torches, and candles.

“Ahoy! Here we are!” Joy’s cheery shout preceded them and echoed in the vaulted passage.

“No answer. How odd!” she said. “I thought Joan would yell—I say, Jen! They aren’t here!” Her astounded cry rang out, as her torchlight flashed round an empty cellar.

“Oh, the dirty dogs!” Jen shouted. “They’ve found some way out, and they’ve gone exploring without waiting for us!”

“I hope to goodness it is only that,” Joy looked thoroughly frightened. “I wouldn’t like anything to happen to Joan. Or to Jandy Mac, of course! But where can they have gone? There’s no way out but the way we came in.”

She looked at Jen, and Jen gazed back at her in alarm.

“I don’t know! It’s very queer. It’s—it’s rather horrible, Joy. They’ve just vanished! You don’t think anything really bad can have happened, do you?” her voice shook.

“Well, they’re not here. I don’t know what to do next,” Joy said hopelessly.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

DISASTER UNDERGROUND

“Oh, look—*look!*” Jen seized Joy’s arm and pointed, her voice shaking.

The lid of the great chest was being cautiously pushed up from within. In the torchlight turned upon the opening there was a gleam of red.

“Joan!” Joy exploded, her reaction from her first terror finding vent in a burst of indignation. “Joan, you utter rotter! Hiding just to scare us! We really thought something had happened to you! You are absolute pigs, both of you!”

“It’s not a bit like either Joan or Jandy Mac to do it just to give us a fright,” Jen objected, acute relief in her tone. “What were you doing in there, Joan? And where is Jandy?”

Joan stepped carefully through the half of the lid which opened. “No, it wouldn’t be like us to do it just for a joke. Don’t be an ass, Joy! There’s more in this than you know yet—literally. There’s Jandy Mac in this box behind me, to begin with. It was a tight squeeze. Come out of it, Jan. These two think we’ve been having a bit of a rag.”

Janice crawled cautiously after her. “A rag! My hat, if they only knew!”

“Well, tell us then!” Joy burst out.

“Two of you in there!” Jen exclaimed. “It must be bigger than I thought.”

“Did you bring candles? Good; now where’s that compass? We’ll tell you all about it in a moment.”

“We’ve come due west, as you hoped,” Joy forgot her wrath and showed the compass. “We must be somewhere near the gate-house. We’ve come straight towards it.”

“I’m sure we’re near it; under it, probably. That settles it, I think, Jan?”

“Sure,” said Janice. “Up we go, all of us. Better tell these two what happened.”

“When you and Jen went off, Jandy and I stood leaning on the chest and talking,” Joan spoke rapidly. “She wanted to sit on it, but I wouldn’t let her, because it’s stone and we’ve thin frocks on. We were talking about her cousin Alec and their plans for going to the South Seas, when Jan interrupted. ‘There’s something awfully odd about this old chest,’ she said; she’d been staring at it while we talked.”

“You said that, as soon as you saw it,” Jen cried. “You said it didn’t look right, somehow.”

“That’s what I said to her. She said—‘Well, you were quite right. It’s the lid—I’ve just seen it.’ Now look here, you two!”

Joan turned her light on the top of the big chest and moved it slowly along where the lid touched the wall. “Now do you see? I hadn’t noticed.”

“See what?” Joy the unobservant demanded. “Looks all right to me.”

Jen gave a little gasp of surprise. “Joan! The lid of the box goes right into the wall! It isn’t a lid at all; it’s a stone slab built out from the wall. You can’t ever move the chest, unless you smash it or take the wall too!”

“That’s what Jandy Mac meant,” Joan agreed. “The chest is a fixture, built in as part of the wall. Now why should anybody do that? Why take so much trouble? It wasn’t Old Miles who made the box, you know; it was the monks who built the refectory. Miles only used it to store his stolen goods in. Why did the monks bother to build in the chest like that?”

“I don’t know!” Jen gazed at her with wide eyes. “Was there any reason? Oh—Joan! Have you guessed? You looked at Jandy Mac as if you knew.”

“We both had the same idea at the same moment,” Joan went on with her story. “We both said together: ‘They did it to hide something underneath. It’s not really a chest, it’s a dummy, to cover something else.’ And then we both shouted—‘The entrance! The way in, or out, that we’ve been looking for!’ You see, Joy and Jen? They made the secret entrance and built the slab over it to protect it, and then they filled in the sides with carved panels, so that it looked like a store chest. I don’t suppose Old Miles ever guessed that it was anything but a chest.”

“So what did you do?” Joy and Jen spoke together, in breathless haste.

“What either of you would have done,” Joan retorted. “We flung ourselves into the chest and began to look for an opening in the back, poking and tapping at the stone. It was a tight fit for two, I can tell you!”

“It was,” Janice agreed. “So tight that we don’t know now how Joan found the right spot; we think she kicked it, in her wriggling about.”

“My foot went to sleep, and I had to stretch, and I pressed against the back wall,” Joan’s tone was full of triumph. “I felt just like *Alice* in the White Rabbit’s house, when she put her arm up the chimney. My foot must have struck the exact spot, for suddenly almost the whole back wall of the chest moved slowly out, and there was another odd blackness, as Jandy said in the old church! We turned our lights on it, and there’s a stair, going up this time—just as we expected. It must go to the gate-house, though where it comes out, I can’t imagine.”

“Old Miles must have known, because of his second map!” Jen cried. “Or why did he make a map of the gate at all?”

“I hadn’t thought of that. It’s true, Jenny-Wren. Then he must have found——”

“And did you go up the steps without us?” Joy exploded. “Well, you are rotters, to go exploring on your own, after getting rid of us! Compass, indeed! I believe it was just an excuse to send us off!”

“Oh, Joy, don’t be such an ass!” Janice said wrathfully. “As if we would do such a thing!”

“Joan wouldn’t, and Jandy Mac wouldn’t,” Jen said stoutly. “You didn’t, did you, Joan?”

“You don’t sound too sure,” Joan said laughing. “Of course we waited for you. Joy, will you never learn to find out before you go off in a rage? Why should Jan and I play such a dirty trick on you?”

“Oh well, I’m sorry,” Joy apologised. “But can’t we go now? I’m dying to go through that hole in the back of the chest. Look, Mrs. Wren! Aren’t you thrilled?” and she bent and flashed her light into the opening.

“Rather! I’m aching to plunge through. It was topping of you to wait, Joan and Jandy.”

“I tucked Jan into the hole while I turned round to climb out, when I heard your voices,” Joan explained. “There’s no room to move, if two people are fitted in there. You feel just like a sardine in a tin.”

“We’ll go one at a time. Shall I lead or will you, Joan?” Janice asked.

“I’m the leader of the expedition!” Joy cried.

“Not this time,” Joan said firmly. “Jandy and I found this, and Jan’s going to lead the way. I shall bring up the rear. In you go, Jandy Mac! Now, Jenny-Wren! Jan, get through the entrance quickly, to make room for us.”

“Hustle, Mrs. Wren! I’m in a hurry to see those steps,” Joy said. “I’ll hoist you in.”

“I don’t need hoisting. I’ve been in before,” Jen said haughtily.

Joy gave her a friendly push. “Hurry up, then!”

“Oh—Joy! Jandy, catch me!” Jen shrieked.

Perched on the edge, she lurched under Joy's onslaught, overbalanced, and fell heavily into the chest. "Oh——! Oh, my foot! Oh—Joan!" she sobbed.

Joan was over the side and bending over her in an instant. "Joy, how could you be so rough? Jen, what's the matter? Oh, you poor kid, you're badly hurt! Oh, Jan, what shall we do?"

Janice, in the narrow space, crept to Jen's side. "She's twisted that foot—fell on it, I expect. Poor infant! Oh, what a mess! What a place to fall in!"

"Joy, hold those lights, so that we can see," Joan commanded.

"I'm sorry," Joy said brokenly. "I never meant to hurt her. I was only in a hurry, as usual. Oh, I am a careless brute! Jenny-Wren, I didn't mean it! I didn't, Jen!"

Her hands shook so that the lights trembled. She made a desperate effort at self-control. "Even now I'm not helping!"

"I'm all right, Joy," Jen gasped. "Don't worry! You haven't killed me this time. It's only—just a bit—oh!"

She choked and clung to Joan and hid her face, as Janice very gently drew out the twisted foot.

"You plucky kid!" Janice said softly. "I must get your shoe off and see how much damage is done. I don't believe it's broken, but you've given it a nasty wrench."

Joan's arm held Jen closely and she felt the stifled sobbing that Jen kept back bravely for Joy's sake.

"Good for you, Jenny-Wren!" she whispered. "You're very plucky. There, is that better?"

"Yes, thanks, ever so much," Jen's voice shook but she tried to speak steadily. "It doesn't hurt nearly so much now. I'm sorry I howled. Tell Joy it's all right now."

"Jen says it's all right now, Joy," Joan said obediently. "But keep those lights steady for Jandy to see. Do you know what to do, Jan? I'm afraid I'm not much good at first-aid."

Janice was touching the foot and ankle carefully. "I'm sure it isn't broken. I don't believe it's even badly sprained. But there may be a slight sprain; she mustn't try to stand on it or she'll make it worse. I'll tie a hanky tightly round it; that will help. We'll have to carry her home."

"You can't carry me!" Jen protested. "I'll hop. I'm far too heavy!"

"We'll carry you among us. You're not to put that foot on the ground for a few days." Janice was busy with the combined handkerchiefs of the whole party, making bandages. "What silly little things we use!"

"How neat you are!" Joan said. "I'd no idea you could do this sort of thing."

"I may need it on my South Sea Island. I mustn't be too helpless."

Jen had hidden her face in Joan's arm again, for the slightest handling of her ankle was painful.

"Thanks awfully, Jandy Mac," she said, her voice muffled.

"Now we must get you out of this, old chap," Janice said gently. "Joan and I will lift you, and I'll keep one hand under your foot to steady it. Joy, you'll have to help; you must take her from us while we scramble out."

"Can't I do anything? I'm frightfully sorry to be such a nuisance," Jen ventured.

"You're doing your share. Don't cry, if you can help it, for that will make us think we're hurting you, and we might drop you. We'll be as careful as we can."

"I won't cry and worry you, if I die for it!" Jen vowed, and set her teeth.

CHAPTER TWENTY

WHAT JEN FOUND

It was a difficult task, and a painful one for the victim. Jen needed all her resolution, but she clenched her hands and kept silent, as Joan and Janice raised her gently to the level of the side of the chest, her ankle supported by Janice's left hand. Joy bent over and put her arms where Joan's had been, and Joan sprang out and turned to take Jandy's place. Janice was over the side in a moment, and in the light of the candles, which Joy had lit when she had to put down her torches, the three girls lowered Jen carefully to the ground.

"How clever of you all!" Jen was white but her lips were steady. "You hardly hurt me at all."

Joan bent and kissed her. "Now shall we take you home at once, or would you like to rest for five minutes first?"

"But you've got to explore the new passage!" Jen expostulated. "You must leave me here while you see where it leads to. I'm all right now—if I don't use my foot. Oh, Joan, you will go on and see, won't you? I couldn't sleep to-night, if we didn't know about that passage and the gate-house!"

"Nobody's going to do any more exploring to-day," Joan said firmly. "We're going to take you home and put you to bed and let the doctor look at your foot."

Jen sat up, wild distress in her face. "I can't bear it! You mustn't all give it up because of me. Jandy Mac, make her go on! She said I could rest for five minutes; I'm sure ten wouldn't matter, and you could find out all about that tunnel in ten minutes. Make her go, Jandy!"

"But we can come back another day, Jen."

"What's the good of that? You'll say I mustn't walk, so you'll have to come without me. Why not do it while you're here?"

"Then I shall stay with you, while Joy and Jandy go and explore," Joan began.

"I'm not frightened to stay alone. I'm not a baby, and we've heaps of lights. You mustn't miss it! I don't want you to stay and hold my hand. Oh, Joan, I'd be awfully sick, if you stayed behind!"

"It needn't take many minutes," Janice interposed, her eyes on Jen, who in her acute distress seemed almost feverish. "We'd better go, to please her, Joan. She'll be all the better for a few minutes' quiet. We'll just go up the steps and see where they lead to, and then come back and tell her."

"But we can't leave her all alone!" Joan said unhappily.

"Oh, you can; of course you can! And you must. I'll be all right. I'm perfectly safe, and I can't run away and lose myself."

"Could I stay with her?" Joy asked diffidently. "I don't suppose she'd want to have me, but you two discovered that stair and you ought to be the ones to go up it."

"But I don't want anybody to stay!" Jen was growing frantic in her efforts to insist. "I've spoiled things quite enough. I want to know about that stair as much as any of you."

"It wasn't you who spoils things," Joy growled.

"Come on, you two," Janice said. "Five minutes, while Jen rests. You'd better both come; she'll go off her head if either of you gives it up."

"I'm quite sure I shall," Jen caught at the argument. "I couldn't bear it, if either Joan or Joy stayed behind."

Janice took off her coat; to her the English spring seemed chilly and in spite of jeers from Joy she had worn her coat all through the exploration of the tunnel, though she had discarded it during the digging operations in the old church.

"Put this round you, and sit on it, Jenny-Wren. Now you'll be all right."

"Would our jumpers be any use?" Joy asked wistfully.

"Give yours to Jandy. She'll feel the cold without her coat." Joan saw that Joy was really anxious to do something for somebody.

Joy gladly handed over her green jersey, and Janice accepted it with warm thanks, from the same motive that had prompted Joan's suggestion.

"Now we're ready. You'll promise not to prowl about and make your foot worse, Jenny-Wren?" Janice said urgently.

"Oh, I'll promise faithfully. I won't walk a step. I couldn't, anyway."

"Well, don't try. Come on, Abbey Girls! I'll go first," and Janice disappeared into the great chest.

"Quite sure you don't mind being left, Jenny-Wren?" Joan asked anxiously. "I don't like going one bit—not for all the secret stairs in the world! I'd far rather stay with you."

"I'd feel fearfully bad, if you did," Jen assured her gallantly.

"We'll be back long before those candles burn out, and you have your torch," Joan said, as she followed Joy, who was creeping through the back of the stone chest to the steps beyond.

Jen bit her lip for a moment. She was bitterly disappointed not to see the matter through to the end. And in spite of her brave words she did not really like being left alone.

A sharp click startled her. She looked all round, but could see no reason for it.

"I wonder what did that? I suppose there couldn't be anything down here?" For a moment her foolish jokes about rats and earth-worms returned to her mind. She shook herself wrathfully. "Idiot! Ass! I should scream for Joan to come back, if I were you! I can't hear them any more; it's odd! They were making such a row at first. They must have gone up the steps very quickly."

She swept the light of her torch round the cellar, just to reassure herself. As she laid it down, it shone on the stones where she sat on the skirt of Jandy's coat, close to the great chest, but in the angle between it and the wall.

"There are marks on the floor. I believe it's letters—a word cut in the stone!" Jen forgot worms and rats and secret stairs, and even her sore foot, in a blaze of excitement. "If I could find something, too—all on my own! That would be simply marvellous!"

She drew the coat away from the stone and turned to examine it more closely, catching her breath as her foot gave a twinge.

"It is words—there's a name—I believe it's a grave," and she drew back hurriedly. "I was sitting on it; well, I never meant to! '*Hic jacet*'—I've seen that in churchyards; it means 'Here lies.' Who was he, I wonder?"

With wide eyes she stared at the name—AMBROSIUS. "It sounds like Ambrose, put into Latin. It couldn't be my Ambrose, *our* Ambrose—the lay brother who was in love with Lady Jehane and buried her jewels in the old church! The grave of good old Ambrose—oh, it couldn't be, surely! Did he come back here to die?"

Jen scrambled up on to her sound foot, clinging to the edge of the chest. "I must call Joan! It's the biggest find we've made to-day—the reason for the cellar, perhaps. I must ask her—"

Joan! Joan! Come here and look—oh, my goodness!”

Her shouts broke off abruptly, as she hung over the side of the chest and stared at the wall where the opening should have been. The hidden door was shut.

“That’s why I couldn’t hear them! Was that the click I heard? I say, I hope they know how to open that thing from the other side!”

She stared in fascinated horror at the closed door. “I don’t know how to do it, even from this side! Joan said she kicked it by accident. I do hope—oh, this is awful! What can I do?”

Suddenly white to the lips, Jen hoisted herself in desperate haste over the side and into the chest. She was hardly conscious of the pain in her left foot, but by sheer instinct she lowered herself on to the right one, and then, crouching, she began to push and thump in every corner of the big stone.

“I can’t do it!” she sobbed at last. “Nothing’s any use! They’re buried alive, and I can’t get them out!”

Shaking all over, she leaned her head on the wall and gave way to panic. “Joan! Joan! Jandy Mac! Joy! Oh, tell me what to do! Oh, somebody come and help me! I can’t move this thing!”

Her mind seemed to work with unnatural quickness and brilliance. She tore off Jandy’s coat and flung it over the side of the chest. “If that lid came down and I was shut in, that would be the end of everything! That will keep it from closing, anyway. At least I’m outside, and I know where they are. I’ve got to do something, though I’m not sure what there is I can do. It’s up to me. I mustn’t get shut in too.”

Freed from the coat she attacked the wall again. But the shock and terror and the pain of her fall had weakened her, and her strength was not enough. The stone did not move, and no sound came from beyond it.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE BURIED ALIVE

Led by Janice, the Abbey Girls hurried up the narrow stair.

“Seven steps, I bet,” said Joy. “Seven seems to haunt us. We came down seven steps.”

“It’s a lot more than seven,” Janice remarked. “Seven steps would take us only to the level of the crypt. It looks to me as if we were going right up to the gate-house; it’s a long straight stair.”

“Queer how fresh the air is,” Joy said. “You’d have thought it would be stuffy.”

“There must be cracks, both here and in the lower passage,” Janice suggested. “Air could get in down below through that heap of rubbish we moved; it wasn’t like a solid mass. What do you think, Joan?”

“Hurry!” Joan said. “I want to get back to Jen. We can talk about things later. I don’t like leaving the kid alone.”

“None of us do, but we had to give in to her. She’d have had hysterics, if we’d stayed any longer. We’d better go to the top of these steps, to satisfy her; then, if we can’t see any obvious way out, we can say we must come back another day and make a proper search,” Janice said.

She paused, a moment later. “This seems to be the top. It ends, as it began, in a mass of rubbish; look!” She threw her torchlight about. “It will have to be dug out. I wouldn’t care to tackle it without a spade; it looks very heavy. We’d better go back to Jenny-Wren.”

“Looks fairly hopeless,” Joy agreed, surveying the fallen stones and earth. “We can’t get through that without some digging. What do you say, Joan?—oh, she’s gone down again. I say, Jandy Mac, put out your torch for a second!”

Janice obeyed, and they stood in darkness, a faint flicker far below showing where Joan was going cautiously down the steps.

“What’s the idea?” Janice asked.

“To get our eyes used to the dark. Now look round—and up. Can you see any light coming in anywhere? We couldn’t expect to see anything while our torches were on.”

“That’s so.” Janice put her hand on the wall to steady herself and gazed upwards.

“I believe there’s a faint glow over there,” she began.

“I can see it too. That’s where the air——”

“Joy! Jandy!” Joan’s voice rang out, sharp with sudden fear.

“Gosh! What’s the matter?” gasped Joy, and went down the steps at breakneck speed.

“What’s wrong, Joan?” Janice asked anxiously, following more carefully.

“Don’t fall, Joy. That won’t help,” Joan’s voice had a queer tense note. “Save your torches; we may need them. Both safely down? Then switch yours off; mine’s enough——”

“What has happened to the door?” Joy shouted. “Has Jen shut us in?”

“Don’t be silly; she wouldn’t do it,” Joan said curtly.

“Has it closed itself behind us?” Janice grasped the position. “I say, Joan! I suppose we can open it from this side?”

“That’s what we have to find out,” Joan said steadily. “It’s shut; that’s certain. We shall have to open it somehow.”

“My aunt!” Joy spoke in an awed whisper. “What a mess! Are we buried alive?”

“Don’t be an idiot!” Janice exclaimed. “Jen is out there. She knows where we are.”

“But what can she do?” Joy persisted. “Suppose she can’t open it either? It was quite by chance that Joan touched some spring or lever or something.”

“Jen will go for help,” Joan’s voice was less steady now. “That’s what I’m afraid of. I know we’ll be rescued in time; she’ll bring people and they’ll break through that stone somehow. But think what it’s going to mean to that poor kid! She can’t move; what is she going to do?”

“If she goes all the way back to the garth, she’ll make her foot a lot worse,” Janice admitted, looking troubled. “Could we make her hear us through the door?”

“But what can we say?” Joy urged. “We must get out.”

The three looked at one another. Then Joy sprang to the stone which blocked the doorway and began to push and thump and prod.

“Kick it, Joan! That’s how you opened it before!” she cried.

“At this end,” Janice added. “That was the bit that swung inwards. Try over here, all of you.”

“We must do it,” Joan said desperately. “Jen will do herself real harm. And think of her all alone in those passages! It’s enough to give any child nightmares for the rest of her life.”

“Jen won’t lose her head. She’s very sensible,” Janice tried to comfort Joan’s distress.

Joan said nothing, but worked frantically at the stone, sounding and pushing every inch. The other two girls helped, but with no result.

“I’m afraid it’s no use,” Janice confessed at last. “We can’t do any more. The thing won’t budge from this side.”

“It’s made us jolly warm, anyway,” Joy dropped exhausted on the ground.

Joan looked round. “Is there any hope of getting out at the other end? I hardly looked; I was in such a hurry to get back to Jen.” Her voice quivered; the thought of Jen’s agony of fear and pain was hurting her bitterly.

“I’m afraid not, but we’ll go up again and try. We must be careful of our torches,” Janice said. “We don’t want to be left entirely in the dark, and it may be some time before anybody can reach us.”

“It will be a long time before Jen gets to anybody,” Joan said unsteadily. “I don’t see how she’s going to manage it at all, but I know she’ll do it, if it kills her. But she won’t be able to do it quickly. If there’s anything we can do, let’s try it. And of course we must be careful of our lights.”

“One’s enough for going up the steps,” Joy said eagerly. “There’s nothing in the way. I just ran down when you shrieked. It’s quite easy going.”

“It looks very hopeless,” Janice admitted, when they had gazed about at the top of the steps—at the mass of masonry which blocked their way, and the gray gleam of light above it. “We could never dig through that without spades.”

“Could we move it bit by bit, as we did the heap in the old church?” Joan asked wistfully. “I’d rather be doing something, even if it’s no use. I can’t sit still.”

Janice put her arm round her. “Don’t be too much upset about Jenny-Wren, old girl. I’m afraid she’ll have a bad time, but she’s tremendously plucky and she has any amount of common sense. She’ll pull through, and she’ll rescue us as well.”

“She’s such a kiddy!” Joan swallowed hard. “I hate to feel she’s going through this for us.”

“Then you’d better take it out of me, for it’s my fault she isn’t here with us,” Joy began.

“I’m jolly glad she isn’t here!” Janice exclaimed, with great vigour. “How would you feel, if she was?”

Joy looked at her, and her jaw dropped. “My aunt! Nobody would know where we were!”
“And we’d be buried alive in earnest,” Janice said grimly. “Buck up, Joan! Jen’s going to be the heroine who saves the whole party.”

“Whatever it costs her, she’ll be terribly thrilled to know she’s rescued you, Joan,” Joy added.

“She hasn’t done it yet, though, and we’re stuck here and can’t help her!” Joan retorted. “I’m going to have a shot at moving that stuff, just for something to do. I can’t sit down and wait to be rescued by a kid with a sprained foot. We might just possibly manage to dig ourselves out.”

“Oh well! It will keep us warm, anyway. We’ll help,” Joy exclaimed.

Janice had no hope of any result, but she came to work also, scraping away the earth with her fingers and lifting aside the stones as they came loose.

Joan’s torch gave a last flicker and went out. She looked up in alarm. “I hope they won’t all play us that trick! It would be rather awful to be left in the dark.”

“We should all go batty,” Joy said. “Hadn’t we better save the other two?”

“I’m afraid we must, as we didn’t bring any of the candles, asses that we were,” Janice said regretfully. “There’s no help for it, Joan. I’m sorry, but we must keep a little light. We’ll sit in the dark for a while. There’s no need to worry, so long as we know we can have a light if we want it. We’d better go down and sit close to the door.”

Joan gave in. “We’ll go down,” she said wearily. “There’s nothing to do but wait.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

JEN BREAKS A PROMISE

“I must go for help! I must fetch somebody!” Jen started up, her face alight with hope. “I can’t move the stone, but a man could manage it. I must find a man at once.”

Her foot gave a sharp twinge, and at this reminder she clung to the side of the chest with both hands, breathing quickly.

“Suppose I can’t do it? It’s a long way through that passage and up the steps—and then I’ll only be in the old church, and there’s no one there to help! Suppose—but I must do it! There’s nobody else to do anything. Here goes!” and very carefully she swung herself over the edge of the chest and dropped gently on her sound foot.

“I thought it would be worse than that!” She caught her breath but spoke valiantly, saying the words aloud to keep up her courage. “My foot must be better; it hurt much more the first time I came out of that ghastly box, although all the rest were here to help. Perhaps Jandy Mac’s bandage is doing some good. Jandy—my hat! I promised Jandy Mac I wouldn’t walk a step! I promised faithfully. How utterly rotten! What shall I do about it?”

She leaned on the side of the chest, biting her lip to steady herself, as the pain in her foot told her that Jandy’s advice had been wise.

“I know I ought not to use it, and it will make it worse, and I’ve promised to keep still! But I’m going to break my word. I’m sure this isn’t a ‘Boy-stood-on-the-burning-deck’ sort of occasion. I’m certain I ought to go for help. Jandy Mac will understand. I’d better get on with it.”

She looked round the cellar, but had no time for a second glance at the tomb of Ambrosius, which she had forgotten entirely.

“I’ll take the matches, and two candles, and my torch, and that spare battery we brought for Joan. I do hope she isn’t needing it! They’ll be upset, if they’ve found out about the door. I wish we could shout to one another! I’d like to tell them I’m going for help. No, I wouldn’t!” she added. “It would worry them, and Joan most of all. It would be hateful for them, when they can’t do anything.”

She was crawling across the cellar to the passage. Her face quivered in pain, and she said unsteadily, “I shall hop as soon as I get to a wall. I must have something to lean against. I believe hopping will be easier than this. It’s going to be a long job, I’m afraid.”

She reached the tunnel at last, and with the help of holes and projections in the wall drew herself upright. It needed a great effort, however, and she leant against the stone, standing on her sound foot, and panted.

“I feel a bit funny. What’s the matter with me? I suppose perhaps it’s hard work, in a way,” she thought, incoherently. “I went all shaky for a minute. How frightfully silly! I’d better get on; I’ve a long way to go.”

Jen looks back on that toilsome journey as a nightmare. She kept her hands on the wall and hopped slowly along, till her overworked leg ached so much that she sank down to rest, and was dismayed to find herself trembling with exhaustion.

Very soberly she sat and faced the situation. “I must do it somehow. I must fetch help for Joan and the others. But they won’t starve or die for a few hours. I’d better go carefully and a bit more slowly, and rest every now and then. If I try to do it too fast, I shall crock up and not

be able to go on. That would be worse for everybody. I'll try crawling for a little while; it will be a change, anyway."

Time after time she had to pause, to rest or to try a new position. The pain in her foot seemed almost lost in the aching of her whole body. Once, to her amazement, she found tears running down her face.

"Oh, you baby!" she half sobbed. "What are you howling about? You're getting along just terribly quickly! I suppose I'm a little bit tired. But fancy crying like a kid! I shall never tell anybody. I really have got on marvellously. I shall soon—oh! Oh, what was that?" she screamed.

Something furry had run between her legs. Her hints about rats swept down upon her, as she saw two bright eyes glittering in the torchlight.

Then—"Just before I went clean batty!" as she told Joan afterwards—a well-known voice said, "Pr-r-r?" in a questioning way which was very familiar.

Jen dropped to the ground and held out her arms. "Mother Superior! Timmy, you almost knocked me down and I very nearly went completely off my head! Come here, you dears! There!" and she hugged them both. "Oh, how you scared me! I thought you were the earth-worm! Did you follow us down the steps? Oh, Timmy! Mother! Is it much farther? You don't know how tired I am!"

Gray Timmy struggled out of her arms and skipped away. The black mother-cat settled down, purring in content at having found a friend in the depths of the earth, and seemed ready to sit in Jen's lap all evening.

"I'm afraid that won't do, darling," Jen said sadly. "I'd like nothing better than to sit and nurse you for ever. I don't want ever to move again. But your missus is down there and she can't get out. We've got to fetch help for Joan. You do see that, don't you, dear?"

She kissed the smooth head by way of apology, and with a tired sigh turned to her task again. It had been comforting to have some one to speak to, however, and she tried to assure herself that Timmy and his mother were not likely to have come very far into the tunnels.

The stout black mother-cat went first, her tail erect, and looked back every few moments as if to ask Jen why she came so slowly.

"I'm sorry, old lady," Jen gasped. "I'm doing my level best. If you knew how sore I am! Go away, Timmy! Don't rub on my legs! Can't you see I've only one foot that's any use? You might lend me one of your four!"

At last, after a lifetime, as it seemed, she saw the seven steps before her. It was hard work, and very painful, to drag herself up, but at least she had hope now. Completely exhausted, she hauled herself through the low opening and fell in a heap on the floor of the old church.

"I must go on!" she said desperately. "It's still a long way to the garth, up all those steps. But I'm doing it; I'm getting somewhere! Some day I shall see people again!"

The cats had gone ahead, leaping up the stairs to the chapter-house. Jen, envying them passionately, crawled across the crypt and bravely tackled the last lap of her terrible journey.

The reading party had long since finished their examination of the ruins. But one of them was an artist as well as a student and wished to make some sketches, and another was anxious to note down details of the pictured tiles in the refectory, which held the coats-of-arms of various ancient families who had given gifts to the Abbey in the old days. While these two worked, their companions waited for them and smoked and chatted.

The Sunday peace of the garth was suddenly broken by a shout from the artist. He dropped his block and palette and ran to the door of the chapter-house, and bent over a small dusty

figure with dishevelled yellow plaits, who had collapsed on the grass just as she reached the sunshine.

"I say, is anything the matter? Great Scott, the child's fainted!" and he waved wildly to his friends. "Come here, you blokes! Here's a fainting lady; call that caretaker female! She'll know what to do. Fetch some water, somebody."

"Undo her collar," one youth suggested. "Give her air."

"Not much collar to undo. No tight-lacing here," said another, eyeing Jen's gym blouse and tunic. "Poor baby, isn't she in a mess?"

"What's up?" the student from the refectory pushed his way through the crowd. "Fainted? Sprained ankle? Where did she come from? What's it all about?"

"Ask the fainting maiden yourself, old son. The woman will be here in a moment. Better not touch the kiddy."

"Oh, rot! I'll carry her to the good lady's rooms and we'll soon bring her round. She's hurt that foot—see? Looks as if she'd done it underground, in one of those odd places the woman showed us, and has had a hard job to get back. Look at her knees—she's been crawling—and her hands. Poor kid! She's had a brute of a time!"

One young man with a sound instinct had been fanning Jen vigorously, and the wind he created revived her. She sat up suddenly, staring at the interested sympathetic grins which surrounded her.

"That's better!" the artist said encouragingly. "Can't you tell us all about it? Hurt yourself down there, didn't you?"

"Oh, you're just what I've been wanting, for hours and hours!" Jen gasped, incoherent from relief and distress and exhaustion. "I wanted men, lots of men! Only men will be any use. Oh, go and save them! They can't get out; they're trapped in the tunnel. Oh, you will help, won't you?"

A laugh went round the circle at the demand for lots of men. "Here are eight men, at your service, madam!" one began.

"Hold on, you fellows, it's serious. The child's going to cry," another said sharply.

Jen's lips were quivering. "Please, I mean it. It's dreadful," she faltered. "You must go and help, please. They can't get out. I came to fetch somebody. I promised not to walk a step, but I had to break my word. I think I've come a thousand miles, and it's taken years. Please don't laugh! And please go and help them."

One man, older than the rest, knelt and put his arm round her. "That's better, isn't it? Now, my lassie, tell us all about it. Where are they? And who are they? What's the trouble?"

Jen hid her face against his coat sleeve, and her shoulders heaved.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, her voice muffled. "I'll tell you in a minute. I'm an ass, but it's been such a long way. It seems centuries since I spoke to anybody. And my foot hurt me; I had to hop. It was a slow way to get along."

"Just take your time." The man who held her spoke gently. "You'll tell us presently. I don't suppose a few more minutes will matter."

"You *are* nice," Jen said gratefully, happily unaware of the grins that were going round the circle, or of the self-conscious look of the friend who held her in his arms. She leaned against him heavily, her face hidden, and for a long moment everybody waited.

"Not going to sleep, is she?" the artist asked in a loud whisper.

"Shouldn't wonder. She's suffering badly from shock. We must get her to bed. But we ought to know what it's all about," the older man said anxiously.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

JEN AND THE READING PARTY

Jen's head jerked up. "I'm not going to sleep. I heard what you said. But I'm so fearfully tired. Oh, please! Please stop bothering about me, and go and help! I'm quite all right, now. They're shut up in a tunnel; I couldn't move the door——"

"Who are shut up?"

"Joan and Joy and Jandy Mac. We were exploring, and we found a stone that moved; we found it quite by chance. It led to a stair, and they went through, and the door shut behind them. I'd fallen down and hurt my foot, so I couldn't go with them. I couldn't open the door, so I had to come for help."

"Joan and Joy—? Are those the owners of the Abbey?"

"Yes, and a friend from Australia. She brought a paper, showing parts of the Abbey we didn't know about, so we went to see."

"And things went wrong. Now how can we find these imprisoned ladies?"

"In the old church, in one corner, there's a hole in the wall——" Jen began eagerly.

"In the crypt? We saw it; your woman said there was some excavating going on. But we can't get through that little hole, though I've no doubt you managed it," the artist looked down at her in amusement.

"Oh, but you must! You must squeeze; we had to wriggle through. It's all right once you're inside; there's a stair going down, with seven steps, and then a long passage. It seemed very long when I came back alone."

"I'll bet it did! We may have to break away part of your wall to get through, you know."

"Joan won't like that," Jen said unhappily. "But you must get them out. Aren't any of you small?"

The circle around her laughed. "Tell us the rest," said the man who still held her.

"The passage leads to a sort of cellar, and there's a huge stone chest, all carved, against one wall. Half the lid lifts up and half is built into the wall. That made Joan and Jandy Mac guess that it wasn't really a chest, but a built-up place to cover a secret way out of the cellar. So they got into the box and searched the back wall; it was a tight fit, and Joan kicked the wall somewhere quite by accident. She must have touched a secret spring, for a big stone swung back and left an opening. There was another stair going up, and they went to see where it led to. I couldn't go; they said I mustn't walk on any account. I heard a click, and I found the stone had swung back and the door was shut. They're stuck behind it, and they must have found they couldn't open it from that side, or they'd have been out long ago. They said they'd only stay five minutes. Joan didn't like leaving me alone."

"We've got that all straight," her friend said. "We squeeze through a hole far too small for us, and go by a long passage to a cellar, and climb into an old chest. It sounds a jolly sort of picnic, doesn't it, boys?"

"Sounds as if we might need dynamite."

"Oh, you mustn't blow up the Abbey!" Jen's shriek of dismay startled the men who did not know her. "Joan would never forgive you!"

"Would she rather spend the rest of her life buried alive?"

“Besides, you’d hurt them if you blew the place up.” Jen’s strong common sense came to her help. “You didn’t mean it. You’ll find some way. You will get them out, won’t you?”

“Sure we will,” her friend said heartily. “Now don’t you worry any more. We’ll tackle the problem, and we’ll get your friends out without blowing up the ruins. All you have to do is rest and keep quiet. Evans, you’re good at first-aid. You must see to this foot before we leave her. Then come after us as fast as you can, for you’re the one who will have to go through that hole first.”

The little Welshman agreed. “Indeed and I will do both. Here is that woman at last. She will tell us what to do.”

Mrs. Watson had been gossiping out beyond the gate-house with a neighbour, knowing that her visitors could not leave the Abbey by any other way. The student who had run to fetch her had not been able to find her at first, but his shouts had brought her hurrying back.

“Is anything the matter?”

“One of your young people has fallen and hurt herself. Where can we carry her? She ought to be taken care of.”

“Eh, Miss Jen!” Mrs. Watson rushed across the garth to the group. “Bring her in here, sirs. I’ll see to the bairn. Where be the rest, Miss Jen?”

“Buried. These nice men are going to dig them out,” Jen said wearily. “I say, Mrs. Watson! We mustn’t let Mrs. Shirley know till they’re safe. She’d have a heart attack, or a fit, or something. But she’ll be wondering where we are; it must be long past tea-time. Couldn’t you send some message that would keep her quiet?”

“We want to keep you quiet,” one of the students said severely. “You’ve done enough for one day. We’ll see to all the rest.”

“I know. It’s marvellous of you,” Jen said. “But you can’t do it till I tell you. Mrs. Shirley will be terribly anxious about us all.”

“We’ll take a message. Mrs.—Watson, is it?—will tell us where to go. Just you keep quiet and leave it all to us.”

Jen surrendered with a tired sigh. She was lifted carefully into Ann Watson’s little kitchen, and laid on the couch and covered with a rug. The Welshman gave directions, and presently sat beside her and bathed her ankle very gently. Mrs. Watson, obeying orders, made strong sweet tea and put a drop of something into it, unknown to Jen, who drank it eagerly and thirstily. She grew very drowsy, and hardly knew when the Mother Superior leapt up and curled down beside her, purring joyfully and seeming to understand that now all was well.

But suddenly Jen jerked herself back to consciousness, wide awake with an impelling idea. “There’s something else. Perhaps it will help. We’re sure the tunnel, where the girls are, is under the gate-house. It went in that direction, and our map said something about the gate. We don’t know where it comes out, but there must be a way out somewhere, and it’s something to do with the gate.”

“That will be a great help, indeed it will. I will tell the others,” said the Welshman.

“And you’ll send a message to Mrs. Shirley?”

“I’ll go myself, Miss Jen,” Mrs. Watson exclaimed. “I’ll tell her you’ve hurt your foot, but that these gentlemen have seen to it, and that Miss Joan and the rest will be home quite soon.”

“That will do the trick. Say we’re still in the Abbey; then she won’t worry,” Jen said drowsily.

Then her eyes opened again. “I say! I’d forgotten all about it. There’s a gravestone down there, close to the big chest—tell them not to hurt it! It’s fearfully precious; the others haven’t

seen it yet. I found it when I was all alone. Don't let it get damaged, will you?" she pleaded. "I think perhaps a great friend of ours is buried there. He was one of the monks, but we know all about him and we're frightfully keen on him. It would be ghastly if I'd found his grave and then anybody went and spoilt it."

The Welshman promised gravely to see that the grave was not harmed, and Jen, satisfied at last, sank back into the stupor of exhaustion that was creeping over her.

"This is nice! Oh, I am so tired! But I couldn't let them blow up Ambrose with dynamite. Could it be our Ambrose? I forgot all about him from the moment I saw that that horrible door was shut."

And, wondering about Ambrose, she fell asleep, with the Mother Superior curled up in a large heap at her side and Gray Timmy purring at her feet.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR THE RESCUE

The Welshman found his friends gathered round the hole in the wall of the crypt.

"It's going to be some job," said one, knitting his brows. "Even you won't find it a picnic to get through that crack, Evan Evans."

"Indeed, and I do not like the thought of it at all. But perhaps there is another way. The child is sure her friends are near the gate-house, and talks of some map which makes them think so. Shall we go first to the gate and see if we can find any way down into the cellar?"

"Good idea. Better than climbing into stone chests or breaking open this gap. Even if we find their secret door, we may not hit on the spring. Let's try the gate first."

"But surely if there was any way down through the gate, it would have been discovered long ago?" the artist objected.

"Might not, if nobody suspected its existence and therefore nobody looked for it. This crypt was here all the time, but they say they only found it a year ago," the leader of the party retorted. "We'll see if we can find anything at the gate before we start smashing up the happy home down here."

"I suppose there is no way to the gate except the way we came in?" the Welshman asked, as they turned to go up to the chapter-house again.

"I haven't seen any other way. Why, my boy?"

"Because we'll have to pass the door of the woman's room. I do not want my patient to be disturbed. She's fallen asleep, and she needs rest badly."

"Oh, righto! Creep past like mice, men! Don't wake the baby! Evans will go off the deep end if you disturb his patient."

"She's a jolly plucky kid," said another. "She's had a ghastly time. We don't know how far she came, but we saw the state she was in. Her knees were all grazed and her stockings were cut to pieces."

"I washed them—her knees, not her stockings," Evans said simply. "It wasn't safe," as the rest tittered. "I had to see that the wounds were clean."

"You're a good lad, Evan Evans! And you just revelled in having a patient," and the leader clapped him on the shoulder. "Go softly, boys. That brave little soul shan't be disturbed by us."

"She will have bad dreams for weeks," said Evan Evans.

A noiseless procession tiptoed past Ann Watson's door, which Ann had left standing open while she went to the Hall to reassure Mrs. Shirley. More than one student peeped in, to glance at sleeping Jen, as she lay with the cats close to her and her yellow plaits framing her face. Then, as soon as they were safely out in the grounds, they raced across the grass, jumped over the fish-stream without going round by the little bridge, and gathered in the gate-house, eager for discoveries.

Shouting comments to one another they poked about in every corner.

"Nothing here. Seems rather hopeless."

"It will have to be the nightmare of tunnels and stone chests, after all."

"We'd better borrow some tools. Might be useful——"

"I say, you fellows, come here!"

At the shout the men gathered round their leader, who stood on the outside of the gatehouse, close to the wall.

"I thought the entrance might be outside," he said. "Listen, all of you! I heard a shout."

In the silence that followed they all heard clearly, from beneath their feet, a girl's voice.

"Help! Is anybody there? Ahoy! Help us, please! We can't get out!"

"Found!" the artist proclaimed. "That is to say, nearly found," he added prudently.

"We do not know yet where they are, at all," said Evan Evans.

"Where are you?" cried the leader. "We were looking for you. We'll get you out all right, once we find you."

"There's a hole somewhere. We can see a gleam of light, when our torch is off," the voice from below replied. "Do be quick and find us, please! We've only one torch left."

"The door is blocked by a heap of rubbish that we can't move," a second voice explained.

"Here, boys!" The artist poked with his stick among the brambles that grew against the wall. "There's a space here. Get these things cleared away. Gosh! What thorns! Why haven't we gardening gloves?"

It was an unpleasant and prickly job, and there was much jeering when it was discovered that Evan Evans was not doing his share. He had disappeared, and only came running back when the work was almost finished.

"Hi, you slack dog! Come and be gashed like the rest of us! What have you been up to?"

The little Welshman threw down a rope. "We shall need it, whateffer. Now we shall not have to wait while somebody fetches one. I went to a farm I'd seen, just down the road."

"Oh, hot, man! Good work! We're sure to need it," the leader said heartily. "Look, Evan! There is a gap. The brambles had grown over it."

"You've given us a lot more light," the girl's voice cried from below. "How can you get us up? We can't reach."

"There's a rope here. We'll haul you up. We'll make the hole a bit larger."

The men fell on the opening, breaking away the earth. There was a scuffle and a stifled scream from below, as gravel rattled down into the cellar.

"Stand clear below there!" the artist shouted anxiously. "Anybody killed?"

"No, only a little startled." It was Joan's voice, half laughing, but full of reproach. "You should have given us warning. The world began to fall in on us. We've retreated now to a place of safety."

"We're binding up our wounds," Joy added. "You nearly stunned Jandy Mac with that first half brick."

"Sorry! Sure you're out of the way now? We'll suspend operations till you're clear."

"We'll go a few steps down. There's no room to spare," Joan said. "Please, are there many of you? We've heard several different voices. Could somebody be spared to go to the house and tell my mother we're all right? She'll be so terribly anxious."

"Your good woman has gone already. That's all right."

"Oh, good! How did you find us? Did Jenny-Wren send you? Is she all right?"

"Is she the heroine with yellow pigtaileds and blue eyes and two cats?"

There was a smothered laugh from below. "I didn't know about the cats," Joan said. "But the rest is all right. Is she?"

"We're sure the heroine bit is correct," said a third voice. "Is she nearly dead?"

"Nearly. But we've put her to bed, plus the cats, in the woman's room. She's a plucky kid; she won't be any the worse."

“Oh, cheers! Thanks so much! Now if you could help us out of this place——!”

“It’s a filthy hole, and we’re more than fed up with it,” Joy called. “We’ve been here about twenty years. Our hair and beards have grown till they touch the ground. Are you the reading party?”

The leader assented, with a laugh. “Sorry it’s seemed so long. We’ve been as quick as we could.”

“Awfully sporting of you!” Joy said warmly. “Now we’ll retreat while you continue to dig us out.”

At last the rope came dangling through an enlarged gap, and a voice called—“All clear! There’s a loop on the rope. One of you must sit in it and we’ll haul you up. Keep one hand free to guide yourself off the edge.”

There was a moment’s discussion below, as the girls came racing up the steps. The men heard—“You go first”—“No, Jandy Mac; she’s the visitor”—“Go on, Joy. Don’t waste time!”—in a tone of authority.

“Ready!” came a shout.

The men hauled, and a red head appeared in the opening.

“Quite easy!” Joy said cheerfully. “We’re all good at gym. I say, thanks awfully! Terribly sporting of you!”

Janice came next, and then, to the amazement of the students, a second red head appeared.

“I say, we’ve had you before!” the artist remonstrated. “You can’t do that, you know; coming up twice, just to give us a shock! How did you get down again?”

Joy’s laugh rang out. “It’s all right! You aren’t seeing double. There really are two of us.”

He eyed their vivid colouring wistfully. “I suppose you wouldn’t let me try to paint you?”

“Not till they’ve had baths and washed their hair,” Janice retorted. “We’re all filthy, and grimy, and covered with dust, and dying for our tea.”

“And we’re in a very great hurry to see Jenny-Wren,” Joan added.

“If you mean my patient, she is asleep and must not be awakened,” the Welshman insisted.

“I’ll bet she had a rotten time getting through that passage,” Joy said. “She’s no end of a brick.”

“She is that,” said Evan Evans warmly.

Joan turned to the leader of the party. “Will you come to the house and let my mother thank you properly? You’ve been so very kind. Well, then, will you come back to-morrow and let us give you tea, and be introduced properly?”

“We’d rather clean up before we meet you officially,” Joy added.

“That would be jolly nice of you—the tea, I mean, of course,” the leader of the party said. “May we really come? We’d like to see this place where you were trapped, but we can’t ask you to go back just now. Perhaps later on——”

“To-morrow afternoon at three, if you can manage it,” Joan agreed. “We’ll explore the passage, and you may be able to find the spring that turns the stone. Come to the Abbey, and we’ll go down with you; then you’ll come to the house for tea and to meet Mother.”

“And Jen,” Janice added. “I’m afraid she won’t go exploring to-morrow.”

“She will not. She will not put her foot to the ground until the doctor gives her leave,” said Evan Evans. “You will send for him at once? Will we carry her to the house for you?”

“I think we’ll let her sleep till he comes. Joy, scoot home as fast as you can and phone for him; say there’s been an accident in the Abbey and ask him to come straight here. He’ll take

Jen home for us. Tell mother the whole story and say I'll come with the doctor and Jen. I'll stay with her till he comes, in case she wakes."

"I'll come with you," Janice said. "I want to thank Jen as soon as there's any chance."

"Indeed, you must not wake her," said the Welshman, as he followed his companions, who had tiptoed back into the Abbey to fetch easel and palette and various belongings.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE “HIC JACET AMBROSIUS”

Joan and Janice stood together, looking down at Jen, who lay in a sleep of utter exhaustion.

“Plucky babe,” Janice whispered.

“She’s a dear kid,” Joan agreed. “She’s having a rotten term. First having to give up her dancing, and now this.”

“But in her heart she’s tremendously bucked that she played up and helped the school; and she seems to have done brilliantly yesterday. I believe she’ll be equally bucked about to-day’s adventure,” Janice said. “She’ll soon be all right again, and she’ll know she’s the heroine of the hour.”

“She won’t play cricket *or* dance for some time, I’m afraid,” Joan sighed.

“Who’s this?” Janice stroked the mass of gray fur at Jen’s feet. “Don’t say it’s the kitten, Joan!”

Joan laughed. “Why not? Of course it’s Timmy.”

“But last summer he was just a spot! He’s grown into a monster; I can hardly believe it’s Timmy.”

“A very beautiful monster,” Joan smoothed the fluffy head, and Timmy yawned, showing a wide pink grin, and turned over on his back and stretched out his fat arms.

The girls laughed, and sat down to the tea Ann Watson had prepared for them and to wait for the doctor.

Jen slept through his careful examination and only half woke as she was carried across the garth and by the tresaut to the Hall. In a dim way she knew she was being undressed and put to bed, and that some one was bathing her foot and tending her scratched hands and grazed knees; then she fell into a deep sleep again, to the doctor’s satisfaction.

“She’ll be all right now. She’s sleeping off the shock and strain. Somebody should be near her during the night, in case she dreams and wants company.”

“I thought I’d sleep in the other bed in her room,” Joan said.

“That’s right. Keep her quiet and make her rest. The ankle isn’t sprained, you know, or I doubt if she could have managed all those steps. But it has had a very nasty wrench and she hasn’t done it any good by dragging it so far. It couldn’t be helped, of course; but she must be careful of it now and rest it completely for a few days. I’ll look in again to-morrow, just to be sure she’s going on all right. Now what about the others? Any more casualties?”

“Nothing that hot baths won’t put right,” Joy told him. “Chiefly dirt and stiffness.”

“Good! Don’t have any more adventures for a week or two, and keep your invalid quiet and calm. Don’t let her talk much, even when she wakes.”

“Calm! My hat, think of Jenny-Wren keeping calm!” Joy said, when he had gone. “She’ll let out one of her wild shrieks when she hears how we went up by that rope. She’ll be upset that she missed the fun.”

“She had her full share of what you call the fun,” Janice remarked. “I want to hear her story, as soon as she can tell us all about it.”

Mrs. Shirley had been anxious until Ann Watson’s explanation eased her mind, though she had been less troubled than she might have been, owing to the message brought by Joy and

Jen when they fetched the compass. Knowing Joan and Janice, she had felt sure the exploration in progress would not be dangerous and had guessed that the girls would be late for tea; and she had only just begun to think they were taking a very long time when first Ann and then Joy had come to say that all was well.

She turned white when she heard the story, all the same. "My dears, what if Jen had been behind that stone with you! I can't bear to think of it."

"No, it doesn't bear thinking about," Joan agreed soberly. "I'm very sorry, dear. It was incredibly careless of me not to make sure that the stone couldn't shut behind us."

"A stick stuck in the crack would have made it safe," Janice said. "I feel crushed to think we were so silly. What Alec will say to me I don't know."

"Or what he would have said to us, if anything had happened to you," Joan added.

"We shouldn't have been here. We'd all have been buried together," Joy pointed out. "You should be grateful to me for being what Joan called rough with poor old Jenny-Wren. I never meant to hurt her, of course, and I'm fearfully sorry I did, but it was a jolly good thing for all of us, all the same. I was deadly sick of that hole. We might be there yet."

"We'd have been found in time, I suppose," Janice said. "Mrs. Shirley and Mrs. Watson knew we'd started our wanderings in the old church; they'd have tracked us through the hole in the wall to the cellar with the chest. But there they'd have been stumped."

"We might have made somebody hear us by shouting up at the gate-house," Joan said. "That was what happened, you know, mother. We went to have another look at the top entrance, before our last torch gave out, and Jandy showed me the light she had seen high up above our heads. We were discussing it and wondering where in the gate-house it could be, when we heard shouting. I asked the students about it, and they said one of them went to fetch Ann Watson, to come to Jen; she was out at the gate talking to somebody and he yelled to her that she was wanted. That must have been what we heard. So we shouted, but nothing happened. We kept on shouting at intervals, and at last we heard people talking, so then we all called together, and that time they heard us."

"It was a yell, too!" Joy chuckled. "I thought the roof would fall in. And then they flung down stones on us! You should have seen us jump!"

"You weren't really hurt, were you, Jan?" Joan asked.

"Nothing serious," Janice laughed. "Just a very small bruise. I thought they'd hit me in the eye, but it wasn't as bad as that."

"You must all go to bed very early," Mrs. Shirley said.

"Dear, I'm just aching to go to bed," Joan assured her. "I want to stretch and rest and forget it all. There's heaps more to say about that cellar, but it will keep until to-morrow."

"Old Miles, yes," Janice said. "He must have known both entrances, for he marked them on his maps. What Jen called 'squiggles' on the map of the gate-house were really his signs to show the entrance to the tunnel."

"Are you sure of that?" Joan asked eagerly. "That's one thing I wanted to know. Are the squiggles at the right place? Have you had time to look?"

"Rather! It's the entrance to the passage all right. I looked before I had my bath."

"That proves it. He had been all the way through. I wonder—all right, mother dear! We won't start on it now," Joan said, with a laugh.

Jen was still sleeping soundly as Joan slipped into the bed which had been Jack Wilmot's when the school had lived at the Hall; she was tired out, and she fell asleep at once. But suddenly she started up, wide awake, for Jen was calling from her corner.

“Joan! Somebody—where am I? Oh, Joan!” with a gasp of relief, as Joan switched on the light. “Are you all right, Joan? And the others too?”

“Everybody’s all right, Jen, thanks to you.” Joan sat on the edge of the bed. “I’m sleeping just over here. Can’t you go to sleep again? It’s one o’clock in the morning.”

“I’m sorry.” Jen pushed back her hair and stared up at Joan. “But one o’clock or not, I’ve got to tell you something. I’d forgotten all about it; I never once thought of it in those beastly underground places, but as I woke up it came into my head. Oh, Joan! What do you think happened down there? Joan, I found Ambrose—dear old Ambrose!”

“Jen dear, you must keep quiet and go to sleep,” Joan said soothingly, distress and almost fear in her eyes. “Jen, shall I call Mother? You will be quiet and stop thinking, won’t you?”

Jen’s laugh trilled out, a happy natural laugh that sounded very healthy. “I’m not off my head! Did you think I was delirious? Joan, it’s true. I can’t be sure it’s our Ambrose, of course, but I don’t suppose there was another. He must have come back to the Abbey.”

“But, Jen——!” Joan remonstrated.

“It’s true as true, Joan. There’s a grave-stone in the floor, close to that horrible cheating chest. You never looked at the floor, did you? You looked round the walls for a way out, and we looked at the carving on the chest, but did you ever look at the floor, down close to the side of the chest, where it would be in shadow? Did you, Joan?”

“No, of course I didn’t.” Excitement began to dawn in Joan’s face. “Jen, is it true? Sure you aren’t just dreaming?”

“I was sitting on it,” Jen said breathlessly. “When you all went, I began to look round, and my torch shone on letters cut in the stone, just where I was sitting on Jandy Mac’s coat. I pulled the coat away, and there were words. It said ‘*Hic jacet Ambrosius,*’ and a date that I can’t remember. I just yelled, and jumped up to call to you; and then I saw that the stone had shut, and you were all buried alive. I tumbled into the chest and *fought* with that stone, Joan! I attacked it at every possible spot, but nothing happened. By that time I’d forgotten all about Ambrosius, and I only remembered him as I woke up. I think I told those nice men not to blow him up, if they had to smash the stone to get you out; but that’s the only time I thought about ‘*Hic jacet Ambrosius*’ until I was waking up just now. When I found I was in bed and everything must be all right, I knew I must tell you about him at once.”

“Ambrose! What a wonderful story!” Joan exclaimed. “It explains the tunnels, or helps to explain them. I was sure Old Miles hadn’t made them, though it’s evident he found them. Ambrose! Buried away down below the gate-house! I wonder how it happened? Did he come back, after the Abbey was dissolved? I don’t suppose we shall ever know the story.”

“You do think it’s our Ambrose, don’t you?” Jen pleaded.

“You can’t remember the date, Jenny-Wren? That’s important, you know.”

“Sixteen hundred and something. I can’t remember the rest. What does it matter, Joan?”

“H’m! Sixteen-something; well, he might just possibly have lived that long. We know he was a young man in 1536, Jenny-Wren.”

“I see. If it was too far ahead he couldn’t have been alive. Oh, Joan, will you go and see the date first thing in the morning?”

“You can be quite certain I shall!” Joan said, with energy. “How I’m to sleep after this, I don’t know. I thought I was too tired to care about anything whatever, but you’ve shown me I’m not. The grave of Ambrose! It doesn’t sound possible. You’re quite sure you didn’t dream it, Jen?”

"I'm not," Jen said. "I'm not sure of anything. I had a horrible nightmare that you were buried alive and I couldn't move the stone, and the nightmare went on for hours, and I was all alone in passages underground. I didn't seem to get anywhere and I thought I never should—oh, yes, and wild animals ran at me, and they were only Timmy and his mother, but I thought they were rats and I yelled. I went on, and the dream went on, and my foot was sore and my other leg nearly broke with tiredness——"

"Oh, stop, please stop, Jen!" Joan was half laughing, half crying. "It was simply dreadful for you! You're the bravest kid I know."

"Ambrose may have been part of the dream—I don't know," Jen ended. "Perhaps I dreamt it all, and the nice men too."

"You didn't dream the men; they're coming to see you. And you didn't dream the tunnels, or being brave all alone. About Timmy and his mother, of course, I can't say."

"They were real, if the rest was. I was scared stiff when I felt Tim at my legs. I thought of rats and worms."

"You poor kid! I suppose they had followed us."

"Do you think Ambrose was only a dream, Joan?" Jen asked wistfully. "I don't feel sure of anything just now."

"No, I don't believe you dreamt about the grave," Joan said, her arm round her. "But it may not be our Ambrose."

"You wouldn't like to go and look at that date to-night, would you?" Jen whispered.

"No, Jenny-Wren, I'd much rather not."

"I'm sure Joy would go, if you told her."

"I'm sure she would. But nobody's going to do anything more to-night, except you and me. I'm going down to warm some milk for you, and then we're both going to sleep again. If Ambrose has waited three hundred years for us, he'll go on waiting till the morning."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX IS IT AMBROSE?

“You know, I thought all those men were a dream,” Jen said seriously, as she sipped the hot milk and ate the sandwiches Joan had brought.

“I left these ready last night, in case you woke.” Joan had brought milk for herself also, and wrapped in a warm blue dressing-gown she was sitting on Jen’s bed. “The reading party didn’t seem at all dream-like to me.”

“Is that what they were? I was saying to myself all the time—‘I must find some men. Nobody will be any use but men.’ I crawled through the chapter-house out on to the garth, where it was sunny, and then everything went black, and when I looked again there seemed to be stacks of men. I really thought I was dreaming them, or that it was a miracle or something.”

“It was very lucky for us that they hadn’t gone away.”

“One of them talked just like father,” Jen said thoughtfully. “Do you suppose he comes from Yorkshire?”

Joan laughed. “I noticed him, but I thought he talked just like you do at the end of the summer holidays. We’ll ask him where he comes from. One of them was very Welsh; he said ‘Inteet’ and ‘whateffer.’ He called you his patient.”

“I expect he was the jolly kind one who put me to bed. I want to say thank you to them all.”

The hot milk made Jen very drowsy, and now that she had shared her discovery with Joan her mind was at ease. She slipped down into bed again with a sigh of comfort, and was asleep in five minutes.

Joan carried the tray away and went back to bed, but it was longer before she slept. Jen’s story kept coming into her thoughts.

The grave of Ambrose, the lay-brother who had loved Lady Jehane and had made the sapphire ring for her; the ring that had gone to Australia and been lost among South Sea savages, and had been brought back to the Abbey by Janice! Joan took the ring from its case and looked at it in a sort of wonder.

“Ambrose made you, before 1536! And now we’ve found him again! It seems too much to believe. Did he come back and live here till he was very old—over ninety? And what became of Jehane? Oh, if only we knew the whole story!”

She drew the blue ring on to her finger and lay thinking in the darkness. “‘*Hic jacet Ambrosius!*’ If it is our Ambrose, I’m glad Jen was the one to find him. She’s always been so keen on him. Of course we never saw the name! Our torches were turned into the chest, to see if it was empty, and the side would throw a black shadow over the corner beyond it. It’s easy to see how we missed it. I wonder why they buried him down there? But the Abbey was in ruins, and the gate-house wasn’t damaged. It may have been the only place they could use. We don’t know what condition the Abbey was in at that time, but it must have been in a bad state, and the church was pulled down. Ambrose! We never thought we’d hear any more about him!”

“Haven’t you been to sleep, Abbey-Girl?” Janice demanded, as Joan came down to breakfast.

Joan's face lit up, though her eyes were tired. "I've slept a little; enough to go on with. Jen woke about one o'clock, so I fetched milk and talked to her till she calmed down. I was glad I was there; she had the weirdest thing to tell, and she wouldn't have rested till it was off her mind. Joy! Jandy Mac! Do you know what she says? Says she's found the grave of old Ambrose, in that cellar, by the big chest!"

"Was she off her head?" Joy cried, wide-eyed.

"Joan believes it's true," Janice exclaimed, her eyes scanning Joan's face. "You do believe it, don't you, Joan? But what a marvellous thing! Ambrose who made the ring?"

"Jen knew what she was saying. She's found the grave of Ambrose all right," and Joan described the position of the tomb as given by Jen. "Whether it's our Ambrose or not remains to be seen, and we may never be sure of it. If she's right, and the date is 1600, he must have been nearly ninety. We know he was quite young when he wrote his manuscript and hid it in 1536. He may not have been more than twenty then."

"The date! We must know that date!" Joy shouted. "We'll go directly we've fed! Come to brekker, both of you!"

They were still talking excitedly of Jen's discovery when Mrs. Shirley came to breakfast. She had heard the story when Joan took in her early cup of tea, and had been thinking about it while she dressed.

Her face was troubled as she asked, "Where is this cellar? Isn't it where you were caught yesterday?"

Joan glanced at her quickly. "It's quite safe, Mother dear. It's on this side of the stone that trapped us; and anyway, the stone has stuck and we can't move it."

"Aren't your friends of the reading party coming back this afternoon, to go through the tunnels with you?"

"Yes, I asked them for three o'clock. But, Mother dear, there's no possible danger now!" Joan remonstrated.

"I would very much rather you waited till they come," Mrs. Shirley said. "My dears, it is only a few hours, and I can't bear the thought of your going down there again alone. I should not know an easy moment while you were away."

The girls looked at her in dismay.

"Oh, Auntie dear!" Joy protested. "We're in such a desperate hurry that we were going to gulp down our breakfast and fly. We simply can't wait till the afternoon!"

"It really is perfectly safe," Janice ventured. "We wouldn't go past that horrible stone again."

"We can't. It's stuck," Joy urged.

"Didn't you open it by chance the first time? You might do it again, and then you would be tempted to go through."

"Well, you'd know where we were!" Joy cried. "The men could haul us up again with the rope!"

"Joan, I don't want you to go alone," Mrs. Shirley said.

"Could you come with us?" Janice suggested. "But I suppose we couldn't ask that, could we?"

"Not through that hole in the wall of the old church," Joan said. "We'll have to wait. All right, Mother dear! It isn't easy, but we'll try not to think about Ambrose till the afternoon. Do you mind very much, Jan?"

“I can bear it,” Janice grinned. “I want to know that date as much as you do, but I can just manage to live for another seven hours without settling the question.”

“Don’t be wild, Joy. We’ll do something else,” Joan began.

Mrs. Shirley’s wish was law to both the girls. Janice was not surprised when Joy laughed resignedly.

“Aunty dear, it’s positively brutal of you! If you say wait, there’s nothing else to do, but I don’t know how we’re going to bear it!”

“I don’t know how Jen will bear it,” Joan remarked. “Fortunately she’s still asleep and looks like going on for hours. You’ll have to comfort her when she wakes, Mother. We’re going out of temptation’s way. Joy and Jandy, we’ll take Billy and the car and run down to school and let the girls look at Jandy Mac’s engagement ring. We meant to take a holiday on your account for a few days, Jan; we’ve no exams this year, so Miss Macey said it didn’t matter and she understood how we felt, but we must send Jen back to school to-day. I was going to phone her and say Jen’s had a little accident and will stay here for a few days; but we’ll go and tell her the story instead. She’ll be interested, and you can meet the girls again.”

“And it will keep us from watching one another to see who is sneaking off to look at that date,” Joy added. “Good idea! We’ll be back for lunch, to be ready for Jen’s gentlemen friends.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE STONE TURNS

Joan, Joy and Janice met the reading party at the gate-house.

"You don't know how glad we are to see you," Joan said gaily. "But where are the others? There were eight of you yesterday."

"The others had engagements they couldn't back out of. May we be properly introduced? Shall I begin?" asked the leader of the party.

Joan's eyes danced. "No, I'll begin. Our part is quickly done; you know all about us already. I am Joan Shirley, and the Abbey is mine." In spite of herself there was a thrill in her voice as she said the words, and the guests glanced at her quickly. She coloured, and hurried on, "I love it so much. It still seems wonderful that it should be mine. This is my cousin, Joy Shirley, and the Hall, where we live, belongs to her. This is our adopted cousin, Janice Macdonald, who is on a visit from Australia. Jen Robins, whom you met first, is resting her foot, but you'll see her presently. We know quite a lot about you, too!"

Her eyes found Evan Evans. "You're from Wales, and you're the one who was so good to Jen."

"Indeed, it is true," he admitted. "That I am from Wales, I mean. How is my patient? Did she have bad dreams?"

"No, she slept very well. She wants to thank you."

"He's Evan Evans," said the leader. "This is Tommy Armstrong, who was sketching the chapter-house when the distressed damsel fell fainting at his feet."

"Do you still want to paint Joan and Joy?" Janice asked.

"Alas, no!" said the artist. "It was impertinence to think of it. I'd like to try, but I'm no good at portraits. May I put two little red spots in my sketch, right at the back of the chapter-house in the shadows, just to remind me? We could pretend you were sitting there."

Joan ignored him and turned to the other two. "And you?"

"This is Jack Thorne, who's crazy over the tiles in your refectory. It was to please him and Armstrong that we stayed so long yesterday. I'm Richard Thwaites, more or less in charge of the crowd."

"And you're from Yorkshire. Jen says you talk just like her father. Her home's on the Sheffield moors."

"He can't deny it, with that name," said the artist.

The Yorkshireman laughed. "So we helped a fellow-country-woman! I must have a good Yorkshire talk with her."

"We're wasting tons of time," Joy said impatiently. "What do names matter? It's dates I'm keen on."

Joan spoke in quick explanation. "Jen tells us she found a grave, with a name and a date on it. We've been pining to go and look at it all day, but my mother felt nervous, quite naturally, after what happened yesterday, and she asked us to wait till you came, so that she'd feel we were safe."

"She's sure the earth is going to open and swallow Joan," Joy added. "So now you know why we're so glad to see you. You're our only hope of solving an important problem."

“Lead on!” Dick Thwaites said. “Don’t let us keep you back. We’re ready to plunge underground at once. What is the problem?”

As they crossed the garth and went down to the crypt, Joan told in a few words the story of the lay brother, Ambrose, who had loved Lady Jehane and had written her story and buried it with the Abbey books before the Abbey was destroyed.

“It was Jen who found it, so she has always felt he was a special friend of hers. He made this ring for his lady,” and she took off the sapphire ring. “Inside are his initial letter, on one side, and hers on the other; the roses are for her, and the fleurs-de-lis are for himself, for he had come to the Abbey from France.”

“By Jove, that’s a treasure, Miss Joan!” cried the artist, as the ring was handed round.

Joan put it on her finger again. “I’m very proud of it.” Her eyes met Jandy’s. “It had adventures before it came back to us; we’ll tell you the story during tea.”

“And you think Ambrose came back to the Abbey, after the dissolution of the monasteries, and died here, and that it is his tomb Miss Jen has found?”

“We hope so,” Joan said cautiously. “It depends on the date. He may have been quite young in 1536, but he was old enough to be a lay brother of the Abbey and to be well-known as a good workman with jewels. Jen says the date on the tomb is sixteen—something.”

“If it’s sixteen-very-much, he wasn’t your Ambrose. I see the point at last. Full steam ahead!” cried the Yorkshireman. “We must carry good news to Miss Jen!”

There was a wild rush down to the crypt, and a sudden check as the hole in the wall was reached.

“I’d forgotten it was quite so small,” the artist growled.

“Evans is the only one who can get through, except the ladies,” said Jack Thorne.

“I don’t want the wall damaged,” Joan began. “But we thought perhaps you could get out one or two bricks at the side. That would make a lot of difference.”

“Sure it would,” Dick Thwaites agreed. “Here goes, boys!”

“Careful, man! Don’t bring the place down!” Thorne cried anxiously. “It’s the most priceless old wall!”

Joan gave him a grateful look. “You love it too, don’t you?”

“Oh, sure! I’ll see they don’t do any harm.”

Three bricks made a great difference in the size of the hole, and with a wild Welsh whoop Evan Evans was through and had dashed down the seven steps, to hold his light at the bottom for those who followed.

“Ladies next!” The men drew back, and the three girls hurried down.

Leaving the rest to follow, Joy rushed along the passage. “Now for Ambrose! Come on, Joan and Jandy Mac!”

“Sixteen hundred and two!” Joan exclaimed joyfully. “It could be Ambrose, Joy! If he was twenty in 1536, he’d only be eighty-six! It’s quite possible.”

“I’m certain it’s our Ambrose,” Joy turned eagerly to their escort. “Look! He wouldn’t be so fearfully old! He may quite well have lived to be eighty-six.”

“Sure to be the same chap,” Dick Thwaites agreed. “It would be odd if there were two of them.”

Joan’s light was moving carefully over the grave. “I say, Joy!” she said, a strange note in her voice.

“Show us this stone that trapped you!” the artist urged, and his words drowned hers. “In the chest, did you say? Great Scott, it’s a lovely piece of work! Just look, you fellows!”

Janice, with a glance at Joan, plunged into the task of taking the attention of the men away from the Abbey Girls. What they had found she did not know, but she saw that Joan wanted to be alone with Joy, and she knew she would hear all about it later.

"It's the most gorgeous carving," she said. "But the thrilling thing was when Joan and I got right inside, and quite by accident she kicked something that loosened almost the whole of the back wall. It swung open, quite easily, and we saw a stair going up. If you could find that spring, we could fix the door open, and then we'd have a way right through to where we were when you let down the rope, and we might be able to find the proper way out to the gate-house. There must have been an entrance."

"In you go, Evan Evans, and kick for all you're worth! But don't damage the wall," the artist shouted.

Janice and the three men held their torches to give the best light, as the little Welshman climbed into the chest and prodded the wall at every spot, then twisted himself round to try what feet would do.

Janice heard a murmur behind her. "I'll take it to the house. You stay here, Joy. They'll notice, if we both disappear."

"But I want to know what it is," Joy objected.

"I know. But you don't want to miss the fun here. There, I believe he's opened it!"—as a shout went up from the men and a cheer from Janice. "You couldn't bear to go away now, Joy!"

"Couldn't you wait?"

"Not a second!" and Janice knew that Joan had gone.

"Have you found the spring?" Joy asked eagerly. "Does it need to be kicked before it opens? But how weird!"

The turning stone had swung back and the way up to the gate-house stood clear. Evan Evans was fixing his stick under the door, so that it could not close again.

"I will go up the stair or there will be no room at all," he said. "We must find that spring, whatever."

"I've an idea how it works," and Thwaites climbed into the chest and crouched cautiously to examine the wall from which the stone had swung. "Yes, that's it! That's why little Miss Jen couldn't find it. I expect she only tried the stone, as you did, Evans. The spring's in two parts, and one is in the wall itself. When the door closes they lock together. A sharp blow releases them, but it must be on the spot where they join, and where the stone meets the wall. Evan Evans kicked it by accident. Do you see how it works, Miss Joan?"

"I see!" Joy cried. "How terribly clever!"

"Marvellous that we've ever found it again," Janice exclaimed. "And that Joan found it in the first place. I'm sure you're right, and that is how it works. Now we can go on and find the proper way out. I'm sure the monks who made it didn't use a rope!"

"Here goes! After you, Miss Joan!"

"I'm Joy, but it doesn't matter. There isn't much difference—to look at; heaps in other ways, of course!" Joy stepped into the chest and crept through the opening after Dick Thwaites. "How did you manage? Wasn't it a very tight fit?"

"Bit of a squeeze, but quite possible. The others will do it all right."

"But where is Miss Joan?" The artist looked at Janice. "Did we make a mistake in thinking there were two of them? Was it an optical illusion?"

“No, you’re all right,” Janice retorted. “Joan has had to go back to the house for something. She’d want us to go on.”

“Oh, right!” and he took his turn of going through the box. “Smart dodge, this! I suppose that door’s safely fixed? We don’t want all the lot of us to be caught.”

“Joan would have to work the rope,” Joy called back to him. “It’s safe enough, unless we shut you in on purpose. Look for yourself and then you’ll be happy about it.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT THE HIGHWAYMAN'S HOARD

"We must have spades," Dick Thwaites said, as the party stood looking down at the rubbish that blocked the way and up at the gap through which the girls had been drawn by the rope.

"There are some in the cloisters. We put them ready," Joy said eagerly. "Shall I fetch them?"

"No, we'll go. Too bad to trouble you," the artist exclaimed. "Come along, Evan Evans!"

As Thwaites and his friend poked at the rubbish, Janice drew Joy into a corner. "Joy, what did Joan find?"

Joy's face blazed in excitement. "A hollow, scooped out in the wall behind the grave, and an old box dropped down in it—a box just like the one that held Lady Jehane's jewels!"

"My aunt!" Janice murmured. "Did she open it?"

"She tried, but it didn't open easily, so she's rushed off home with it. Jandy Mac, it was carved with roses and fleurs-de-lis!"

"Like the ring! Then it is our Ambrose!" Janice cried.

"Oh, rather! It's Ambrose all right. Don't say anything till we've seen Joan."

"Not a word," Janice agreed. "Joan will tell Jen, but she may feel it's too—too wonderful to be discussed before these men."

"Too sacred," Joy said soberly. "That's what Joan feels, and what you wanted to say, Jandy Mac."

"That's it," Janice admitted. "I feel just the same. To have Ambrose come into our lives again like this is something too big to talk about with strangers, however nice they are."

"Here you are! Spades and picks and shovels!" the artist said cheerfully, wriggling his way through the back of the chest again. "I say, you'll let us dig through that heap of stuff, won't you? It can't do any harm here; it's not like that precious Saxon place down below."

"Joan wants us to open up the old entrance, if we can," Joy assured him.

"To work, then! If you wouldn't mind standing back," Thwaites said to the girls, "we'd be sure we weren't hurling fragments over you."

Joy and Janice retreated a few steps into safety, and watched the digging operations.

"Looks as if they'd have the whole gate-house down," Joy said.

"I wonder just where we shall come out?" Janice began.

A shout from the artist interrupted her. "We're through! I see daylight!"

The girls came nearer, in eager interest. In a very few minutes a gap in the pile of bricks and stone appeared, and was quickly enlarged to a reasonable size.

"Let me go first!" Joy begged. "I'm smaller than you people!"

"No, second," the leader said firmly. "Up you go, Evan Evans! You can help the ladies."

Joy leapt after the Welshman, scorning his offered hand. "The gate-house it is! Jandy Mac, we're in the angle of the east and south walls. It always looked an untidy corner; the wall seemed made up of rubbish, but we never guessed the rubbish covered a doorway. And there's the hole they pulled us through yesterday."

"Where's my map?" Janice produced the scrap of paper marked "gate."

Joy came eagerly to look. "Yes! See, Jan! What Jen called squiggles; he's marked this spot. He did come out this way. What a thrill! The highwayman's exit!"

"Sure thing," the artist studied the map. "He came out this way all right. He must have found that secret spring in the same way that we did."

"When he was in the chest, hiding his stolen treasures," the girls spoke together.

"I say! There's something here," Dick Thwaites shouted from the doorway. He had been the last to come out, and had paused to look more closely at the pile of bricks that had been thrown aside.

The rest crowded round to look. His light was turned on one spot and he was carefully drawing something from among the broken bricks.

"My light caught the corner and shone on the metal," he explained.

"Oh, what is it?" Joy and Janice almost whispered, in the intensity of their excitement.

"Joan ought to be here," Joy added.

"It's a wallet, a man's wallet," Thwaites held up his find. "Leather—very strong—initials in silver, J.A. What do you make of that, ladies?"

"J.A.!" the girls stared at one another.

"How old is it?" Joy asked breathlessly.

"It can't be Jehane and Ambrose," Janice exclaimed. "It's modern, compared with them. And J.A. can't stand for Old Miles. Is it one he stole from somebody?"

"It's nothing to do with your mediæval monks and ladies," the artist confirmed Janice's statement. "It may be a hundred years old, or a hundred and fifty, but not more. I'll bet it's connected with those guineas you found; part of the Highwayman's Hoard. Any one beginning with A living in these parts a hundred years ago?"

"But of course!" Joy gave a shout. "My mother was Joyce Abinger, and the family had lived at the Hall since Tudor times. It's Abinger Hall, you know."

"An ancestor of yours, Joy, coming home across the hills. He was held up by highwaymen and his wallet and money—in guineas, of course—were pinched," Janice said. "He was John or James or Jeffry Abinger, and Old Miles may have been the thief himself or he may have stored the goods for the 'gentlemen of the road.' He hid his stuff in the Abbey, having discovered the upper entrance, away in the hills, by chance. He came down the long tunnel and found himself in the crypt, and then he found the door in the corner, which may have been a real door then, and he went along to the cellar and used the chest as a store-house. One day he opened the back wall by chance and went along to see where it led to, and then—" she paused. "Why did he drop the wallet?"

The artist took up the reconstruction of the story. "I'll bet the stone shut behind him, and he had the fright of his life. He dug himself out, but he dropped his booty, and he never cared to go back. He loathed the place, and he covered the entrance and never used it again. But he made the maps and handed them on to his descendants. That's the story, Miss Joy, though you'll never be able to prove it."

"Sounds jolly likely," Joy agreed. "Will the things in the wallet be ours? There is something in it, isn't there?"

"Something; not very much, I think," Thwaites pulled at the strap which closed the wallet.

"Oh, please don't!" Janice cried. "Wait till we get back to the house! It isn't fair to Joan."

"Or to Jen," Joy added. "If you don't mind, we'd rather wait."

"Right! I quite agree. Shall we go, then?"

“This way! Through the Abbey, but not down the tunnels,” Joy turned eagerly and led them through the gate-house and across the bridge to Ann Watson’s door.

“Here’s Joan!” Janice gave a shout, as they reached the tresaut. “She’s coming to find us.”

Joan was just entering the passage from the other end. “I was coming after you. Did you find the way out?”

“Yes, rather! The entrance is just where it’s marked on the map. And we found——”

“The Highwayman’s Hoard!” Joy shouted. “A case with my ancestral initials, J.A. We haven’t opened it. We’re waiting for you and Jen.”

“Marvellous!” Joan’s face lit up. “How terribly nice of you to wait! But I was coming to Jandy Mac. Jan, here’s a telegram. I thought you’d better have it at once. I hope it isn’t bad news.”

Janice snatched the envelope from her and tore it open, stepping into the day-room where there was more light.

“Oh!” There was a mixture of relief and distress in her voice. “I was afraid something had happened to Alec! It’s from grandfather, in Scotland. I posted a letter to them as soon as I reached London, and they’d have it this morning. This is to say grandmother is ill and he’d like me to go at once. They didn’t expect me for a week yet, but now that I’m in England he wants me to go. I’d like to see her again; she’s a dear old thing. Joan, what shall I do?”

“Oh, you can’t go and leave us!” Joy cried. “We’ve only had you for two days! We want you for weeks!”

“I should go to her, Jan, and come back to us later,” Joan said at once. “But not to-night; you can’t take night journeys all alone. What time must you get to London in the morning?”

“To leave by the ten o’clock train. Nothing else is any use; it means a steamer at the end of the train journey, and the last boat meets that train.”

“We’ll all get up at five and see you off. The car can take you to town. You’ll leave your luggage here and just take a suit-case; if you want more things we’ll send them to you. As soon as you can you’ll come back and stay with us for a long time.”

“It’s fearfully good of you,” Janice began. “You make it all sound easy. I’m sorry to go, Joan, but I would like to see her again, and I’m afraid it may be serious.”

Joan took her arm. “It’s the only thing to do, Jandy Mac. But we couldn’t let you go to-night. We must see the things you’ve found. And Jen and I have something to show you too.” Her voice had a ring of triumph.

Joy and Janice looked at her quickly.

“Joan! What is it? I shall shake you!” Joy said.

“Is it Ambrose?” Janice asked.

“Ambrose it is. But don’t say anything. We’ll tell you when these men have gone.”

“Jandy Mac said you’d feel like that,” Joy groaned.

“Ambrose! After all these centuries!” Janice murmured.

Joan nodded, her eyes very bright. She turned to the men, who had drawn back at sight of the telegram. “Will you please come to the house and meet my Mother and see Jen? Mother is so very much obliged to you for helping us this afternoon. She was really frightened at the thought of our going down there again, but we couldn’t bear not to know how that stone worked. I know you opened it, but I don’t know how. Won’t you tell me all about it?”

“And we’ll examine the Highwayman’s Hoard!” Joy chuckled, recovering from her disappointment. “Have a look at the wallet, Joan! But don’t open it till we’re all together.”

“No, we won’t leave Mother and Jen out of this,” Joan examined the case carefully, as they went back to the house.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

DIVIDING THE SPOILS

A jewelled snuff-box; several rings and brooches; a small locket and a lady's gold purse; a handful of guineas; two bracelets, and two small strings of pearls—Dick Thwaites spread the booty on the library table and looked at it thoughtfully.

Mrs. Shirley and the girls exclaimed and admired, handing round the purse and the box and the locket and the brooches for examination. The other three men looked over their shoulders, amused and interested.

Joy made herself heard above the chorus of comment. "Whose are they? That's what I want to know. They were found by Mr. Thwaites, in Joan's Abbey. What about it?"

"In a case belonging, perhaps, to your ancestor," Janice added. "But it's only perhaps. And we very strongly suspect that they weren't his at all, but were stolen goods."

"I'm quite sure they were," Jen cried. "The highwayman put them in J. Abinger's case, but they may have belonged to anybody. We could never find the owners now! Look, that purse has letters on it, all mixed up together. What are they, Joan? It's not J.A., at any rate. This thing has them too; they must have belonged to the same person." And she picked up the gold locket and looked at it curiously.

"A monogram," Joan examined the purse. "It looks to me like K.M. or M.K. That didn't belong to J.A.! Jandy Mac's right, of course; these have belonged to different people and we could never find the owners. What ought we to do with them?" and she looked up at Dick Thwaites.

"Oh, keep them, and say nothing about it!" Joy cried.

"I shouldn't quite do that," he said, "though I expect it will come to the same thing in the end. You'll feel better if you've had proper advice. Do you know any magistrate in the neighbourhood? I should go to one of them and tell him the whole story. He'll probably authorise you to keep the trinkets. There's nothing of any great value; nothing the British Museum would want as curiosities, for instance. These things aren't in any way unique."

"But they're jolly pretty," Jen urged. "There's the loveliest little ring here, with one blue stone in it, just like the seven sapphires in the Abbey rings."

"It's a small sapphire," the artist said.

"That's a very good idea," Joan exclaimed. "I want to keep the things, of course; I'm already planning how we'll divide them! But I'd like to be sure it's all right for us to keep them."

"Your magistrate will probably say it's quite all right. Do you know to whom to go?"

Joan looked thoughtful. "Sir Keith Marchwood would be the nearest. He's the lord of the Manor; the Manor is next door to us, but it's been shut up for years. Sir Keith is ill, and he lives in their town house. He may live for a few years, but he'll never be anything but an invalid. He has no son, so the Manor will belong some day to his step-brother, who is a good deal younger than he is—Andrew Marchwood, the explorer. You'll know his name."

"I don't believe K.M. stands for Sir Keith Marchwood," Jen murmured, "but it might be Kate Marchwood. Perhaps the highwayman robbed her coach, as she was driving home across the hills."

"Your lord of the Manor seems no use. Is there anybody else?"

Joy gave a shout. "Joan! Old Mr. Broadway, the President's grandfather. He's a J.P. and all sorts of public things. We'll rush over to Broadway End and consult him!"

"That's the idea," Thwaites said. "Now, if he tells you to keep the loot, how shall you divide it?"

Joy and Jen and Janice looked at Joan.

She laughed. "First of all, if I have my way, I shall ask each of you, and the others who helped to rescue us yesterday, to accept one of the guineas, as a souvenir. You can hang it on your watch-chain, or give it to your mother or your wife for a brooch."

"Joan, you do have marvellous ideas!" Jen shouted. "Of course our brave rescuers must have something to remember us by!"

The brave rescuers laughed, much embarrassed.

"I say, that's perfectly tophole of you!" the artist exclaimed.

"We shall all be delighted, but even without the guineas we shan't forget you and those tunnels," said Dick Thwaites.

"Indeed no, we will not, whatever," Evan Evans said with energy.

"And will you draw lots for the rest of the booty? Or shut your eyes and grab?"

"We might," Joan agreed. "And we could exchange afterwards. But I was going to suggest we should each choose in turn, beginning with Jenny-Wren."

"Because I'm the littlest? But I didn't find them. I hadn't anything to do with finding them," Jen protested, her eyes wistfully on the sapphire ring.

Joan laughed and handed it to her. "No, because you're the pluckiest. You saved us all. Besides, Joy and I have sapphire rings, and Jandy Mac has an engagement ring. It's time you had one too."

"It almost fits me!" Jen gave a shout of joy. "Oh, Joan, how topping! I did want it so fearfully badly!"

"I know you did. But it isn't yours till we've consulted Mr. Broadway, you know."

Jen pulled the ring from her finger with a sigh. "How soon can you go?"

"After tea," Joy said promptly. "But let's divide the things on chance. May I have the snuff-box? I'm dying to have a snuff-box."

"Joan ought to choose next," Janice remarked.

"I don't want the box, but I would like a string of pearls and a brooch."

"You and Joy ought to have the pearls, as there are two strings, and the bracelets, as there are two of them," Jen said.

"That's a good idea," Janice agreed. "Would that do, Abbey-Girl?"

"If you're satisfied, I'm sure we shall be. What suits one of us suits the other. But——"

"Pearls! I'm on!" Joy said, gloating over them.

"But what are you going to have, Jandy Mac?"

"She ought to have the gold purse, because one of the letters is M," Jen began, a wistful note in her voice. "But you won't be M. very long, Jandy Mac. You're going to be Mrs. Fraser at Christmas."

"And you'd like to have K.M.'s purse and locket," Janice said laughing. "But do I come into this share-out? Why should I? The hoard wasn't stolen from my ancestors or found on my land!"

"But it was marked on your map!" the other girls spoke together.

"But for you and your Uncle Tony we should never have dreamed it was there—or that other things were there!" Joan's eyes gleamed for a moment. "What rubbish, Jandy Mac!"

Choose quickly, before there's nothing left. Choose three treasures; Joy and I have three each, and so has Jenny-Wren," and she pushed the purse and locket towards Jen.

"May I?" Jen gave a whoop of joy. "*Both* of them?"

"The purse and locket must go together. We couldn't separate them after a hundred years," Joan said laughing.

"I'll be terribly proud of them! I'm tremendously thrilled about K.M.! I'm sure her name was Kitty Marchwood; I shall make up romantic yarns about her. Do you think she got out of her coach and danced a minuet with the highwayman?"

"Don't talk too much about Kitty Marchwood, or some of the family may claim your purse! Well, Jan? Do you despise our booty?"

"Not a bit of it," Janice was eyeing the remaining treasures thoughtfully. "I'd love to have a ring and a brooch to remind me of our hours on that horrible stair. Won't Mrs. Shirley have something too?"

"She's going to have my string of pearls. I'd planned that," Joan began.

Her mother protested vigorously, however. "Not for a moment! You and Joy must wear the pearls. What I really would like would be this little brooch."

"And a ring," and Joan slipped a pearl ring on her mother's finger. "But it isn't yours till we've consulted Mr. Broadway, you know, Mrs. Shirley!"—in the tone in which she had said the words to Jen.

There was a laugh from the company. "How long will it take you to consult your friend, Miss Joan?" Dick Thwaites asked. "We ought to be going, but we would like to know the result—quite apart from our guineas!"

"We could run over to Broadway End in the car, as soon as we've given you tea," Joy exclaimed. "It wouldn't take us an hour to go there and back. Could you stay and talk to Aunt and Jen?"

"Oh, do!" Jen cried. "I've thousands of questions to ask! What happened yesterday? Did I crawl into your midst and roll over in a dead faint? I thought you were figures in a dream, too good to be true. I wanted some men so terribly badly!"

Joan had disappeared to hurry up the tea, and Joy had raced off to give warning that the car would be needed in half an hour.

"They may go there and back in an hour," Janice remarked. "But it will take longer than that to tell the story to the President and Mr. Broadway."

"The President?" the artist asked, raising his brows.

"Of our club, the Hamlet Club," Jen explained. "We dance country-dances and crown May Queens. Joan and Joy have both been queens."

"I won't go with them. I shall pack my bag for to-morrow morning," Janice said. "I've a sort of feeling that we've a good deal of talking still to get through this evening."

"That's true, Jandy Mac." Joan, coming in at that moment, heard the words and gave her a radiant look. "There's a lot to say before we can let you go off to Scotland."

"Oh, *heaps!*" Jen murmured, as she twirled her blue ring with glowing eyes.

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE RING AND ITS MESSAGE

“For you, Jenny-Wren!” Joan dropped the sapphire ring, a chain of blue beads, the locket, and the gold purse into Jen’s lap. “Yes, it’s all right. Mr. Broadway says we may keep the spoils, as we can’t hope ever to find the real owners.”

“Can’t fear, I should say! Not much hope about it. I don’t want to find them,” Joy said, laughing.

“Oh, Joan! May I really have them? I love that little ring, and Kitty Marchwood’s locket, and her purse!” Jen cried.

“Wasn’t the President thrilled?” Janice asked.

“Completely bewildered. Joy rushed in and poured out a stream of babble, about tunnels and chests and highwaymen and treasures, till poor Cicely begged her to stop and asked me what it all meant. It was just like Joy; that’s the way she rushed at Mother, two years ago, to tell her she was chosen queen. Mother didn’t know what to make of it all.”

“You made Mr. Broadway understand beautifully,” Joy mocked. “It was as clear and concise as an essay or an answer in a matric paper.”

“He did understand, and that was the thing that mattered,” Joan retorted. “He’d never have grasped it from your wild gibberings.”

“‘Wild gibberings’ is good, and just describes Joy. I shall remember it,” Janice said, with appreciation. “I’ve packed, Abbey-Girl. I’m ready to pick up my bag and walk out of the house.” There was meaning in her tone. “There’s just one more thing I want.”

Joan nodded. “Good for you, Jandy Mac.” She turned to the reading party. “We mustn’t keep you any longer; I know you want to get away. Perhaps you’ll come back and see us another time. You will take the guineas, won’t you? They really are curiosities.”

“We’ll be delighted to have them. But are you sure you can spare them?”

“There are some for all of us, as well as the eight for your party,” and Joan, with laughing eyes, solemnly presented the coins. “We’re very much obliged to you.”

“Presents for good boys,” Joy added.

“That’s cheeky, ‘Traveller’s Joy,’ ” Janice said.

“By the way,” the artist turned back from the doorway, “what about that grave, down in the depths? Do you think it’s your friend, who loved the beautiful Jehane?”

Joan’s eyes gleamed again. “We’re sure of it. If you come to see us some day we’ll tell you how we know, but it’s too long a story to start on now.”

The reading party accepted this dismissal and said good-bye, and the girls turned to go back to Jen and Mrs. Shirley.

“There they go, jingling the highwayman’s guineas!” Joy said.

“Now, Joan! I shall die, if you make me wait a moment longer!” Janice cried. “Tell us about Ambrose! How are you so sure?”

“It’s Jenny-Wren’s story. She’s had time to look at the book. She shall tell us, and we’ll read it later on.”

“Book?” Joy and Janice shouted together. “What book?”

“Ambrose’s story of his life!” Jen’s shriek of triumph echoed through the hall. “It was in the box Joan found! He wrote down all about his last days, just before he died, and they buried

it with him!”

“Oh, Jen! Really?” Janice stared with startled eyes.

“Marvellous old chap!” Joy gasped, and collapsed in a big chair. “He wrote it all down, just as he wrote the story of Jehane? My hat! Ambrose is the sort of ancestor I like! No leaving things to chance with him!”

“He wasn’t your ancestor; he never married Jehane. But he says—oh, I just love what he says about it!”

“Then tell us what he says!” Joy commanded.

“Have you had time to read it, Jen?” Joan asked.

“Only some, of course. I want to read it all again slowly. But I skimmed through and found what happened.”

“My hat!” Joy said again. “I couldn’t skim through Ambrose’s writing! It takes me hours to decipher it. I’d far rather be told the story.”

“It’s easy,” Jen insisted. “It’s just like the writing of Lady Jehane’s book, only much better. He had plenty of time. He was in a hurry when he did the first one; Henry was coming to smash up the Abbey, and Ambrose finished the book all in a hustle. And when he wrote the beginning it was a secret and he might have been found out by the Abbot at any moment. This one is much more carefully written.”

“That’s a good thing!” Joy teased. “Has his spelling improved at all?”

“You couldn’t expect it to get much more modern,” Janice said. “Where is the book, Jen? Oh, Joan has brought it!”

Joan came running down the wide staircase with the little oak box in her hands. She laid it on Jen’s knee and drew up a chair for her mother.

“Now, Jenny-Wren! Introduce us to Ambrose in his old age!”

“Have you looked in the box again, Joan?” Jen asked eagerly.

“Not since you and I opened it and we saw the little parchment book and I left you to read it, while I took the telegram to Jandy Mac. Why? We knew from the outside that it must be Ambrose’s story.”

“Because of the roses and fleurs-de-lis he’d drawn on the cover,” Jen agreed. “Well, look here! When I took out the book, underneath it I found this, Miss Shirley!” Her tone was full of reverent triumph, as she lifted the book.

She held out a gold ring, a wide band engraved in patterns. “Roses and fleurs-de-lis again. It was his ring, Joan. He tells the story in the book; he never wastes words, you know! He just says: ‘My lady bade me make a golden ring and decorate it, and then she put it on my hand, saying it was mine and I must wear it always, for her sake.’ And here’s the ring. Doesn’t it make you want to cry?”

“They buried it with him, because he always wore it!” Joy exclaimed, springing from her chair and coming to look.

“They buried it with his book,” Jen corrected.

“Marvellous!” Joan said softly, her tone reverent. “What a real treasure; the ring Jehane gave to Ambrose! Look, Mother dear! Isn’t it wonderful to have it, after all these years?”

“Does he say any more, Jen?” Janice asked. “Where were they? Wasn’t the Abbey in ruins?”

“In London. When Henry’s men came the monks were driven out, and Ambrose went to London, because he knew Jehane was there with her father, Sir Eustace. Ambrose met her and found that her father was trying to marry her to Lord Somebody, but that Jehane really was in

love with him. She told him so, and he said he'd get out of his vows, as he was only a lay brother. But she was very devout—that's what he says; perhaps he means devoted to church affairs! She said he mustn't do it, but that she would never marry any one else. Then she gave him some gold and told him to have it melted down and made into a ring, and to decorate it. He found a friend he'd known in France, who had a workshop in London, and he made the ring and took it to Jehane. She gave it to him and said he must wear it for her sake. And then she died."

"Stars! Wasn't that rather sudden? You don't mean she killed herself, to get out of marrying the lord?" Joy sat up in dismay.

"No, it was smallpox. He says so."

"It used to be horribly bad, almost like a plague," Joan said. "Poor Ambrose! But if she wouldn't marry him, perhaps it was better. Her father might have forced her into another marriage."

"That's what Ambrose thought," Jen said eagerly. "I just love what he says about it. It isn't sad, Joan; not really. Just at first I thought it was dreadful that she should die while they were both so young, and he should go on living till he was nearly ninety, but when I read how he felt about it I saw it was really quite happy, after all. He says, 'My lady was sick for three days and then she died. Now I have her in my heart and she is mine for ever.' She could never be anybody else's, could she?"

"Oh, that's nice!" Janice cried. "I do like Ambrose!"

"It's brave, and of course it's true," Joan said, her tone reverent again. "Show me where he says it, Jen! 'Now I have her in my heart and she is mine for ever.' Nothing could take her away from him then. Yes, it is happy, as you say."

"It's a marvellous way to feel about anybody who has died." Joy, the thoughtless, spoke with strong feeling in her voice. "I've sometimes thought I'd go out of my mind if I lost anybody I cared about very much. It's so final; one would feel so hopeless. But if one could feel as Ambrose did——! I'm afraid I couldn't be as brave as that."

"You might have to be," Janice said bluntly. "I've thought about it; about what it would mean if I lost Alec or he lost me. People do live through it, but they have to go on alone. We'd better all remember Ambrose, if anything of the sort should ever happen to any of us."

"It is true, isn't it, Joan?" Jen pleaded. "He would be happy, wouldn't he? She would be in his heart for ever. I think it's the most marvellous idea."

"It's a true one, Jenny-Wren." Joan glanced at her mother, whose face was grave but not unhappy.

Then she said briskly, "Now what about the rest of the story? Doesn't Ambrose tell how he came back to the Abbey?"

"Oh, rather! He tells the whole thing," Jen said happily, and she took up the book and began to turn the pages.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

AMBROSE'S KEEPSAKE RING

"It's like what Miss Macey said last summer—the ring and the book!" Janice murmured, as Jen found the page she wanted.

Joan glanced up and laughed. "Did she, Jandy Mac?"

"She said it sounded odd. Now for Ambrose!" and Janice curled up on the rug at Mrs. Shirley's feet.

Joy flung herself into her big chair again. "I feel battered and worn with to-day's excitements! Ambrose is becoming more real and alive every moment!"

Joan laughed and sat on the arm of the chair. "We know the end of his love-story, anyway, and that's more than we ever dared to hope for."

"And we've found his ring," Jen added. "Here it is! Will you have it in his words or mine? I think mine would be quicker. We can all read it for ourselves afterwards."

"Yes, you tell us what happened to him," Joan agreed.

"After Jehane died he wandered about, and went across to France for a while. But he wasn't happy anywhere, so at last, after about ten years, he came back to the Abbey. It was all broken down and the church was gone, but, as he says, the old church was still there, and he knew the way into it from the gate-house, and the gate hadn't been damaged."

"That's the passage we've just found?" Janice interrupted. "Did Ambrose climb through the chest?"

"He calls it 'the secret way,' so I suppose he did. He says he went to the old church to pray."

"But that's where he'd buried her jewels!" Joy exclaimed. "Why didn't he dig them up? We know he didn't, because we found them still there."

"But what would he have done with them?" Joan objected. "He didn't want to give them to her father, who, after all, hadn't been nice to Ambrose."

"He buried the stones to hide them from the old man, to please his lady," Joy admitted. "He couldn't produce them without owning up, of course."

"It would have been awkward," Janice agreed. "I don't suppose he wanted Sir Eustace to have them."

"He never says a word about the jewels," Jen said. "But he can't have forgotten them, if he went to pray in the old church, for that 'Jehane III.' would be staring at him from the wall every time he went down. I think he just didn't want Sir Eustace to have them; there was the stepmother, who had tried to get them before, you know. Ambrose knew Jehane didn't want the stepmother to have her own mother's jewels."

"So he said nothing, and four hundred years later we came and found them," Joan said. "Did he live here, Jen?"

"He asked leave to live in the gate-house," Jen explained, her face lighting up. "The porter's lodge was still there; the upper room, you know. The roof must have fallen down later. Sir Eustace said he might stay, if he kept in the ruins out of his sight."

"Rather like grandfather-Sir-Antony and us," Joy remarked.

"I shall always feel differently about the gate-house now, Joan," Jen exclaimed. "Before, it was just the Abbey gate, but now it's the place Ambrose lived in for over fifty years! It does

make a difference, doesn't it?"

Joan's eyes were bright also. "It does, Jenny-Wren. The gate-house has its story now, as well as the Abbey. The places seem to come to life when we find a story about them. And we owe this one to you, just as we do the Abbey histories. I don't see how we can ever let you go away from the Abbey!"

"I shall always think of Ambrose when I go through the gate," Jen said happily.

"I always loved it, because of the porter's greeting to every one who came," Joan added. "But it's marvellous to think of Ambrose having lived there! For fifty years, did you say?"

"He never went away again. He lived above the gate, and the country people came to him in their troubles, when they wanted comfort or advice, and he helped them when he could. Doesn't it sound as if he grew into a sort of old saint, Joan?"

"Just exactly that. I love to think of him, with the Abbey all in ruins, carrying on the old tradition of welcome and kindness. I'm sure he was a blessing to the countryside."

"He made them promise that he should be buried under the gate," Jen said. "He showed them where it was to be, and he says his son had promised to bury the book and his ring beside him."

"His *son*?" There was an astounded shout from the other girls.

"That's what he says. He calls him 'my lad Peregrine' or 'my falcon.' Why falcon, I wonder?"

"Peregrine means hawk or falcon," Joan said. "But look here, Jen!"

"It's all right," Jen began to laugh. "I was stunned at first, too. He means an adopted son. You know how the Abbey turns people into adopters; even the Mother Superior had to adopt Timmy! Peregrine was an ancestor of Joy's, a real one. He was a grandson of Sir Eustace; the old man died—he didn't live to be almost ninety! Peregrine was the son of his only son, and he loved Ambrose like his father; Ambrose says so himself."

"I bet he did!" Joy exclaimed.

"An old, old man, very holy and kind, living among the ruins at the gate of Peregrine's home!" Janice reconstructed the story as she saw it. "Of course a boy would be thrilled. He'd adore old Ambrose!"

"Ambrose would love him too," Joan said. "It's wonderful to know he had that happiness at the end of his long life. So it was Peregrine Abinger, Ambrose's 'falcon', who had his ring and the book buried beside him! That just finishes off the story. Is there any more, Jen?"

"Only a note at the end, in different writing. It says: 'I do as my father Ambrose wished and lay this book beside his grave, in the dungeon below the gate, with his ring.' And it's signed P.A. Look, Joy! Your ever-so-many-greats-grandfather!"

"Peregrine's writing?" Joy sprang to look. "Oh, marvellous!"

"I love the picture of old Ambrose, cared for by young Peregrine," Janice said.

"I love the whole story," Joan agreed. "It's very satisfying to know the end of the romance of Ambrose and Jehane."

"He kept her always in his heart, and she was his for ever," Jen said dreamily.

"Ambrose was a poet, as well as a worker in precious stones and a saint," Joy remarked. "It sounds just like a line out of a poem."

"What shall you do with his ring?" Janice asked. "Keep it in the refectory, with the rest of the Abbey treasures?"

"I don't see why we should. There's no need for tourists to gaze at it. If Jehane's ring can be worn, by somebody who loves her story—and that's Joan—why shouldn't Ambrose's be

worn too?" Joy asked.

"Hear, hear!" Jen cried. "It's much jollier than turning it into a show thing. Joy must wear Ambrose's ring!"

"I didn't mean to bag it for myself." Joy's eyes met Joan's with a question in them and she raised her brows very slightly. "I don't want it; I have mother's sapphire ring. Who ought to wear old Ambrose's keepsake, Joan?"

"What a lovely thing to call it, Joy!" Janice exclaimed. "Who's being a poet now?"

"That's what it is, of course; he was to keep it always, for Jehane's sake, just as he kept her in his heart," Jen gloated over the idea. "Oh, marvellous, Joy!"

"Who loves Ambrose best of all of us?" Joan took the gold ring, with its roses and fleurs-de-lis, and laid it in Jen's hand. "For you, Jenny-Wren, with love from the Abbey."

"For—*me*?" Jen gave no shriek of joy, but looked up, awed and startled. "You couldn't give it to *me*, Joan?"

"Why not? Don't you love Ambrose enough to like to have his keepsake?"

"*Like* to have it!" Jen gasped. "Joan, how can you? You know it would always be my very dearest treasure! But it mustn't go away from the Abbey!"

"Then you must come and stay at the Abbey often," Joan said seriously. "You must bring the ring on long visits."

"We'll keep the book, with Ambrose's yarn and young Peregrine's writing," Joy said. "He was my ancestor and I'm rather keen to have it. But I do feel Jen ought to have that ring."

"So do I. What do you say, Mother?"

"I should like Jen to have the ring," Mrs. Shirley said quietly.

"I knew you would! What do you think, Jan?"

"Absolutely right," Janice said. "You owe the whole of Ambrose, and lots more, to her. And she found his grave."

"I was sitting on it," Jen gave a little gasp. "I jumped off as soon as I knew. Joan and Joy, it's just terribly nice of you! You don't know how I love that ring! Look, it's not much too big! I expect he had clever thin artist's hands. If I grow a wee bit bigger, I shall be able to use it. I shall wear it always, as Joan wears Jehane's blue ring. You're sure you want me to have it? Don't you think you ought to talk it over?"

"We did talk it over," Joy said laughing. "I looked at Joan and she knew I was saying: 'What about it?' She looked back and said: 'Yes, of course.' We both looked at Auntie and she nodded. We all felt the same, at the same moment."

"Marvellous of you all!" Jen cried softly.

Then she looked up, with the shriek of excitement which had not come before. "Joan! Joy! Such a thrilling idea! Has that explorer man any boys about my age?"

"Explorer? Is she light-headed?" Janice stared at Jen's excited face.

"Better take the ring away again. It's too much for her," Joy was staring too.

"I'm not! The explorer who is going to live at the Manor, next door to you, when Sir Keith dies. Don't you see? If he had a nice son, you could pal up with the family and I could come and stay with you, and then I'd marry the boy and live next door, and the ring would come back to the Abbey again!"

Joy and Janice shouted with laughter. "All for the sake of the ring!"

"Oh, he'd have to be nice, or I couldn't do it, of course."

Joan was laughing too. "I'm afraid he isn't married, Jenny-Wren. He's always travelling in wild places, and he doesn't want to settle down; that's all I've heard about him. So your kind

plan won't come off."

"Your future husband isn't born yet, Mrs. Wren," Joy teased.

"Isn't there anybody in the family I could marry, so that I could be your next-door neighbour? The ring ought to come home some day."

"Perhaps the explorer has young brothers," Janice suggested.

"The ring will come home when you come to stay with us, Jenny-Wren," Joan said. "In the meantime, get that foot better as fast as you can, for at school this morning Muriel told me she wants to give a party to the club, and you must be ready for it."

"But, Joan——!" Jen looked startled. "If my foot is well enough for dancing, I'll be playing cricket. I can't come to the party!"

"You'll come to this party! It's going to be held here, as Muriel hasn't a big garden; it has to be here or at school, and we know the club would like to come here."

"Oh, rather! Heaps jollier than at school! But how can I come? What did you mean, Joan?"

"I had a good idea," Joan explained. "Muriel's going to make it an open evening and invite anybody who cares to come and have a try at the dances. Jack and Nora can come, if they like! So no one can say a word if you come, Mrs. Wren."

"Oh, marvellous!" Jen shouted. "A party for me, after all! Oh, Joan, how tophole of you! I'll make Jack come; Nora won't, I know. And you'll help me through the *very* easy dances, won't you? I do want to know what they feel like! Perhaps Nesta would take care of me in 'Bonnets' or 'Butterfly!' Oh, what a joke! How they'll scream, if I ask them to pull me through!"

Joan laughed. "That's what I thought. But you won't dance one step unless the doctor says your foot will stand it."

"No, I mustn't spoil myself for cricket," Jen agreed. "I've let Jack down quite badly enough. She won't like my dropping out for a week or two. Don't let Muriel have the party too soon, Joan! I'd hate to have to look on!"

"That would be hard lines! But you're going to be all right long before the party," Joan said.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE TEXT OF THE SERMON

It was three weeks before Janice returned to the Hall.

“Granny is better,” she wrote from Scotland. “I really believe my visit helped her to turn the corner, so I’m glad I came at once. I’m coming back to stay with you properly this time; not just for a week-end! But I shall come here again to say good-bye before I go, for once Alec and I are married I don’t suppose I shall come home for some years. How is Jen’s foot? I’d like to dance at her party; perhaps I could help her with the easy dances!”

The car met Janice in London late one June afternoon and whirled her off to the Abbey. Billy, the young chauffeur, handed her a note from Joan.

“So sorry not to meet you, but it’s what you call ‘Jen’s party’ to-night. You’ll be in time for a good deal of it, as we shall go on till dark, and the evenings are long now. It’s Muriel’s party, really, of course, but as the club’s coming to the Hall, Joy and I will be busy. The girls want to see our secret door and the old chest; Joy expects to spend her time leading processions from the crypt to the gate-house. Jen’s quite fit; she took seven wickets again in the match last Wednesday, so Elijah’s mantle is still resting on Elisha and she doesn’t find it quite so heavy as she did at first. If you aren’t too tired you shall dance with her.”

“Tired!” Janice laughed. “Not too tired to dance with Jenny-Wren! It will be a treat, after the noise and rush of the Royal Scot all day!”

The lawn before the Hall was filled with dancing girls, in summer frocks of brilliant colours, as the car came up the drive. Janice said a word to Billy.

“Could you stop for one moment, before they see us? I want to hear the music.”

Billy drew up in the shelter of the beech avenue, where the bobbing figures gleamed through the screen of big gray tree-boles. Brisk hand-clapping, four sharp rhythmical reports like pistol-shots, rang out, and then the tune came clearly from Margia Lane’s fiddle.

Janice laughed. “‘Sweet Kate!’ Thanks awfully! Now let’s go on!”

Jen forsook her partner and came leaping to meet the car, a vivid blue figure with flying yellow plaits.

“Jandy Mac! How marvellous of you to come to-night! Will you dance with me? It’s ‘Hey, Boys’ next. They’re all pulling my leg and telling me it’s too difficult for an outsider!”

“It’s too difficult for me. I’m sure I’ve forgotten the figures,” Janice said laughing. “I haven’t danced since last summer! You seem quite fit again, Jenny-Wren.”

“I’m all right. I played in a match on Wednesday.”

“I know; seven wickets. Jolly fine! It’s becoming quite a habit.”

“Oh, did Joan tell you? Jack was fearfully bucked. Never mind your luggage; come and dance!”

“Don’t be absurd, Jen!” Joan came running up and protested, laughing. “Jandy must have something to eat. Glad to see you, Jan! Your supper’s waiting. Jen, you’ve danced every dance; you’ll be doing too much for that ankle! Suppose you take Jandy in and feed her, and give her a wash and brush up, and then bring her out to dance! We’ve still an hour of daylight.”

“Righto!” Jen assented. “If you don’t want Jandy Mac, I’ll be glad to have her.”

"I do want her!" Joan cried indignantly. "But I can't desert Muriel and Joy!" She threw a laughing look at Janice and ran back to her duties.

"Doesn't Joan look marvellous in that gray frock she wears for dancing?" Jen exclaimed. "Come and have your supper, and then we can dance; you needn't waste time doing your hair. Everybody's a bit blown about by this time."

She perched herself on the end of the table, when Jandy's wants had been supplied, and held out her right hand. "Look!"

Janice looked at the broad gold band, kept in place by the little ring with one sapphire in it. "Ambrose's keepsake ring! Jen, how jolly! Do you really wear it?"

"Only for very great occasions; not at school, or for cricket. It's not much too big; the little one keeps it on quite safely. I love it more than anything else I possess."

Janice glanced at her sober face. "I'm sure you do. I'm glad they gave it to you. I was hoping they would, but I couldn't suggest it."

"It was marvellous of them," Jen assented. "And it was Joy who said it first. I always thought I liked Joan heaps better than Joy, and I do, of course; but sometimes Joy is just terribly nice and kind, you know, Jandy."

Janice agreed warmly. "I've noticed it, Jenny-Wren. You're wearing the locket, too. Doesn't it bump about when you dance?"

Jen laughed. "Rather! But I don't mind, and I'm so fearfully bucked to have it. Joan showed me how to open it, and inside there's a scrap of yellow hair, a wee baby's curl. I'm so terribly thrilled about it. I know Kitty Marchwood would like her locket to go to a party, and her blue beads and her ring too."

"You don't know that the ring and beads belonged to her!"

"No, but I expect they did. I wonder if she danced our dances at her parties? I don't see why not."

"You don't know that K.M. was Kitty Marchwood!"

"I'm quite sure she was! I believe in her firmly," Jen retorted. "Be quick, Jandy Mac, or the party will be finished! What are they doing now?" and she turned to the window. "Oh, how odd! The President's making a speech! I wonder what it's about?"

"Announcing the next meeting, I expect." Janice looked across the suddenly emptied lawn, where the long shadows of the trees lay undisturbed by blue and gold and pink and white figures, to the corner where the tall President stood on a chair and addressed the dancers, grouped on the grass at her feet.

The announcements took some time; Cicely was speaking earnestly, and it seemed almost as if she were telling a story. Her audience listened soberly, with serious faces, all their laughing chatter subdued.

"It's very mysterious!" Jen said wistfully. "I suppose I mustn't go and listen; I'm not a real member of the club just now. But Jack's listening," she added, "so there's no reason I shouldn't!"

"Go and find out what it's all about," Janice suggested.

"No, it would be rude to you. Jack will tell me later."

"Does Jack like dancing?"

"Not too much. She came to please me. But she thinks she could get to like it, if she had time. They're starting again; it's 'Nancy's Fancy.' Do you think perhaps you'll be ready for the next one, Jandy Mac?"

“Go and dance, Jen!” Janice commanded, laughing. “I hate to feel I’m keeping you away from it. Shall I come too? I’ll have some more supper later. I feel terribly untidy, but you look a bit wild yourself. Will you tell me what to do?”

“Sure!” Jen’s face lit up. “Sure you aren’t dying of hunger? Then let’s join on at the end. It’s easy!”

They met Jack and Nesta after a couple of turns of the dance, and Janice was greeted gaily by both.

“Jolly to see you again, Jandy Mac!”

“Nice to see you dancing, Jacky-boy! Your step’s no worse than mine, and I expect you’re being taken care of, just as I am.”

“Jack!” Jen called over her shoulder, as she went up a place and they were separated. “Have the next with me! I want to speak to you. Oh, last time! Thanks so much for stopping half-way through your supper, Jandy Mac! Jack’s gone to ask the name of the next dance. Here she comes—with Beetle, for you.”

“It’s ‘Ruffy Tufty,’ Jen!” Jack cried.

“Oh, right! You and Jandy can do that! We’ll make a set together.”

“Are you sure you know it, Jenny-Wren?” Beetle asked seriously. “Shall I remind you which hand to use? Can you set and turn single?”

“Don’t be too funny, dear!” Jen retorted. “Jack!” she said imperatively, as the dance began. “What was the President talking about?”

She saw the look that flashed from Jack to Beatrice, and added, “It can’t be a club secret, for you were there. Why don’t you tell me?”

“It was about the motto of the club,” Jack explained, as Jen led her out and back, and then turned to lead Janice. “She said we might all listen, if we cared to.”

“Oh!” As they met for siding Jen looked sober. “I’m glad; I hoped she’d do it some day. Did she say it nicely?”

“Marvellous. She’s a jolly decent sort.”

“We all know that. I say, Jack!” Jen voiced a sudden fear, under cover of the music, as they armed together. “Cicely didn’t say anything about—well, about——”

“You?” Jack grinned. “You bet she did! You were the text of the sermon.”

“Oh! Oh, how dreadful of her!”

“Not a scrap. I said: ‘Hear, hear!’ and they all joined in. Are we going to do this thing again?”

“Always do. I never thought the President would do that,” Jen said gloomily.

“You are going it this term!” Jack chuckled. “As if it wasn’t enough to be Elisha, *and* the heroine of the highwayman’s haunts, you have to be the text of a sermon as well!”

“Ass! *Do* stop trying to give me your right hand!” Jen exploded. “I’m the man at present! Be properly humble and let me lead! You keep trying to lead me!”

“I don’t see that. What does it matter?” Jack jeered.

“Outsider!” said Beetle. “It’s just as bad for me, Jen. She’s wrong every time.”

“She’s got quite a decent step,” Jen eagerly changed the subject. “She could dance all right if she’d only think.”

Jack grinned impishly. “Elisha! Heroine of the highwayman’s haunts! Text!” she murmured.

The dance came to an end, and Jen flung a curt nod at her partner and fled.

“What is it all about?” Janice asked, and Jack and Beatrice took her into a corner among the trees and told her.

“President!” Jen’s tone was accusing, as she found Cicely. “Why did you?”

“I want a dance, Jenny-Wren. What about ‘The Triumph?’ ”

“Oh! Will you?” This was an honour Jen could not resist.

“Who gave me away?” Cicely asked. “I told them not to say anything to you.”

“I asked Jack. She couldn’t help it. I saw you speaking to them; I was in the house with Jandy.”

“Joan told me, and I seized the chance. You don’t really mind, do you?”

“I don’t know what you said. It was a gorgeous chance for Jack, of course.”

“What did Jack say?”

“That I’d been the text of your sermon.”

Cicely laughed. “Very well put! Jen, you wanted me to remind the club of the meaning of the motto. You don’t mind my using you as an illustration, to make it quite plain to them, do you?”

“Um!” Jen allowed Joy, as second man, to lead her away. When she met her tall partner again she answered the question. “It depends whether the rest rag me too much. I don’t mind Jacky-boy, but I don’t want the others going on at me.”

“I’m sure they won’t. I put it to them very strongly.”

“I’d simply hate it,” Jen said, reddening. “I had to do it. There wasn’t really any choice. I’d loathe it if anybody made a fuss.”

“Nobody will. But we’ll all be very glad to see you back next term.”

“I’m looking forward to that,” Jen’s face lit up. “But cricket isn’t so bad, you know, President.”

“I know; seven wickets again. You’ll have to play for the school every summer.”

“I don’t know about that. I’m training Kathy Parker, and she’s going to be quite good. President—look!”

“Is that the wonderful old ring? Joan told me the story,” Cicely looked at the right hand she was holding, as she led her partner down the middle. “Aren’t you tremendously proud of it?”

“Just terribly bucked,” Jen said. “We’re having a lovely term, after all.”

“Well, I won’t refer to it again, but I’m just terribly bucked about my club this term, thanks chiefly to you,” the President said firmly, as the dance ended and Jen bobbed her curtsey. “Here’s Joan coming to find you. I hear you’re to stay for the week-end, to see something of your Australian Janice?”

“Jen, I want you for ‘Sellenger’s Round.’ Joy’s dancing with Jandy.” Joan held out her hand and led Jen to the big ring round the fiddler that filled the lawn. “After this we’ll send everybody home to bed.”

“And you and I, and Joy and Jandy Mac, will talk for hours and hours!” Jen said happily.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Secrets of the Abbey* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]