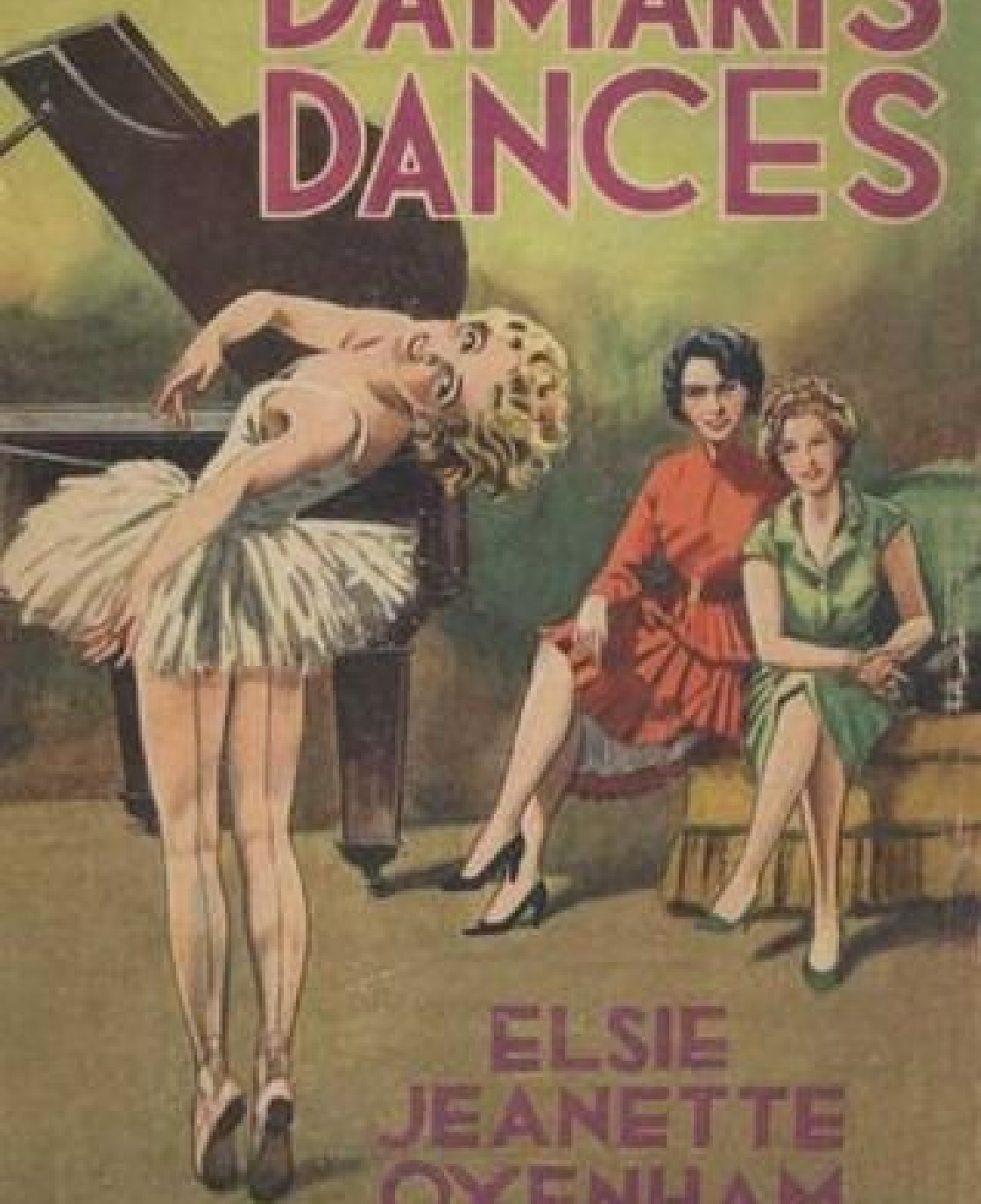


DAMARIS DANCES



ELSIE
JEANETTE
OXENHAM

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A rapt silence filled the theatre

DAMARIS DANCES

Elsie Jeanette Oxenham

Published by Spring Books, 1940.

To
my Father
JOHN OXENHAM
whose enjoyment of this story
chapter by chapter
as it was being written
gave me courage
to go on

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'Oh, ma foi, I shall break my heart!' wailed M. Berthelot

'Well, I never did!' Miss Baldry murmured

'I am proud!' Damaris said again

'All is well!' Madame said quietly.

CHAPTER I

DAMARIS DANCES

'Dance to us, Damson!' The whisper came from every corner of the dormitory.

Damaris paused, her hand on the rail at the foot of her bed. A slim graceful figure in blue-striped pyjamas, she hesitated as she looked round.

'I ought not to do it. I've said so often enough. It's after lights-out.'

'You've said it every time we've asked you to dance this term. It's the last night; after being so painfully proper all the summer, can't you be like old times for once?' somebody suggested.

'It is the end of the term, of course.' Damaris was plainly tempted. 'I've wanted to do it when you asked me before, but I promised them at home that I'd swot this term and not get into any rows.'

'You've swotted hard enough for six,' said another. 'You've been definitely a model of a good little girl. Couldn't you relax and be yourself?'

Damaris dived for her pillow and hurled it at the speaker. 'Of course, if I've passed matric _____'

'You won't come back next term and we shall never see you again. Dance to us, Dammy! It's our last chance!'

Damaris took the slides from her hair, so that the yellow curls fell across her cheeks. Pondering, she slowly went back to the foot of her bed and laid her hand on the rail, as if it had been the practice bar. Balancing on one toe, she went through some preliminary movements.

'I don't see anything very wonderful in that, murmured a critic, who was in her first term at St. Dorothea's. 'You said Damson was so marvellous when she danced.'

'You wait,' her friend retorted. 'She always starts like that. It's to loosen her joints, she says. She's getting ready. She used to dance to us a lot; it was our regular evening show. But this term she's seemed different—more grown up and in earnest, and almost like a prefect. She'll be one as soon as she's in the Sixth.'

'She won't be here,' some one said sadly. 'If she's passed matric and able to go into the Sixth, she'll leave. You know she's to go abroad with Rachel to learn to talk French and Italian. We shan't ever have Damson as a prefect. It's rotten hard lines.'

'I never knew Rachel. She's older, isn't she?'

'Just a year. She didn't come back after Easter. We didn't know she was leaving, but something seems to have happened at home. Their father died in America, for one thing. You know Damson came back late and missed a week or two at the beginning of term. That's why she's worked so hard for matric. I hope she's passed, and yet I hope she hasn't. For if she hasn't she'll come back to have another shot at it.'

'Oh, I say, look at her! Stop jawing, you two!'

Tense silence filled the big room. From the farther corners girls crept forward and joined the circle on the nearer beds. Only one light was burning, and under this Damaris was dancing, light as falling snow, swift and graceful as a seagull. At one moment poised on tiptoe, then springing high to alight like a feather, then travelling with raised arms and tiny

steps almost on her 'points', she paused at last in a perfect position, one arm flung out, one leg supporting her while the other was stretched behind.

'Go on, Damson! Don't stop!' came the breathless demand.

In the doorway, unknown to the spellbound audience and the equally entranced dancer stood the gym mistress. A streak of light had caught her eye; somebody, eager for the treat, had forgotten to place a mat at the bottom of the door. End of term or not, she had come to remonstrate.

Now, dumb with surprise, she watched like the girls, but with more understanding. To them it was a fascinating show, but Miss Allen knew what she was seeing. This was ballet; unfinished, no doubt, and with plenty of need for training; but these were the classical steps and here was the correct position, the turned-out hips, the use of 'points'. As Damaris paused, the line of her body, from the tip of the raised hand to the toe of the outstretched foot, was perfect. Was it an accident? Did the child know what she was doing? Why had this been kept secret? How was it that no one knew?

'I'll do the Swan Dance,' said Damaris. 'Not the real one, of course. I wasn't old enough to learn that, and anyway, I'm not Pavlova! But I'll do my own Swan Dance for you. I made it up years ago.'

'Damaris!' said Miss Allen.

'Gosh!' Damaris, rising on her toes, her hand on the bar, came to earth again with a start, as the girls sprang up in dismay.

'Damaris, what are you doing?'

'It's the last night, Miss Allen,' Damaris pleaded. 'I haven't done it all term, truly I haven't.'

'We made her dance, Miss Allen,' came a hasty chorus. 'We begged and prayed her to do it; she wouldn't at first.'

Miss Allen made her way through the crowd. 'Go to your own beds, girls. Damaris, when did you learn to dance?'

Damaris shot a look at her. Was it possible Miss Allen would understand? She did not sound as much enraged as might have been expected.

'I haven't danced for them once all term, Miss Allen, and I've worked frightfully hard,' she urged.

'You have worked well; we all know that. But answer my question. When, and where, did you learn to dance?'

Damaris looked bewildered. 'Do you mean right from the beginning?'

'It's the beginning I want to hear about,' Miss Allen said briskly. 'How old are you? Sixteen next month? Yes, well, this isn't your beginning! You started dancing when you were much younger than you are now. I know a little about it, though I haven't trained in ballet.'

'Miss Field had; she'd done a year of it in London,' Damaris explained. 'She was here when I first came to Dorothy's, and she helped me a lot.'

'I wish she had told me.' Miss Allen mentally blamed her predecessor bitterly. 'I might have helped you in certain ways. But was that your start? How old were you?'

'Oh, I started in America, when I was eight,' Damaris said simply.

'Eight! Yes, that's what I wanted to know. That explains a good deal,' Miss Allen exclaimed.

'I didn't have very long,' Damaris added. 'Ray and I came back to England a year after that, but I'd learned quite a bit and I loved it. I knew how to stand and how to jump and I

could use my points. Of course, I can't do it properly without shoes.' She gave Miss Allen a quick shy look. 'You aren't wild with me, are you?'

'Only because of the time you choose to dance,' the mistress said promptly. 'It's nearly ten o'clock. You can't expect me to approve, can you?'

'No, I suppose not. No, of course you couldn't,' Damaris conceded. 'But I've kept off it all the term!'

'You sound as if it were a dreadful thing that you had to deny yourself! At a proper time——' Miss Allen began.

'I know; I'm sorry. But my aunts always talked as if it was a dreadful thing, so I felt I had to keep it dark,' Damaris pleaded.

Miss Allen raised her eyebrows. 'They didn't approve?'

'They were horribly shocked. They kept a farm, and they thought dancing was absolutely wicked, especially dancing that could be used on the stage. They didn't mind a dance in the barn, at weddings or harvest; but they said my sort was affected and theatrical. They called it showing off.'

'And therefore wicked,' Miss Allen agreed, with understanding. 'But when you came to school Miss Field encouraged you?'

'She seemed quite pleased about it and she told me to go on. She showed me some new steps that I'd been too little to learn at first. I've always loved it, so I practised for her, in odd times, and I danced once or twice at school shows. But she left, and you did more about games and drill, and I went all out for cricket and was fearfully keen, and the dancing didn't seem important. I did it for the girls now and then, and I practised steps when I had a chance.'

'Not important. No, I see,' Miss Allen looked at her curiously. 'Well, Damaris, jump into bed. I'll say no more about it, as this is the last night, if you settle down quietly now. But tomorrow I want you to make time to come to me for half an hour; I must have a talk with you, in case your matric is all right and you don't come back to us—as we quite expect, of course!'

Damaris coloured. 'I hope so, Miss Allen. I don't feel too sure about the maths.'

'Your train doesn't go early, does it?'

'Not so very early. Rachel's meeting me at Euston at five o'clock.'

'The afternoon train; good! We shall have a little time. I want to talk to you. Now, girls! Not another sound to-night!'

'Good old sport!' Damaris murmured, as she sprang into bed. 'I wonder what she wants to say to me?'

CHAPTER II

PLANS FOR A CHICKEN-FARM

‘Come to the gym, Damaris,’ Miss Allen commanded.

Damaris followed her and, standing by the piano, took something from the bag in her hand. ‘Look, Miss Allen!’

Miss Allen raised her eyebrows at the sight of the pink ballet shoes. ‘Oh, so you have the right ones! Where did you get them?’

‘It’s been our secret. Rachel gives me a pair on my birthday every year, so that I can practise. She knows I want them more than anything. I don’t use them much, for they wear out so terribly quickly, but just now and then I have a try at doing proper steps. I can’t really get up on my points without them, though the girls didn’t understand that last night.’

‘No. You need shoes,’ Miss Allen assented. She leaned on the piano and gazed at the girl. ‘You’ve puzzled me, Damaris. You’re such a strange mixture. I’ve seen your keenness over cricket and your control of the younger girls. You would make an excellent gym and games mistress. But this dancing side, which you have kept secret, I’d never suspected. Well now, let me see what you can do with the help of your shoes. Do you want music?’

‘I’d like it. It doesn’t seem the real thing without music! But I’m not used to it, Miss Allen. I’ve had to do without.’

‘In the dormitory, after lights-out?’

‘Sometimes.’ Damaris reddened. ‘But I’ve practised at all sorts of odd times—even out on the fells at home. Ray used to whistle tunes.’

‘Show me what you can do without music,’ Miss Allen suggested.

Damaris changed her shoes and went through her preparatory movements. ‘My teacher in America told me to do it. She had some odd word for it.’

‘Limbering up.’ Miss Allen smiled.

‘That was it!’ Damaris looked at her with wide eyes. ‘I’d forgotten what she called it. I say I’m loosening my joints.’

‘Can you put your toe on the mantelpiece?’

Damaris laughed. ‘Yes, rather! The girls try to do it, but they can’t. I’m ready now.’

Then, once more, Miss Allen saw what had astounded her the night before: true ballet steps, ‘points’ used boldly and with good effect, the perfection of movement and of line.

‘I like your arabesques,’ she said casually.

Damaris swung round on her. ‘You know the names of the steps! I’d forgotten them. This is battement, isn’t it? And the arabesque is the pause, with one arm and one leg flung out?’

‘Yes, but what I want to know is this! Is it an accident that your arabesque is so good? You make a perfect line; do you do it on purpose, knowing you are doing it? Or does it just happen?’

Damaris eyed her curiously. ‘I try to do it, of course. That’s how I was taught; I’ve practised a lot and made Ray tell me if it was right. I’d like to do it in front of a mirror, but I’ve never had the chance. You’re sure I didn’t wobble?’

‘Not a quiver,’ Miss Allen said laughing. ‘You were as steady as a rock; but “rock” seems the wrong word for any one as light as you are. I thought of birds and snowflakes.’

‘How marvellous of you!’ Damaris cried. ‘That’s what I’d like to be, of course. I know I’m miles away from it, but even if I’m bad it’s enormous fun to do, Miss Allen!’

‘Oh, but you aren’t bad!’ Miss Allen exclaimed. ‘That early training has given you something invaluable. It looks to me as if you might have a future before you. What are your plans, if you don’t come back to us? I’ve heard something about farming. Suppose you tell me what you mean to do?’

Damaris spoke eagerly. ‘It’s going to be no end sport! We planned it last holidays. We’d been expecting our father to come back from America, but instead we heard that he was dead and that he’d left no money for us. We hadn’t seen him since we came home, when I was nine, you know. About the same time, the aunt who had taken care of us died, and she left Crossrigs, where we’d lived with her, to Rachel and me. It’s only a tiny farm, but there are some fields and a jolly old house. Our half-Italian cousin, Maidlin, came to look after us, and she had a marvellous idea for me. We knew we’d have to find jobs, of course, so Ray’s to be Maidlin’s secretary—Maid has money, and a castle in Italy, and she’d have adopted us, but we couldn’t let her do that; we said we’d rather work for ourselves; so she offered Ray the job of being her secretary, and Ray’s been swotting at shorthand and book-keeping all summer.’ She stopped for breath.

‘And you? You didn’t tell her about your dancing?’

‘My hat, no—I’m sorry, Miss Allen!—But there isn’t anything to tell. It’s just for fun. Maid suggested that I should go to college and be trained, and then go home to Crossrigs and keep hens and bees. It’s going to be great sport! I love the fells, where we lived, in Cumberland; and I said I must have an outdoor job. I’m going to drive a little car and rush about the country, delivering eggs and butter and honey. But I’m not old enough to be a farmer yet, or even to go to college, so as soon as I’ve passed matric Ray and I are going abroad for a year, to improve our French and Italian. Maidlin knows jolly places where we can stay, and it’s absolutely necessary for Ray to be able to talk, for she’ll have to travel with Maid and look after things for her. I don’t need languages for my hens and bees, but it won’t do any harm to know French better, and I’ll be company for Ray. So it’s all planned out, and if only I’ve passed matric we can start at once. We’re both fearfully keen.’

‘I see.’ Miss Allen looked at her thoughtfully. ‘You’ve never thought of taking up dancing as a career?’

Damaris gazed back at her in wide-eyed surprise. ‘On the stage, do you mean? But I’d never be good enough!’

‘You aren’t ready yet, but it looks to me as if you would be worth training.’

‘But don’t you have to start as a baby?’ Damaris cried.

‘Not as a baby. That would be bad for any girl. You began quite early enough.’

‘But I didn’t keep on!’ Damaris stammered, in complete amazement.

‘You ought to have been working steadily, of course. But you have kept in training and your cricket and games have helped to keep you supple. If you took it up in earnest now——’ Miss Allen paused. ‘Do you know what I’m talking about, Damaris?’

‘About stage dancing—for *me*. It sounds too—impossible, Miss Allen. Am I going batty?’

Miss Allen tried to look reproving. ‘I don’t believe you do know what I want you to do. Have you ever seen ballet—the real thing?’

Damaris flushed. ‘I *don’t* know what you mean,’ she admitted. ‘I’ve never seen anything; my aunt would never have let me go.’

‘No, I suppose not. *Giselle*, *Swan Lake*, *Sylphides*, *Petrouchka*; they aren’t even names to you, are they?’

‘Are they plays with dancing in them?’

Miss Allen laughed. ‘You don’t know the first thing about your own dancing, and yet you have the makings of a ballerina! I’d like to take you to see *The Spectre of the Rose* or *Jeux d’Enfants*! Is there no chance of your having training in London?’

‘As a dancer? You really think I could do something worth while?’ Damaris gasped.

‘I’d like very much to see you try. I’d like to see what you could do after a year’s steady work.’

‘But I’m too old! I’m just on sixteen! Ray read something in the paper about girls of thirteen who danced marvellously.’

‘The young Russian dancers,’ Miss Allen assented. ‘You are too old to start as a baby prodigy, of course. But, as I keep reminding you, this isn’t your starting-point; you began years ago. I believe with regular and good training you would make a dancer; how good or how great a dancer, of course, I can’t say.’

Damaris looked thoughtful. ‘It’s a weird idea. I’d never thought of it in earnest. But I’d have to give up my hens and bees! I’m desperately keen on my farm, Miss Allen. And college; and going abroad with Rachel—I couldn’t do any of those, for I’d have to start at once, wouldn’t I?’

‘Oh, certainly! You’ve lost quite enough time. You couldn’t afford a year in France.’

‘I couldn’t let Ray down, and she’d hate to go without me!’ Damaris exclaimed. ‘It’s a marvellous idea, Miss Allen, and I’m frightfully grateful to you for telling me about it. But Ray must go abroad, and I must go too. I’m booked for the next year, at least.’

Miss Allen looked at her with a touch of regret. ‘It’s not my business to urge you to alter your whole life. In a year it would be too late for you to begin training in earnest, with any hope of success; I am sure of that. Now, at just sixteen, with your background and the amount you can do already, I believe you might still succeed. You have excellent natural movement, and—well, I won’t go on! You must do as you think best. But—hens and bees, in the depths of the country! It seems a pity.’

‘But I shall love the hens and bees!’

‘Oh, very well!’ Miss Allen laughed and dismissed her.

When Damaris had gone, the gym mistress went up to the gallery, where Miss Cunningham, the Head, had been sitting. ‘There!’ she said in triumph. ‘Wasn’t I right? I couldn’t say too much to her, but you saw? Pure ballet, and the most lovely natural line and movement. And she insists on burying herself in the country with hen-coops and chicken-runs!’

‘I saw, and I agree with you,’ Miss Cunningham said. ‘But all the family tradition would be against any connexion with the stage, at least on her father’s side. The aunts in the country would have died of horror.’

‘What about her mother?’

‘One of our old girls. She was musical and very pretty and graceful. But there was no stage connexion, so far as I have heard.’

‘Do you know the Italian cousin who seems to be responsible for them now?’

‘I haven’t met her. I believe she is a singer. But she is still very young. She doesn’t come into her Italian property till she is twenty-five, in about two years. So Rachel will be ready; it’s a fine opening for her and will be a pleasant job, I am sure.’

‘And Damaris, with that gift, will go and keep bees in the country!’ Miss Allen wailed. ‘It’s sheer wicked waste! I wish I had known of this before!’

‘You’d have tempted her? But that might not have been a kindness. If her family did not stand by her she would have been very unhappy. We had better leave her to the life she has chosen.’

‘She talks of dancing as “just for fun” and “not important”!’ Miss Allen groaned. ‘If she could see *Swan Lake*, just once!’

‘Better not. If Rachel and the cousin did not approve, Damaris would break her heart, if she realized what might have been. We’ll leave them to their plans. Don’t unsettle her if she comes back next term! But I don’t think she will. She has worked well. I feel sure she has passed.’

CHAPTER III

A HOME IN FRANCE

In the ruined Abbey in the grounds of the Hall where Maidlin had made her home for eight years, Damaris told Rachel of Miss Allen's strange suggestion.

The sisters were alike in many ways, with the same steady brown eyes and the same firm lips and resolute chins. But Rachel's wavy hair, cut short, was dark-brown, while Damaris had a mop of yellow curls, parted above her forehead and falling on her cheeks.

Rachel sat up. 'But how marvellous, Marry! Did she really think you'd be good enough?'

'Seemed to; said so, anyway. But only with lots more training, and we couldn't afford it. I didn't say that to her, but I couldn't live in London and have dancing lessons every day.'

'No.' Rachel lapsed back against the sunny wall. They were sitting in the cloister garth, where in the old days the abbot's seat had been. 'No, you wouldn't like to ask Maid to pay for that.'

'Not when she's offered to send me to college. And I couldn't let you go to France without me.'

Rachel looked at her anxiously. 'Marry, you aren't self-denying yourself just to keep me company? I'd hate that. I could go alone.'

Damaris laughed. 'Don't worry, old thing! I think Miss Allen's a bit batty. I'd never be good enough to be—what did she call it?—a ballerina! Suppose I gave up France, and you, and college, and my farm, and then found I was only fit for the back row of the chorus!'

'The *corps de ballet*,' Rachel corrected her. 'I was reading about some new ballets the other day. The chief dancer was a girl under twenty, who started when she was thirteen. I think you're too old.'

'I said that, but Miss Allen said—oh well! I'm not going in for it, so why worry? I don't believe Maid would agree to it anyway. She planned the bees and hens for me; I couldn't let her down.' Damaris rolled over on the grass and gazed up at the sky. 'But it was a weird idea. I'd like to go on playing at it. Miss Allen was thrilled when she saw my pink shoes. You'll give me a new pair on the twenty-seventh, won't you? We'll be in France by then, thanks to Maid and my jolly old certificate. I am glad to have matric off my mind!'

'You're sure you want the usual thing?' Rachel asked, as she did every year.

'Oh, rather! More than anything!'

'Then of course I'll give them to you. There's the bell; that means tourists. We'd better disappear.'

'We'd better pack, if we're really starting for France in the morning, and Maid seems to think we are,' Damaris said lazily.

'We're nearly ready. I'll finish for you,' and Rachel led the way back to the garden.

A week later Maidlin said good-bye to Rachel and Damaris at Annecy station, and set out on the second stage of her journey to Italy. She was a slight slim girl, smaller than her cousins, with very dark eyes and black hair, and clear pale skin, showing the signs of her Italian father but none of her mother from the farm in Cumberland. Yellow-haired Damaris, called after that mother—her father's favourite sister—was very like that first Mary Damaris.

Maidlin's mother had died at her birth. Brought up, as Rachel and Damaris had been, on the farm, she had been adopted at fourteen by friends who lived in the south of England, when

the death of her Italian grandfather left her the heiress to his fortune and estates. Unprepared for such a position in the future, she had been trained and watched with loving sympathy and care by Joy, now Lady Marchwood and the owner of the Hall, who had known from her own experience what it meant to come into an unexpected inheritance as a girl. For eight years Maidlin and her chum, Rosamund, had made their home with Joy, helping in her village activities after they left school and caring with her for her fatherless twin girls, Elizabeth and Margaret.

When the death of the Cumberland aunt left Rachel and Damaris stranded, it had been natural for Joy, the soul of hospitality, to bid Maidlin bring them to the Hall until their future was decided. Rachel, nearly seventeen, had passed matric; it had been arranged that she should become Maidlin's assistant, and Joy's secretary, Mary Devine, had been teaching her shorthand and training her in business methods during the summer months. Damaris had gone back to school to win her matric certificate, with plans for a year abroad to study languages and a college career to qualify her as a poultry-farmer.

So, at last, the girls, who had never been parted before, were together again and were starting out on their new adventure, alone in France.

'You're sure you'll be all right, Rachel?' Maidlin asked, for the hundredth time, as they waited for the train which would take her to Aix to catch the Italian express.

'Maid dear, definitely and absolutely all right. Madame Pernet and Annette are darlings. We're feeling thoroughly at home.'

'Don't lose your way! Your French isn't very good yet.'

'It's good enough to ask our way home!' Damaris laughed. 'Even I could do that much! Maid, you've almost caught the train before yours!'

'I always do,' Maidlin sighed, a smile creeping into her grave eyes. 'I'm so sure I'm going to be late that I'm always far too early. I used to be late in starting for school, and Rosamund had to hustle me; so I reformed and now I've gone too far the other way. What will you do with yourself while Rachel goes to shorthand classes, Damaris?' She had begged to be allowed to use the girls' full names and not to shorten them to Ray and Marry.

'Oh, explore! It's a marvellous old town. I shall wander about and get lost and find myself again. It will be good for my French! Besides, there's always the lake. If I find that, I shall know my way home.'

'I'm rather frightened of shorthand lessons in French,' Rachel confessed. 'But I see that it will be useful. I hope they'll go slowly at first.'

'I'm sure they will. Don't wander into any too dreadful places, Damaris! You're—don't be shy!—you're so pretty. You might get yourself into trouble.'

Damaris laughed, her clear ringing laugh. 'Don't worry about me, Maid dear! Perhaps I'll help Madame and Annette at their busy times.—This train really seems to be going to start at last. You'd better climb into your seat.'

When they had waved good-bye the girls turned back into the town and wandered through the strange old streets towards the lake. Annecy had already fascinated them; the arcades above the shops, giving shelter from the blazing sun, the narrow streets and the canals, the curious red-roofed church towers, the open-air market, the mountains all around, and the deep green of the lake, each in turn gave them keen delight. They knew Tournette, Parmelan, Dents de Lanfon, and other peaks by name, for Maidlin had pointed them out on the never-to-be-forgotten first sail round the lake. She had taken them to the top of the Semnoz, and in the distance they had seen Mont Blanc, with its glistening snow. They had been with her to

marvel at the Gorges du Fier and to see the treasures of the Château de Montrottier; and they knew that on all the shores of the lake there were towns and villages to be explored.

‘There’s plenty to do,’ Damaris said contentedly. ‘I’m going to ask about chicken-farms and bee-keeping, and go to see how they do it here; but not till I can talk easily! There are sure to be people who go in for hens and bees, in country like this.’

‘Heaps!’ Rachel agreed. ‘It’s a good idea to study French methods. It’s rather like Windermere, isn’t it? Maid said it was the Lake District of France. The mountains here are higher, of course,’ and she looked up at the range dominating the lake, and Tournette reigning over the far end. ‘Marry, that’s a jolly good plan of yours about helping Madame at rush hours. I wonder if she’d let you?’

‘I asked her; she’s keen to have me. At certain times she and Annette are run off their feet. They sometimes get in outside help, but they can’t depend on that; other people are busy, too, at the same times. Madame says if I’ll help she’ll give me extra pocket-money; it’s a very sound idea!’

Rachel laughed. ‘You’ve had experience! That week at Hikers’ Halt, when we helped Miss Baldry, taught us something about serving teas. Do you remember—oh well! Of course you do. You know all about being a waitress. If there’s a fearful rush I’ll help too, but I must work at shorthand, and at reading and writing French.’

‘That’s your job,’ Damaris assented. ‘So long as I can chatter, that’s all I need.’

‘You’ll learn to do that quite soon,’ Rachel laughed.

‘I’m used to being “Mademoiselle Marie” already,’ Damaris grinned. ‘I don’t wonder “Damaris” was too much for Madame and Annette. As soon as they heard you call me “Marry,” they leapt at it. Jolly useful for everybody!’

‘Your first name is Mary, so it’s really all right,’ Rachel added.

They made their way by the side of the lake and stood leaning on the railing of a small park to watch the white steamer leave the pier, setting out for Talloires, far down the opposite shore.

‘We’ll have another sail some day,’ Damaris remarked. ‘But I must earn some cash first. Maid’s been jolly generous about pocket-money, but I’d like to feel I was paying for my outings by working for Madame. Let’s go home and see if she has a job for me to-day!’

CHAPTER IV

DAMARIS DANCES AGAIN

The little café, with its basket chairs and small green-topped tables under a green-and-white striped awning, had been busy, but had settled down into quietness. Rachel, with a week's steady work behind her, spread out books and began to translate a paragraph of the French newspaper into shorthand.

Damaris, wearing an overall, went into the scullery and took the washing-up mop from Annette.

'I'll do this,' she said. 'There is somebody coming in who wants to see you, Annette, *ma belle*. You go and talk to him.'

Annette grew crimson. 'Who is it, *Mademoiselle Marie*?'

'Oh, *fié*, Annette! You know who it is very well. I don't mean he is the only one who comes,' Damaris added hastily, in stumbling French. 'There are others, I know. But this is the one you want to see. Run along, Annette, and be kind to him. He's nice!'

'It is M. Berthelot?' Annette queried.

'Truly, it is M. Berthelot, from the Casino. There he is!' Damaris thrust Annette into the outer room and began to wash cups, whistling under her breath.

With a tidy scullery, she presently looked out into the café. Rachel was scribbling slowly, translating back her shorthand into French. Annette and M. Berthelot were deep in conversation at a corner table; Madame sat in the doorway, busy with her endless knitting.

Damaris, whistling softly, strolled to the wireless set which had been Maidlin's gift to Madame and Annette. 'I wonder what's on? They'll never hear it; it won't disturb anybody. I'll try London.'

The last notes of a gramophone record died away, and another began.

'Gosh!' said Damaris. 'That's weird!'

Rachel looked up and laughed. 'How odd to hear that here!—Oh, *Marry!*'

Damaris was dancing, in the cleared space near the music. 'You know I always do, when I hear that tune,' she jerked.

'She always does,' Rachel said apologetically, speaking in English, with which Annette and Madame Pernet were familiar, while M. Berthelot spoke the language well. 'It's an English dance—"Shepherd's Hey"—but *Marry* has made her own version and puts her own steps to it. It always sets her off; she loves——'

She stopped in amazement. M. Berthelot, the manager of the Casino and Annette's chief suitor, had risen and was staring at Damaris with a look which Rachel could not understand.

'I'm sorry!' Damaris cried, in laughing apology, as the music ended. 'I'm crazy for that tune; on the record it works up so gloriously at the end.' She switched off the set. 'I didn't know that would come out when I turned the thing on! Madame, you don't mind? I always want to dance when I hear it.'

'But, *Mademoiselle Marie!*' cried M. Berthelot. 'What is this? You are a dancer?'

Damaris turned to him in surprise, and at sight of the look on his face grew bewildered. 'Monsieur, I don't understand! What is the matter?'

'You are a dancer? Why did you not tell me? You are training with *Les Ballets Russes*?'

Rachel laid down her pencil and stared at him. 'The Russian Ballet?' she said.

'I'm not training for anything.' Damaris spoke with a touch of shyness. 'I just dance for fun, Monsieur.'

'For fun! Mon Dieu, what are you saying? Who has taught you? Have you studied in Paris? The great schools are there; or perhaps in London? You belong to Les Ballets Russes? And I did not know!'

'Les Ballets Russes—and all ballet—is his greatest joy,' Annette put in. 'We did not understand, Mademoiselle Marie.'

'But *I* don't understand!' Damaris cried. 'What is the Ballets Russes? I've never heard of it. I tell you, I'm not being trained at all.'

'Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!' groaned M. Berthelot, and he sank down at a table, his head in his hands. 'She is not training; she dances for fun; she has not heard of Les Ballets Russes! Nor of Massine—or Diaghileff—or Baronova—or Toumanova—or Riabouchinska?'

'They aren't even names to me,' Damaris retorted, her eyes startled.

'Monsieur, you don't mean that you thought Marry's dancing was like that of the Russian Ballet?' Rachel asked slowly.

'No Les Ballets Russes, from Monte Carlo. The Russian Ballet was in the days of Diaghileff, but he died—it was a tragedy—some years ago. But now we have Les Ballets Russes; and the new young dancers, of whom I spoke; and Massine, who was with Diaghileff, in the old days.' M. Berthelot leaned across to Damaris. 'Please to come here, Mademoiselle. Tell me why you dance.'

'Because I like it. It's such fun,' Damaris said stoutly. 'And because I know the steps and the music seems to need them. That tune just asks to be danced to.'

'How do you know the steps? Who has taught you?'

Breathless with surprise at something in his tone, Damaris told of her beginning in America at the age of eight and of her school life in England.

'And you did not go on?' he groaned. 'You say nobody knew? You did not tell them you must dance? But it is a crime! If you had been trained, as you should have been, at classes every day, you would be in the front rank of our dancers now, a leading ballerina and an English one, not Russian. What was your mother thinking of? Your father?'

'He was in New York. My aunts thought it wicked and sinful,' Damaris said defiantly.

M. Berthelot threw up his hands and groaned again. 'A crime!' he moaned. 'But it is not too late. You are a natural dancer, and your movement is exquisite. You have balance; you have perfection of line. With a few months' hard work—perhaps a year—we will yet see you lead the ballet.'

'Oh, but I'm going to be a chicken-farmer!'

'Mademoiselle, you are *not!*' he said firmly. 'That was a childish dream. Now you are going to work. A gift like yours cannot be hidden. You are born to dance, and I shall see that you do it. Am I truly the first to understand? Mon Dieu!' he cried again. 'Has no one discovered you? It is left to me? Then it is my joy, my pride, and I shall make you dance. You will be Pavlova—Karsavina—over again; given back to us when we had lost them!'

'But I'm not going in for dancing!' Damaris began.

'Monsieur!' Rachel interrupted. 'How could you judge from those few minutes? Could you really see so much in that one dance that Marry has made up?'

'He knows, Mademoiselle Rachel!' Madame and Annette spoke eagerly. 'He knows all about the ballet. He has seen much——'

‘She made that dance herself?’ It was M. Berthelot’s turn to interrupt. ‘Because she liked the little tune with the big ending? It is not a dance in England?’

‘It is a dance in England; a very old folk-dance,’ Rachel said. ‘But Marry’s dance isn’t in the least like the real one. She made up her own version, out of the steps she practises.’

‘We heard it often, at my cousin’s home,’ Damaris added. ‘They go in for folk-dancing; heaps of it! I liked the tune, and I made my own dance to it.’

‘You made it? A child who has had no training?’ Amazement was in M. Berthelot’s voice again. ‘Could you do it once more for me?’

‘I could, but I couldn’t make the wireless go back and play it again,’ Damaris retorted.

‘I don’t suppose Annette has the record.’ Rachel glanced at the big gramophone, which also had been a gift from Maidlin, after a troubled time in which Madame had been more than kind.

‘The record! We could buy one. Write down the name for me, Mademoiselle Rachel. I must see our dancer once again!’

Started by his almost feverish eagerness, Rachel handed him a slip of paper. He dashed out of the café, calling that he would return in five minutes.

‘What an excited little man!’ Damaris raised her eyebrows and spoke in a would-be careless tone. ‘You’ll have a hectic life if you marry him, Annette!’

‘Don’t lose your head about all this, Marry,’ Rachel warned her. ‘It’s not likely Maidlin would let you go on the stage.’

‘I’m not going on the stage. I won’t be cheated of my bees and chickens, after thinking about them for so long. But I’d simply love to have some good lessons in dancing, while we’re here, if he could tell me how to manage it,’ Damaris said.

‘He knows,’ Annette said again. ‘He will tell you. He will make you dance. He is not such a very little man, and he makes everyone do what he says.’

‘He won’t make me go on the stage! And he is a little man; you’re taller than he is. He’s a little round bald cherub,’ Damaris retorted.

‘He is not!’ Annette cried.

‘Now, Mademoiselle Marie, let me see your dance again!’ M. Berthelot rushed in. ‘I have the record. Work up your grand finale as you did before. It was magnificent!’

‘But it wasn’t “Shepherd’s Hey”!’ Rachel murmured.

Damaris dashed out of the room. ‘My new shoes! One moment, Monsieur! Such beauties! Get the record ready!’

‘Ah! Those are better!’ M. Berthelot cried, at sight of the pink ballet shoes, with their blocked toes. ‘Now we shall see you on your points. You will be Columbine—Giselle—the Swan Queen! Now let us see your own little dance!’

CHAPTER V

PLANS FOR A DANCER

‘Yes!’ M. Berthelot spoke more quietly, as Damaris whirled to her last triumphant pirouette. ‘Now, Mademoiselle Marie, you will come with me to Madame Bonnet. She has a ballet school, you understand, here in Annecy; not a very big one, not like those in Paris. But Madame danced in the Russian Ballet under Diaghileff, and she is known as a good teacher. She will see you dance and she will take you in her school, and you will work, every day. For how long do you stay in Annecy?’

Damaris stared at him, wide-eyed. ‘For six months, at least. But——’

‘Bon! And then? Back to England?’

‘No, to Italy, for six months, to learn Italian.’

‘Oh, très bon! We will make you a dancer yet. Where in Italy?’

‘Near Milan, Monsieur. Our cousin has friends there.’

‘That is very good. I too have friends in Milan, and they will advise you. In a year you will be ready to show what you can do. I may be wrong, though I think not. A year’s hard work and good training will tell us.’

‘But, Monsieur, I am not going on the stage!’ Damaris cried. ‘I am going to live in the country and keep a little farm.’

‘Ah, bah! It is not possible. I will not allow it. You are going to dance to the whole world!’

‘Monsieur, how could we afford to pay for lessons?’ Rachel asked quietly. ‘Surely, from a good teacher, they would be very expensive?’

‘And I’d need a new pair of shoes every week,’ Damaris added. ‘We couldn’t possibly afford it.’

‘Perhaps not every week! As for Madame Bonnet, once she has seen you she will take you without payment, because in the future you will bring such credit on her school.’

‘Oh, tosh!’ Damaris cried. ‘People don’t do that sort of thing!’

‘Oh, but they do, Mademoiselle Marie,’ Madame Pernet exclaimed. ‘There was a young girl in Annecy who danced like an angel and was very beautiful, and Madame Bonnet took her into her school for no fee, because when she became a great dancer she would say she had been Madame’s pupil and the school would become famous. But the poor child took fever and died, and Madame wept because she had lost her ballerina. If she thinks you are as good as M. Berthelot says, she will take you. She will be glad to teach you.’

Damaris looked from one to the other. ‘But, my dear people, you don’t understand!’

‘You will work for us and earn the money for your shoes,’ Annette said eagerly.

‘But there’ll be heaps of other things; special clothes, I suppose, and they’ll wear out!’

‘Undoubtedly, if you work hard they will wear out.’ M. Berthelot beamed on her. ‘Mademoiselle Marie, I have faith in your future, and I do not believe that you will still want your hens and bees after you have trained in ballet for a year. I shall be proud to help you with your extra expense; after all, it is my wish and you do it to satisfy me.’

‘That’s true, of course.’ Damaris looked at him thoughtfully. ‘But I can’t let you pay for my clothes. What shall I have to wear? Pink silk tights, to match my shoes?’

‘We shall see. And when you are our ballerina and dance in Paris and London, you will sometimes send Papa Berthelot a ticket for a box or a seat in the stalls.’

Damaris went to him and looked down into his kind, eager eyes. ‘You really do mean it? You would like me to try?’

‘You must try, or I shall break my heart, *petite*. I believe I have found a treasure in you, but you must be tried and trained and tested. Then we shall know.’

‘It’s just marvellous of you! But I’m frightfully afraid of disappointing you. You won’t ask me to promise to give up my farm? May I see how I feel about it after a year?’

‘Promise nothing, my dear. I know what you will feel after a year.’

‘You seem very sure about it! But there are other difficulties, *Monsieur Papa!*’

He laughed in delight. ‘What are they, *petite?*’

‘My people know nothing of all this. I’ve never danced at home. We owe everything to our cousin, and the farming was her idea. I couldn’t disappoint *Maidlin*. If she didn’t like the thought of my dancing on the stage I couldn’t go on with it, and then your money and *Madame’s* teaching would be wasted.’

‘Tut! Once she sees you dance she will agree. A gift like yours must not be unused.’

‘I’m not at all sure of it,’ Damaris said.

‘Neither am I,’ Rachel agreed. ‘*Monsieur, Marry* cannot take your very kind offer of help unless you understand that without our cousin’s consent and goodwill she could not go on the stage!’

‘You could write and ask,’ *Annette* began.

‘Oh, not till I’ve tried and they’ve decided if I’m going to be worth while!’ Damaris cried hastily. ‘I’d feel an awful ass if I suggested it and *Maid* agreed, and then I had to write and say—“Not good enough”! Please don’t say anything to her yet!’

‘She must not be asked in a letter. She must see you dance, and then she will consent,’ *M. Berthelot* said firmly. ‘It is not a thing to put into words. I will take the risk; we will train the little *Marie* and then she will go and dance to her cousin, and then she will become our ballerina. *Papa Berthelot* says it!’

‘*Papa Berthelot* is an angel!’ Damaris exclaimed. ‘But I’m still keen on my farm! I’ll love to have good lessons and to dance in earnest; I’ve often longed to go on with it. But I haven’t promised to give up my chicks yet.’

M. Berthelot laughed. ‘We will speak of those chicks again in a year, my little one. By that time you will understand what is before you.’

‘Well, of course, I don’t understand!’ Damaris admitted. ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about.’

‘*Mon Dieu*, how should you know? You have never yet seen *le ballet*.’

‘How could I see it?’ Damaris retorted. ‘You aren’t taken to see ballets at school! And in the holidays I’ve been on the farm—looking after the hens, among other things. I’m quite a good hen-lady.’

‘No, you are right. You could not know. When you see *le ballet*, you will understand and you will love him.’

‘I should have thought the ballet would be her or she,’ Rachel said.

‘No, he is *le ballet*. *La danse* is she, but *le ballet* is he, *Mademoiselle*.’

‘How odd!’ Damaris grinned at him. She was fingering the new record. ‘What’s on the other side of this? Anything decent?’

Rachel turned the record over. ‘“*Shepherd Fennel’s Dance*.” Do you know it?’

‘Never heard of it, but it sounds good. I’m all out for shepherds and dances! Let’s hear it.’

Rachel played the record, and Damaris listened with eager eyes, while M. Berthelot watched her with a strange look on his face.

‘What a marvellous thing! It would make a glorious dance, with those, changes from quick to slow; no, from dance-y to dreamy music! I say, Ray, play it again!’

Rachel laughed. ‘I know what you’re going to do!’

‘Now once more!’ Damaris cried gaily.

This time she began to dance. The merry music of the gathering in the shepherd’s cottage was shown in quick leaping steps, high in the air; but the slow introductory bars, repeated in the middle of the tune, gave her opportunities for beautiful positions and she seized them with full effect.

‘A small *adagio*, and she uses it as such,’ M. Berthelot murmured, fascinated. ‘What poise! She never wavers! And what line! She is perfect. I have found Pavlova!’

He stepped forward, his face alight. ‘Petite, is it true you have not heard that music before?’

‘Jamais de ma vie!’ Damaris retorted laughing. ‘On my honour, Papa, I never heard it till now. They don’t use records at my cousin’s home; they dance country-dances to a fiddle, or the piano, or a little pipe. I heard “Shepherd’s Hey” on the wireless; I’ve never seen the record, nor heard this other marvellous tune, till to-day.’

‘You made that little dance now, at this moment, just for us?’

‘Nobody has ever seen it but you dear people. What else could one do to that music? It asks for all those steps!’

‘It is true. But not every one could tell that so quickly—nor, ma foi, could many do the steps as you do! We must tell Madame Bonnet; she must see you make a new dance—so quickly! I begin to wonder about your future, little one.’

‘Why? I’ve told you—hens and bees on the fells; those are the hills where we live, Monsieur Papa! Hens and bees and a little car, and some dancing just for fun.’

‘No,’ he said. ‘No! It is not possible.’

‘What are you doubtful about, Monsieur?’ Rachel asked.

‘Whether the little Marie will stay in ballet, Mademoiselle Rachel. She will begin there; oh, yes! She will begin, as all must do, in the *corps de ballet*, and then she will become our ballerina and dance alone and lead them all. But in ballet, you understand, she must accept the steps which are always danced; she must not use her own. She would disturb her partner and all the rest if she changed the dance. Also, the steps are known and waited for by the audience. But our Marie will want to make her own dances; to choose her own music and show us what it says to her.’

‘It sounds more like her,’ Rachel admitted, while Damaris listened, a gleam of amusement in her face.

‘That is why I am not sure. There are new ballets being written, little one.’ He turned to Damaris and caught the glint of laughter in her eyes. ‘Perhaps you will help. You may not be content to repeat the roles that others have made famous. I begin to think you will create new ballets for us. Why do you laugh?’

‘Because you refuse to believe in my bees and hens, Monsieur Papa Berthelot.’

‘Bah! I do not believe in them. You will do great things in the world; you will not be content in a farm. You are no longer a child, to dream of simple things.’

‘Oh, là, là!’ said Damaris. ‘I am going to be a bee-lady, a chicken-maid. But in the meantime, Ray, put on that gorgeous new tune just once more!’

M. Berthelot nodded in beaming satisfaction. ‘You will dance, petite. You will be my ballerina. Yes, let us see your new little dance again!’

CHAPTER VI

MADAME SPEAKS

‘But the girl is too old,’ Madame Bonnet said sharply, eyeing Damaris over her spectacles. ‘Albert Berthelot, are you mad? What are you dreaming of? I do not teach large young women!’

‘Oh, Madame! I am not a large young woman!’ Damaris pleaded, laughing and dismayed.

She wore the green school frock, with its short sleeves and white collar, which she had used on the sands for cricket, with the sapphire-blue tie and girdle of the Fifth Form. Rachel, watching anxiously, wore her blue frock of the same pattern, with the golden colours of the Sixth at St. Dorothea’s and the badge of a prefect on her breast.

M. Berthelot explained eagerly. ‘But, Madame, we have not told you yet. She has danced since she was eight, but she has had no help after the first year or two. Her people said—can you believe it—that it was wicked, but she still danced for her own pleasure.’

‘Wicked?’ Madame Bonnet asked, appalled.

‘Oh, terribly sinful! To be on my points—but they said toes, of course—was disgusting and theatrical and ever so much more. They couldn’t help it, poor old dears!’ Damaris said tolerantly. ‘They’d grown up that way. Don’t be too hard on them! They were honestly shocked and dreadfully upset. They told me not to think any more about it. I was a child of nine at that time.’

‘But you did not obey?’ Madame gave her a quick look.

‘I couldn’t, Madame. I loved it too much.’

‘Good! But you had no more lessons and you did not talk about it at home? Did you know?’ She turned to Rachel sharply.

‘Oh, yes, Madame. I thought Marry danced beautifully. I didn’t want her to give it up.’

‘She gave me shoes on my birthday every year. That helped a lot, Madame,’ Damaris said earnestly.

‘So!’ Madame looked at them. ‘Well, then, tell me the story, and after that I will see you dance. Then I will tell you whether I will teach you or not. Who gave you the first lessons, when you were eight?’

Damaris gave her short history. ‘I wish there was more to tell!’

‘So do I!’ Madame said with emphasis. ‘It is indeed a crime that you have wasted all these years. But let me see; I shall soon know if they have been altogether wasted. You have shoes—yes? Change them and show me your steps, at the bar.’

Rachel watched the grim face intently while Damaris, her hand on the bar, went through the exercises she remembered. Madame was elderly and inclined to be stout; she knew what she was looking for and her eyes were keen. Was it fancy, Rachel wondered, or was there a gleam of surprise and satisfaction in their black depths?

‘It is wrong! It is a sin!’ Madame burst out.

Damaris stood and gazed at her in dismay. ‘Am I as bad as that? Oh, Madame! I’m so sorry. We won’t trouble you any longer——’

‘It is a crime that I have not had you since you were ten,’ Madame snapped. ‘By now you would have been ready. You might have equalled the young Russian girls, marvels as they are. It is a sin!’

‘Oh!’ Damaris stared at her, doubtful still.

‘You think Marry is worth training, Madame?’ Rachel ventured.

‘I knew it!’ M. Berthelot triumphed.

‘Worth it! Yes, she is worth it, but she will have to work hard to make up for the years she has lost. I can make something of her; what, I cannot yet say. Can she act?’

‘I’ve never tried, Madame. I’d like to have a shot at it.’

‘You will have to learn. It will be hard for you to succeed, unless you can act. We will teach you to mime.’

‘What’s that, please?’

Madame threw up her hands. ‘What a babe! To act without words, child; to express what you feel in movement alone.’

‘Oh! I’d like that. I think I could play about and do actions.’

‘It is pantomime,’ said Madame. ‘You will need it. Now what is this I hear about dances you have made yourself? It is nothing, you understand; every girl makes dances. You must not waste your time; for you there is work to do.’

‘Oh, Madame, don’t I know it! Indeed, I will work! I will do my very best!’

‘But, Madame, you will see her little dance?’ M. Berthelot pleaded. ‘And you will remember that she had heard the music only twice. She had no time to think and plan and polish her dance; it is what the music said to her.’

‘It is waste of time,’ Madame grumbled. ‘But I will see it, to please you.’

M. Berthelot placed the record on the big gramophone. ‘Now, little one, do just what you did for us yesterday. First the dance you had never done before. After that we will have the one with the big ending, for that, too, is your own.’

‘You’ve all made me horribly nervous,’ Damaris said lightly. ‘Eh bien, Papa, I am ready.’

Madame watched keenly, that grim look on her face again. Rachel tried to read what was passing in her mind, but this time she failed.

Damaris paused and waited for comments. ‘I know it’s unfinished,’ she said shyly.

‘Humph!’ said Madame. ‘So you think that is very fine, do you—you and Albert Berthelot?’

‘Oh! Is it as bad as that? I don’t think it’s anything wonderful, but Papa Berthelot seemed to like it.’

‘Madame likes it also.’ M. Berthelot knew his old friend. ‘The other one, ma petite, and work it up at the end as you did before.’

Damaris obediently danced her ‘Shepherd’s Hey’, and to Rachel it seemed to have more life and vigour than ever before.

‘Yes!’ Madame delivered judgement at last. ‘Well, my child, you will give no more time to making dances. You will work and learn. There are years of work before you. Long after you have begun to dance in public, you will still go on learning and working.’

‘Indeed I will, Madame. But——’ and Damaris paused, her mind reverting to those hens and bees.

‘But her own dances, Madame?’ M. Berthelot pleaded. ‘They are good, n’est-ce pas? Some day she will show her own dances to the world? You can encourage her?’

Madame turned on him. ‘They are a child’s work and a child’s ideas. What else is possible? She is still only a child. But for an untrained child, who has never seen the ballet, who knows nothing of what could be, they are amazing—I say it—amazing! It is certain that when she knows what she is doing she will give us something new, something that will

astonish us. And for that reason’—she turned sternly to Damaris, who was staring at her in blank unbelief—‘for that reason, she must spend no more time now making up these childish things. I do not say “waste”, you notice; but she has no time to spare. She must learn her art; it will take her every minute. Just because one day she will make new dances and turn music into a beauty that we can see, she must lose no more time now. Marie, I shall make you work hard; but the result will be worth it.’

‘Oh, I will, I will!’ Damaris cried. ‘You are more than good! But—oh, Madame! Did not Papa Berthelot tell you? Suppose, when you have taught me, I still want to keep my bees and hens in the country? I haven’t promised to be a dancer!’

‘It may not be possible,’ Rachel put in anxiously. ‘There are friends at home who might object. We owe too much to them; we couldn’t break their hearts.’

Madame gave her a withering glance. ‘No hearts will be broken. When Marie is ready, your friends will be proud to see her dance. But even if all their hearts should break, she must dance. She is born to dance. She is a gift to the world. I—Mathilde Bonnet—I shall train her. And you, my friend Berthelot, she is your discovery. We shall be proud some day, you and I. We will sit together in a box at the theatre, and laugh and weep, as Marie dances.’

‘But my farm! My hens and bees!’ Damaris wailed. ‘Suppose I don’t want to dance?’

‘You will want to dance. Do not be an infant,’ Madame said. ‘You still do not understand.’

‘Well, please remember I haven’t promised anything,’ Damaris retorted defiantly.

Madame laughed. ‘Little one, there is no need. You will not turn your back on your future, once you have seen what it is to be. You will not refuse your destiny.’

‘I won’t promise,’ Damaris said again, half laughing, half frowning.

‘Marry, what do you mean to do?’ Rachel asked in bed that night.

Damaris crept closer to her, like a troubled child. ‘Ray, I don’t know! Tell me what to do!’

‘After what Madame said I thought you might have decided to go in for dancing, no matter what it meant to anybody else.’

‘I feel like that. And then I want my farm; I’ve lived with the thought of it for months! Ray, don’t you feel the world has turned upside down?’ Damaris whispered.

‘Not quite that, but I know what you mean. It’s all so new and strange.’

‘The exact opposite of our whole lives, up till now. We had to take Aunt Rachel’s way of looking at things; she brought us up, since I was nine and you were ten. She’d have hated this idea; she’d have had forty fits.’

‘She taught us a lot,’ Rachel said, ‘but it was housework and farm stuff. You know a good deal about hens already.’

‘Yes, she’d have approved of Maidlin’s plan. The thought of the stage for one of us would have upset her fearfully.’

‘It would probably have killed her,’ Rachel agreed.

‘Do you suppose Maidlin will feel the same?’ Damaris groaned.

‘I shouldn’t think so. She’s been brought up by people who love music and dancing.’

‘Country-dancing!’ Damaris cried. ‘Not the ballet! It’s different, Ray.’

‘We must wait till you feel sure,’ Rachel said.

‘It’s awful to be drawn two ways, divided between two whole lives,’ Damaris grumbled. ‘I expect I shall be in a frightful temper most of the time!’

‘I’ll soon tell you off! Don’t be an ass! You can’t live like that. Do as M. Berthelot said—don’t worry about the future, but learn all the dancing you can and enjoy it. You won’t dance well if you feel gloomy. When everybody is being so kind, it’s up to you to do your best.’

‘You really think I can put off deciding and just have a good time?’

‘I think you must.’

‘Right-oh! I’ll do it!’ and Damaris turned over and went to sleep.

CHAPTER VII

PAPA BERTHELOT'S ADVICE

'Mademoiselle Rachel, you understand that your sister will be great and rich and famous some day?' M. Berthelot asked earnestly.

Rachel smiled up at him from the table under the awning where she sat with her books before her.

'It seems a long way off, Monsieur. Perhaps none of it will happen.'

He brushed this aside. 'But she must work, and study. It is of that I have come to speak.'

'Oh, she'll do it! She has always wanted to know more about this dancing. She says Madame has all sorts of new steps to teach her. Marry's fascinated. She loves it; she'll work all right.'

'Yes, I believe it. But she must also read. She knows nothing at all yet. She must read the lives of the great dancers; Karsavina and Pavlova. And the history of ballet; of the Russian ballet and *Les Ballets Russes*, and your new English ballet; all this she needs to know.'

Rachel took up her pencil. 'Tell me, and I'll write down the names. But I'm afraid it will be slow work till Marry can read French a good deal better than she does at present. I suppose Annette could fetch these books from a library, but Marry couldn't read them easily yet. She could do it, of course, but it would be slow and it would feel like a school lesson. We couldn't afford to buy them in English.'

'Soon she will read easily; she must learn to do it. But to begin, I will lend her the life of Karsavina, written by herself and in English. She is Russian, of course, but she wrote her own story in English when she went to live in England.'

'But why have you an English book, M. Papa?' Rachel asked, smiling at his eager face.

'Mon Dieu! It pleases me to hear you and the little Marie call me that! Because, my dear, when I studied English, books were necessary, and the ballet has always been my greatest joy, so I found a book in English which I would read with pleasure.'

'I see. It will be a big help to Marry to read a book like that. You are more than kind, M. Papa.'

'Good! But she must read our French books too. And there is music; it is all-important to her. I have seen her at the piano—and you?'

'Oh yes! We both play, and Madame has most kindly said we may use her piano, which belonged to Odette, her little girl who died. I want to keep up my music, and I've told Marry she ought to practise. She'll do it; she's really keen on music.'

'For you it is useful, for you will play for her to dance,' said M. Berthelot. 'For her, it means even more. She must know, and play, the great music. Chopin—mon Dieu, yes! It is the music for *Les Sylphides* one of the very greatest ballets. Make Marie work at her music, Mademoiselle Rachel. It will help her greatly.'

'Most of all it would help her to see the ballet,' said Annette, who had been listening. 'Is it true that *Les Ballets Russes* will come to Aix next month? I read it in the paper.'

M. Berthelot groaned. 'Do not speak of it, Annette! I did not mean them to know. There are no seats, Mademoiselle Rachel; they were all sold at once. There is no chance for Marie, so it is better she should not know. Of all the things I should have wished for her, that would be the greatest, and I would give it to her, if I could. It breaks my heart to think that *Les*

Ballets Russes will come as near to us as Aix, and I cannot take Marie to see them! I am desolated at the thought.'

'We won't tell her anything about it.' Rachel tried to comfort him. 'How she would have loved it!'

'But, Albert, how is it that you have not a ticket?' Annette began. 'You go always to see Les Ballets Russes, if they come even as near to us as Lyons.'

M. Berthelot made a gesture of despair. 'Annette, my love, I could wring your neck,' he said simply. 'The performance was announced last March, when I was so ill with *la grippe*; for days I knew nothing, and in those days all the seats were sold. I wept when I heard of it, too late. Now if I had had a loving little wife, who understood my longing, she would have bought a ticket for me.'

'Oh, là, là! It is time you found her then, if you need to be looked after so badly.' Annette shrugged her shoulders. 'Why did you let yourself be so ill? You must have been very careless!'

'I have found her, but she is not kind to me,' said M. Berthelot mournfully. 'And so I shall miss Les Ballets Russes. I shall sit at home and weep.'

'No, don't do that,' Rachel said, laughing. 'Come and spend the time with us, and we'll put on records and Marry shall make dances for you, in spite of Madame Bonnet. We'll have an evening of ballet all for ourselves.'

'It is not the same,' he groaned. 'She cannot be Tumanova and Riabouchinska and Baronova and all the *corps de ballet*.'

'It sounds rather too much for one person, certainly,' Rachel admitted.

'If you had that wonderful wife, Albert,' Annette began, edging towards the door, 'she would remind you that seats are sometimes not used at the last moment and the tickets are returned; and she would write to the theatre and ask them to telephone to you if it should happen.'

'I did it months ago, my dear. There are no seats returned when Les Ballets Russes are there.'

'But there might be! Your little wife might write to the manager and remind him and say it was very urgent. Shall I try to find her for you?' and Annette fled to the kitchen.

M. Berthelot started up in pursuit, then sat down again with a rueful look at Rachel. 'Shall I ever win her, Mademoiselle?'

'You've done it already,' Rachel said promptly. 'She wouldn't tease you, if she didn't care. She's yours, M. Papa; but don't be in a hurry! She'll be a splendid wife for you, and you'll be very happy.'

'I should be happier if I saw any hope of taking our Marie to see Les Ballets Russes,' he groaned.

CHAPTER VIII

THE KINDNESS OF PAPA BERTHELOT

Rachel looked up from a letter she had just read. 'Maid won't be staying with us on her way back from Italy, Marry. She's started for home already and she's rushing straight through, without time for even one night here. She's glad to know we've settled down so thoroughly, and she hopes we're happy and that we won't mind being left out of her journey home.'

'I'm happy, if you are!' Damaris, balanced on one foot, swung the other in a new exercise. 'I'm bursting with happiness. What's up with Maid? Why is she speeding home? It's a month sooner than she meant to go.'

'There's illness at the Hall and she wants to help with the nursing. Lady Marchwood had flu, and now the twins are down with it, and Mary-Dorothy too, and Rosamund has had to leave her baby brother and go to look after them all. Maid says that isn't fair and she must go to relieve Rosamund.'

'Maid could never stay in Italy and enjoy herself if Lady Marchwood and the twins were ill,' Damaris agreed. 'Pity it's cut short her trip, though. As for us, I'm jolly fond of Maid and so I think perhaps it's just as well she shouldn't come.'

'And what do you mean by that queer saying?' Rachel raised her brows.

'I don't want to tell her about all this business yet. Just because I'm so fond of her, I'd find it difficult to keep dark about it if I talked to her.'

Rachel nodded. 'I feel the same. We can keep it out of letters.'

'Oh, that's easy. But I'm so bursting with new ideas and dances, as well as with happiness, that Maid couldn't have helped seeing there was something up, and if she'd asked me straight out I'd have had to tell her.'

'Yes, it's better to wait. Are you really going to be a dancer, Marry?'

'No! I'm going to be a farmer. The dear people won't listen to me; they just laugh and tell me to wait. So I'm waiting, and while I wait I'm going to learn all they can teach me. But I'm still keen on my farm on the fells.'

'You could do both,' Rachel said thoughtfully. 'The farming could come afterwards. You couldn't go on dancing in public till you were old, or even middle-aged.'

Damaris gave a whoop and leapt up in a triumphant pirouette. 'I say! That was a good one! Did you see? Ray, that's a marvellous idea! I could be a dancer, and then when I'm old and stout I could take up farming.'

Rachel laughed. 'You don't look like being stout at present.'

'They say dancers often are, just like singers. I'll keep your idea at the back of my mind. It would be top hole to do both! I hate having to choose between two jolly things.'

'In the meantime, have you practised to-day?' Rachel asked sternly.

'Piano? No, afraid I haven't. I will, Ray; it's all right. Madame Bonnet says it's important.'

'M. Berthelot said it mattered tremendously.'

'I think it does,' Damaris admitted. 'I see movements and dances while I'm playing. Hello, what's going on out there? It sounds like Papa Berthelot being excited again. He's adorable when he's in one of his bubbly states! I wonder what's up now?'

'Mademoiselle Rachel! Marie, my little one! Where are you?' cried M. Berthelot wildly.

As the girls appeared in the doorway of the café, he rushed towards them, waving a telegram. 'From Aix! They have three seats returned for to-night. We shall not be heartbroken, after all!'

'The ballet?' Damaris cried. 'The Ballets Russes? Oh, Papa! Is it possible? All the girls at the school are talking about it and lots of them are going—and Madame. She wanted to take me, but there was not a seat to be had. Papa, are we really going to see the real ballet, at last?'

'The best in the world, my child.' He beamed at her happily. 'I shall take you in my car. You will see *Sylphides*, *Carnaval*, *Lac des Cygnes*. That is the programme; I could not have chosen better for you if I had been consulted. It is right that you should know these, the great ones of ballet, first. Later you will see the newer ones; *Le Beau Danube*—a marvel, that! And *Cotillon*, and the symphonies of Massine. But they would be too hard for you just now. *Petrouchka*; yes, you must see that too, and *L'Oiseau de Feu*, and *Jeux d'Enfants*, and the *Boutique*; but not all at once.'

'My hat, no! I should have mental indigestion! I'd like to see the one about the Rose—where the man leaps through the window.'

M. Berthelot sighed. 'I saw *The Spectre*, with Karsavina and Nijinsky; poor Nijinsky! You will not see that one to-night, my dear. But the programme is excellent for you; excellent!'

'But, Monsieur Papa, you've only three tickets,' Rachel objected. 'What about Annette? You must take her, you know. I'll stay at home with Madame.'

A cloud fell on M. Berthelot's eager face. 'But I want you to see the ballet too, Mademoiselle Rachel. You ought to understand what your sister is going to do. There is but one way; for I have no hope of another seat. Annette, my dearest, you will come with us in the car; it will be better for our demoiselles that you should come. They might think I would run away with them, if they went alone with me! You will come, and when we reach the theatre'—he paused and sighed deeply. 'When we reach the theatre——'

They gazed at him expectantly, Annette standing behind the younger girls.

'I shall sit in the car, while you take these two to see the ballet, I suppose,' she mocked.

'No, I shall sit in the car,' he groaned. 'You will take them into the theatre, and afterwards you will tell Papa all about it, and everything you felt and said, n'est-ce pas, ma petite?'

'Oh, we couldn't do that!' Rachel and Damaris spoke together. 'Not one of us could sit still for five minutes, if you were waiting outside.'

'My little ones, you will forget that there is a Papa Berthelot as soon as the curtain rises. You will forget everything. If you do not, it is waste of time for you to go.'

'Then I'd better be the one to wait outside,' Rachel said promptly. 'For I'm not in the least likely to be as completely carried off my feet as you seem to expect.'

'Albert, you are a good soul!' Annette exclaimed. 'The ballet is your greatest joy, and you would give it up for me! About these two there is no question; it is a wonderful chance and they must see it. You also; not only for your own great pleasure, but because you can help Marie to understand. It is important for her that you should be there; and you are longing to know what it will mean to her—you know you are! So I say you are a good soul to say that I shall go and leave you outside. But I, Annette Pernet, I say no! To me the ballet is a pleasure and I like to see it; but it is only a very pretty show!'

He moaned and dropped his head in his hands. 'A pretty show! Mon Dieu!'

'I know,' Annette laughed. 'You will mock me, no doubt. To you, it is one of the great joys of the world; the greatest, maybe. So you will go to the ballet; but I shall not sit in the car! You will ring up my friends in Aix, and I will go to see Cosette and her new baby, and when

you leave the theatre you will come for me and take me home. And I shall spend quite as happy an evening as you will, my friends.'

'Impossible!' M. Berthelot groaned. 'But if you truly think you will enjoy that, my dear _____,'

'Oh, Annette, how simply marvellous!' Damaris shouted. 'That's a perfect way out!'

'It is better for us all. I have wanted to see Cosette's baby for weeks. But he is a good kind friend, is he not?' she murmured, and her eyes were gentle as she watched M. Berthelot bustle away to telephone to Aix.

'One of the best.' Damaris swayed lightly on her toes. 'You're jolly lucky, Annette. When are you going to marry him?'

'In a year, two years; we will see. You are like a rose on its stem, in the wind, when you rise on your points like that, Marie.'

'Oh, là, là! You are trying to be a poet, Annette! How I want to see the real thing in ballet!' Damaris sighed happily. 'The girls at class have been talking of nothing else for days. I'm just dying for to-night to come!'

CHAPTER IX

DAMARIS SEES LES BALLETS RUSSES

Rachel shot a startled look at Damaris, who had stiffened into rigid attention. The orchestra was playing a Chopin Prelude, one that Madame Bonnet had demanded Marry should learn, without giving any reason for her choice. Rachel had heard it day after day; now she knew why Madame had insisted.

The great curtain rose slowly, to show the dim background of a wood and the exquisite grouping of the still, white-clad girls. The *corps de ballet*? More than that; beautiful figures who began to move as in a dream to the music of a Nocturne.

A little gasp, stifled so that only Rachel and M. Berthelot heard it, broke from Damaris. One girl was dancing alone, and the music had changed to the Valse; then a Mazurka, and another girl had taken her place.

‘Madame—makes *me* learn those dances!’ Damaris choked, and caught her breath. ‘I know them, every step. I know what those girls are going to do. But I didn’t understand what I was learning. Oh—the difference! That I should ever have tried to do them! The—the cheek of it!’

She was quivering with emotion which she could not have explained, in the grip of a new experience, a great revelation of the beautiful.

Rachel’s hand slipped through her arm. ‘Steady, Marry, old girl!’

‘I didn’t know what it would be like,’ Damaris whispered, her wide eyes fixed on the stage. The man dancer had entered for his famous solo.

‘This was created by the great Nijinsky.’ M. Berthelot spoke very quietly. ‘But this one—he is a marvel also.’

He glanced at the girls, who had not seemed to hear. Then he leaned forward and patted Damaris on the cheek. ‘Courage, my little one! It means to you what it means to me. I knew it! One day you too will be a sylph. One day you will dance like this.’

Damaris brushed her hand across her eyes, as the first Prelude came again, and a white dream-girl once more danced alone, far away, absorbed in the music. ‘Never! Papa, don’t be silly! I’ll never even try to dance again, after seeing this. I know now what an ass I’ve been to listen to you and Madame.’

‘Oh, là, là!’ he chuckled. ‘Then you had better not see any more. We will fetch Annette and go home. But it is a pity you should miss *Carnaval* and *Lac des Cygnes*.’

‘You couldn’t take me away unless you carried me,’ Damaris muttered fiercely.

The final ensemble began, with all the winged white figures; the grouping and the patterns were perfect; the grace of the movements a thing to dream of for weeks. The music was the Valse Brillante.

Then it was over, and the theatre rang with applause. But Damaris sat with bent head, her shoulders shaking.

Rachel’s arm crept round her. ‘Lovely, wasn’t it, Marry dear? To think that you’re learning to be like that!’

‘I never dreamed—I couldn’t have imagined anything so beautiful.’ Damaris almost sobbed out the words. ‘But I can’t go on. It’s too far beyond me. It’s madness to think of it.’

‘Oh, tchutt!’ M. Berthelot said briskly. ‘You will do it, and before so very long. I am glad your first ballet was *Les Sylphides*. Some of them make you laugh, you understand; *The Fantastic Toy-Shop*, with its dancing toys, for one. But *Sylphides* is so grave and beautiful, like a girl’s dream of fairies in the forest. Yes, I am glad that is your first picture of the ballet.’

‘Nothing else can ever come up to that!’ Damaris vowed. ‘All right, Ray. I’ll pull myself together. I won’t weep in public. But it was too lovely for words.’

‘The others are different,’ said M. Berthelot. ‘More often there is a story; lovers—separation—sorrow—meeting again—happiness; that is why you must learn to mime as well as to dance. But *Sylphides* is the pure dance, without even gay costumes; just the white frocks and the little wings and the flowers in the hair. There is nothing to take our thoughts off the dance and the music.’

‘The music was heavenly,’ Rachel said. ‘You’ll enjoy practising it more now, Marry.’

M. Berthelot put out his hand and motioned her to silence. The curtain was rising for *Carnaval*.

Entranced, the girls watched the many half-familiar figures as they flitted across the stage—tragic Pierrot, chasing Papillon, poor Pantaloon mocked by Harlequin, Chiarina and her two companions—all of them puppets in a masked ball, all looking dwarfed like dolls because of the great height of the stage, and all moving to the well-known music of Schumann.

‘Oh!—Oh, marvellous!’ Damaris gasped at one point.

The music had changed, become more lively; the stage for one moment had been empty. Columbine was entering, poised on her points, with tiny steps; Harlequin held both her hands leaping beside her, cat-like in his grace. They promenaded round the stage together.

‘She’s lovely,’ Rachel said.

‘She’s a wonder,’ Damaris whispered, almost fiercely. ‘Oh, if I ever could——! If I could be like that!’

‘But you will, my child,’ M. Berthelot said gently once more.

‘You’re crazy,’ Damaris told him, and in the next interval she turned on him. ‘I know now what you meant. When you saw I had ballet shoes you said—“Now you will be Columbine on her points!” I didn’t understand; but now I know. How could you say it? How could you think it?’

‘I do say it,’ he said steadily. ‘If you work, you too will dance like that.’

‘I never could,’ Damaris repeated restlessly. ‘But I’m glad to have seen it,’ she added. ‘I thank you a million times for bringing us to-night, Papa.’

‘Bon!’ He patted her cheek again. ‘To thank me you will work, and then we shall see.’

‘I’m tired!’ Damaris said, in an amazed tone. ‘As tired as if I’d been dancing all the time! Why? It seems so odd! I’m sore all over!’

‘You have been dancing in your mind,’ M. Berthelot said wisely. ‘Your mind and your heart have been there, in the carnival with the puppets, in the wood with the sylphs. I too go home from the ballet worn out.’ He glanced at her anxiously. Her reaction to the new experience had been very satisfying, but even greater than he had expected.

‘Oh, I’m all right!’ Damaris saw his look. ‘Don’t worry about me! It’s been the most marvellous time I’ve ever known. What about you, Ray?’

‘Same for me,’ Rachel said quietly. ‘I’ve loved every minute of it. Some day I shall sit and watch you dancing over there on that great stage.’

‘Ray! You couldn’t think——’

‘Hush! Here is *Lac des Cygnes*,’ said M. Berthelot.

Again there was a new world of enchantment. Fairy-tale this time: princesses turned by evil magic into swans; the princely hunter; the Swan Queen. With the fairy-tale romance there was once more the beauty and mystery of the white figures in *Les Sylphides*; these swans were white also, with shorter frocks and longer legs. The Prince and the Swan Queen gave their exquisite *pas de deux*; the four little swans danced their famous *pas de quatre*; the Swan Queen said farewell, for she must fly away at daybreak; the heart-broken Prince tried to follow, but the wicked Sorcerer, disguised as an owl, kept him back, and he fell dead.

Damaris brushed her hand impatiently across her eyes again. ‘Idiot! But *how* beautiful!’

‘I liked the music,’ Rachel said.

‘It is marvellous music. It is Tchaikovsky, you understand,’ M. Berthelot said. ‘Now, Marie, petite, we go home.’

Damaris stumbled from her seat in a dream, her eyes still dim. Rachel took her by the arm.

‘Your coat, Marry. And here’s your beret. You’re forgetting everything.’

‘Everything, except the poor Prince and the sad enchanted swans,’ M. Berthelot agreed.

‘You were there with them, as I was, little one. We must take care of her, Rachel, ma fille. Wrap her up well, or she will take cold.’

Damaris submitted to their care, barely conscious of what was going on around her. She silently drank the cup of coffee at a café, on which her guardian-papa insisted, and sank, speechless still, in the corner of the car.

‘Did you enjoy it?’ Annette asked gaily, when they called for her. ‘Was it as wonderful as he says? For me, I have nursed Cosette’s daughter and I have been very happy.’

‘We too have been happy. The little Marie is still far away. Leave her to herself,’ M. Berthelot advised.

As they reached home Damaris sat up, and spoke.

‘I’ll *never* dance again! I’ve been an utter idiot to think I could. I didn’t know what I was doing. It was just steps and patterns before. Now I know how big a thing it is, and it’s far too big for me. Papa, you have been more than kind, but I could never be good enough. I’d better give it up at once, and go back to my hens and bees. Never in this world could I dance as those girls did; and you say they are younger than I am—I can’t believe it, but everybody says it’s true. I’m only fit to live in the country and keep a farm. I’ll never even imagine I could dance, after to-night!’

‘Oh, là, là!’ cried Annette. ‘Albert, you should not have taken her!’

‘Oh, ma foi, I shall break my heart!’ wailed M. Berthelot.

‘Marry, come to bed and don’t talk nonsense!’ Rachel scolded. ‘In the morning you’ll be crazy to begin again! Don’t worry, you people. Remember it’s been the most marvellous evening in our whole lives. Give us time to settle down! Even I feel all churned up, and Marry must be simply fermenting inside!’

‘If I could ever hope to be the least important of those lovely sylphs, or the tiniest of the swans, or something right in the background, I’d work till I dropped,’ Damaris wailed. ‘Just to be part of it, the very smallest part there is, would be too wonderful. But I could never be fit even for that.’

‘You will lead the ballet. You will be Columbine—the Swan Queen—the girl who dreams and dances in the sylph-wood,’ said M. Berthelot. ‘Madame Bonnet says it, and I say it.’

‘Then you must both be altogether crazy!’ Damaris retorted, strung up to a high pitch of nervous excitement.

‘Maybe. We shall see! Only keep up your courage, and work, and go on as you have begun, my little one. Now go to bed and sleep.’

‘Sleep! My hat! It’s likely I shall sleep, isn’t it?’ Damaris cried.

Rachel pushed her through the door. ‘Go and get into bed, anyway!—Monsieur, don’t take any notice of her to-night. To-morrow it will all seem different. She will go on; Marry never gives up!’

He beamed on her. ‘My dear, I have not forgotten my first night of the ballet. I too was overwrought, and I had not the knowledge that my friends were expecting me to be a dancer. Of course she is in despair. But that will pass.’

‘Oh, yes! She’ll be all right to-morrow. Thank you for a wonderful time!’



'Oh, ma foi, I shall break my heart!' wailed M. Berthelot

CHAPTER X

PAPA BERTHELOT'S SERMON

'It would perhaps have been a more balanced programme if the last ballet had been *Prince Igor* or *Fire-Bird*; something more fierce than *Lac des Cygnes*,' M. Berthelot said judiciously. 'I should like you to see the Russian dancing of the men; but another time will do for that. For you, and for the petite Marie, *Swan Lake* was better. The poetry and romance and beauty are right for you, rather than the wild fierceness of *Prince Igor*.'

'Nothing could have been more beautiful than what we saw last night,' Rachel agreed. 'It's all whirling in my head, and Marry still looks dazed.'

'You were fortunate in your music,' M. Berthelot conceded. 'Chopin—Schumann—Tchaikovsky! Yes, you did very well, for one night!'

Damaris was quieter this morning, though she had not slept much. She had lain awake, whispering at intervals—'Oh, Ray! Those lovely girls in white!'—'Ray, do you remember that white glove waving good-bye, when Chiarina had disappeared through the curtain?'—'Ray, wasn't that a wonderful moment when the Swan Queen was held up?'—'And those arabesques in *Swan Lake*! They were too marvellous for words!'

'I wish you'd let me go to sleep, if you can't do it yourself, Marry!' Rachel had groaned at last.

'Sorry! Oh, I am so sorry! I won't say another word.'

She had slept at last, from sheer exhaustion, and had been wakened only by Rachel's appearance at the door with the rolls and coffee.

'Oh, Ray! What a lazy brute I am!'

'No, only tired. I'm tired too, but I didn't get quite so much worked up as you did. M. Papa is here, to ask how you are. He was a bit worried about you last night,' Rachel explained. 'I've had my coffee, so I'll go and speak to him. You come when you're ready, and show him you're all right,' and she left Damaris tackling her rolls and honey in a way that suggested there was not much the matter with her.

'How will it be with you and Annette, M. Papa?' Rachel put a question which had occurred to her during the night. 'You love the ballet so much, but she doesn't care. Won't it make you both unhappy?'

'But no, my dear!' He smiled at her. 'She will laugh at me because I am mad, and I shall laugh at her because she cannot understand. I shall go to the ballet; she will go to the pictures—mon Dieu, the pictures! We shall both be happy, and we shall each be patient with the folly of the other.'

'I see. It's rather—rather fine and generous of you both.'

'She knows I cannot help it. I know she cannot help it. If we love one another we shall each want the other to be happy and to have the thing that gives the greatest joy. But I shall not take Annette to the ballet—ma foi, non! And she will not take me to the pictures. We shall care for one another and we shall be content. And perhaps one day she will have somebody else to care for as well.' And he beamed upon her happily.

'I'm very glad,' Rachel exclaimed. 'We shall always wish the best of everything for you both.'

‘Papa Berthelot!’ Damaris appeared in the doorway, ‘After last night, don’t you honestly think I’d be wiser to stick to hens and bees?’

‘To stick to the honey, in fact?’ Rachel murmured.

M. Berthelot sprang up to greet her. ‘My Marie, I do not. The ballet means as much to you as it does to me. I know that some day you will dance.’

Damaris groaned. ‘After seeing those lovely white ghosts in the wood, you can still say that?’

‘They were not ghosts; they were sylphs. For ghosts you must see *Giselle*,’ M. Berthelot said, laughing.

‘Oh? Really and truly ghosts in a ballet?’

‘Spirits,’ he amended. ‘The poor village girl dies after her great sorrow, when her lover has left her; and she joins the other spirit-maids and dances in the woods.’

‘Silly girl, to die like that!’ Damaris said severely. ‘But it would make a marvellous dance.’

‘It does,’ M. Berthelot agreed. ‘You must be part of it one day.’

‘You really think I could? A very small part, somewhere at the back, where no one would see me?’

He lay in his chair and laughed. ‘There is no such part. And people must see you; they will want to look at you, and you will want to be seen. Little one, you said to me “honestly”; I now say it to you. Can you honestly say you would be content to turn your back on the ballet and live with bees and hens?’

Damaris looked at him thoughtfully. ‘No, I suppose not. I’d be dreaming of it all the time.’

‘It would be frightfully hard on the chickens,’ Rachel said.

‘I want to go on; to learn those lovely dances, and to get the steps as good as possible,’ Damaris admitted. ‘But that doesn’t mean that I’ll want to dance in public. After last night I feel it’s mad to think of it.’

‘Ah, ça! Do not be troubled, my dear. It was your meeting with le ballet; before, you knew him only by name. Now you have fallen in love and you will never forget him; he is a master who holds his lovers for ever—an enchanter! But you have plenty of time in which to fit yourself for his service. No one would bid you rush off and begin to dance at once. Wait for one year of work, or two. Then we shall see. Keep the hens and bees in your mind, if they are a comfort to you,’ and he smiled kindly up into her eyes. ‘It is a peaceful life to dream about and it will help to keep you poised. A life of ballet is not one of peace. No! It is excitement, work, great moments of joy, but also of sorrow and disappointment. Even the ballerina cannot be always up in the air, either with her body or her mind. You will fall to the depths, but only so that you may rise again to the heights. No, it is not easy, and it is not peace. But it will give you joy, and you will give great joy to others—to hundreds of thousands in all lands. You have the courage for it, ma fille, but not yet. In time, when you are ready, it will come. For now, do not be troubled. Be happy and dance, and work very hard, and have the bees and hens in your mind to keep you quiet and content.’

The girls were staring at him, Damaris only half understanding, Rachel grappling with a host of new ideas.

‘Ma foi, mon papa! What a sermon!’ Damaris stammered. ‘I did not know you could be a preacher!’

‘And a poet,’ Rachel added. ‘Now Marry knows what it means to fall in love with the ballet.’

‘A hard master, but he gives great rewards. Would you like to see him again, my children? In March Les Ballets Russes will come to Geneva; it is not far to go. Shall I send for tickets for us all?’

‘But we won’t be here!’ Damaris wailed. ‘Oh, Ray, would Maid let us stay a little longer? Our six months will be up in February! Oh, we must see those marvellous people again!’

‘Maidlin said for six months,’ Rachel began.

‘If my French was still very bad, or if you couldn’t manage the French shorthand, we could beg her to let us stay till after Easter,’ Damaris hinted. ‘I could easily manage to be still very bad at French.’

‘Oh, Marry! I think we should tell Maid all about it.’

‘Not yet,’ Damaris cried. ‘Ray, I’m not ready to tell anybody yet!’

‘I shall take the tickets,’ M. Berthelot broke in. ‘Perhaps your cousin will let you stay here for the spring. I can always sell them again or return them. We will hope for one more night of joy before you go to Italy.’

‘You’re an angel, Papa,’ Damaris said fervently. ‘I’d rather go to see le ballet with you than with anybody else.’

He beamed on her again. ‘You feel as I do, little one. Some day assuredly I shall see you dance.’

‘I wonder what the dear little man meant by all that sermon?’ Damaris wandered restlessly about, unable to settle to work, when M. Berthelot had gone out.

‘Go and practise!’ Rachel said severely. ‘No, not steps—music! I should think you’d be dying to play over that Chopin we heard last night. I wonder how it was arranged for the orchestra? And *Carnaval*; it’s all piano music.’

‘Jolly clever. I’ll have a shot at it,’ Damaris agreed, and went upstairs to Madame’s sitting-room, where little Odette’s piano had been put at her disposal.

Left alone, Rachel thrust aside her shorthand and dropped her chin into her hands, with her elbows planted firmly on the table, and thought. M. Berthelot’s sermon had awakened new ideas and had flung before her a vision of the future. These dancing people had no settled homes; or, rather, they did not spend much time in them. Aix—Geneva! She knew they visited London—Paris—Rome—America.

Would that be Marry’s life? Always travelling; dancing in new cities and lands? Seeing the world—making hosts of friends, no doubt; but it would be strenuous, a hard life, as their friend had said, with great moments, but also with many weary days. The bees and hens in the little fields of the Cumberland farm would be much more peaceful. Rachel suddenly saw the grey-green rocky fells, the little black-faced Herdwick sheep, the silver shimmer of Grasmere with its islet, the long slopes of Helvellyn, the cool mist and the grey veil of rain, the glory of the spring gorse and the autumn heather, of Wordsworth’s daffodils by Rydal and Ullswater, the valleys with their white roads climbing up, to drop to another glittering lake, the smooth tracks among the rocks which wandered across the hill-sides, the rushing becks and the tumbling waterfalls.

‘It means a lot to Marry; she loves it as I do. I’ve known I could only have it in holidays, if I’m working for Maid, but Marry hoped to live among it all. I’d have gone to stay with her often. She’ll have to give it up; I don’t wonder she’s hesitating. Home will pull her tremendously; she loves the fells so much. I expect she’s thinking a lot more than she says. I wonder which way would make her really happier?—I must talk to M. Berthelot again. He’s

filled my head with new ideas. It's very jolly for Marry to learn to be a good dancer, but as for making it her whole life—it needs thinking about. She's right to hesitate.'

It was easy to find a chance to talk to their kindly friend, for he came continually to see Annette. Rachel tackled him one day when Damaris was at the dancing school, and asked many questions, to find out if her ideas of the life of a dancer were correct.

'But yes, my dear,' he smiled at her. 'She would go all over the world with the company which she had joined. And you would go to take care of her. She would need you, n'est-ce pas? It would be a great joy to you, a grand life. You would see everything in the world, and always you would see her triumph, and you would be proud, knowing that without your care it would not be possible.'

Rachel, wide-eyed, thanked him, and went to practise some music by Grieg, to which Damaris was longing to make a dance.

Once more her mind was whirling with possibilities, fermenting as wildly, in its way, as Marry's had been doing all these weeks. If Damaris had found revelation and a host of new ideas in her dancing, Rachel was finding them in the vista which had so suddenly been flung before her.

'Marry will need me. Yes, I see that. There would have to be somebody, and I'm the right one to do it.'

That was a fixed starting-point and admitted of no argument—if Damaris turned her back on her hens and bees.

But what of Maidlin, who had been so generous, who had adopted them so completely, and who was now waiting for her secretary?

'She's given me all this training. How could I let her down? She's been disappointed once already. Mrs. Biddy—Mme Verdier—was to be her secretary, and Maid looked forward to it for seven years; they arranged it when she was only fifteen. And then Mrs. Biddy married her Frenchman, and Maid was left with no secretary. Now it's nearly time for her to take over the Italian estates, and she needs my help, and she's giving me the right training for the job. How could I fail her?—But Damaris ought to come first; Maid would say so at once. She'd tell me to stand by Marry and say she'd find somebody else; and she'd be terribly disappointed but say nothing about it. What ought I to do? Marry—Maid! How can I choose?'

There seemed no way out. She thrust the problem aside at last; it belonged to the future, and the decision was first of all in Marry's hands. It was for her to choose.

'I mustn't influence her. I can't help seeing how much easier it would be for everybody if she stuck to her farm, but they all say it would be a crime. We'll have to wait. I'll go on working for Maid and helping Damaris! Perhaps something will show us the way out.'

Damaris, too, was troubled during these days of discovery. Life had suddenly become full of problems as well as full of joy. It had seemed so simple during that last term at school, and she had looked forward eagerly to an outdoor farming life and had never dreamt of taking seriously that secret craving which had made her want to dance. All the influence of home, aunts, and farm had been against it, and she had been completely ignorant of all that lay behind the dancing she loved. Now that she understood, she could not turn her back on it, but then, if she went on, she must forsake her early plans. She felt her word was pledged to Maidlin by her eager acceptance of Maid's suggestion of the chicken farm, and she dreaded the disappointment to their cousin of such a change of plans. The tension in her mind was great, and at times she was irritable and not easy to live with. Then she would put the problem

away and be radiantly happy again, and Rachel, always responsive to her mood, would cast off her depression and be happy also.

‘The most marvellous bit of my life up till now,’ Damaris summed up her feelings one day, ‘but one of the most difficult. All this gorgeous new dancing, and all this ghastly new worrying! Between them I go nearly demented. And then I rush off and dance and forget it all.’

Late in November Maidlin’s weekly letter held a suggestion for Christmas. Would the girls care to come home for a few days?

They looked at one another doubtfully.

‘What do you think?’ Rachel asked.

‘I know what I think. But what about you? You’re the elder. Do you want to go?’

‘You mean that you don’t?’ Rachel queried.

‘Better not; that’s what I think. We’ll only have been here four months. It might drive the French out of our heads.’

‘Yes, our thoughts would go all English again. There’s something in that,’ Rachel agreed. ‘Christmas here would be rather fun.’

‘There’s a dance at the school,’ Damaris said. ‘I want you to come. And there’s to be an evening when we invite our friends and any of us will be allowed to show a dance we’ve made ourselves. It will be great sport! I’d hate to miss it.’

‘Oh, you couldn’t miss that!’ Rachel exclaimed. ‘What will your item be?’

‘One of those Grieg things you’ve been playing for me. Besides, Ray, I really don’t want to see Maid just now.’

‘You’d feel you had to tell her about the dancing?’ Rachel nodded. ‘I think so too. We’re too fond of Maid to keep a secret from her, if we were talking to her. I’ll say we felt it would be wiser to stay here, if she really doesn’t mind.’

Maidlin’s reply was cordial agreement. ‘It’s jolly sensible, if you don’t mind being away for Christmas,’ she wrote. ‘I know Madame and Annette will give you a good time. It’s much better to keep yourselves all French for a few months. You’d feel you had to start again when you went back.’

A cheque fell out of the letter, and Damaris caught it. ‘Gosh! Maid’s been generous! What are we to do with this?’

‘It’s her Christmas present,’ Rachel was reading the end of the letter. ‘Maid says, if we can find time—and she knows Damaris must have plenty on her hands!——’

Damaris groaned. ‘How little dear Maidlin knows! Well, what’s the cheque for?’

‘Driving lessons. I ought to be able to drive a car, and you’ll need to have one for your farm. We’re old enough to learn, and she’s sure we’re steady enough to be trusted.’

‘Whoops! I’ll make time! Maid’s a jewel!’ Damaris shouted. ‘I’d love to be able to drive. We’ll ask Papa where we’d better go. I call that a present worth sending! I say, Ray! After Christmas, I want you to write and ask if we may stay here till Easter. Say our French is coming along quite well, but it needs a few months more to finish it off. Or say we want to see the spring come on the lake! Anything you like, so long as we stay till the end of March; I simply must go to Geneva with dear Papa, to see the ballet again!’

So Rachel wrote, during the dark days of January, and once more Maidlin agreed, but added a suggestion which made the girls look at one another thoughtfully.

‘I want to go to Italy in May this year,’ Maidlin wrote. ‘My visit in September was cut short, you know, and I promised to come back soon. Suppose you two come home early in

April, for a month, and then we'll all go straight to Italy? I'd like to introduce you to my Italian friends myself, and you'll feel less strange in a new country if we have a few weeks together, before I leave you there.'

'I'd love a month at home,' Rachel began. 'And I'd like to fall in with Maid's plan. It's a kind idea. Perhaps we could have a day or two at Crossrigs. It would be marvellous to see Grasmere again!'

'It's terribly tempting,' Damaris agreed. 'But I shall have to own up to Maid, and I didn't want to do that till I'd heard what they'll say to me in Italy. Madame and Papa talk so much about the schools there. If they say I'm no good, I shall give it all up—except for my own fun, of course!—and go back to the farm idea.'

'They won't say that,' Rachel assured her. 'Even I can see that you've improved enormously.'

'I don't feel certain; there's such heaps to learn. But I'd like to see everybody at home, and good old Crossrigs, and the fells!'

'Perhaps you'll decide you must have your farm, once you see it again,' Rachel said. 'What shall I say to Maid?'

'Say we like the idea very much, but we'll decide a little later on, if she doesn't mind. If we're going home I'll have to get used to the idea of telling her all about it, for I'm far too fond of Maid to keep it dark from her.'

'Marry doesn't see what it's going to mean to Maidlin,' Rachel said to herself. 'I feel bad about that side of it. Maid will tell me to stand by Marry; she won't think of herself. But I'm thinking of her and all the trouble she's taken to help me to be ready for her job. I hate to feel I may have to let her down.'

'There's no hurry to decide,' Maidlin wrote in reply. 'I want to have a talk with you, Rachel, before my next visit to Italy, but there's plenty of time. If you don't come home I shall come to Annecy to fetch you, on my way, and we can talk then.'

'Whether we go home or Maid comes here, you'll have to tell her, Marry,' Rachel remarked. 'If she'd taken us straight to Italy, it might have been just possible not to say anything about your dancing. In a new country, with sightseeing all the time, you might have been able to put the dancing into the background, but you couldn't do it here—with Papa Berthelot, and Madame Bonnet, and Annette and Madame, all round us. Somebody would be sure to say something, and then Maid would have a shock, because you'd kept it from her. It's time she knew.'

Damaris nodded. 'We'd better go home. I'll be able to choose the best time to tell her. I wouldn't like somebody else to give me away.'

CHAPTER XI

NEWS OF THE FARM

March came at last, and with it another wonderful evening of enchantment, when Damaris cried for the sorrows of poor *Petrouchka*, laughed over the antics of the toys in *The Fantastic Toy-Shop*, and marvelled at the beauty of *The Fire-Bird*.

‘What a programme!’ M. Berthelot sighed happily, as the car carried them back to Annecy. ‘My dear Marie, no doubt you will also see the ballet in Italy, but what we have given you is the very best. You will never see dancing more wonderful than this.’

‘I’m sure of it, Papa,’ Damaris cried. ‘It has been simply marvellous—but how tired I am!’

‘Again?’ he chuckled. ‘That is good! You have not yet lost the first thrill of joy!’

A letter from Maidlin was waiting when they reached home.

‘Leave it till the morning!’ Damaris pleaded. ‘It’s long past midnight and I’m dead.’

‘You go to bed and dream about the Fire-Bird. I’ll glance through the letter and make sure everybody’s all right. You can read it in the morning,’ Rachel said.

She went up to join Damaris some time later, looking sober.

‘You’ve been a long while,’ Damaris grumbled. ‘I thought you were only going to look at the letter!’

‘There were enclosures. I had to read them. I’ll tell you presently.’ Rachel began to undress quickly.

She took out her slides and shook her hair loose, and crept into bed beside Damaris. ‘Marry, I’m afraid your chicken-farm has gone up in smoke.’

‘What on earth do you mean?’ Damaris sat up and stared at her. ‘Are you batty? I thought I was the one who went off my head after an evening of ballet!’

‘The Cumberland County Council says you may have your hens and bees, but not at Crossrigs. You’ll have to keep them somewhere else.’

‘Quite mental. I’d better tell Madame. Annette could fetch the doctor,’ Damaris wailed. ‘Rachel Ellerton, if you don’t tell me what it’s all about I’ll smother you,’ and she threatened her with a pillow.

‘There’s a letter from Mr. Ward, enclosing an official notice.’ Rachel lay gazing up at the poised pillow, ready to leap aside. ‘You remember our lawyer friend in Windermere?’

Damaris chuckled and dropped her weapon. ‘I do! We ran away from him and he didn’t love us. What’s the notice about?’

‘The Council are going to by-pass the village. It means making a big new road, and Crossrigs is right in the way.’

‘My hat! What are they going to do? Pull down our dear old house, where the family has lived for untold years? What ghastly cheek!’ Damaris fumed.

‘Not the house. They’ll leave that, but they want our land. Mr. Ward says they’ll give compensation but we can’t object. They’ve the right to take land, if a new road’s needed.’

‘I see.’ Damaris considered the position. ‘We’ll have the house, but there won’t be room for my hens. Is that it?’

‘They’ll take all the fields and most of the garden, Mr. Ward says. The house will stand quite close to the new road. He suggests that we should come and see for ourselves.’

‘Yes, we’d better do that as soon as we go home. Then we’ll know exactly how much we have left,’ Damaris agreed. ‘What a rotten business! Why couldn’t they leave us in peace?’

‘Oh, I don’t know!’ Rachel argued. ‘Think of the narrow twisty streets in the village, and all that mass of traffic in the season! Charas, and cars, and cyclists, and crowds of hikers and climbers, all mixed up in those little roads! It’s really very sensible. You couldn’t expect one little farm, sitting right in the way, to be allowed to hold up a useful scheme like that. You can have your hens somewhere else. And you aren’t even sure that you want them yet.’

‘I don’t want them anywhere else; I’m sure of that.’ Damaris frowned. ‘I wanted to live at Crossrigs. I couldn’t bear to settle down in a new place.’

‘Then be thankful there’s something else you want to do.’

‘But I’m not good enough! After to-night, how can you dream of it, Ray?’ Damaris sank into despair again. ‘Think of the dancer in *Petrouchka*! That marvellous *can-can* in the *Boutique*! And that exquisite *Fire-Bird*! How can you even speak about me to-night?’

‘I’ll wait till the morning, then,’ Rachel retorted. ‘But this letter makes it certain we must go home.’

‘And see what will be left of our property,’ Damaris groaned. ‘Oh yes! We’ll have to go, and we’ll have to tell Maid all my silly ideas. I know she’ll laugh at me.’

‘She won’t do that,’ Rachel observed. ‘But she may be frightfully upset at the thought of your going on the stage. Leave it till the morning, Marry! If you can’t sleep, then think about it quietly.’

‘I shall think about *Petrouchka*.’

‘Then you *won’t* sleep! Much better think about Crossrigs. Go a tramp up to Grisedale Tam and Helvellyn, and see it all in your mind,’ Rachel advised. ‘I often hike about the fells as I’m falling asleep.’

‘You’re even keener on them than I am,’ Damaris said. ‘But when you’re Maid’s secretary you won’t be able to see the fells very often.’

‘I’d thought of that,’ Rachel told her dryly, ‘and a lot more too. Good-night, Marry!’

‘Don’t say anything to Papa Berthelot about the farm, Ray,’ Damaris begged, as they dressed next morning. ‘He gets so worked up! He’d want me to rush off and join a ballet company at once. I’m not ready for that yet, not by a thousand miles.’

‘I don’t feel you’re ready yet,’ Rachel assented. ‘We’ll just say we have news which makes it certain we must go home.’

‘Are you sure you can manage the journey alone?’ Maidlin wrote, when she heard they had decided to come. ‘Shall I meet you in Paris?’

‘Maid dear, *no!*’ Rachel wrote back. ‘We shan’t have the slightest difficulty. Annette’s friend, M. Berthelot, will tell us what we’ll have to do; and we can ask. Our French is quite healthy and useful now. We want to do the journey alone, just to feel we’re able to look after ourselves. It’s part of my training, isn’t it? If I’m your secretary I shall have to look after things for you when you go abroad. I may as well begin at once.’

‘If!’ she said to herself, as she closed the letter. ‘Maid doesn’t know what that “if” means. If Marry can’t have her farm she’ll want at least to try to dance. I couldn’t let her plunge into that life alone; she must have somebody behind her. I shall have to let Maid down; but how I hate the thought of it! I wish I could see some decent way out between the two of them.’

‘But you will come back, my little one?’ M. Berthelot pleaded, when the time came to say good-bye. ‘I shall see my ballerina again soon?’

‘We’ll want to come, to see all you dear people,’ Damaris assured him. ‘You have been most tremendously kind, Papa.’

‘And when you dance you will not forget your Papa?’

‘You and Madame Bonnet shall have front seats, and Annette and her mother too,’ Damaris cried gaily.

‘You will study in Italy; you will win your cousin’s consent. Then we shall see,’ he said. ‘Rachel, my dear, you will take care of her? She must not have an accident and break her leg!’

‘Oh, là, là! I am not made of eggshell, Papa!’

‘I’ll try to take care of her,’ Rachel said, laughing. ‘But she won’t always do what I say, you know.’

‘She must obey you. You are her guardian, instead of her mother.’

‘Ah, bah! Aunty!’ Damaris mocked.

CHAPTER XII HOME AGAIN

M. Berthelot begged to be allowed to travel as far as Paris with the girls and to see his future dancer safely into the train for Boulogne, but Rachel was firmly resolved to do the journey alone.

‘It’s good practice for us,’ she said.

‘Dear good little Papa!’ Damaris exclaimed, as the train steamed out of Aix; he had insisted on going so far, to help them into the Paris express. ‘If I ever do anything worth while it will be owing to him. Now for Maid! That’s the next step—no, the farm first. We’ll have a look at it before we say anything to Maid.’

Rachel agreed. ‘We’d better know where we stand. I wonder what she wants to talk to me about?’

‘I’m longing to see the family!’ Damaris said. ‘We’ve had such a good time and it’s all been so thrilling, that I’ve never missed them. But now that we’re really on the way I’m craving to see those twins again.’

‘You had only one week with them in May, before you went back to school, and then three weeks in August. I lived with them for four months,’ Rachel remarked. ‘I’ve missed them badly, but it was no use talking about it. I want to see how much they’ve grown; they must be almost seven now.’

The car met them at Victoria and whirled them out into the country, through primrose-starred lanes, to the Hall. On the terrace, dancing with excitement, were two red-headed sprites, in smocked frocks of chestnut linen one shade darker than their bronze curls; and behind them came Maidlin, eager and welcoming.

‘So you’re safely here at last! Welcome home, Ray and Marry! Aren’t you tired out?’

‘Not so terribly tired,’ Rachel laughed. ‘How nice it is to be home again! Twins, how you’ve grown! You are big girls!’

‘Nearly seven, Aunt Ray. That’s big, isn’t it?’ cried the younger and more hasty twin, Margaret.

‘Parlez-vous français, Mademoiselle Elizabeth?’ Damaris greeted the elder one seriously.

‘Is that French? It sounds fearfully silly,’ Elizabeth retorted.

‘Crushed, Damaris!’ Maidlin laughed. ‘Let’s forget the French and enjoy ourselves. My dear, how well you look! Rachel looks well too; Madame and Annette have taken good care of you. But you seem more than well; radiant, almost, as if you had a private store of health shining out of you. What have you done to yourself?’

Damaris grew scarlet. ‘Maid, what rot! Perhaps I’ve fallen in love.’

Maidlin gave her a quick searching look, startled, almost afraid. ‘Damaris, what do you mean? You’re only sixteen!’

‘Oh, don’t look so scared! I am in love, with a dear little bald Frenchman, but he’s going to marry Annette, not me.’

‘The man from the Casino? Oh, I’m glad, for Annette’s sake. I met him once; if you like him so much, she’s sure to be happy. Have you had such a good time in Annecy?’

‘That’s all that’s the matter with me,’ Damaris said lightly.

Rachel had turned away quickly, lest her eyes should betray that there was more to tell. She had surprised that radiant look in Marry's face often of late, and she knew the source of her secret life and the joy it gave her; but she had not known it would be so obvious to Maidlin.

'Joy isn't here.' Maidlin referred to the widowed mother of the twins, as they went indoors. 'She's having a few days in town, so we're on our own, the twins and I. Mary's staying at the Manor, to help them for a week or two.'

'Mother likes going to concerts,' Elizabeth put in unexpectedly. 'Some day we'll go too.'

'Some day we'll play at concerts, and Auntie Maid will sing,' Margaret proclaimed.

Maidlin looked at her cousins. 'You know how quietly Joy has lived for the last seven years, bringing up the children and writing songs and looking after the village. Lately she has begun going to concerts and has made new friends, through her music, and she's very happy in it all. We're used to being left alone, aren't we, Twins?—I suppose you two want to rush off to Cumberland quite soon,' she said presently, as they sat down to a late tea.

'We want to see how much of our poor farm is left to us,' Rachel admitted.

'Damaris may have to find another place for her bees and hens. Crossrigs wasn't a particularly good spot, after all.'

'But it happened to be our home.' Damaris frowned. 'I'm mad with the Council for bagging our land. I don't want to find another place.'

Maidlin glanced at her. 'Perhaps there's more room left than you think. You may be able to squeeze in, at any rate for a start. But you must do it properly, Marry. That means college, you know.'

'Oh, I'm not ready to start anything in earnest yet,' Damaris cried. 'But we must see Crossrigs! How soon can we go?'

'You've only just arrived!' Maidlin protested, laughing. 'Have a day's rest before you rush off! How about the driving? Are you both to be trusted with a car?'

'Oh, rather! Certificates—highest honours! Ray's a steady trustworthy driver and keeps her head in any emergency.'

'Did they give you a testimonial when they passed you? Congrats, Rachel! I knew you'd drive well.'

'I love driving.' Rachel flushed. 'We're most awfully grateful, Maid.'

'You'll be tremendously useful. I've never learnt to drive; I don't care about it and I'm certain I'd lose my head if anything went wrong,' Maidlin owned.

Rachel waited for her to add—'It will be useful to have a secretary who can drive.' But the remark did not come. Maidlin stared out of the window, and Rachel wondered, but said nothing.

'What do you want to talk to me about, Maid?' Rachel asked, as they sat over a little fire after dinner.

Maidlin's face clouded. 'Rachel, my dear, I am so worried! I'm afraid you'll feel I'm letting you down.'

'*You're* letting *me* down?' There was emphasis in Rachel's surprised question which Maidlin did not notice. 'Maid, dear, what do you mean?'

'I won't let you down, of course; we'll make some other plan. There's been an idea in my mind ever since my last visit to Italy. You know I'll have to take over those estates, and the castle, in less than two years? I'm frightened of it,' Maidlin said restlessly. 'I don't feel ready

for the responsibility. I'd much rather stay here, and go on with my music. I can't bear to leave Joy and the twins, and Rosamund, and everybody.'

'But you'll feel like it when the time comes!' Damaris exclaimed, listening curiously.

'There's a good while yet, Maid,' Rachel added. 'And you'd come back often. This will always be home to you.'

'They'll expect me to live in Italy. So I had an idea, and I've talked it over with Joy. She thinks it's a good plan; she doesn't want me to go. There's a big convent near the castle, and the Sisters do tremendously good work, caring for the poor people and the invalids and old ones, and the children. And I thought—suppose I lent them the estate for five years, to be used to help everybody! They'd do it well, and I'd be free to stay here. What do you think?'

'It's such a new idea that I'll need to get used to it before I say much,' Rachel answered. 'In lots of ways it seems a jolly good plan. The Sisters would use the place well, and they know all the people.'

'That's what I thought!' Maidlin said eagerly. 'I couldn't be slack and do nothing about the people. They are my responsibility; I know that. But if I could find somebody who would do it better than I ever could, then I shouldn't be neglecting anybody.'

'You can't decide yet.' Rachel spoke thoughtfully. 'You may feel more ready for the job when you've come of age. It's a jolly idea, but I think you ought to wait. You could see what your Italian relations think about it.'

'I hope to do that, when we go to Italy. But I've told you because it affects you, Rachel. You see that, don't you?'

There was something she could not understand in Rachel's tone as she replied—'Maid, don't worry about that. I see what you mean, of course. You wouldn't need a secretary, and after training me, you feel you're leaving me without a job. But a trained person can always find work, and you've given me a jolly good training. I'll find something else to do.'

'I feel horribly as if I were letting you down,' Maidlin said apologetically. 'I promised you this job, and you've worked hard for it.'

'A chauffeur-secretary, speaking and writing French and Italian, won't have to look far for a good post,' Damaris remarked.

'It will be my business to see that Rachel finds the right job, of course,' Maidlin added. 'But there's another point you've just raised, Damaris. Will you be willing to go on, and struggle with Italian, when perhaps you'll never need it, Rachel? It doesn't seem fair to let you do it.'

'Oh, but Italian will be useful!' Damaris said quickly.

Rachel shot a look at her which Maidlin did not understand. 'I'd like to go to Italy,' she said. 'You may still need me. Even if you don't, Italian will be an asset, as Marry says. We're looking forward to Italy, Maid. The real question is, are you willing to send us there, when it may not be necessary? Don't you feel it will be a waste of money?'

'No, I want you to have it,' Maidlin said eagerly. 'If I should be going to let you down, I'd like to give you every possible thing that might be helpful to you in finding another job.'

'I'm sure Italian would be a help! Then if you're willing, we'll go, and we won't worry about the job till the time comes,' Rachel exclaimed.

'I'm glad I've told you. It's been worrying me a lot,' Maidlin confessed.

'I'd rather work for you than almost anybody else I can think of,' Rachel added. 'But if you don't need me, I've no doubt I shall find some one who does.'

‘“Than *almost* anybody else?”’ Damaris jeered. ‘Who is it you’d rather work for than Maid? I should have thought she’d come first!’

‘Perhaps she does.’ Rachel rose. ‘We’ll go to bed, Maid. We’ve come a long way to-day.’

‘Don’t go off to Grasmere to-morrow! I’ve an engagement for you at night.’ Maidlin smiled at the thought of the treat she had planned for them. ‘I hope it will appeal to you.’

‘What is it?’ The girls spoke together.

‘Some time ago Joy took tickets for Sadler’s Wells, but there’s a big concert at the Festival Hall, and she wants to go. I’ve been asked to sing at a village concert, and anyway, I couldn’t leave the twins at night for long enough to go up to town. It means being very late home; after midnight. You two won’t mind that, so I thought perhaps you’d use the tickets.’

‘Sadler’s Wells!’ Rachel looked at Damaris.

‘The English Ballet?’ Damaris blazed with excitement. ‘Oh—Maid! Do you really mean it?’

Maidlin looked at her curiously. ‘Why not? What do you know about Sadler’s Wells?’

Rachel held her breath. How would Marry meet this emergency?

Damaris had control of herself in an instant. Her voice was quite natural as she explained.

‘Annette’s friend, M. Berthelot, is a ballet fan; crazy about it! He told us a lot, and he took us to see the Ballets Russes. It was so marvellous that we couldn’t write about it; we felt we’d rather tell you as we knew we were coming home soon. He told us there was English Ballet, at Sadler’s Wells in London, and said we ought to see it and compare it with the Russian people. Maid, we’ll simply love to go! Do you know what the programme is? Papa Berthelot told us about the different ballets, because he saw we were interested.’

‘*Swan Lake*,’ Maidlin began.

‘Oh, lovely! We’ve seen that. I’m dying to see it again!’

‘I never dreamt you’d be so keen,’ Maidlin said laughing. ‘I *am* glad! It will be a real treat, to celebrate your hard work. I went once with Joy, and I enjoyed it, but with reservations, you know! We’re such keen folk-dancers here that I didn’t quite like the staginess of the ballet; the attitudes and posturing seemed theatrical—they had to be, of course! But they jarred on me; I like dancing to be natural and unconscious.’

‘Oh, but you can’t have that in a theatre!’ Damaris exclaimed. ‘You can’t be unconscious. You have to know what you’re doing and how it’s going to affect the audience. What else are they giving, Maid?’

‘I like dancing to be for its own sake, just for enjoyment,’ Maidlin remarked. ‘The other ballets are *The Spectre of the Rose*, and *Checkmate*.’

‘I’ve heard of *The Rose*; I’m longing to see it. I don’t know anything about the other one.’

‘You may find it difficult. It’s more modern, I believe. The early romantic ballets are easier to follow. But *Checkmate* belongs to Sadler’s Wells; one of their own productions.’

‘It’ll be jolly interesting to see it,’ Damaris commented.

Rachel had been standing gazing into the fire. Now she looked up. ‘If there’s that excitement for to-morrow night, we really ought to go to bed. Maid dear, you are a whole ton of bricks, not just one! We shall enjoy it enormously.’

‘Ton of bricks sounds ponderous, and Maid’s such a little person!’ Damaris laughed. ‘Good-night, and thanks mille fois for everything, Maid!’

‘You’re a good actress, Marry,’ Rachel observed, as they prepared for bed.

‘Well, didn’t Madame Bonnet say I’d have to be? She’s been coaching me all winter.’

‘I thought you’d have to tell Maid, when she asked what you knew about ballet.’

‘I felt horribly ashamed of myself when I babbled to put her off the scent. I’ll apologize when I tell her all about it. But I want to see Crossrigs first.’

‘The way you talked, and hid what you really felt, was marvellous. I wasn’t sure about your acting before. Now I’ve seen what you can do, without any preparation or rehearsal.’

‘That’s only control. You must be able to hide your feelings.’

‘I suppose so. It’s very clever.—I say, Marry!’

‘What’s the matter? Sounds serious!’

‘It’s frightfully serious. You won’t ever act to me, will you?’

Damaris gave a ringing laugh. ‘My dear silly, you’d see through me right away! Of course I won’t!’

‘I might not. It would be awful, if——’

‘If you had to be always looking at me suspiciously! I won’t ever try to do it, Ray; I swear it! I shouldn’t want to do it. There are only the two of us; if we don’t keep like one person, as we’ve always been, it will be fairly ghastly for us both.’

‘We can’t be like one person—I know what you mean by that—if we try to cheat one another.’

‘No. I’ll never do it, Ray. But—I say! I wasn’t trying to cheat Maid, was I?’

‘You would have been, if you hadn’t been meaning to tell her in a few days. There’s no harm in waiting till we’ve been to Crossrigs.’

‘I’ll tell her after that,’ Damaris agreed. ‘Sadler’s Wells, to-morrow! My aunt! What a bit of luck!’

CHAPTER XIII

OFF TO THE NORTH

‘Ray, what did you mean when you said to Maid you’d rather work for her than *almost* anybody else?’ Damaris asked, as they wandered in the Abbey ruins next morning.

Rachel did not reply, and Damaris looked at her quickly. ‘What *did* you mean, Ray?’

‘I’ll tell you later. Think it out for yourself.’

‘I can’t. I’ve tried. Are you going to get married and work for some wretched man?’

‘Ass!’ Rachel laughed. ‘After that I’ll jolly well not tell you anything.’

Damaris had to be content to wait till she was ready to speak. In the excitement of the evening’s enjoyment she soon forgot the brief remark.

‘It’s thrilling to be able to compare different people’s performances! Different interpretations of the same part!’ She sighed happily, as the car carried them home at night. ‘*Swan Lake* seemed quite different, done by these English dancers. I’m glad we had one thing we’d seen before!’

‘They seemed to me very good,’ Rachel said. She had offered to drive to town, but Maidlin had refused to allow it.

‘Not at night, when you’re tired and excited by the theatre. Frost will take you and bring you home,’ Maidlin had decreed.

‘Oh, jolly good! They were marvellous, and that girl was magnificent!’ Damaris cried. ‘I’m so glad she’s English, in spite of her name! It’s wonderful to know an English girl can do it!’

‘You’re an English girl, and you’re going to do it,’ Rachel murmured, with a glance at Frost’s back.

‘Only perhaps. But that’s why I’m so glad to have seen her. Wasn’t *The Rose* a dream? That man’s marvellous leap!’

‘I thought it was spoilt by the clapping, at that point. The girl was being rather wonderful, but every one was clapping the man.’

‘Papa Berthelot told me it’s always like that. But how could anybody help clapping? He was extraordinary, you know, Ray!’

They crept up to bed, hoping not to wake any one. But Maidlin’s door opened, and she came, in dressing-gown and long black plaits, to speak to them.

‘Had your supper? Good! Was it very wonderful?’

‘Quite marvellous, Maid dear. We’ll never forget it. But we’re terribly tired,’ Rachel said.

‘Maid, it’s been a dream. I feel dazed,’ Damaris added. ‘Thank you again just terribly much!’

‘I’m so glad. But I’m sure you’re tired. Tell me more in the morning.’

‘I won’t have to pretend,’ Damaris said wearily, as she stepped into bed. ‘Maid will expect a certain amount of enthusiasm and excitement!’

Two days later they set out for the north. Maidlin realized that for some reason they were anxious to have the visit to Crossrigs over and that they would not settle to anything until they had been. After some hesitation and many anxious cautions, she borrowed the small Rover car from the friends at the Manor and allowed the girls to go off without the chauffeur in attendance.

‘But don’t let Damaris be summoned for driving without a licence!’ she warned them.

‘We shall be all right.’ Rachel settled herself at the wheel. ‘Mrs. Green, of Greylands, has promised to give us a bed. You don’t mind if we stay an extra day? We’re pining to see the fells again.’

‘You deserve it, after a year’s hard work. Have a good time!’ Maidlin called. ‘And *do* take care of yourselves!’

Damaris waved good-bye to the twins, and the car sped down the beech avenue. ‘Here begins a new adventure!’ she proclaimed.

‘There’s one thing I’d like to do, after we’ve been to Crossrigs and seen the worst,’ Rachel remarked. ‘Isn’t it school holidays?’

‘Sure to be. It’s April. Why?’

‘I’d like to see young Philippa again. We’ll call on her in Windermere. I haven’t seen the kid since I left school.’

‘She howled her eyes out when she heard you weren’t coming back last summer,’ Damaris observed. ‘Oh yes! We must call on Philip. It would be a dirty trick to go home without seeing her. There’s something *I* want to do, Rachel Ellerton!’

‘Oh? What’s that? Climb Helvellyn?’

‘I’d love it. But I want to go to tea at Hikers’ Halt.’

Rachel gave a shout of laughter. ‘Where we once helped to give teas to other hikers! You shall, Marry; it will be great sport! I don’t much want to see Miss Baldry again, but I’d like to go back to the cottage.’

‘We’ll ring up Pip and take her there to tea,’ Damaris said, in delighted anticipation.

‘Have you those maps and Frost’s route-chart handy? I’m depending on you to tell me how to turn.’

‘That’s my job.’ Damaris spread out the papers on her knee. ‘It’s an enormous help to have Frost’s directions; he’d consulted Henderson, from the Manor, who brought us home last year. Between the two of them we can’t very well lose ourselves.’

‘I’d have liked to do it in one day,’ Rachel said, ‘but as Maid simply wouldn’t hear of it we’ll put up for the night with these friends of hers near Sheffield. Maid rang up, and they said they’d have us. It’s much better than going to a pub.’

‘Hotel,’ Damaris said severely. ‘Maid would never approve of a pub. But this big house on the moors sounds all right; Maid has stayed there often, she says.’

‘Good-bye to the Abbey!’ Rachel cried, as they passed the gate. ‘Now for Sheffield and the moors! And to-morrow we’ll be home again on the fells!’

‘And that’s the end of my childish dream!’ Damaris said mournfully, as they turned away from the little farm next day.

‘Not childish. Childhood’s dream, if you like. It was a jolly good plan, but there’s no room for chickens here,’ Rachel agreed. ‘You can have your hens and bees somewhere else, but not at Crossrigs. The house will be nearly against the road, and there’s almost no garden left.’

‘I don’t want them anywhere else.’ Damaris kicked one of the posts that marked the course of the proposed new road. ‘No, that’s over. I’ve lost my farm and my job.’

‘Perhaps I’ve lost mine too. It’s odd that it should happen to us both at the same moment.’

‘What will you do?’ Damaris stood by the gate and gazed at the fells.

‘Ring up Philippa from the ’phone-box in the village.’

Damaris laughed. ‘Oh, right! But I meant about finding a new job?’

‘Take you to Italy for six months’ training, with Maid’s full knowledge and consent,’ Rachel retorted.

‘Right again,’ Damaris agreed. ‘We’ll tackle Maid as soon as we go back.—I say, Ray! Don’t tell Pip I’m going to be a ballet-dancer! She’d spread it round at school.’

‘No; much better not,’ Rachel assented. ‘It’s all too vague just now.’

‘Maid might put her foot down and squash all my hopes. It’s a little foot, but I think it could be heavy.’

‘What will you do, if she does?’

‘Ray, I don’t know! I couldn’t break Maid’s heart. I’d try to talk her round.’

Rachel nodded. ‘I’ll help. I’m worried about Maid. No, we won’t tell Philip.’

Philippa, three years younger than Damaris, had been a close friend of both the girls at school. She had slept with Rachel in a small dormitory which they had not shared with any one else, and this had brought about a companionship and a sense of loyalty which had been very strong. Rachel had repaid the younger girl’s hero-worship with warm affection and had written to her at intervals during the past year. To visit her home country without trying to see Pip would have been impossible.

‘Let me speak to Philip! I’d love to ring her up!’ Damaris pleaded.

From the post office she rang up the house in Windermere.

‘Can I speak to Philippa, please?—Oh, Philip! Would you like to see us again?’

‘Can’t say, till I know who you are! Sounds like Dorothy’s; nobody else calls me Philip. Who is it?’

‘Guess! Speaking from Grasmere.’

Pip gave a shout. ‘Not Ray and Dammy? But you’re in France!’

‘We’ve been there. Yes, it’s Ray and your old friend Damson. We’re here for two days, viewing the wreck of our inheritance.’

‘Oh!—yes, the new road. It spoils Crossrigs, doesn’t it? I went to see. There’s not much left.’

‘Only the house. We’re in despair.’

‘Where can I see you, Damson? Will you come to tea? Is Ray there too?’

‘Rather! We’ll take you out to tea. Do you know the big garage—Elleray’s—at the foot of the pass?’

‘Of course I do. When shall I come?’

‘Three o’clock to-day. Come prepared for a tramp.’

‘Oh, where are we going? Up Helvellyn?’

‘We’ll take you to-morrow, if you like. Here’s Ray, wanting to speak to you.’

Rachel took the receiver. ‘Hello, young Philip!’

‘Oh, Ray! It will be marvellous to see you again!’

‘We want the latest news from Dorothy’s; and we’ll tell you our adventures—some of them.’

‘Can you both talk French?’

‘Like natives! Beautiful French,’ Rachel laughed. ‘See you this afternoon, then!’

Pip was fourteen, with black eyes and a cropped black head. She was waiting eagerly outside the garage when the little car drew up.

‘Ray! Damson! Oh, how lovely to see you again!’

Damaris sprang out. ‘Ray will take the car in. I’m not supposed to drive till I’m seventeen.’ She gave Pip a cheerful wink. ‘I hope your legs are in good condition, young

Philip, for you're going to use them now.'

'Where are we going? To Ullswater?' Pip pleaded, as they turned towards the pass.

'No, idiot. Do you know a weird little tea-place, about half-way up?'

'Hikers' Halt?' Pip gave a shout. '*Don't* I? We had tea there on Easter Monday! Isn't Miss Baldry a funny old thing?'

The girls looked at one another. 'In many ways, yes, she's a very funny old thing,' Rachel assented, her face grim. 'Look here, young Philip! You'd better know the worst. When we didn't go back to Dorothy's, this time last year, we were at Hikers' Halt, helping Miss Baldry to give teas. We were afraid our cousin would insist on adopting us, and we wanted to be in a job and be working for ourselves.'

'But how wildly thrilling, Ray!' Philippa cried.

'We've such disgustingly independent minds,' Damaris added. 'We didn't know Maidlin and we didn't dream she'd understand. She saw how we felt and began to talk about training us for good jobs, and everything seemed different at once. We never meant to go on working with Miss Baldry for ever.'

'My hat, no!' Rachel exclaimed. 'It was only for a start. It was a horrible place to live in.'

'I gave it its name,' Damaris laughed. 'Miss B. was just starting the tea business and the shanty hadn't a name. I said something about a halt for hikers going up the pass, and she seized on it and had it stuck on the gate.'

'She gives quite a decent tea,' Pip began.

'That's because you were hungry with hiking, my infant,' Damaris retorted.

'No, her cooking was all right,' Rachel said. 'I haven't forgotten her scones and tea-cakes. But she didn't play the game by us, and we were glad to get away. We trusted her, and she wrote and told Maidlin where we were!' Her face clouded at the remembrance of the betrayal of their confidence.

'Oh, don't worry about that now!' Damaris cried. 'Think of all the jolly people we've met since then! Smell the fells!'

Philippa laughed. 'Smell the fells! Dammy, you are a scream!'

'A scream! I'm a heartbroken chicken-farmer!'

'You won't be able to have your farm at Crossrigs,' Pip assented. 'What shall you do?'

'Everybody says—"Find somewhere else." But I don't want to start in another place. Perhaps I'll give up my hens and bees and find a new job.'

'Oh, Damson, what will you do? You'd be a good gardener; you want something outdoors, don't you?'

A look flashed from Damaris to Rachel. Philippa caught it and gave a shout. 'You've some plan! You know what you want to do! Oh, Damson, tell me!'

'No,' Damaris said firmly. 'There's not enough to tell yet. You tell us about Dorothy's instead. We want all the latest news!'

CHAPTER XIV

BACK TO HIKERS' HALT

'It looks rather awful, doesn't it?' Rachel paused at the gate and gazed down at the untidy cottage, standing below the level of the road which wound in long zigzags up the pass. The back windows had a wonderful view of fells and valleys, rising to a range with bold beautiful peaks; but the small front garden was neglected and the wooden chairs and tables did not look inviting.

'Only the very weary hiker would halt here!' Damaris said. 'The woman's an idiot. Why hasn't she made it more attractive? She's had a year to tidy up. She needs us to hustle her, Ray. Remember how I polished the dusty apples?'

'We had to carry all our water from the beck, across the road.' With her enlarged experience, Rachel shrank from the thought of that unpleasant week, and realized how Hikers' Halt must have appeared to Maidlin. 'We were idiots, Marry!'

'We never meant to stay! It was only for a beginning,' Damaris said briskly. 'Come on! I want my home-made scones. You aren't going to funk it, are you?'

'No, but I'm glad we didn't stay here any longer. What infants we were!' Rachel's lips were pinched, as she went down the steps to the cottage and knocked.

'Come ye in!' called a well-remembered voice.

The girls looked at one another, and Pip exploded with a smothered giggle. 'Your face, Damson!'

Damaris pushed past Rachel and strode into the cottage. 'Tea, scones, and cakes, please!'

The tall thin woman at the kitchen door stared in blank amazement. 'Eh, Dammy Ellerton, be that you? Rachel too! And grown into tall young women! Well, I never did!'

'No, I don't expect you did,' Damaris said cheerfully. 'Tea for three, please.'

Miss Baldry called an order to a girl in the kitchen, and continued to stare at her former assistants. 'You be different. What you bin doin' wi' yourselves all this year?'

'We've been living in France.' Rachel tried to speak pleasantly, but resentment had come sweeping over her at sight of Miss Baldry. 'We trusted her, and she betrayed us to Maidlin.' The thought rang through her mind.

'Eh well, it's done somethin' to ye both. Ye'd no' care to fetch the cans from the beck now.'

'No fear!' Damaris threw herself into a chair. 'How's business?'

'No' that bad. A-plenty 'ikers on the fells. You been 'ikin'?''

'No, driving a car. You haven't made many improvements in the place,' Damaris retorted.

'You look here, then.' Miss Baldry went to a case on the dresser and turned a knob.

'Wireless, by gum!' Damaris shouted. 'Up here in the wilds!'

'Folks likes it,' Miss Baldry said proudly. 'The boy comes up once a week.'

'That's new, certainly,' Rachel admitted. Then—'I say! How odd! *Again!*' as music filled the cottage.

Damaris raised her head at the first note. Then Philippa gave a cry, for Marry had sprung up and was dancing in the narrow space.

Rachel quietly moved back the chairs and drew Pip into a corner, Miss Baldry stood in the kitchen doorway, staring wildly.

As Philippa watched, holding her breath, she knew that here was something new and living, which only Damaris could do. Damaris had something to say, fresh and joyous and full of meaning, a secret between herself and the music. Pip could not have put it into words, but she knew that it was beautiful, that every movement was perfect, that it was something everybody would want to see.

The dance was short. The music changed, and Damaris stood poised, swaying lightly.

Rachel switched off the wireless and there was silence in the cottage. Pip was staring, fascinated, at Damaris.

‘Well, I never did!’ Miss Baldry murmured again. And then—‘I best be gettin’ your tea. You’ll be wantin’ it after that. My girl, you hurry up wi’ those scones!’—and she disappeared into the kitchen.

‘Damson, is *that* what you want to do?’ Pip gasped. ‘It was the loveliest thing I ever saw! It’s quite different from what you did for us at school. Have you been having lessons? Why is it so much better?’

‘Like it?’ Damaris asked casually. ‘I’d rather do it in a proper frock. Do you think people would come to see me dance?’

‘I *know* they would! You’ll be famous! I’ll be proud to say I saw you do it, at school and in this weird place!’

‘She always dances when she hears “Shepherd’s Hey”. But she’s made much jollier ones than that,’ Rachel said.

‘Tell me, Dammy!’ Pip pleaded. ‘I’m stunned! Are you going to be a dancer?’

Damaris flung herself into a chair and stretched out her legs to the fire. ‘Don’t know yet. I’ve been learning in France and they say I ought to take it up. As my farm has been wrested from me I’m wondering about going in for dancing in earnest. The trouble is, our cousin Maidlin doesn’t know, and we don’t know what she’ll say. She’s been so awfully decent that I’d hate to hurt her by going against her ideas.’



'Well, I never did!' Miss Baldry murmured

'It is a change from hens and bees,' Pip admitted. 'But when she sees you she'll understand. You couldn't give it up now, Damson!'

Miss Baldry came in with a tray and rummaged in a drawer for a cloth, casting curious glances at Damaris. 'Be you goin' on the pictures, Dammy Ellerton?'

Damaris gave a shout. 'I hadn't thought of the pictures! Perhaps I shall, if I'm asked!'

‘You’ll get lots o’ money, dancin’ like you,’ Miss Baldry said.

‘Philip, don’t talk about it at school,’ Rachel begged. ‘Marry wouldn’t like it. There’s nothing to tell yet.’

‘My aunt, no! Please don’t say anything!’ Damaris cried. ‘We didn’t mean to tell you, but when my tune came out of the box I forgot. It was the first music I ever made a dance to; I’ve done heaps since then, of course. Don’t tell anyone at Dorothy’s, please, Philip!’

‘But I want to tell everybody about your future career! We’ll be terribly proud!’

‘Wait till the career comes nearer! It’s rather hazy at present.’ Damaris grinned. ‘I’d feel such an ass if it never came off.’

‘Oh, but it will! I know you’ll be famous! You’ll need to have a different name, won’t you? You ought to sound Russian—Ellertonovska!’

Damaris laughed. ‘It’s almost long enough! In France they said I’d have to change my name, but there’s no need to decide yet. Perhaps I’ll be original and use my own! There are some dancers with English names.’

‘Come and eat,’ Rachel said. ‘Miss Baldry’s scones look as good as ever. Of course you’ll keep Marry’s secret, Philip. We’ve trusted you; you couldn’t give her away.’

‘No, I suppose not.’ Philippa’s tone was regretful. ‘I’ll promise, then, but I’d have loved to tell everybody.’

‘Shall I send you a ticket, when I dance in London, Miss Baldry?’ Damaris asked gaily.

‘I’ll come and see ye dance. And what be young Rachel goin’ to do?’

‘I don’t know yet,’ Rachel said.

‘Better take care o’ Dammy; she’ll need it. She’ll go into strange company,’ Miss Baldry said. ‘You allus did have your head screwed on straight, young Rachel.’

‘What a marvellous idea!’ Damaris sat up and stared at the hard-faced woman. Then she swung round to Rachel. ‘Papa Berthelot said something like that. I say, Ray, was that what you meant when you said “almost” to Maid?’

Rachel reddened. ‘I thought you’d see it in time! We’ll talk about all that later, Marry. Are we going to take Philip up Helvellyn to-morrow? Maid said we might have one day for a holiday.’

‘Oh, I’d love to go!’ Pip cried. ‘I have been to the top; I’m not nervous about Striding Edge!’

‘I shall do a little dance on Striding Edge,’ Damaris began.

‘You won’t!’ Rachel said firmly. ‘If there’s to be any dancing up there, I’m going home in the car and you can follow by train.’

‘Oh, all right.’ Damaris surrendered hastily. ‘I’ll wait till we’re safely down again!’ And in talking over the plans for the climb she said no more about Miss Baldry’s suggestion.

CHAPTER XV THE FIRST FIRE-MAKER

'Ray, had you really been thinking that if Maid didn't need you, you might stand by me?' Damaris demanded.

Rachel was driving carefully through the streets of Kendal. 'I can't discuss it just now, Marry. These corners need watching. It's waste of time, too. The first thing is to talk to Maid. You must have a clear way ahead of you now.'

'That's true. But, Ray——!'

'Leave it at present,' Rachel said quietly. 'I've thought, of course. You can think too. But we won't talk about it till we know what you're going to do.'

'It would be terribly sporting of you! I'd be fearfully lonely without you,' Damaris began wistfully. 'But it seems an awful shame, Ray. It wouldn't be much fun for you.'

'Oh, I don't know about that! And there are other things in the world besides fun.'

'Do you mean horrid things like duty, and bearing burdens? I'd hate to be a burden or a duty!'

'Marry, don't be an ass!' Rachel laughed. 'Do stop upsetting me! I nearly killed that cat, and it would have broken my heart if I had.'

'It was the silly animal's own fault. Cats think they own the world,' Damaris grumbled.

Rachel found the way out of the town and they raced off to Lancaster, Preston, and the south.

That night, from the old house on the Sheffield moors, Rachel rang up the Hall to report progress.

'All well, Maid. We'll be home to-morrow evening.'

'Is Damaris very much upset about the farm, Rachel?' Maidlin asked. 'If it would cheer her up, tell her that Rosamund has been here and she's sure that when Damaris is qualified, a job could be found for her at Verriton House, where Ros and Baby Roderick have been staying with Mr. Kane, the nice invalid cousin. It would be a splendid start and a lovely place to live.'

'Oh, Maid! How kind of Rosamund! What a way you Abbey people have of thinking out jolly things for everybody!'

Maidlin laughed. 'Perhaps we could persuade Mr. Kane that he needs a resident secretary! Then you two could be together. It won't be till Damaris has been through college, so there's plenty of time to prepare his mind.'

'Maid, you couldn't! Rachel protested. 'But I'll tell Marry of Rosamund's kindness.'

'You may arrive in the middle of my Camp Fire meeting,' Maidlin warned her. 'The girls are coming at six; I want the meeting here, as it's a rather special one. So if you find we're busy, slip in quietly.'

'We won't disturb you. Is Lady Joy at home?'

'She came home, but she's gone away again. Some old friends invited her for the weekend, so she came back to pack and to see that the children were all right and then she went off. We're still on our own.'

'Right! See you to-morrow,' and Rachel went to talk to Damaris.

Damaris looked grave. ‘Maid is a sport! I do hope she won’t be too much upset. Verriton must be a lovely place; it would be marvellous to live there.’

‘I haven’t seen it, but I know the gardens are beautiful and I’ve heard Rosamund talk about the little farm. It would be a wonderful job, Marry.’

‘I know. But, Ray——!’

‘The other pulls you more strongly,’ Rachel said. ‘I’d hate to have you choose chickens and be yearning all the time for theatres.’

‘That puts it jolly well!’ Damaris exclaimed. ‘You are understanding! If there’s any chance at all of feeling that wonderful thrill, that something between me and an audience, like electricity or—or magnetism—I want to go all out for it, Ray.’

‘To see if you can hold an audience; that’s what Papa Berthelot called it. I know you want it,’ Rachel assented. ‘You’ll have to try.’

‘If only Maid isn’t too much upset!’ Damaris sighed.

It was half-past six next day when the car drew up before the Hall. The girls handed her over to Frost and slipped in by the big doors, for the windows of the drawing-room were darkened and they knew Maidlin’s meeting must be in progress.

They were not left without welcome, however. From the depths of an arm-chair in the hall rolled two small figures, and the twins hurled themselves on the travellers.

‘You’re late, Aunt Ray! Meeting’s started and we want to see it. Aunt Maid told us to wait for you; you can go in and watch, if you like.’ Elizabeth grasped Rachel’s hand and gazed up into her face.

‘Can you come now, at once?’ Margaret began to pull Damaris across the hall.

‘Oh, Twins! You’ve dressed up!’ Damaris cried.

They wore their chestnut linen smocks, but had tied green ribbons round their heads, just above their eyes, while strings of glass and wooden beads hung round their necks.

‘Made ourselves as Camp-Fire-y as we could,’ Elizabeth explained. ‘It’s a surprise for Aunt Maid.’

‘We put on all the beads we could find,’ Margaret added.

‘I can see you did. You mustn’t jingle, or you’ll spoil the meeting,’ Rachel suggested.

‘Don’t jingle, Twin!’ Margaret broke into a trill of amusement.

‘I’ll jingle as little as I can.’ Elizabeth clasped her middle firmly. ‘Come on, everybody!’

‘Be very quiet! Mustn’t spoil a sherry-something meeting.’ Margaret looked at Damaris severely. ‘Do you know about sherry Council Fires?’

‘Twin means cere-moni-al,’ Elizabeth explained. ‘We must creep in and not even whisper.’

‘But we may look at one another,’ Margaret urged. ‘Twin knows what I want to say when I look at her.’

‘Gen’rally I do. But you look so funny sometimes,’ and Elizabeth opened the door, with a warning upward glance.

The room was dark. At one end was the glow of a small fire; before it on the hearthrug stood three tall candles, and these gave a faint light.

Dimly outlined against the glow were the figures of girls, seated in a half-circle on the floor. Standing to address them was Maidlin, their Guardian, in her long yellow gown, decorated in many colours. Her black hair hung on her breast in two thick plaits, under a glittering headband of beads, and the firelight twinkled on these and on the beadwork of her dress.

‘High priestess!’ Damaris whispered. ‘Princess! How lovely she looks!’

The twins, enthralled and very quiet, drew their guests to the big table, which was pushed to the back of the room. They climbed up by chairs and seated themselves, and the elder girls silently perched beside them, watching the proceedings.

‘Girls of Camp Waditaka, “Camp of Adventurous People”, there is one more rank to give to-night,’ the Guardian was saying. ‘Our sister Gratitude is ready to be our first Fire-Maker, and it makes me very proud to have a Fire-Maker in the Camp at last. She was at our first meeting and she has worked well and has met with us whenever she has been in England. When she is abroad with her mother, she still works for honours and keeps the Law of the Fire. She is leading the way, but others are nearly ready to follow her, and soon we shall have three or four who have qualified for their silver bracelets.—Cecily, Grateful One, will you be our first Fire-Maker?’

From a corner came a tall girl, taller than the Guardian; she, too, wore the gown and headband, with long chains of gay wooden beads swinging as she moved. Her hair, in the Camp Fire plaits, was the most vivid red Rachel had ever seen; not the rich bronze of the twins’ curly heads, but a fiery glowing colour.

Maidlin slipped a silver bracelet on her bare arm. Cecily repeated a verse, expressing her desire to bring all her strength and ambitions to serve ‘the fire that is called the love of man for man, the love of man for God’. The circle of girls broke into a cheer, and she stood, looking half-shy, hesitating.

‘Do you want to make a speech, Gratitude?’ Maidlin asked, smiling. ‘Or will you give us one little tune? That would be a very suitable greeting from you.’

Cecily put to her lips a silver pipe, which hung round her neck by a leather thong. In the background Elizabeth grasped Rachel’s hand in delight and Margaret drew closer to Damaris, whispering, ‘It’s lovely when Cecily pipes!’

A stream of clear silvery notes held every one by a spell. Damaris stirred restlessly and Rachel laid a hand on her knee in warning.

‘I’m aching to dance to that pipe!’ Damaris murmured.

‘Thank you, Gratitude!’ Maidlin exclaimed. ‘Your pipe is a part of our meetings. We miss it when you’re away. We’ll go out to the hall and you shall play for a dance.’

‘Sing to us first, Guardian!’ There was a chorus from the circle.

‘Please, Guardian!’ Cecily sank down on a cushion.

Maidlin stood with clasped hands and began to sing, a lilting lullaby, and again the twins clutched the person nearest to them in ecstasy.

‘Maid’s voice gets better and better!’ Damaris whispered.

Rachel nodded, her eyes glowing, as the song ended. Maidlin moved to the door, with the dignity which her gown and her position gave her, threw it open, and invited the Camp Fire to go out and dance.

The lounge seemed filled with girls in gowns and beads, as they sprang up and stretched, and all began to talk at once.

‘What a marvellous meeting, Maid!’ Damaris cried.

‘I thought you had come in.’ Maidlin came to them. ‘We haven’t finished; but after the ceremonies we like to relax and dance and chat. Are you very tired?’

‘Not a scrap. We’ve had a jolly good holiday.’

‘Maid, what a lovely person!—your new Fire-Maker, I mean,’ Rachel said. ‘Why have we never seen her before?’

'She lives in Switzerland a great deal. Her mother's an invalid and has to stay there. She comes to see us when she can.'

'What's her real name?'

'Cecily Ruth Perowne; in the family she's known as Cecily-tom, because she's a piper; Tom, the piper's son! Her music's first-class, both violin and piano; she's a born accompanist and she's worked very hard.—Twinnies! You do look fine!'

'We dressed up.' The twins showed themselves proudly. 'Do we look like the Camp Fire?'

'Quite like Camp Fire Girls,' Maidlin agreed, with laughing eyes. 'But what about bedtime?'

'Oh, not yet! Let us have one dance with the Camp Fire!'

'When we've taken the trouble to dress up!' Margaret said reproachfully.

'Just one, then. Cecily will pipe for a dance or two.'

The girls were crowding round Cecily, begging for favourite dances. She raised the pipe and began to play. The girls caught hands, in rings of three couples, and danced 'Maid in the Moon'.

'Jolly pretty!' Rachel said, leaning with Damaris over the railing of the gallery to watch the moving figures in the yellow gowns. 'Look! The twins are going to dance.'

There was laughter from the crowd, as Elizabeth led Margaret down the middle of the set, in 'The First of April'.

'They are pets,' Damaris laughed. 'Good dancers too!—But think of the difference, Ray! What do you suppose Maid will say to me?'

Rachel shook her head. 'Were you thinking of *Les Sylphides* and *Petrouchka*? It is rather different, Marry dear.'

'And this is what Maid likes!' Damaris murmured. 'Natural—unconscious—just for fun! She'll say I'm stagey and unnatural and affected.'

'You're not affected,' Rachel said quietly. 'I believe Maid has more understanding than that.'

'How did you close the meeting?' Damaris asked, as they sat round the fire in the hall, later in the evening.

'Just a few quiet songs, and then we put out the candles with some good-bye verses and the girls crept away and left me in the dark. It calms them down after the thrills of the meeting.'

Maidlin had put away her gown and had come to dinner in a dark red dress which suited her rich colouring. Cecily wore a frock of bright green, her vivid red plaits wound round her head.

'She's only just put her hair up,' Maidlin explained. 'She's eighteen, and she's going back to Switzerland to show her mother how she looks.'

Cecily laughed. 'It's mother's hair; she's responsible for it. She asked me to let it grow.'

'It suits you,' Maidlin said. 'You must play to us; the girls would like to hear your fiddle. They won't see much of you, as you're off to-morrow, but you'll meet them again later on.—Well, Damaris! You've told us your adventures during dinner. I do sympathize about the farm, but since it can't be helped, how do you like my new plan? Don't you think Verriton would be a jolly place to live?—Why, what's the matter with you both?'

She and Cecily, each keenly sensitive, had felt the instant change in the atmosphere—the sudden tense attitude of the other two.

Rachel looked at Damaris. The moment had come. Should she try to help?

Damaris spoke bravely, but she had grown suddenly white. ‘Maid, I didn’t mean to tell you to-night. Oh, Maid, it’s a kind idea, but I want to do something else. Maid, may I show you?’

‘Show me?’ Maidlin stared at her, looking dazed. ‘Damaris my dear, what are you talking about?’

‘Just three minutes! I may as well do it properly!’ And Damaris fled, up the wide staircase to her room.

Maidlin looked at Rachel. ‘What does she mean?’

‘If you could wait, just a moment, Maid!’ Rachel begged. ‘You’ll understand so much better! It isn’t a thing we can explain in words.’

Maidlin looked helplessly at her. ‘I don’t understand. What is it all about?’

‘She’ll tell you, in her own way. Maid, don’t disappoint Marry! It would break her heart. She’s so keen! If she had to give it up now, she’d feel as if something had been killed—stifled—smothered!’

‘Rachel, this is very hard on me!’ Maidlin cried. ‘If Damaris cares for something so much, why haven’t I known?’

‘We came back from France to tell you; we couldn’t put it in letters. There was nothing to say before we went to Anney; it all happened there. But we had to see about the farm before we said anything. Marry’s been hesitating for months between her hens and bees, and—and this! Losing the farm-land has helped her to decide. You will wait, won’t you? She won’t be long.’

Maidlin looked at her. Then she turned and stared at the fire, her lips pressed tightly to steady them.

Cecily glanced at Rachel, raising her eyebrows. Rachel said no more, but went quietly to the piano and lifted the lid.

Maidlin watched her with widening eyes, but did not speak. Cecily, looking startled, laid her hand on the violin-case on the settle beside her.

Then—‘Oh, look!’ she whispered. ‘Guardian, look!’

Damaris ran lightly down the wide shallow steps. She had flung off her blue frock and wore a white dress, very simply made, with smoothly fitting bodice and low-cut neck and puffed sleeves, and a very full short skirt, and her pink ballet shoes. It was almost the costume of her beloved sylphs in *Les Sylphides*. With her yellow curls on her cheeks and round her neck, and her big dark eyes full of excited anticipation and a hint of anxiety, she was a delightful picture of youth and life, and every movement was full of beauty.

‘Damaris!’ Maidlin cried, astounded.

‘It’s only tarlatan. It cost almost nothing, Maid.’ Damaris stood on the lowest step and held out her skirts. ‘Annette made it; she said she’d be proud to do it, and you know how clever she is.—“Evening”, please, Ray!’

Rachel nodded and began to play. She used no music and her eyes were on Damaris most of the time.

Maidlin and Cecily leaned forward, gazing breathlessly at Damaris, as, rising on her points, she seemed to float into her dance.

At last she paused. ‘That’s all! Like it, Maid?’ Her tone was would-be matter-of-fact, but Rachel realized the tremulous anxiety behind the light words. ‘It was “Evening in the High Mountains”, from Grieg’s *Lyric Pieces*. I made the dance myself. Play me something else, Ray!’

‘What a wild mad thing!’ Cecily murmured. ‘So different from the dreamy one! She’s wonderful!’

Still Maidlin stared, as if stunned. Cecily glanced at her, then slipped a hand into her lap. Maidlin gripped it, as if grasping the known and understood, while facing something strange and almost frightening.

Damaris stood, lightly poised and swaying, as she so often did. ‘It’s jolly hard work. But—oh, Maid! It’s such fun to do!’

Cecily leaned forward. ‘Damaris, would you dance to my fiddle? I’d be tremendously proud to play for you.’

‘Would you? I’d be fearfully bucked. Maid said you were a born accompanist.—Maid, won’t you say something? Are you wild with me?’

Maidlin started. ‘Not wild, but you’ve given me a shock. I’ve lost my little cousin, of the hen-and-bee farm.’

‘Oh yes, you’ve lost her! But she might come back later on.’ Damaris looked at Cecily, who was tuning her violin. ‘I’d like to dance to your pipe too; I love the sound of it. But what I really want is an orchestra. What will you play?’

CHAPTER XVI

MAIDLIN DECIDES

The hall was very quiet. The last notes of the silver pipe had died away.

Tired but happy, Damaris sank down on a stool at Maidlin's side, her white skirts in a cloud around her. 'Now, Maid, what about it?'

Rachel and Cecily, side by side on the old settle, looked at Maidlin, who relaxed and lay back, with a sigh that showed how tensely she had been watching.

'Damaris, tell me! Do you want to make this your life?'

'Sure I do! But I want you to be pleased, Maid.'

'I know nothing about it, but you seem to me very good. You've taken my breath away; I had no idea! Do you want to dance in public?'

'You bet! I want to join a ballet company and dance with a big orchestra, and lovely frocks, and lights, and a huge audience! Some day I'll have my name up over the theatre and on all the hoardings!'

'I don't want it for you!' Maidlin cried. 'I don't want you to have that sort of life, Damaris!'

Damaris stiffened. 'And why not? You're going to sing in public and have your name on concert programmes; you're preparing for it. Why shouldn't I have my chance too? They all say I'll be good enough by the time I'm ready.'

Maidlin looked at her. 'Damaris, tell me more. I'll try to understand. Remember that you took me by surprise!'

'Marry, you gave her a shock,' Rachel said, very quietly. 'Tell her how it's happened, or I shall.'

'Sorry, Maid dear!' Damaris threw her bare arm across her cousin's knee and poured out her story.

Maidlin gazed down at her. It seemed so incredible; the tom-boy Damaris, of cricket and the fells and the little blue shorts, of the chicken-farm in the country, was gone, and in her place was this radiant creature, eager, full of life and artistry, who danced as lightly as a butterfly. Maidlin looked at the sparkling dark eyes, the yellow curls, the rounded arms and neck, beautiful shapely legs, stretched out from below the frilled skirt, and knew that Damaris would succeed, if her dancing was really as good as it appeared to the uninitiated.

'But, Damaris!' she began at last, as Marry paused for breath. 'So many people do it! You seem to me very good, but are you better than the others? For if not——'

'Even if I'm only fit for the back row of the *corps de ballet*, I want to do it, Maid! Just to be part of *Les Sylphides*, a sylph in the wood, or a little swan in *Lac des Cygnes*, would make me happy!' Damaris cried. 'Before I understood I said I would only go in for it if I could be prima ballerina, but I know better now. I must be a part of ballet, however unimportant I am at the beginning!'

'You don't expect to start as a new Pavlova?' Cecily gave her a smile whose sympathy could not be mistaken.

'No, but I mean to work up to it! I'm going to dance in a way that will make them pick me for solo parts, if once I get the chance! Maid, how can I know, till I try? Papa Berthelot said I had something new, that was all my own. If he's right, I shall succeed. I'm not ready yet. I

want six months in Italy; after that I shall know. But I must have your consent, Maid. I'm in earnest about it now.'

She glanced up at Maidlin's troubled face, and then looked at Cecily. 'You understand, don't you? You think I ought to try?'

'I should want to try, in your place.' Cecily's tone was guarded, and she, too, looked at Maidlin.

'Tell us, Cecil!' Maid commanded. 'You've more to say. Help us, if you can.'

'I was thinking of myself,' Cecily explained. 'I was restless and unsettled—stifled, as Rachel said. Then I went to that folk-dance class, and all at once I was crazy with joy. The dancing and the music set free something that had been crushed; woke up a part of me that had been asleep. Then all you dear people here gave me music, and that was my beginning. If something like that has happened to Damaris, bringing into life a part of her that must dance, I don't see how you can stop her, Guardian. She has the same right to go ahead that you all gave to me.'

'Oh, marvellous!' Damaris cried, while Rachel gave Cecily a glowing look of thanks. 'My name ought to be Gratitude, not yours! You've said it beautifully! Maid, I do feel something is pushing me on, and I want to try to make good. Let me have my chance! If I fail I'll go to college and be a farmer, and I'll try to settle down. But I'll never be really satisfied until I've tried.'

Maidlin's hands clenched. 'Damaris, I'd rather you didn't have that life. It will be hard, even if you succeed. Do you know what it means?'

'Work,' Damaris said promptly. 'Always, unless I give up dancing, it means work, practice, classes. One's never done with it; there's always more to learn, and faults to be corrected, and points to be improved. Then there would be rehearsals, and—with luck—a show at night. It's a full-time job, with no playing about and enjoying oneself. But I shall love it, Maid! It will be work at a thing I'm crazy for.'

'And travelling; no settled home. A performance in one town and then a hurry to pack and go off to another; life in lodgings and hotels! Can you face that?'

'Maid, it will be fun!' Damaris cried. 'Every minute will be a thrill!'

Maidlin sighed. 'I'd feel so much happier about you if you kept to your first plan. You'd be safer, too. There's danger, Damaris, and heart-break.'

'Do you mean men and all that?' Damaris jeered. 'Oh, don't worry! I'll see that they don't worry me! Is that what is going to break my heart?'

Maidlin looked down at her. 'Not entirely. I meant disillusion and disappointment. You can't expect a triumphal progress all the way. I don't want you to suffer.'

'It's fearfully nice of you, Maid,' Damaris conceded, much touched. 'But honestly I'm ready to take the risk.'

'It's such a public life, and you're such a dear, Damaris. I hate the thought of it for you!' Maidlin cried.

Damaris bubbled with laughter. 'I'm not such a dear as all that! I don't want to be kept in a glass case in a museum! It's a *very* public life; I want it to be!'

Maidlin shivered. 'How I'd hate it! But I mustn't judge you by myself. Rachel, do you want her to try?'

'It would be an adventure, and I believe she has it in her,' Rachel exclaimed. 'We've never shirked adventures, good or bad. Yes, I want her to try, Maid.'

Maidlin sighed. 'It's true; you aren't the sort to shirk. Damaris always accepts a challenge—even if it's a dozen people all at once to tea at Hikers' Halt!'

Damaris gave a shout. 'Fancy remembering that! Maid, you're right. Papa Berthelot, and Madame Bonnet, and something very strong inside me, have all challenged me to try my luck. I can't settle down till I've done it. But it's more than that. Every time I've seen ballet—and with every new step I've learnt, and every time I feel I've done better than I've ever done before—something challenges me to go on, and use all that I know, and dance to crowds of people, and find out if I really am any good. It's not merely steps! Anybody can be taught steps, more or less. It's more; it's yourself, the way you do it, and whether you can put it across to the audience, and how they respond. I can't know all that till I've tried.'

'Personality,' Maidlin said. 'You've plenty, my dear. Your audiences will like you all right. But it's so unlike Damaris, with her shorts and her love of the fells and sheep!' and she sat brooding over the fire.

'We'll keep those for holidays. Even ballet girls must have holidays, or they'd break down. Maid dearest, will you tell me truly just one thing?'

Maidlin smiled into her eager dark eyes, in spite of the trouble in her own. 'I'll tell you truly or not at all, Damaris.'

'Is it only for my sake you feel you have to object? Because you'd like me to have everything easy and sheltered and pleasant? Because I'm such a dear and you want to protect me and be a mother to me? Or is it that you don't like ballet for its own sake and you don't want me to go in for it?'

'I shouldn't have called chicken-farming easy and sheltered and protected,' Rachel observed. 'It must be extremely hard work, and very messy and dirty, and dreadfully exposed at times.'

'I don't mean sheltered from bad weather,' Damaris retorted. 'Maidlin understands. Tell me. Maid!'

'It's for your sake, Damaris. Your dancing was beautiful and you'd look lovely on the stage,' Maidlin said quietly, knowing very well that this was her surrender, but driven on by honesty.

Damaris sprang up with a shout and began to pirouette round the hall, her white arms raised above her head. 'Whoops! That's good enough! I'll be a sylph! I'll be a swan in *Lac des Cygnes*! I'll be a vampire in *Giselle* and lure men to their doom! I'll be the girl who wakes and dances with the Spirit of the Rose! I'll be all the lovely things and dance to all the glorious music! And some day I'll make new dances that everybody will love, and the world will have new ballets because Maidlin was kind and understood!'

Maidlin and Cecily watched her, spell-bound. 'You couldn't stop that, you know, Guardian,' Cecily murmured. 'She'd break her heart.'

'She'll be all right, Maid,' Rachel said. 'M. Berthelot talked to me. If she joins a company she'll be taken care of. She'll be so valuable that they'll treat her like egg-shell, he said. He's certain she'll be prima ballerina quite soon.'

Maidlin drew a long breath. 'No, I can't keep her back. She must have her chance. Ballet isn't my choice of dancing, but I can't deny its beauty, and I can't keep Damaris in cotton-wool. Marry dear, you're a lovely marvellous thing when you dance. I can't think how you do it. I'm sorry it's your gift; I won't go back on that—I *am* sorry! But it is a gift, and you must use it.'

Damaris ran to her and threw herself down beside her. 'But you're only sorry for my sake, Maid?'

'That's all,' Maidlin smiled, in spite of herself. 'I'm afraid your gift may bring you suffering as well as joy.'

'That's only fair; all the best things are mixed. I'm not afraid.'

'No, you have the courage for it. I shouldn't have. I couldn't bear a life like that.'

'It's given me heaps of joy already,' Damaris said stoutly.

'It will give joy to other people too; perhaps to people all over the world,' Cecily said.

'Yes, we must remember the other people,' Maidlin admitted. She laughed as she made a confession. 'Damaris, you challenged me to be honest. I may as well own that I want Joy to see you dance, and Rosamund, and everybody. There! That's a complete surrender, isn't it?'

Damaris caught her hand and pressed her cheek on it. 'Maid dear, you've made me so happy. I'll make you proud of me!'

'I'm sure you will. May we see something else? I love to watch you; it's like a dream.'

Damaris caught her breath. 'Maid, I don't believe I'll be happier on the night of my first big success!—Ray, play me a Chopin Nocturne! That will make her feel she's in a dream!'

'What is Rachel going to do?' Cecily asked, as Damaris subsided on the hearthrug in a billowy cloud of tarlatan after dancing again. 'Hasn't she lost her job too?'

'Perhaps. My fault,' Maidlin admitted. 'But we'll find her plenty to do. Or do you want a great career too, Ray?'

'It seems to me'—Rachel looked at her cousin, sure of her understanding—'that if you don't need me—and perhaps even if you do, and in spite of all the training you're giving me—my job is not to have any career or any plans, but to stand by Marry and take care of her. I fancy she'll need me, and in that case doesn't she come first?'

Maidlin's face had filled with relief. 'Oh, Rachel! If you'll do that, it will help me more than anything!'

'Ray!' Damaris for one moment had been unable to say a word. 'Ray—oh, you mustn't! You must have your life too; you can't just stand by me! If you talk like that, I shall have to go back to the hens and bees!'

Cecily's eyes had lit up. 'What a wonderful idea! How lovely it must be to have a sister!'

'It's going to be my adventure too,' Rachel said stoutly. 'I won't let Marry have it alone. We always do things together.'

Maidlin spoke with deep earnestness. 'Rachel, if you do that, you'll be taking on a far bigger job for me than merely being my secretary. The training won't be wasted; you'll need the whole of it. I'll be far happier about Damaris if you are with her.'

'I should want to be with her. I'd worry all the time if she went out alone to conquer the world.'

'But what about you?' Damaris cried. 'It isn't fair! You're older than I am; why should I be the one to have everything? Of course I want Ray! I shall always want her. But I can't let her——'

'You won't be asked!' Rachel retorted. 'Maid, could we go to bed? We've driven from the Midlands to-day, and all this business of telling you has been a bit of a strain. We've been worrying over what you'd say. Marry doesn't think she's tired but I know she is.'

'You're sensible and practical. You'll be the greatest possible help to Damaris,' Cecily remarked.

‘Marry has been hesitating for months between her practical and her artist side; just as she is when she stands swaying about on her toes—sorry, Marry, I mean on your points!’ Rachel said. ‘The sensible Cumberland part of her, brought up on the farm by severe old aunts, said that dancing would never do for a career; but another part, which must have come from our mother, I suppose, has been pushing her on, through music, towards the stage. If she’s coming down heavily, once and for all, on the artist side, she’ll need me to balance her on the other.’

‘I shouldn’t have thought Damaris could come down heavily, if she tried,’ Cecily said. ‘I never saw anybody so light.’

Damaris laughed. ‘Good for you, Gratitude! But I don’t feel that this idea about Ray is at all fair. Marvellous for me, of course, but I ought not to agree to it. Please don’t look on it as settled.’

‘Nothing’s settled, except that Maid has been an angel and is willing you should go on training,’ Rachel told her. ‘You aren’t ready to dance in public yet. The next step is Italy. Perhaps the schools there will say you’re too old, or too bad, or something, and will refuse to have anything to do with you.’

‘It’s not in the least likely.’ Maidlin smiled at Damaris. ‘Yes, as to bed I quite agree, but before you go tell me one thing! Is the time in Italy a real part of your plans, or are you going because I said Rachel must learn Italian?’

‘Oh, no! I want to go to Italy!’ Damaris cried. ‘Papa Berthelot said it would be the very best thing for me. Nobody thinks I’m ready to dance in public yet.’

‘Then we’ve nothing to do at present; we’ll go ahead with our plans. I shall hear what the Italian school says about you, and we’ll be guided by their verdict.’

‘That’s all I want,’ Damaris said gratefully. ‘But I’ve been craving to have your approval and good wishes, Maid. We both felt I couldn’t go on if you were set against it.’

‘I couldn’t have stopped you. I’ve no power to do it.’

‘Oh, I think you have!’ Rachel exclaimed. ‘Not legally, perhaps, but in every other way. Think of all you’ve done for us! Neither of us could plunge into anything with any decent feeling about it, if you’d asked us to give it up.’

‘No, I don’t believe I could, even though I’m so keen,’ Damaris agreed. ‘I’d feel frightful, but I’d have had to wait till I had your consent, Maid.’

Maidlin flushed. ‘It’s because you feel like that, that I had to hesitate. But now—yes, I do agree that you must go on. My good wishes, dear! I’ll help you all I can.’

Damaris caught her outstretched hand and with almost a sob pressed it to her lips. ‘Oh, Maid! That means everything to me! I’ve been so frightened for fear you wouldn’t understand. Forgive me for doubting you, Maid!’

‘I don’t blame you,’ Maidlin said. ‘It was a very big thing to tell me—such a change in your whole future. It was a shock to me, as you saw. Go to bed now, dears, and don’t worry about me any more!’

‘You won’t lie awake thinking of objections and difficulties, will you?’ Damaris pleaded.

‘I shall think about your future triumphs.—What’s the matter, Cecil?’

As they moved towards the staircase a scuffling sound had caught Cecily’s ear. She darted forward and up the stair, and grabbed a twin in each hand.

‘You monkeys! How long have you been there?’

‘Twins, you went to bed hours ago!’ Maidlin said reproachfully.

‘We wakened up,’ Margaret cried defiantly. ‘The music wakened us.’

‘Oh, you silly, girl!’ Elizabeth scolded. ‘Why couldn’t you be quiet? She fell over her dressing-gown, Aunty Cecil; that was what you heard.’

‘People often do, when they run about at night,’ Cecily said dryly. ‘Why aren’t you in bed?’

‘Aunty Dammy’s dancing was so lovely,’ Elizabeth pleaded. ‘You were the people in the front row, and we were the ones upstairs. We peeped through the banisters.’

‘The gods in the gallery!’ Damaris laughed. ‘I hope you liked it? The gallery audience is very important!’

‘It was simply marvellous!’ Elizabeth gazed at her with wide brown eyes. ‘I can’t think how you do it!’

‘You were just like a balloon, bouncing round the hall, Aunty Dammy,’ Margaret shouted. ‘It’s a simply marvellous frock!’

‘Glad you approve.’ Damaris stretched out the billowy tarlatan and made a deep curtsy.

‘Oh, teach us to do that!’ Elizabeth begged, hopping about in excitement. ‘I can dance on my toes!’

‘We’ll have to make you a little *tutu*,’ Damaris suggested.

‘What’s a too-too?’ Margaret demanded.

‘A little white frill round your waist. My frock’s too long for a *tutu*.’

‘We’d like to have *tutus*. Then we could dance like you,’ Elizabeth said.

‘Twins, go to bed this instant!’ Maidlin commanded sternly.

The twins fled, with a cry of—‘Dance to us again to-morrow, Aunty Dam!’

‘That was our fault. We’d better vanish too,’ Rachel apologized.

‘We’ll have to stop that “Aunty Dam.” It sounds too terrible,’ Maidlin said.

CHAPTER XVII

'MARY DAMAYRIS' IS BORN

'Ray, did you really mean it?' Damaris whispered in the dark.

'That I was dead tired? Yes, I did.'

'No, that you'd stand by me and be the mother in the background. All the girls in France had mothers who came to watch the classes. I said I hadn't one, but now I think perhaps I have.'

'You're rather a large child for me, aren't you? Of course I meant it, silly. I couldn't let you go into this alone.'

'I couldn't pull through without you.'

'You aren't going to try, even if all I can do is to see to your meals and do your washing and mending.'

'You shan't do that sort of thing for me!' Damaris cried. 'I'll do my own washing and mending, or else I'll pay for them.'

'Oh no! Not the sort of washing I mean. You'll need lovely delicate things that you wouldn't trust to anybody but me.'

'Ray, I shall sob on your neck, if you talk like that,' Damaris said desperately.

'Much better go to sleep.' Rachel turned her back on her resolutely.

Maidlin greeted the girls next morning with a change of plans, which showed she had spent at least part of the night in thought on their behalf.

'Are you in a hurry to go on with your career, Damaris? Then suppose we cut the holiday short and start off as soon as Joy comes home. I'd like to go to Italy by way of Annecy, and hear for myself what your Madame Bonnet and M. Berthelot say about you.'

Rachel looked up from a letter which had just come. 'Oh, Maid! Could we go to Italy first and have a week in Annecy on your way home, and then go back to settle down to work? I know it sounds mad, but—look!'

'What a daft plan!' Damaris said frankly. 'Why leave Italy as soon as we've arrived?'

'An invitation to Annette's wedding, in July. She and Papa Berthelot want us to be there,' Rachel explained.

Maidlin handed Damaris the letter which Rachel had passed to her. 'Annette says she can't be married without you, and that "Papa" will be desolated. That decides our plans; we'll go direct to Italy, see the teachers there and make arrangements for your classes, spend a few weeks sightseeing, and then come back to Annecy together. I'll talk to Madame Bonnet and M. Berthelot, and then I'll leave you there. I'd like to stay for the wedding, but I'll have been away from home quite long enough. I must have some weeks in Italy, for Joy is keen that I should have a few lessons from a very fine professor there; she thinks it will help my singing. So—two months in Italy, and then a week in Annecy; you'll stay for the wedding, and your friend "Papa" will put you on the Italian express at Aix. You'll have no difficulty, will you?'

'Not the slightest, now that we can ask our way! It's a marvellous plan, Maid! You'll know what the new dancing school says about Marry and you'll hear what the Annecy people think of her.'

'Maid, you're being a real help already!' Damaris exclaimed. 'I wonder every half-hour why we didn't tell you long ago. We've been so frightened of you all winter.'

‘Frightened of *me*?’

‘No, of worrying you and making you unhappy,’ Rachel amended. ‘We were never frightened of you, but we thought you might be terribly upset.’

‘The world’s all different, now that you’re helping us,’ Damaris said happily. ‘It turned upside down when the Annecy people said I’d have to dance and give up my farm; now you’ve put it right side up again.’

‘The world? Am I as important as all that?’ Maidlin laughed. ‘Damaris, I want you to do something for me. I’ve rung up Rosamund and asked her to come to tea; she’s staying at Verriton, so she’s on the ’phone. I’ve told her you are here and you have a surprise for her. Is that all right?’

Damaris looked at her, bright-eyed. ‘You want me to dance for her? I’ll love to do it, Maid.’

‘I want to know what she thinks of you. Rosamund’s opinion has always mattered a lot to me.’

‘But you’ve decided to stand by us, whatever she says?’ Damaris asked anxiously. ‘If she doesn’t like me, you won’t let that put you off?’

‘Maid’s not so soft,’ Rachel cried.

Maidlin flushed. ‘I used to be influenced by Rosamund, but I decide things for myself now. Don’t worry, Damaris! It’s the Italian school’s decision that matters to me. That might make me try to dissuade you, but nothing else will.’

‘Sorry, Maid!’ Damaris apologized.

She was, nevertheless, a little anxious all day. ‘I’ll be glad when it’s over,’ she confessed to Rachel. ‘Maid thinks such a lot of Rosamund.’

‘But why shouldn’t Rosamund like your dancing? Can’t she have good sense too?’

‘It’s more than that; it’s artistic sense! Rosamund’s common sense might say it wasn’t a good life to take up; not much money in it—lots of clapping but not much cash! It’s true, you know. I’m not likely to make a fortune.’

‘Unless you leap to the very top! But you’ll make something else. Think how Maid and Cecily enjoyed your dances!’

‘And the gallery audience!’ Damaris assented. ‘Oh, yes, I hope to please people and show them something——’ she paused.

‘Beautiful. Don’t be shy!’ Rachel said laughing. ‘Rosamund will appreciate you as much as Maid did. You needn’t be frightened!’

Rosamund, tall and fair-haired, and carrying herself with unconscious dignity, had been Maidlin’s close friend since their schooldays. She came at tea-time, gaily crying out to be told the surprise.

‘The last time one of Maid’s friends came home from France with a surprise, it was a marriage and a baby. Who is the bride—Rachel or Damaris?’

‘Damaris,’ Rachel said laughing. ‘But it’s a thing she has married—or at least fallen in love with; not a person.’

‘Suppose we say an art. Or a gift she has discovered,’ Maidlin said. ‘Look, Ros!’

Rachel went to the piano, as Damaris, in her white frock, ran lightly down the stairs.

Rosamund gave a low cry of surprise. The twins chuckled with glee and crouched together on a settle, clutching one another in ecstasy as Damaris danced.

‘Pretty girl! No, beautiful creature!’ Rosamund whispered. ‘Maid, didn’t you know? She’s lovely!’

‘I had no idea. She did this last night. I had a shock. I thought she was going in for chicken-farming.’

Rosamund glanced at her. Then her hand reached out and grasped Maidlin’s in sympathy and understanding, while her eyes went back to the radiant, whirling, leaping white being that was Damaris.

‘Wonderful!’ she murmured. ‘And they hadn’t told you?’

‘They were a little afraid.’

Rosamund nodded. ‘They care so much, and they knew it would be a shock. Damaris has given her whole heart to it, or she couldn’t dance like this.’

‘Rachel cares almost as much, for her sake.’

‘I know. I see it in her face; they’re devoted to one another. They’re bothered about me now.—Come here, Dammy-Marry! You’ve given me a shock, as well as Maid! Tell me about this. Toumanova and Baronova will have to look out!’

‘Oh—Rosamund! You know? You’ve seen them? But you couldn’t compare me with those marvellous girls!’ Damaris came in a whirl of white skirts to drop on the rug between Rosamund and Maidlin.

The protesting twins were swept away to tea by their nurse, while Rachel and Damaris told their story in a sort of duet.

Rosamund nodded. ‘I forgive you for keeping it dark. As you were so far away it was natural. It isn’t a thing to put in a letter. Of course you must go on. We shall see you at Covent Garden yet—unless you decide on Sadler’s Wells! What shall you call yourself? I don’t say a Russian name is necessary nowadays; we’re past that stage. People know there are English dancers! But your name matters; I can’t quite imagine an audience rising to its feet and shouting “Ellerton!” when the curtain falls.’

Damaris laughed. ‘We met a girl from school when we were up north, and she wanted me to be Ellertonovska. I’d rather have Damariska!’

‘That might do; not Ellertonovska!’

‘What I’d really like,’ Damaris went on eagerly, ‘would be to use my whole name—Mary Damaris, the Dancer! It sounds like the stage!’

‘I don’t like it,’ Rachel said. ‘You don’t want your audiences shrieking “Damaris!” That’s our name for you.’

‘You all seem sure about that shouting crowd,’ Damaris laughed.

‘You don’t like the thought of “Damaris” as a stage name, do you, Maid?’ Rachel urged. ‘It’s private; her home name. She ought to have a stage name!’

‘I’d rather she didn’t use it,’ Maidlin said, very quietly. ‘But I don’t know what else to suggest.’

Rosamund, Rachel, and Damaris all glanced at her, with the same idea. ‘Mary Damaris’ had been her mother’s name; the favourite aunt after whom Marry had been called.

‘I’ll think of something else,’ Damaris said, but there was a tinge of regret in her tone.

‘I’ll give you a name,’ Rosamund announced. ‘You may not like it, but here’s an idea. In church lately we had your verse read; you know—“the woman Damaris”. The dear old clergyman called it “Damayris”, to rhyme with Mary’s. I thought how pretty it sounded, with the accent in the middle. Put that after your first name, Marry Ellerton!’

‘“Mary Damayris!” Rosamund, how marvellous! Everybody will think Damayris is my surname!’

'I *can* imagine an audience calling—"Damayris! Mary Damayris!" They won't know what language it is, but that doesn't matter,' Rosamund said laughing.

'And Damaris can be private, for us at home,' Maidlin agreed. 'It's a good idea, Ros.'

'She's always called Marie in France,' Rachel added. 'I like it. I want to keep Damaris for ourselves.'

'You may think of something better,' Rosamund remarked. 'But if you use my name I shall be proud.'

'I *shall* use it. "Mary Damayris" has been born!' Damaris said gleefully.

'And who is Mary Damayris?' asked a new voice behind them.

The girls sprang up, as Mary Devine came in by the garden door. She was Joy's secretary and friend, and her home was with Maidlin and the twins at the Hall, though at the moment she was staying at the Manor, where the little cousins had been ill. There was close friendship between her and Rachel, whose teacher she had been all the previous summer in shorthand and business methods; Mary had written several books for girls, which Rachel and Damaris had known and loved in their schooldays, before they had met Mary herself, and Rachel's admiration for her, both as a writer and a friend, was very great.

'Oh, Mary! I was afraid we weren't going to see you!' she cried.

'I am Mary Damayris!' Damaris raised her white skirts and sank in a low curtsy. 'The future ballerina, Miss Devine!'

Mary's eyes were eager. 'May I see? Maid told us by 'phone of your strange ideas; she says you're a new person, Damaris. We all want to see you dance.'

'Rosamund has given her a new name, for stage use,' Maidlin said. 'She's going to be Mary Damayris to her cheering public.'

'I like the name. It sounds like music and it's easy to say,' Mary agreed. 'I can't stay long; I just came to see the girls and to fetch some letters. But I want to see Damaris dance; may I?'

'Play that lovely nocturne, Ray,' Damaris said. 'Mary will like the dreamy things.'

Mary watched with amazed eyes as the white cloudy figure drifted through the dance. Her life had been restricted and in many ways starved of beauty until her coming to the Hall; she often felt she had only begun to live when friendship had transplanted her from her London typewriting office to the country loveliness of the Hall and had set free the writing gift that had been stifled.

'I never saw anything like that before!' She drew a long breath of delight as Damaris paused and curtsied again. 'It was beautiful—but I'm stunned! You took my breath away. I agree with everything Maid said on the 'phone, Damaris dear. I thought she had been a little excited about you, but she was right. She didn't say a word too much.'

'Put me in a book!' Damaris cried laughing. 'But wait till I've found that cheering crowd! Wait till Mary Damayris is really born!' and she began to dance again.

CHAPTER XVIII RACHEL'S SECRET

'So!' The head of the great Italian school of ballet sat at the piano and glared at Damaris. 'And how long has Mathilde Bonnet of Annecy had you in her hands?'

Damaris shrank under his gaze. 'I studied with Madame for seven months, Signor. Before that I had done nothing at all; nothing in earnest, you understand!' They were speaking in French, as Italian was still strange to the girls.

'For seven months Bonnet has had you? I must have you for a year. A year, or not at all.'

'Oh, Signor!' Damaris cried, and looked at Maidlin in despair. 'Six months, we thought. I'm not sure that a year will be possible.'

'Maestro, you think she is worth training?' Maidlin asked.

'She is worth it, or I would not take her. She has still much to learn, but I can give it to her. I am a pupil of the great Cecchetti, who has taught every one, from Karsavina herself. I know what this child needs. But I must have her for a year.'

'You shall have her for a year,' Maidlin said quietly.

'Oh, Maid! You angel!' Damaris exclaimed.

'And after that?' Maidlin looked at the great man. 'What will she do then, Maestro?'

'Then she will dance. She will join a company; Les Ballets Russes, or one of your London companies. They will take her; I say that they will take her!'—at an incredulous exclamation from Damaris. 'They will train her and she will dance, and in time she will be *soliste*. You understand, girl,' and he turned sharply on his new pupil, 'you will never have finished learning. After you dance in public you will still go on. When I have done with you there will be no more that a class or a teacher can give you; the stage will train you after that—experience—life! You must dance, and by your failures and difficulties you will grow. We here have much to give that you would not learn in France, and they have given you much that you would not find with us. We differ, but you need us both. When we can give you no more, then the stage itself is your school; we can but prepare you, so that you are ready to learn.' His stern face softened into a smile. 'You do not make the mistake of thinking that you will start as a great dancer, with success and triumph from the first, and with no need to trouble any more?'

'Oh, no, no! I'm not such a baby! I shall be content to have a very little place,' Damaris said earnestly. 'But ballet is so beautiful. I must be part of it, if I can, Maestro'—hastily adopting the title Maidlin had used.

'So!' he said again. 'A part of the ballet you shall be, if you work hard and obey me.'

'Oh, I will! I'll do my best, Maestro.'

'Good! Then we will start at once.'

'But, Maestro!' Damaris looked at him in wide-eyed dismay. 'We must go to Annecy in July. Not for long, perhaps, but we must go. M. Berthelot, who sent me to you, is to be married and we have promised to be there. It is owing to him that I am learning to dance; I was just a baby, knowing nothing, but he saw me dance—for amusement, you understand—and he said I must have training and took me to Madame Bonnet. I must go to his wedding!'

'So the good Berthelot will marry at last! Is the lady worthy of him?'

'She's a dear and they love one another very much.'

‘Then my friend Albert will be happy. Well then, you must go, but do not stay too long. One week—two! I will give you two weeks for Albert Berthelot’s wedding.’

‘Oh, thank you, Maestro! That is very kind!’

‘But we will start,’ he said briskly. ‘We cannot wait till August. You will come to me each day,’ and he turned to Maidlin to complete the arrangements.

Maidlin, writing to Rosamund that evening, was a little wistful, and Rosamund realized it as she read the letter.

‘It’s all settled,’ Maidlin wrote. ‘The great man is pleased and will teach Damaris, and in a year she’ll be ready to dance. It’s a wonderful chance and I’m glad she should have it; M. Berthelot’s introduction was the greatest help. But she’s changing, Ros! She’s different, and she’ll grow away from us now. I don’t want to lose her; I was so fond of my Marry of the fells and the farm.’

Rosamund’s reply was prompt and practical.

‘Maid, you dear silly, you sound sad about your Dammy-Marry! Don’t be a goose! Of course she’ll change. She’s done it already; she’s turned from the tom-boy you loved into a deeply sensitive artist. That side of her must have been stifled by the stern farmer aunts, and it was set free just in time. It’s a good thing Aunt Rachel went when she did, and you were able to take charge! Damaris is a born dancer and a real artist. She’ll do great things and you’ll be proud of her. As for growing away from you, she must do that, but she’s sure to grow into something nice, because she belongs to you! So why worry? Give the girls my love. I consider that Rachel’s being *the* perfect brick over this business.’

‘Oh, Ros dear, you are silly!’ Maidlin laughed, as she read one sentence near the end. ‘But you’re right about Rachel, so you may be right about Damaris too.’

With Maidlin taking regular singing lessons from her professor and Damaris absorbed by the dancing school, Rachel had time on her hands. She wandered about the city and went often to the cathedral, revelling in its magnificence, and there Maidlin found her one day and carried her off for a walk and an earnest talk.

‘I want you without Damaris for once! Rachel, I’ve been waiting for a chance to ask—what about you, in all this new development? Damaris seems to have her life planned out, if she succeeds as they expect. But you; are you satisfied?’

‘Surely, Maid, now that I know I’m not letting you down. That worried me badly during the spring.’

‘It was nice of you to think of me! Damaris comes first, of course. You aren’t letting me down, if you take care of her. It’s the thing I want you to do most of all. But still, what about you?’

Rachel looked puzzled. ‘How do you mean? I shall help Marry instead of you.’

‘Haven’t you any ambitions of your own? Are you willing to give up your life to one or the other of us?’

Rachel grew suddenly scarlet. ‘Maid, that’s my job. I’m prepared to work for somebody; I’ve been trained for it.’

‘As a start, yes. But what is it you really want to do? I can see there’s something.’

Rachel looked away from her. ‘Maid, don’t tease me! There’s no chance of it. I can’t let Marry down.’

Maidlin gazed at her thoughtfully. ‘Rachel, I’ve felt you were being generous in the way you put Damaris first, but are you being brave as well? Does it mean you must put aside some plan of your own?’

Rachel sat with downcast eyes and shook her head mutely.

Maidlin laid a hand on hers. 'Tell me, Rachel! I might be able to find some way. At least you'd know I was sympathizing, if I understood.'

'I never had any ideas, until you took me to the Hall, last spring,' Rachel said unsteadily. 'But when I met Mary Devine and she taught me shorthand, I asked questions and I heard about her books, and—and I've thought how marvellous it would be if I could do that too.'

'Write?' Maidlin's face lit up. 'Oh, Rachel! That would be thrilling!'

'Please don't tell Mary—or anybody! I know it's silly. Heaps of girls say they'd like to write, just as Marry was told all girls try to make dances. I don't suppose I could ever have done it. Now, of course, there won't be time.'

'But why not?' Maidlin asked gently. 'Rachel, it's a wonderful idea. I hope you'll try, and before very long. Why shouldn't you write, while you're looking after Damaris? There'll be hours every day when she's at rehearsal or classes; you'll have plenty of time!'

'Oh no! There will be too much to do for her. If we have to wander about, living in digs, I shall have heaps to do.'

'If what the maestro says is true, it won't be digs; it will be good hotels,' Maidlin said. 'He's certain that Damaris will be *soliste* before long; that's what he calls it. It will mean a good salary, even if it doesn't mean a fortune. You'd only have small personal things to do, like her mending and perhaps attending to letters for her. Rachel, you will have time for yourself.'

Rachel looked up, hope in her eyes. 'Really, Maid? Of course, hotels would be better than digs. I thought I'd need to cook and clean up for her.'

'And you were taking on all that without a single moment's grousing! Just quietly deciding to devote your whole life to being her attendant!'

'No, her mother in the background.' Rachel laughed unsteadily. 'That's what Marry calls it. I want to do it, Maid. I'll be proud to feel I'm making her career possible.'

'She couldn't bear it without you, that's certain! Rachel, I know we'll be proud of her some day; but I'm proud of you now,' Maidlin said earnestly.

'Maid, don't—please! Marry belongs to me. I must see her through.'

'Of course! You'll do it, and when the theatre audience calls for "Mary Damayris", you'll pat yourself on the back and say—"You couldn't have her without me!" I won't worry you, Rachel; but I am very proud of you both. And I hope you'll try to write. There's not the slightest reason why you shouldn't.'

'I'd put away the thought of it, Maid. I thought I might have a little time as your secretary, but not as Marry's deputy mother.'

'You'll have heaps of time. And you're so well fitted for it! Look how you're being prepared, with all this travelling, seeing countries and meeting people! Mary-Dorothy never had half your chances.'

'No, but she has the stories inside her!'

'Haven't you stories inside you too?'

'I don't know.' Rachel reddened. 'I haven't tried to bring them out yet, Maid.'

'I believe you have them hidden somewhere. You'll write wonderful books one day. I do feel bucked!' Maidlin exclaimed. 'You and Damaris are both going to do big things in the world!'

'It's a long way in the future, for both of us,' Rachel protested. 'But if I could sometime hold in my hands a book I'd written myself, and give one to you!'

‘It must be as wonderful a feeling as Damaris will have, when she knows the thrill of holding her first audience. There are two sorts of people who do artistic work.’ Maidlin was thinking aloud. ‘Take Joy and me! I only try to interpret other people’s music; I couldn’t make a song to save my life. But Joy writes songs all the time, and brings new things into the world. You’ll be like her—a creative artist. Damaris has bits of both in her; I suppose many people have. At present she must learn to interpret the great roles of ballet, and to translate music as the great dancers have done, but everyone says that she’ll end by creating new parts and perhaps even new dances and ballets. You’re alike, Rachel; you’ll be an artist, and create, in your own line.’

Rachel’s eyes were shining. ‘How I’d like to try! Maid, thank you for understanding!’

CHAPTER XIX

A HOME IN ITALY

On the advice of her Italian cousins, Maidlin had sought out an old woman who had once been a nurse in her father's family and had arranged that Rachel and Damaris should board with her, so to her house they went after their return from the wedding in Annecy.

Old Caterina looked them up and down. She was small and wizened, with a brown wrinkled face, and she dressed always in black, but wore a gaily-coloured handkerchief on her head.

'You, Signorina Maria, you are the dancer. And you, they say, are like the girl he married in England; my Paul, the father of our little Maddalena. Is it so?'

Damaris spoke in halting Italian. 'Signora, I believe it is true. I am said to be like Maidlin's mother.'

'We were told she was so beautiful. Eh well, perhaps——' and she scanned 'Maria's' laughing face and yellow curls speculatively.

Damaris laughed. 'My name isn't really Maria, but you can call me that. I dare say it's easier than Damaris! I was called Marie in France. I'll try to be beautiful some day, Signora.'

'Call me Caterina; it is better. Some day I shall see you dance?'

'Every day, I expect,' Damaris assured her. 'I shall have to practise for hours. Will you let me do my exercises in that little courtyard? I'll love to work in the open air. It's going to be jolly hot!'

'The small children will come to see. Will it be allowed? We all love the ballet.'

'I shan't mind! I like an audience!'

And Damaris soon found that she must practise before a group of brown-faced, black-eyed children, their numbers limited only by the size of the tiny garden, which was made smaller, but cooler, by a fountain splashing musically in the middle.

'Can you really make room for the piano Maidlin says we must hire, Caterina dear?' Rachel asked. 'It will fill up your house terribly, but at the school they say it is important for both of us. They were so pleased to find that Marry plays really well and they want her to go on; they say it will be a tremendous help to her. And I'm to play for her practice work sometimes; she'll be able to hear me out in the courtyard, with the window open. But isn't it a dreadful bother for you?'

'No, truly, she must have music. Our little Maddalena said she must have a piano,' Caterina agreed. 'We will make room.'

'I wish we were violinists! A fiddle's so much neater!' Rachel said laughing.

'Or a little silver pipe, like red Cecily's,' Damaris added. 'That's the neatest music I've ever seen.'

'Do you still hang on to that practice bar and balance on one toe and waggle your other leg?' Rachel asked one day, when Damaris came in from her lesson.

'My dear old silly!' Damaris rocked with laughter. 'I shall hang on to the bar and waggle my leg as long as I go on dancing. Even Pavlova used to do it every day, all her life.'

'Gosh! Do you never get past that?' Rachel cried, though she had been assured of this often already.

‘Never! Side-practice—the bar is side-practice—is always needed, until one gives up dancing. But I’m doing a lot in the centre too,’ Damaris added. ‘That’s advanced work, without the bar. They put me into the advanced class right away, but they criticize me a jolly lot. My technique isn’t nearly what it ought to be yet; I lost so many years, you see. The rest of the girls have been at it steadily since they were ten.’

‘Will you ever be able to make up for it?’ Rachel asked anxiously.

‘I’ll have a jolly good try! I’ve a feeling that Maestro and Madame—she teaches us a lot—don’t think those years at school were wasted, though they won’t say so. Now and then they make a remark about my good English education being useful. After all, I have matriculated! The other girls have spent hours every day at steps and positions.’

‘But for dancers that must matter more than matric,’ Rachel argued.

‘True, O Wise One! But a dancer can, and does, go on improving her technique all the time, long after she’s begun to dance in public. She doesn’t attend to her general education. The idea seems to be that—don’t laugh rudely!—I have a highly trained mind and can learn quickly, and that this may help me to make up for my lack of technique. I didn’t go entirely to pieces during those years at school! Gym and cricket and hockey and swimming all kept me loose and supple, and I practised steps and positions just for fun. I’d like to inform you that my *fouettés* and *pas de bourrée* are much admired, Rachel Ellerton, and my *entrechats* aren’t too bad.’

‘I’m glad to hear it,’ Rachel said laughing. ‘And I’m very glad you think you can catch up on the years you’ve lost.’

‘I mean to catch up! They say I’m original in my ideas and that will help. There’s something else too, but they don’t put it into words; something to do with how I respond to the music. They’re quite clear that they’ll let me begin to dance in earnest before my actual technique is perfect; I shall still have heaps of faults and I’ll need to go on correcting them all the time. But I’ll only find out what the faults are after I’ve begun to dance.’

‘*Begun to dance!*’

‘In public, dear,’ Damaris mocked. ‘Even a *soliste* has faults to correct. We don’t talk so lightly about being ballerinas as dear Papa used to do. That’s a very long way ahead. But we all keep a secret hope that one day we’ll be good enough to be *coryphée* or *soliste*.’

‘*Coryphée?* What’s that?’

‘Leader,’ Damaris told her. ‘Much more important than just a member of the *corps de ballet!*’

‘How do you get on with the Italian girls?’

Damaris said nothing for a moment. Her face had clouded and she stood gazing into the fountain.

Rachel glanced at her sharply. ‘What’s the matter. Marry? Aren’t they nice to you? Don’t they like your being English?’

‘It isn’t that. They aren’t all Italian; they come from all over the place. I didn’t mean to tell you, but—oh, Ray! The jealousy—the gossip—the things they say!’ Damaris burst out, revolt in her voice. ‘If somebody’s chosen for anything special, the rest gather in corners and mutter like little cats, and then somebody says something aloud, and she weeps, and it’s all spoilt. If you see me going like that, Ray, for goodness’ sake pull me up!’

‘I shall. Don’t you worry,’ Rachel said promptly. ‘If you show signs of cattiness you’ll find you have me to reckon with. I’m sorry, Marry; an atmosphere like that must be horrible to work in.’

‘It’s not all the time, of course; nor all the girls,’ Damaris admitted. ‘But if there’s anything special going to happen and people have to be chosen for leading roles, then it all flares up. We study the different ballets, and girls have to take the solo parts, and there’s always bad feeling over it. If the same sort of thing goes on in ballet companies—and I should think it will be worse—life won’t be exactly peaceful.’

‘I’m sure it will be worse. You’re only girls in class; wait till there’s money and fame concerned!’

‘Comforting, aren’t you?’ Damaris groaned. ‘But it’s true, and I’ll have to make up my mind to it. Ray, don’t let me go that way! I’d hate to develop into a cat!’

‘We’d all hate to have you a cat,’ Rachel said, with energy. ‘I shall lead you an awful life if I see any signs of it. Was it as bad at Annecy? You never said anything about it there.’

‘Nothing like. But we were so much younger. I was older than most of Madame Bonnet’s kids. Here we’re getting near the real thing, and we talk—or they talk!—about their débuts all the time.’

‘Don’t get drawn into it too much,’ Rachel advised. ‘Pretend you don’t understand. Be very English and rather dense and stand-offish and self-satisfied.’

‘Just what I’ve been trying not to be! I don’t want them to hate me. Something happened to-day; I didn’t mean to tell you, Ray, but you’d better know. There’s to be a Christmas show, and something was said about giving me a part—a solo part. I felt bad, because I’m so very new; but I felt tons worse afterwards, when I saw how the rest looked at me. Every single one of them thought she ought to have had the part, instead of an outsider from England. I went to Maestro and said I’d rather be understudy, if he would allow it, as I hadn’t been here very long yet. He said perhaps it would be wiser; I think he knew. I didn’t want to give it up altogether, for it means extra training in the part and that’s worth having.’

‘It was jolly sensible.’ Rachel looked at her thoughtfully, with slight surprise. ‘I’m glad you were so wise.’

‘But you’re a little startled?’ Damaris laughed ruefully.

‘It’s because you were so plucky. I can guess how you’d have liked the big part.’

‘I’d have loved it, of course,’ Damaris said, with regret in her tone. ‘But I could see how they’d all hate me.—I say, Ray! Do you think this was what Maid meant?’

‘Maid? What do you mean, Marry?’

‘When she said it was a hard life and spoke about disillusionment and breaking one’s heart, and all that. Do you think she knew that ballet people were difficult?’

‘I expect she guessed there would be jealousies and quarrels behind the scenes. I hadn’t thought of it,’ Rachel admitted, ‘but now that you’ve told me I see it was sure to be like that.’

‘Some people say it’s good,’ Damaris remarked. ‘There’s an old music mistress who says we work better when we’re jealous, because we try to outdo the others and so we do our best.’

‘That bit’s all right, if you can do it without trying to hurt the other people. To try to be best is what you have to do, isn’t it?’

‘Yes.’ Damaris squared her shoulders. ‘I’ll need to face it. It’s going to be a bit of my life, that’s evident. I must see my way through. I have to fight for my place, of course. I want the big parts, and I’m going to have them! But I’ll try not to trample on other people and break their hearts, and I’ll never be a cat to any girl, just because I’m disappointed and she’s been given the role I wanted. And I’ll do my very best not to let people break my heart, when they’re catty to me because I’ve succeeded. It isn’t going to be easy; perhaps it will take as

many years to find out the technique of it as it will take me to learn the technique of the dancing! But I'll do it. I'll find the way! I won't turn into a jealous cat!

'I'm sure you'll do it,' Rachel said fervently. 'Let me help, Marry! I can't help you in your dancing, but I think perhaps I can be of some use to you here. If you'll talk things over with me quietly and not brood about unpleasantnesses and unkindnesses, I'm sure they'll be easier to bear. It's a hard side to the life you've chosen and I'm sorry it's there, kid.'

'But since it obviously is there, I shall expect you to pull me through, Ray. I'm glad I've told you. I felt at first it would be brutal to drag you into it.'

'You can't keep me out,' Rachel said.

CHAPTER XX

MYSTERIOUS RACHEL

The winter and spring of hard work in Milan were punctuated by letters from home, bringing news of events and changes, till Rachel exclaimed: 'It will seem like going back to a new world!'

Joy Marchwood, the mother of the twins, was married during the autumn to Sir Ivor Quellyn, the musician, and the children rejoiced that at last they had a father. Their own had died before they were born, so, as Elizabeth said, he had not been of much use to them; they had envied their cousins at the Manor, who had a father and baby brothers and sisters, and they had taken Sir Ivor to their hearts from the moment of his first visit to the Hall.

Rosamund's engagement to her second cousin, the new Earl of Kentisbury, was announced, and Rachel and Damaris approved, and felt she would make an excellent Countess. In the spring came the news of her marriage, and a special message to Damaris that if she ever turned her back on 'le ballet' she would be welcomed at Kentisbury Castle and given a job among bees and hens.

Maidlin sang at a big London concert for Sir Ivor, her first public appearance at an important event, and was warmly greeted by the great audience. Invitations to sing were showered upon her, and she had to choose among them but refused to accept too many, as her home duties for Joy, her Camp Fire, and her village country-dancing claimed much of her time.

'Maid's made good,' Damaris said. 'She doesn't say much, but she's had a big success. It was jolly of Rosamund to send us the newspapers.'

'Maid would never have done it herself,' Rachel agreed. 'Rosamund thinks of everything. She'll be a splendid Countess; she's so capable.'

Then came news of the departure of Joy and Sir Ivor to New York, where he had to take charge of an orchestra, and Maidlin and the twins were left with Mary Devine at the Hall.

'Joy will be home again in the late autumn,' Maidlin wrote. 'But it seems a long while, and we're feeling terribly lonely! I wish June would come and you two would be home to cheer us up. You'll deserve a holiday after your hard work.'

At last they were on their way, travelling by Anncy to spend a few days with Madame Pernet at the café and to meet the niece who had come to help her when Annette left home. Damaris was interviewed and criticized by Madame Bonnet, and the girls went together to see Annette in her new house and to be shown a week-old Baby Berthelot.

'Papa's more bubbly than ever, over that boy,' Damaris said laughingly, when at last they were in the train for Paris.

'It's lovely to see them so happy about le petit Jean. Careers are thrilling, but Annette has found the best thing,' Rachel remarked.

'Oh, I don't think so! It's jolly, of course, but she'll do nothing all her life but wash Baby's undies and darn Papa's socks. Fearfully dull!'

Rachel laughed. 'Not if it's the right Papa and the most wonderful baby in the world. Don't be infantile, Marry! Careers don't last as long as a home and family.'

'Ray, you're different lately,' Damaris began, settling down beside her. 'Is it just being nearly grown-up? You're almost nineteen; odd to think I'm eighteen in two months!'

‘How am I different, silly?’ Rachel mocked, a touch of colour in her face.

‘Older; as if you were thinking a lot, about things you haven’t told me. Are you in love?’

‘No, idiot!’ Rachel laughed.

‘Well, what is it, then? What have you been doing while I’ve been at classes? You say, “Writing letters and doing shorthand; reading Italian and talking to people; wandering about Milan and going out into the country.” Is that the whole of it?’

‘Isn’t it enough for one person—plus practising and doing your darning?’

‘Your music’s better than mine; you’ve had more time. I’d have given it up, if you and Maestro hadn’t kept me at it. Is there anything you haven’t told me?—Ray, there is!’ Damaris cried. ‘You look frightfully guilty! What is it? Oh, Ray! How could you keep a secret from me? Didn’t you say we’d have no secrets?’

Rachel had grown scarlet. ‘Marry, do you remember that spring in Annecy, when we were uncomfortable because we were keeping a secret from Maid, and yet you wouldn’t tell her, for fear it would all be no good?’

Damaris shot an odd look at her. ‘Then there is something! Ray, what have you been doing? And I’ve been absorbed in the school, and I’ve never noticed! Have I been a ghastly selfish pig?’

‘You couldn’t be one. If anybody’s a pig, I am, for keeping things to myself. But you were so busy, and so buried in it all; I had to have something to think about,’ Rachel owned.

‘Tell me, Ray! If you don’t I’ll throttle you, here and now, and they’ll lock me up, and I shall never dance to the world. Not that it would matter very much!’

Rachel laughed. ‘Oh, I think it would be a great pity! Marry, Maid forgave us for keeping the secret; she knew how we had felt. I want you to be generous and understanding too.’

‘You aren’t going to tell me?’ Damaris asked, her face falling. ‘Oh, Ray, you brute! I can’t bear it! When will you tell me?’

Rachel flushed again. ‘Perhaps when we get to the Hall. I can’t say yet.’

‘Ray, you’re being positively abnormal!’ Damaris wailed. ‘How can you keep things to yourself? It’s not playing the game!’

‘I’m sorry, Marry.’ Rachel looked contrite. ‘I don’t suppose I shall ever want to keep a secret from you again. But just this once, and just until we reach home, do please be nice about it!’

Damaris shot a look at her. ‘You will tell me when we’re at the Hall?’

Rachel hesitated. ‘I’ll try. Honestly I’ll try to tell you.—Well, I’ll promise. I will tell you when we reach home. But it may be horribly difficult. If I don’t want to tell you I shall feel ghastly. But I’ll promise, Marry.’

‘I shall keep you to it.’ Damaris gave her another searching look. ‘I simply don’t understand! Do you mean that when we reach home you’ll know whether you want to tell me or not?’

‘That’s exactly what I do mean, Marry dear. Please don’t tease me any more!’

‘I can’t make you out!’ Damaris sighed. ‘How can going home make up your mind for you? Why can’t you tell me now?’

Rachel, scarlet again, shook her head and gazed out at the hills and woods of Burgundy. ‘Don’t, Marry!’

Damaris groaned. ‘Ray, how firm you look! I don’t think I can live till we reach home!’

‘Well, I’ll tell you one thing.’ Rachel relented suddenly. ‘I meant it to be a secret for a little longer, but just to console you, Marry, here’s something I’ve done while you’ve been at

the school. I found out who would be the best person to go to, and I've had a few lessons in massage. I told them exactly what I wanted—to help a dancer in the ballet, when she was very tired. They told me about muscles and things and where to find them, and I honestly do know what to do when you come home stiff and sore all over. I'll begin practising on you as soon as you like, but the time I've really learnt it for is when you've danced in public, and you come home too tired and thrilled to sleep. Then I shall take charge and massage you all over, and it will help you to calm down and rest.'

'Ray! What a marvellous idea,' Damaris said unsteadily. 'And how lovely of you to think of it! Fancy taking all that trouble for me! I *am* jolly lucky to have you! Can't I do anything for you, for a change?'

'Be nice and don't tease me about my poor little secret,' Rachel retorted. 'Don't you think I'll be proud, when your huge crowd is shouting for Mary Damayris, to say to myself, "It's all very well to clap, but in an hour or two I shall have her to myself, and I'll be rubbing her legs"? That will be my share in your triumph!'

'It's not only legs,' Damaris laughed ruefully. 'And I hope there will be a shouting crowd some day! I'll feel terrible if I disappoint you. Oh, Ray, you are jolly good to me!'

'Then be nice to me, when I ask you!'

'I won't tease you any more. But I'm fearfully curious!' Damaris sighed.

CHAPTER XXI

A CAREER FOR RACHEL

Mary Devine came out to the terrace at the sound of the car, and ran down the steps to welcome the girls.

'Now, Ray, we're home! Tell me!' Damaris shouted.

Rachel turned from her, almost fierce in her tense anxiety. 'Don't be in such a hurry!—Mary!'

'Rachel dear, I am so glad! Oh, Rachel, I like it! It's beautiful,' Mary said, and she drew Rachel to her and kissed her.

'Mary! Do you really mean it? You think it isn't too bad?' Rachel stammered. 'I've been feeling so awful, ever since I posted it!'

'I know,' Mary laughed in sympathy. 'I've been through it! I'd have wired to reassure you, but you said Damaris didn't know, and I was afraid a wire would set her asking questions.'

'I've had a shock!' Damaris proclaimed. 'I—coming home, trained and ready to start on my great career—am forgotten, of no consequence, on the shelf, in the background! Ray is received with congratulations! I demand to be told what it's all about!'

Rachel faced her, with laughing eyes full of relief. 'I've been so nervous of meeting Mary-Dorothy! Marry, forgive me, but I had to know if she approved. I wrote a little story, and sent it to her, just before we left Milan. If she likes it, some day I may do more.'

'More! Of course you'll do more. It's excellent——'

'Whoops!' Damaris shouted. 'Ray's an authoress! Ray's going to have a career too! She's started before I have! I feel a worm, but never mind! Ray will be rich and famous!' And she danced a hornpipe on the lawn.

'Don't be an ass, Marry!' Rachel cried. 'It's only a tiny thing, and it may never be published. I thought perhaps it was all wrong.'

'No, it's all right,' Mary said laughing. 'It's well put together; there are no dull moments; your characters are clear and your descriptions are good. If you'll type it out—I'm sure you'll want to do it yourself, or I'd offer to do it for you!—I'll tell you where to send it; there are weeklies that use a lot of stuff. I feel sure you'll place it somewhere. That's how I started, you know. But you'll go on to books. Short stories won't satisfy you.'

'I'd like to try a book some day,' Rachel admitted, colour in her cheeks. 'Oh, Mary-Dorothy! I am relieved!'

'You wouldn't believe how edge-y and irritable she's been, for the last hour; ever since we landed at Dover, in fact,' Damaris said.

'Oh, Marry, I wasn't! I'm sorry!'

'I'll forgive you when I've read the story. So that's what you've been doing on the quiet! I thought she was in love, Mary. I *am* bucked! It's far more thrilling than a man in the background!'

'You are a silly!' Rachel laughed. 'Mary, where is everybody? We're usually greeted by a rush of twins.'

Mary smiled. 'I believe the twins are up in a beech tree. Maid's Camp Fire is meeting in the wood behind the Abbey, and they've gone to watch.'

'May we go? I know the place. We could walk back with Maid.'

‘She’ll be pleased to see you. Leave everything with me.’

As the girls went down a narrow path, thick with brown spines from the beeches, Damaris slipped a hand through Rachel’s arm. ‘Ray, old girl, fooling apart, I am so frightfully glad. You’ve been such a thumping brick about me.’

Rachel gave her a radiant look. ‘Have you forgiven me for the secret?’

‘My hat, yes! I know how you felt. I say, Ray, you mustn’t waste time doing jobs for me any more. You’ll have your own work now.’

‘You are my work.’ Rachel’s tone was as firm as it had been in the train. ‘Writing is for odd moments, and to cheer me up when you have to leave me alone.’

‘No! That isn’t fair!’

‘Here’s the meeting,’ Rachel warned her. ‘Isn’t it pretty? I love to see the Camp Fire in the woods!’

A glade among the beeches was filled with girls in yellow gowns, grouped round a fire of logs. The twins, in green frocks, were perched on a low branch to watch the proceedings.

As Rachel and Damaris approached, the last notes of a chanted song died away. Each girl made a farewell sign, raising her right arm and pointing upwards, and Maidlin, facing them, responded with the same gesture. Then they filed away in a silent line, by a path that led to a summer-house, where they would change into outdoor clothing.

The last to go was Cecily, her red hair hanging in its long plaits once more. Maidlin’s hand on her arm stopped her.

‘Stay with us, Gratitude. We’ll go back to the house together.—Well, Rachel! Dear, I am so glad! You have been quick in making a start!’

‘Mary told you?’ Rachel coloured. ‘It was because you encouraged me, Maid. I had to justify your faith in me.’

‘Mary couldn’t keep it to herself. If she had tried I should have known. But we didn’t tell any one else; Gratitude doesn’t know what we’re talking about.’

‘Gratitude wants to know, very badly,’ Cecily said.

Rachel smiled at her. ‘I’ll tell you later. We’re so glad to see you again.’

‘Cecily is staying with us for a while, to help Mary when I want to go to stay with Rosamund,’ Maidlin explained. ‘With her books and all her work for Joy, Mary can’t be asked to look after the twins and give them their lessons all by herself. Cecily and I teach them French and music, but she’s quite able to do it without me, and Ros will want me at Kentisbury sometimes.’

Damaris had been helping the twins down from their branch. She turned to Maidlin with laughing eyes.

‘Ray has put me quite out of the picture! It’s been a heavy blow. But some day I’ll have my turn! Wait till my first audience raises the roof, shouting for Mary Damayris!’

‘I hope I shall be there,’ Maidlin said. ‘I’ll shout most loudly of all. You’ve grown, Damaris, my dear.’

‘Not much, I hope. They’ve been watching me anxiously in Italy, for fear I’d be too tall, but they think I’ll just escape.’

‘Is there a height limit for dancers?’ Cecily asked, a smile lighting up her grave face.

‘Oh, rather! They won’t have you if you’re a giantess.’

‘You won’t be that,’ Maidlin said laughingly. ‘What was the Maestro’s last word to you?’

‘To go and dance in the *corps de ballet* and find out just what a lot I still have to learn. Cheering, wasn’t it?’ Damaris grinned.

‘Oh, good! He really thinks you’re ready to start?’

‘He said so. I don’t feel like it myself.’

‘I *am* bucked about you both!’ Maidlin said warmly. ‘But you must have a holiday before you do anything, Damaris dear. In the meantime, I’m sure you’re famished. We’ll send these children to bed, and we’ll change and have dinner.’

‘Glad you’ve come home, Aunty Dam!’ Margaret skipped up to her. ‘When will you dance for us?’

‘Not till you learn my real name,’ Damaris retorted. ‘Aunty Dam doesn’t dance for anybody.’

‘Aunty Dam and Aunty Ray. We like to call you Aunty Dam,’ Elizabeth urged.

‘Then it’s time you went to bed,’ Rachel informed her, and gave a hand to each and ran with them through the wood.

‘Now, Ray! Show me my nephew!’ Damaris demanded, as they changed their travelling suits.

‘Nephew?’ Rachel reddened and laughed.

‘Or is it a niece? Your first child—your petit Jean! You’re quite as clever as Annette, and you haven’t the fag of a husband.’

‘Marry, don’t be absurd!’ Rachel protested.

‘No wonder you stood up for romance against careers! That’s part of your job. You’re going in for a career yourself, all the same. Hand it over! If it’s a tremendous length I shall be late for dinner, and I’m famished. But I’m hungry to see your infant.’

Rachel, scarlet, handed her the envelope which Mary had returned. ‘I told you, it’s very short; not worth making a fuss about.’

Damaris dropped on the window-seat, in a state of undress. ‘This is a thrill! Ray’s first baby!—You may unpack, Authoress.’

‘I intend to.’ Rachel turned away and tried to keep her eyes from wandering to Marry’s face.

She fled to the bathroom at last, too nervous to wait for the comments at the end.

When she returned Damaris had put down the papers and was gazing out at the garden.

Rachel began to brush her hair, conscious that her heart was thumping.

Damaris rose at last and came to her. ‘Ray, dear, thank you for that lovely little yarn. It did me good.’

‘Oh, Marry!’ Rachel caught her breath. ‘You did like it? I’ve been so frightened!’

‘You old idiot! Don’t you know how good it is? And to think I never guessed! Ray, I’m proud to know you!’

‘Who’s, the idiot now?’ Rachel laughed unsteadily. ‘You’re prejudiced; you can’t judge whether it’s good.’

‘On the contrary, I’m very critical. And Mary knows what’s good, and she liked it. Ray, you’ll do some more?’

‘Perhaps. I had to know if this one was any use.’

‘Do a lot more and collect them into a book! You could bag my stage name, and call yourself Rachel Damayris!’

‘That’s a marvellous idea!’ Rachel cried, laughing. ‘It would advertise us both. In the meantime, Marry, you’d better put on a frock.’

‘I am proud!’ Damaris said again, and pulled Rachel to her and kissed her.



'I am proud!' Damaris said again

CHAPTER XXII

MAIDLIN SINGS

‘What do you do now, Damaris?’ Maidlin asked, as they sat talking on the terrace in the long June twilight. Mary had excused herself after dinner and had gone up to her brown and gold study, and Rachel had understood the impulse that drew her back to the book on which she was at work; but it was late now and she had come out to join them, bringing coats for each to slip on.

Damaris looked up eagerly. ‘Such a bit of luck, Maid! I’ve had so many bits of luck that I begin to wonder if there’s something behind it; a guardian angel taking charge, perhaps! Think of the luck of meeting Papa Berthelot as soon as we went to Annecy! I might have wasted years before I turned to dancing in earnest, and then it would have been too late. Oh, Maid! Papa has a brother, M. Jean Berthelot, who works in London with people who produce plays; an agent, you know! He’s given me a letter of introduction, and he’ll write himself as well. He may forget, because he’s so wildly excited about le petit Jean—off his head with joy! But he’ll remember presently.’

‘That ought to be a great help. You’ll go to see him, I suppose?’

‘I shall ask for an appointment—an audition. He’ll see me dance, and he’ll tell me what to do.’

Maidlin nodded. ‘But you must have a holiday first.’

‘Just coming home is holiday enough. And we had a week in Annecy. I want to feel I’ve started.’

‘How about you, Maid?’ Rachel asked. ‘You’ve told us nothing about your singing since that first big concert.’

‘We’ve had other things to think about, with marrying Rosamund and seeing Joy off to America.’

Mary laughed. ‘Maid’s too modest. She sang at the Festival Hall last week, and had another big success. I’ve kept the crits. for you; she wouldn’t let me send them, as you were on your way home. And to-morrow night’—she paused and looked at Maidlin.

‘Another concert?’ Damaris cried. ‘We’ll come! I’d love to be part of your shouting crowd!’

‘There’s no crowd this time.’ Maidlin flushed. ‘It’s only the B.B.C.’

‘A recital? All on your own?’ Rachel exclaimed.

‘What a thumping great honour!’ Damaris shouted. ‘You have jumped to the top of the tree!’

‘I’m to give half an hour’s recital. I’m a little frightened,’ Maidlin confessed. ‘I’d rather not talk about it.’

‘You needn’t be nervous,’ Cecily said quietly.

‘Frightened of what?’ Damaris demanded. ‘If you’ve sung in the Festival Hall, what is there to be scared about?’

‘The microphone and the empty studio, Damaris dear. I’ve never done it before.’

‘That’s enough to make it frightening to Maid,’ Mary remarked. ‘But even if it’s an ordeal, it will be a great occasion. Joy is going to listen, in New York.’

‘Seems odd, doesn’t it?’ Damaris said reflectively.

‘I can’t believe she’ll hear me,’ Maidlin admitted.

‘She’ll send her criticisms in her next letter. Then you’ll believe it,’ Rachel suggested.

‘Ivor will criticize,’ Maidlin laughed. ‘He always tells me what I ought to have done.’

‘And your other bit of news, Guardian,’ Cecily urged.

‘Oh! I’m to sing at one of the Promenade Concerts in August.’ Maidlin tried to speak naturally, but there was a quiver of excitement in her voice.

‘The Proms? The Albert Hall? Oh, cheers!’ Damaris cried.

‘Oh, Maid dear, you’ve arrived! I *am* so glad!’ Rachel said eagerly.

‘Keeps you busy,’ Damaris added, in a more casual tone, but showing her pride in her voice.

‘I’m looking forward to the concert,’ Maidlin owned. ‘I’m nervous beforehand, of course, but I enjoy it when the time comes. Ivor wants me to sing in New York. Some day the children and I will go back with them, I expect.’

Maidlin was restless all next day, obviously burdened by the evening’s ordeal. Damaris, amused, drove her to Kentisbury Castle to see Rosamund in her new home, to keep her from brooding.

‘Fancy Maid being so nervous, after what she’s done already!’ she said to Rachel.

‘Be thankful you don’t know the meaning of the word,’ Rachel retorted.

‘Oh, but I can’t be sure! I haven’t done anything really big yet. I shall be very nervous if M. Jean Berthelot grants me an audition.’

Late in the evening the big door of the Hall opened and Maidlin came quietly in. The girls sprang up to greet her, and Mary put down her writing-pad and smiled her welcome.

‘Oh, Maid! Glorious!’ Damaris cried. ‘I loved your Italian songs!’

‘Maid, it was wonderful!’ Rachel exclaimed. ‘I could have cried over “O Rest in the Lord”! You should go in for oratorio singing!’

‘People are telling me that.’ Maidlin looked at them anxiously. ‘Was it all right?’

‘You are Nawadaha, the Sweet Singer, to-night.’ Cecily used Maidlin’s Camp Fire name, as she lifted the cloak from her shoulders. ‘Come and rest, Guardian! You gave us, and half the world, a marvellous treat.’

‘I rested in the car. I was glad none of you came with me.’ Maidlin dropped into a chair. ‘Frost doesn’t talk. I was far too limp to speak to anybody.’

‘We’d have liked to come, but you begged so hard to be left alone,’ Rachel said. ‘Was it as bad as you expected?’

‘Until I’d started. Joy’s little song gave me courage.’

‘It was beautiful, Maid. You always sing Joy’s songs with so much feeling,’ Mary said, arranging a table beside Maidlin for her meal.

‘I wanted one in the programme, to make me feel she was there with me. Ivor helped me to choose, before they left home.’

‘We nearly burst with pride,’ Cecily said. ‘Mary Damayris couldn’t sit still.’

‘I danced to that Italian thing with several verses, Maid. I just couldn’t help it.’

‘You must sing it again and watch her dance,’ Mary said. ‘You must be starving, Maid.’

‘I had sandwiches and coffee at Broadcasting House. Everybody was very kind, but I wanted to get away. It had worked me up terribly and I had to be alone and quiet.’

‘You did awfully well!’ Rachel exclaimed. ‘You’ll realize that when you’ve rested. I’m so glad we came home in time for to-night!’

'If you hadn't been coming I'd have let you know, so that you could listen from France or Italy.' Mary Devine smiled at her.

'Brick! I'm sure you would.'

The telephone rang and Damaris sprang to answer it. 'Rosamund, from Kentisbury, Maid. —Don't come; I said you were having something to eat. She wanted to know if you were safely home, and she sends her love and very warm congratulations. She enjoyed every minute of it. She'll talk to you in the morning.'

'How nice of her to ring up at once,' Maidlin said gratefully.

'Maid, would you like something new to think about? Or would you rather not be bothered with my affairs to-night?' Damaris asked, a touch of apology in her voice.

Maidlin looked up quickly. 'Oh, please tell me! Has anything happened?'

'A friendly letter from M. Jean Berthelot, asking me to go to see him on Monday morning. Dear Papa must have written, as he promised; there hasn't been time for an answer to my letter. He'll only have it to-morrow.'

'Oh, Damaris! I am glad!' Maidlin forgot the trial of the evening and her face lit up in delight.

'I'll be the frightened one on Monday!' Damaris groaned. 'You'll come with me and hold my hand, won't you?'

'Oh, nonsense! You're never nervous!'

'I want you and Ray to come,' Damaris said earnestly. 'You must watch his face and tell me what he really thinks. Couldn't Gratitude come too? He'll want me to dance, and I'd like her to play for me. Do you mind, Ray?'

'I'll be only too glad,' Rachel assured her. 'I should be afraid of spoiling things; I shall be nervous, whether you are or not!'

'Maid can say she's my guardian, and Cecily's my music and we'll say you're my mother.'

'He won't believe that,' Rachel said laughing.

'I shall be on edge till Monday comes,' Damaris groaned. 'I hate periods of waiting! If I'm too bad for words you'll tell me off, won't you?'

'You mustn't be temperamental,' Cecily warned her. 'If Rachel finds you difficult to live with she'll be worried about the future.'

Damaris looked grave. 'Ray has a future too. I must think of hers! If I'm a little beast she won't be able to write any more immortal works. I'll try to control my fears, for her sake.'

'Oh, Marry, what tosh! Don't be an ass!' Rachel cried laughing.

The morning brought a cablegram of congratulation to Maidlin from New York. '*Well done, Maid: Thank you. Joy.*'

She sat drinking her early cup of tea and gazing at the message, her hair hanging in its long plaits so that she looked still a schoolgirl. 'Isn't it wonderful, Mary? Joy and Ivor heard me sing!'

'But you knew they would!' Mary had brought the cablegram with her letters.

'I didn't quite believe it. And now Joy has spoken to me from New York! It makes it seem so much more worth while. I always feel I'm singing for her.'

CHAPTER XXIII THE VERDICT

M. Jean Berthelot was a smaller edition of his brother, as round and chubby and friendly, but with a keen critical eye. He looked his astonishment when his room was invaded by four girls instead of one, but checked any explanation by a swift gesture.

‘No, do not tell me. I will guess.’ And his eyes swept over the four.

First Cecily. His eyes lingered wistfully on her tall figure and flaming red hair, hardly covered by her green cap. But no; she was not his dancer. She had a fiddle; she was merely the music. Pity! She would look well on the stage.

Rachel? Oh, no! A sister of the dancer, perhaps; Albert’s letter had spoken of a sister. Her anxiety was not for herself. She was troubled, but it was for somebody else. His eyes hardly rested on her.

The little yellow-haired one; very young, not too tall. Ah, yes! This was the dancer; her eager sensitive face and the appeal in the big dark eyes left no doubt of it. Well, she would do, so far as looks went; oh yes, she would do very well indeed—if she could dance. She was very attractive. She would be a success—if she could dance at all.

He glanced at the fourth girl; the very dark, small person in the background—a guardian, perhaps.

Then, with an exclamation, he sprang towards her.

‘Miss di Ravarati! What an unexpected joy! But I do not understand! Why are we so honoured?’

‘Gosh! I’d forgotten Maid was a celebrity!’ Damaris cried.

M. Berthelot broke into a kindly laugh. ‘Some day, my child, perhaps you, too, will be known to everybody. You are my dancer; I have seen that. But, Miss di Ravarati——?’

‘The girls are my cousins, Monsieur, and in a way my wards.’ Maidlin had coloured at his recognition.

‘So! A large and elderly guardian for two very small children!’ His laugh rang out again.

‘She’s been a marvellous guardian to us,’ Damaris cried, her shyness gone. ‘Maid gets her own way, although she’s not very big. You don’t know her, if you’ve only seen her on a platform!’

‘Damaris!’ Maidlin exclaimed.

‘I have heard her sing in the Festival Hall and three nights ago. I wept for “He Shall Feed His flock” and “O rest in the Lord”! Mademoiselle, I am enchanted and proud to see you here. I shall watch your little ward—or shall I say your big ward?—with great interest.’

‘I hope you will, Monsieur,’ Maidlin said sedately. ‘We believe she has a future before her.’

‘This is going to be a jolly good thing for Marry,’ Rachel said to herself. ‘Fancy our not remembering what an important person Maid is!’

‘What a splendid introduction for Mary Damayris!’ Cecily thought, as she took out her violin. ‘She’s going to be taken seriously, for Maidlin’s sake. And none of us realized it!’

‘Now, my dear!’ M. Berthelot turned back to Damaris. ‘First tell me, how old are you?’

‘Eighteen at the end of August, Monsieur.’

‘This is June—good! Now you will dance for me.’ He placed chairs for Maidlin and Rachel.

Rachel helped Damaris out of her coat, with care for the white frock, and drew her seat close to Maidlin’s before sitting down.

The little Frenchman smiled at her. ‘You are her sister? Do not be frightened. She is pretty and full of life, and I have heard from my brother of her good training. She will do well.’

‘Thank you very much!’ Rachel said fervently, and clasped the hand Maidlin held out to her.

M. Berthelot smiled again and turned away from the sight of her anxiety.

‘Now, my little one, let us see! What will you dance for me?’ Cecily played a few notes, and Damaris nodded.

M. Berthelot turned and looked at the violinist, as if the music had given him food for thought. Then he turned again and watched Damaris as she danced.

‘It’s all right, Rachel. He’s pleased.’ It was scarcely a whisper from Maidlin; just a movement of the lips.

Rachel’s eyes never left the great man’s face. ‘Yes, I think so. I’m not so frightened now.’

‘Come here, my child! Who taught you that?’

Damaris stood like a schoolgirl, her hands clasped loosely before her. ‘Did you like it?’

‘It was good, my dear. A great many people will like it. I must see more, but I will say at once—do not be afraid. You have a great gift, and we will help you to use it.’

‘Oh!’ Damaris threw up her head in triumph, tossing back her curls. ‘Ray! Maid! Did you hear? Cecily, thank you! The music was lovely!’

M. Berthelot glanced at Cecily. ‘Yes, Mademoiselle, it was played magnificently. I have rarely heard better for dancing. You are full of music and of sympathy for the dancer. What do you do? Surely not sit at home, play tennis, pay foolish calls, and gossip? Will you let me find you engagements, to play for my singers and dancers?’

‘Oh, how lovely of you!’ Damaris cried. ‘If I could make Cecily’s fortune I should be awfully bucked!’

Cecily looked at Maidlin, her face flushed. ‘Thank you very much, Monsieur, but I have work to do at home. Not those things you scorn so much; I am really needed. Later, I may be able to come, and then I shall be grateful for your help.’

M. Berthelot saw her look. ‘Surely Miss di Ravarati is not your guardian also?’

‘In one way I am,’ Maidlin said laughing. ‘Monsieur, if you will help Cecily later we shall be glad.’

‘Do not go to anybody else, Miss——?’

‘Perowne. Cecily Ruth Perowne, Monsieur.’

‘Come to me. I will find you all the work you want.’

‘Oh, marvellous!’ Damaris cried. ‘We never thought of that happening! Oh, I am so glad!’

M. Berthelot turned to her again. ‘Now, my child! You did not answer me. Who taught you that dance?’

‘I made it. I never heard it till last week. It’s a thing Maid and Cecily are fond of.’

‘You made it? A child like you? My brother said you had made dances, but I thought nothing of it. Am I to believe this?’

‘Oh, it’s true!’ Maidlin said quickly. ‘I was there when she first heard the music, and I could see she didn’t know it. She turns all our music into dances.’

M. Berthelot stared at Damaris, as if seeing her for the first time. 'But how did she know? She is just a child!'

'It's all in the music,' Damaris argued.

'It's a good thing Maidlin's here,' Rachel said to herself. 'He wouldn't have believed Marry.'

'Bien!' M. Berthelot agreed. 'But the music would not say so much to everybody. You are sympathetic—an artist; you respond in the right way. Now show me something you were taught in France or Italy.'

'Yes, it is excellent,' he said presently. 'It is more finished than your own dance; one can see you have been well trained. But your own dance is better, all the same. Show me another that you have made yourself, ma petite.'

Rachel's tension relaxed, and she watched the absorbed faces of the rest. Maidlin could not take her eyes off Damaris, who, freed from anxiety at last, was enjoying herself and was entirely happy.

'Good! We must not tire our little lady,' M. Berthelot said at last. 'Come here and rest, my child. Miss Perowne, I thank you for your music. You need never look for work, if you will come to me.'

Cecily thanked him, deep colour in her face. She laid the fiddle on the piano and sat down to listen.

'My dear!' He turned to Damaris. 'You will be one of our great dancers, if you work and—this is important!—if you keep yourself good and true and simple, as you are now. Your dancing is sincere as well as beautiful; you must keep it so. There will be much temptation to become artificial, to use movements for effect and not because the music demands them. You must be careful. Your charm lies partly in your freshness and simplicity; if that goes, I cannot say. You may develop, and find a new gift, and then you will become very great; I hope it will be so with you. There is much for you still to learn, you understand.'

'Oh, I know! But if I could try, Monsieur——!'

'Yes, we will arrange that for you,' he said briskly. 'You will dance in the ballet and it will teach you much. Will you be guided by me, my child?'

'To be sure, Monsieur. You've been so very kind.'

'I shall send you to Georges Antoine. You know him?'

'The producer who worked with Diaghileff? I've heard of him,' Damaris exclaimed, round-eyed.

'He has a new ballet, he and Tatiana Roskova. You know of Madame Roskova also?'

'The Roskova? But I thought she was dead, years ago! I've read about her, of course.'

'She did not die; she married. So far as her dancing was concerned, it was the same thing. But now she is a widow and she has no children, so she has come back to her art; not to dance, naturally, but to teach and to produce new ballets. She is with Antoine and they are at this moment choosing their dancers. I shall send you to them. Antoine will use you in his *corps de ballet*; it will be good experience.'

'Oh, Monsieur! Will he really give me a chance?' Damaris looked at Rachel and then at Maidlin, her face alight.

'My hope for you is that Roskova will see you herself. If she is pleased she may be willing to take you as a pupil. But it is not a thing one can suggest to her. You must go to someone, for criticism and practice; you understand that?'

'Oh yes!' Damaris cried. 'I know everybody has to do it.'

‘Bon! You will not be proud and grow lazy. I shall write to Antoine; you will hear from him. My brother tells me to ask your name. What does he mean by that?’

Damaris laughed. ‘Monsieur, in my letter to you I gave my name as Mary D. Ellerton, because M. Berthelot in Annecy always calls me Marie. But every one says I must have a stage name. Is that right?’

‘What would you choose, my dear?’

‘D stands for Damaris, Monsieur.’

‘A pretty name, and one that suits you, petite.’

‘Yes, but it’s my home name, and these dear people want me to keep it for them. So I thought I’d be Mary Damayris.’

He looked at her, a twinkle in his eyes. ‘Damayris—Damaris! It is good! Mary Damayris you shall be. It is almost your own name, but not quite. You will be called “the little Damayris”. My brother liked your *nom de guerre*?’

‘He laughed, but he said it would do.’

‘Yes, it will do. I will introduce you to Antoine, and to the world, as Damayris. My good wishes will be with you, my dear. In time you will take London by storm; but you must not lose your head and you must remain yourself. Stay with your family as much as you can. They will help to keep you as you should be.’

‘Congratulations, Damaris dear!’ Maidlin exclaimed, when M. Berthelot had bowed them out.

‘Congrats, Mary Damayris!’ Cecily added.

Rachel said nothing, but her look was more expressive than words.

‘I nearly died, when he forgot me and went plunging at you, Maid!’ Damaris laughed, as they sat over lunch. ‘I do apologize! We simply hadn’t realized your fame.’

‘It was all the help in the world,’ Rachel said.

‘Did you know what would happen?’ Cecily looked at Maidlin. ‘You should have warned us!’

‘I never thought about it. Damaris was the only one who mattered. But, of course, there have been photos.’

‘I’ve seen them—lovely! All bare neck and chiffon and roses!’ Damaris agreed. ‘Well, Maid, you’ve made our fortunes to-day. Gratitude is fairly launched too.’

‘Yes, I’m more glad about that than I can say.’ Maidlin had coloured at the remarks, and now changed the subject gladly.

‘To begin in an Antoine ballet is a splendid start, Damaris! They have a good name. I’m so glad!’ she said.

‘Perhaps they won’t take me, when they’ve seen me,’ Damaris said gloomily.

‘Don’t worry! Dance as you did to-day and you’ll be all right,’ Cecily assured her.

The afternoon post on the following day brought a letter which Mary Devine handed to Damaris with a smile.

‘The first time we’ve seen that address!’

‘“Miss M. Damayris”! It’s from M. Antoine!’ Damaris gave a shout. ‘The darling, to write at once!’

‘Doesn’t it look well on an envelope?’ Cecily was not anxious about the letter, whose contents she considered a foregone conclusion. ‘It’s a jolly good name.’

Rachel was waiting nervously, but a second shout from Damaris relieved her anxiety. ‘He’ll see me next week—on Wednesday! Oh, the angel! They’re starting rehearsals; he’ll see

if they can use me. On M. Jean Berthelot's recommendation he's "dispensing with the usual preliminary audition". Oh, how marvellous!

'Don't go up in the air too wildly,' Rachel warned her. 'It's a wonderful chance, but he doesn't promise anything. They may not use you, after all.'

'No, that's true. Help me to keep my head, Ray! I need you to balance me.'

'Wednesday of next week?' Maidlin said. 'Then will you do something to please me? Take the car—we'll borrow the small Rover again—and go off to Crossrigs for a week's holiday. Mrs. Green, next door to the farm, will put you up. As it's midsummer, it will be light till almost ten in Cumberland, so if you'd like to do the journey in one day I won't object, and you can have almost a week on the fells. There are two of you to share the driving, and you can start from here at six.'

'Whoops!' Damaris shouted. 'It will help me to bear the week of waiting! Oh, Maid, you jewel! What a marvellous plan!'

'I'd love it more than anything!' Rachel's face had lit up in delight.

Next morning they went off for a week of freedom, drinking in the cool air of the fells, climbing Helvellyn and crossing the wet moors from Thirlmere to Watendlath and down to Derwent-water; and, using the car, made a much-longed-for trip to the High Street range, at which they had often gazed from Hikers' Halt.

Rachel rigidly banned all talk of the future, and Damaris acquiesced and threw herself into the enjoyment of the moment. But in bed, on the last night, she crept close to Rachel.

'Ray, the day after to-morrow it's all to start; my career, and the new life. It's so big and thrilling! Sometimes I wish I could live here on the fells, with you.'

Rachel's arm went round her. 'But you're looking forward to it, Marry?'

'Oh, rather! I want to do it. But it's come so quickly; it's a wee bit frightening. You'll stand by me, Ray? When I'm really frightened I always think of you.'

'Marry! Do you mean that, kid?'

'I feel you're a strong sort of rock, and I'm just a birch tree, like those we saw by Rydal to-day, waving about in the storms. Then I remember I can hang on hard to my rock—that's you!—and I feel better.'

Rachel's arm tightened round her and she spoke unsteadily. 'Marry, I'll never let you down. I'll be your rock, if you'll let me. Will you promise me one thing?'

'Anything in the world, Ray, if you'll stand by me!'

'I can't stand by you unless you promise. I wouldn't throw you over, if you broke your word; but I wouldn't be able to help you as I want to do.'

'What *do* you want me to say, Ray?' Damaris asked in astonishment.

'That you'll still sleep with me, always; or if you're too tired and want your own room, that you'll always talk to me before you go to bed.'

'Oh! I see! You mean I'm never to do anything that I can't tell you at night?'

'That's exactly what I do mean, Marry dear.'

'I'll promise,' Damaris whispered. 'You are wise! You'll be a real rock for me to cling to.'

'Then that's settled. Now go to sleep!'

'Neither of us could have said a word of all this, except in bed. We're definitely not sentimental!' Damaris murmured with a chuckle.

'This isn't sentimental; it's severely practical. I can't let you have secrets from me.'

'You'll take care of me beautifully.' Damaris crept more closely into her arms and fell asleep.

Rachel lay awake, deeply touched. 'Poor little birch tree! I will take care of her, in the queer country she's going into! She'll meet strange people, and they'll try to influence her and perhaps she'll grow away from us. I feel like her mother; she's such a babe sometimes,' and her arms tightened round Damaris, who sighed and slept more deeply, while Rachel prayed that if changes came they might be for the better and that she might still keep her sister.

They arrived at the Hall at dusk the following evening, looking brown and well, invigorated by those days on the fells.

'Ready for anything now, Maid dear!' Damaris assured her.

'I've one thing to ask you children,' Maidlin said, as they sat resting after dinner. 'If M. Antoine can use Damaris, where do you intend to sleep?'

Damaris looked at her in wide-eyed dismay. 'I never thought about it! We'll have to find digs in London. We couldn't come out here every night.'

'Mary-Dorothy knows people in London,' Rachel said. 'Couldn't she help us to find rooms, or a hostel? I'd thought of it, Maid, but I wanted to ask your advice. Marry won't worry, so long as she has a bed and something to eat.'

'I've been talking to Rosamund and she has a plan for you. I want you to agree.'

'Is it something we won't like?' Damaris demanded.

'Are you speaking as a guardian, Maid?'

Rachel asked. 'In a way, perhaps I am. I can't bear the thought of you two in rooms alone; not yet. Rosamund reminded me of Kentisbury House, their huge place in town, which is only used when she and Geoffrey want a few days in London. There are some servants there with a housekeeper, to keep things in order, and Ros suggests that you should board with Mrs. Bloom, who is kindness itself. She'd feed you and look after you.'

'In the servants' quarters, I hope?'

Damaris asked in alarm. 'Not in the family's ancestral halls? They'd be far too palatial to be comfortable!'

'That's the idea. You wouldn't want the front rooms.'

'May I practise in front of one of the big mirrors? There are sure to be some in the posh rooms; I won't touch anything else,' Damaris pleaded. 'I'd like to have mirrors all round me, so that I can see what I'm doing.'

'Rosamund won't mind that. And she'll lend you a gramophone, if it would help you.'

'It's a marvellous plan!' Rachel exclaimed. 'It's more than kind of Rosamund.'

'I *am* relieved!' Maidlin said laughing. 'I was afraid you'd want to insist on being independent and living alone in digs.'

'We'll do that later on. When Marry goes on tour we shall have enough of rooms and hotels.'

'Wise girl!' Maidlin approved. 'Then we'll tell Ros that's settled, and I shall feel happy about you.'

'I'll write to thank Rosamund,' Rachel said. 'A 'phone message isn't enough. She's been so terribly kind.'

'But you'll come back to-morrow night, to tell us all about it?'

Maidlin begged. 'You can call on Mrs. Bloom and arrange things, but we want to hear about M. Antoine properly—not by 'phone or letter.'

'Oh, sure! We shall want to talk,' Damaris agreed. 'If he's kicked me out I shall come crawling back to sob at your feet.'

'Yes, do,' Maidlin said. 'I'll expect you—if he does. But he won't, Damaris, and you know it.'

'I'm hoping it won't happen as quickly as that,' Damaris laughed.

CHAPTER XXIV THE STORY OF THE GOOSE-GIRL

‘All right, Maid! He’ll have me. I’m a member of the *corps de ballet* for the new Antoine production, *The Goose-Girl*. I’m a village maiden in the first act and a beautiful slave in the second.’ Damaris ran up the steps to the terrace, where Maidlin sat waiting for them.

‘Sorry we’re so late, Maid,’ Rachel added, following her. ‘But Marry was kept at the theatre, and then we went to see Mrs. Bloom.’

‘Bloomy’s an old dear.’ Damaris took up the story. ‘The Countess had ’phoned and she was expecting us. Everything’s planned beautifully. It will be much better than pigging in rooms.’

‘Much more comfortable, I’m sure,’ Maidlin laughed. ‘Congratulations, Damaris! We want to hear all about M. Antoine, as soon as you’ve had something to eat.’

‘And about the new play.’ Cecily appeared in the doorway. ‘Can you tell us the story yet?’

‘The play’s rather tripe,’ Damaris said frankly, as she and Rachel sat down to a belated dinner. ‘But it has some gorgeous dances and that’s all that matters.’

‘Oh, I rather liked the little story,’ Rachel argued. ‘It’s a romance, of course; not one of these difficult modern things. M. Antoine told the girls the story of the play, Maid; it was the first time they had all met, you know. I was allowed to sit and listen, in the empty theatre; it was so odd!’

‘The first act’s in a barbarian village, in some northern land, in the days of invasions from the south,’ Damaris began. ‘The place has been conquered by a great King; Antoine is doing the King himself. The village women do a dance of tragedy and despair, to solemn music, and the soldiers dance in triumph, and then the barbarian men do a marvellous thing—it will have to be marvellous, to fit the music; Antoine played it to us, wild and fierce and defiant—and the soldiers break in with their dance again. Suddenly there’s an interruption; a few notes on a little pipe, like Cecily’s, and the Goose-Girl comes running in. She knows nothing of the war or of the capture of the village; she’s running away from her shepherd lover. She has a solo, but we didn’t hear the music for that, and then——’

‘Who is dancing the Goose-Girl?’ Maidlin asked.

‘She isn’t chosen yet. They spoke of some French girl, who might be free by that time. The shepherd runs in, chasing her, and they have a *pas de deux*, while their friends of the village join in and the soldiers watch. Then another interruption comes; a village girl runs out and catches the Goose-Girl’s arm and points at the strangers. I wish they’d choose me; I’m sure I could put a lot of fear and horror into that pointing! The Goose-Girl starts back in terror, her lover’s arm round her; they turn to run back to the hills, but are stopped by a soldier, who leads them to the King. They break away from him and dance together in despair, knowing they will be parted. The shepherd is seized by the soldiers, the girl is dragged to the King. She struggles, breaks loose, and is knocked down by a soldier. She falls and lies in the middle of the stage, and everybody draws back to leave her there. The shepherd wrenches himself free and runs to her side, and as the curtain falls he raises his arms to call down curses on the King. That’s the first act.’

‘Jolly parts for somebody,’ Cecily remarked.

‘I can see it all as you tell it,’ Maidlin said. ‘I never dreamt you had so much drama in you, Mary Damayris.’ She looked at the eager animated face in surprise. ‘I hadn’t thought of you as an actress!’

‘Mary Damayris has to be an actress,’ Damaris retorted. ‘What I can see in the story is the gorgeous chances somebody will have for solo dances. Think of the Goose-Girl’s entrance and solo, and her duets with the shepherd! It’s a marvellous part.’

‘Are they at the King’s court in the second act?’ Mary Devine asked. ‘Have they been carried off?’

‘That’s the idea. It’s the garden of the Palace. The girl and the shepherd are there, but she’s beautifully dressed now; they dance together—they’re in love, of course! Then the jealous Princess comes in; she’s rather a beast, but it’s a very dramatic part. She wants the shepherd and she dances, trying to make him leave his Goose-Girl; her Prince appears and sees what’s going on, and he grabs the girl and dances with her, just to teach the Princess a lesson. The Goose-Girl is unwilling but is gradually lured into the dance; rather an interesting bit of work for her! The shepherd and the Princess have disappeared and they have the stage to themselves, but just at the climax of their dance the shepherd appears again, spurning the Princess, and the Goose-Girl breaks off her dance at its very height and runs to him and dances with him instead, and the Prince, who hasn’t been in earnest, stands and laughs at them. The Princess comes in a rage, but he laughs at her too; and then the King and all the court come in, and the shepherd and the Goose-Girl run away. There’s a series of lovely dances before the King; the ladies of the court and the warriors—the captives from the war—and the beautiful slaves, including me—all have their special dances. The King isn’t satisfied; he remembers the Goose-Girl’s dance in the village and he sends for her. She has a marvellous solo, and then the Prince brings the shepherd and they dance together, and the King is pleased. The Princess rushes in and begins to accuse the shepherd of behaving badly to her; the Prince laughs at her again, and she has a dance of fury and despair. He pleads with the King for the girl and the shepherd. Then—the ending really is rather tripe, in spite of Ray, who likes romance!—an old man steps out from among the captives, and the Goose-Girl kneels before him. The programme tells you that he is her foster-father; he blesses her and puts a little crown on her head. She is the daughter of their chieftain, left in his keeping for safety as a baby. The captive villagers dance round her, and she——’

‘“Sellenger’s Round”?’ Maidlin and Cecily cried, laughing.

‘That sort of idea. She breaks through the crowd, and finds both the shepherd and the Prince waiting for her. The jealous Princess is tormented with fear that she will lose her Prince in earnest, and she’s showing what she feels in another frantic solo when the Goose-Girl runs to the shepherd and leads him forward as her partner. They are still captives and he is her choice. The Prince soothes the jealous woman and her dance grows quieter and she falls into his arms. The King summons the shepherd and the Goose-Girl and sets them free, and sends them away together—home, to rule their country for him, the programme says. Everybody crowds round them and the curtain falls on a dance of joy and triumph.’

‘And it all ends happily,’ Rachel added.

‘Truly romantic!’ Maidlin said laughing. ‘You’ve told us the story so that we’ve seen it all, Damaris. It will be wonderful to see it really happening. We shall come to watch you being a beautiful slave!’

‘What is the great Antoine like?’ Cecily asked.

‘Oh, an autocrat! You could call him a bully without exaggeration,’ Damaris admitted. ‘But he knows what he wants and how to get it. We did a little of the village scene; he had quite a crowd there, though not the full number. I never felt such a babe since I left the First Form! We were ordered about as if we were two; or as if we were imbecile. When Ray met me afterwards she said, “Well, don’t you feel a worm?” and I said, “A crushed worm.” But it’s huge fun, all the same! And such a thrill! Martin Bernard was there; he’s to be the shepherd. He didn’t dance, of course; only very humble people did anything to-day! But he was talking to Antoine, and we had a good look at him. Think of being on the stage with Bernard!’

‘He’s good, isn’t he? I’m afraid I don’t know all these people,’ Cecily said.

‘One of the leading English dancers. I’ve read about him. That really is a privilege, Damaris,’ Maidlin said.

‘We saw him at Sadler’s Wells last year, in *Swan Lake*,’ Rachel explained. ‘He was marvellous! Marry’s in luck.’

‘And *The Spectre of the Rose*!’ Damaris cried. ‘Don’t you remember his leap through the window? Just to be somewhere in the background, when Bernard is dancing, will be the biggest thrill of my life!’

‘I am glad, Mary Damayris!’ Maidlin said warmly.

‘When the first night is fixed I must write to dear Papa Berthelot and Madame Bonnet,’ Damaris said exuberantly. ‘I believe Papa, at least, will come. And we promised to tell Miss Baldry! I wonder if she’d leave Hikers’ Halt for one day to watch me being a beautiful slave? But we won’t tell anybody yet, except the family, please! Things sometimes go wrong. I might still be kicked out, for some ghastly reason!’

‘It’s not at all likely,’ Maidlin said laughing, as she looked at the radiant face before her. ‘I should imagine your future career is safe now.’

‘We’ll hope for the best. But Antoine is an old bully,’ Damaris warned them.

CHAPTER XXV

KICKED OUT

‘It will not do!’ M. Antoine stormed. ‘I have said it before! I will not have it! You—in the left file—the yellow-haired girl—Damayris! Come here!’

Damaris, looking frightened, came to the front of the stage and stood like a scolded schoolgirl. ‘Monsieur, I am sorry. Was I wrong again?’

He softened; she looked so childish and appealing. ‘My dear, there is no pirouette. I cannot have it. You spoil the whole effect. You must do what you are told.’

‘But—the music—’ Damaris stammered. ‘I am frightfully sorry, Monsieur! The music seems to want a turn there, and I was listening and——’

‘Bah! It is not for you to tell me what the music says!’ He blazed up at once. ‘I will not have the line broken by a pirouette. Go back to your place, and be careful. I have told you before.’

Damaris, scarlet, tried to apologize again. ‘I did not mean——’

‘Go! Let us get on. Repeat that phrase; this child must learn to keep her place.’

Damaris crept back to her position in the line of beautiful slaves. They had been rehearsing for three days and her great wish had been granted; she had been chosen as the village maid who warned the Goose-Girl and had been commended for the dramatic feeling shown in her gesture. It was a distinctive part, even if it lasted only for a second; her cup of happiness teemed full.

The music, newly written by an English composer who loved folk-song and dance and had adopted its special idiom, was beautiful and appealed to her greatly. Absorbed, she danced for pure happiness and forgot everything.

‘Stop!’ the wrathful voice thundered. ‘Again! Three times we have had to stop for you. I cannot have it! If you cannot think, you are not yet ready to dance. Go! I will find somebody else; there are plenty of girls. Go! You are dismissed.’

Damaris gazed at him in incredulous horror. ‘Did I do it again? Oh, Monsieur, it is the music! I can’t think of anything else, and—and it makes me turn, at that point! It just asks for the pirouette! Oh, let me try once more!’

‘You are obstinate,’ he raged. ‘Do you think you know better than we do? No, I will not have you. Go back to school, and work; come to me again in a year, when you are older and have learnt control. Go, I say! You are keeping us from our task.’

Damaris stumbled blindly towards the wings. As she left the stage she turned, on a strange impulse, dashed her hand across her eyes, and ran back to the front. ‘M. Antoine, I am very sorry. I shall come to you again in a year. Thank you for the permission.’

He was looking at the music, his conscience uneasy. Was the child right about the pirouette? As her voice rang out in the moment’s silence, he gave her a startled look, which turned to amazement at the unconscious drama of her attitude.

Then she was gone, to drop in a corner of the dressing-room and sob her heart out.

He shrugged his shoulders. ‘That again, ladies; thank you!’

From the back of the empty theatre came a woman who had been watching; the great Madame Roskova, who had worked with him on the ballet. ‘Antoine, perhaps the child is right. Who is she?’

‘Right or not, I will not be told my business by the *corps de ballet*,’ he growled. ‘I will not have a pirouette there.’

‘Oh, là, là!’ Madame laughed softly. ‘If a pirouette is right I should not mind who told me, so long as the dance was perfect. You are not quite an artist, my friend! The dance is all that matters. Who is the girl?’

‘Mary Damayris. It is her first time, and, it seems, she is not yet ready.’

‘I know what is the matter with the child. Have you her address? I must talk to her.’

‘I will find it later,’ he said irritably. ‘But I will not have her in the *corps de ballet*. All the time she would be telling me what to do.’

Madame laughed again. ‘She was a brave girl. But no doubt she did not know how great was her crime. To try to teach Georges Antoine! Ma foi, what a beginning! But no, she did not mean it; what was brave was her acceptance of her dismissal. “I shall come again in a year. Thank you!” That is the spirit! That was truly brave!’

She was talking to herself. M. Antoine had turned again to his *corps de ballet*.

Damaris walked into the back premises of Kentisbury House, holding her head high.

‘Where’s Rachel, Mrs. Bloom? Oh, Ray, I’ll come upstairs.’

‘Why are you home so early?’ Rachel hung over the banister rail. ‘You’re not ill, are you, Marry?’

‘No. I’ve been kicked out.’ Damaris spoke in a jaunty tone. ‘We’ll have to tell Maid—and everybody——’

She ran past Rachel into their room and dropped in a crumpled heap on the bed, sobbing heartbrokenly.

‘Marry!’ Rachel closed the door and took her in her arms. ‘Oh, Marry, dear, don’t cry like that! You’ll kill me. Never mind, Marry; you’ll try again!’

Damaris clung to her. ‘Hold me, Ray! I never meant any harm—I wouldn’t have tried to— to tell them—oh, Ray! He was a brute!’

She told the story at last. ‘Ray, you know I never meant what he said!’

‘No, I know. But it was awkward for him, Marry. Couldn’t you have tried?’

‘Oh, I did! I did try! But the music went to my head, and I forgot. It *was* in the music—that turn, Ray! I heard it every time. I did it without thinking.’

‘What shall you do now?’ Rachel asked.

‘Confess to M. Jean Berthelot and ask him what school I ought to go to. And then—I shall have to ask Maid—and she’s done so much for us already! I did hope I was going to begin to pay her back!’

Rachel knit her brows. ‘Maid will stand by us, but I’m frightfully sorry about it. She’ll be disappointed—— Oh, Marry dear, don’t start again! I didn’t mean to upset you. What would really worry Maid would be if you gave up in despair. You won’t do it, Marry?’

‘I told him I’d come back in a year, as he said,’ Damaris cried. ‘Does that sound like giving up in despair?’

‘You told him—on the spot? Oh, that was plucky! That sounds like you, Marry!’

‘But I feel it’s the end of everything, all the same,’ Damaris wailed. ‘I’d hoped so much—I was so happy—I was looking forward to it! Oh, gosh! I’m glad no one knows except the home folks!’

‘When I write a book and put everything I know into it, all my best work, and then it’s sent back by a publisher and I have to start over again and send it to somebody else, that’s

how I shall feel,' Rachel said. 'When my turn comes and I think my heart is broken, you'll stand by me, won't you, Marry?'

'But you'll go on? You'll send your book to someone else?' Damaris whispered.

'I hope so. You may need to buck me up and tell me not to be a silly ass.'

Damaris gave a broken laugh. 'I'll do it, when the time comes. You'll be brave and go on.'

'I'm sure to make false starts and have my things returned. I don't know how I shall bear it, but I know it has to happen. You've made a bad start, that's all. Next time things will go better,' Rachel comforted her.

'Sensible person! But there may not be a next time. Perhaps no one else will have me,' Damaris groaned. 'It's not a good beginning, to be kicked out by Antoine!'

'Oh, I don't know! If he's such a bully, people may be used to him. They'll say, "Oh, Antoine!"—and they'll give you a second chance.'

'But he had such a good reason!' Damaris wailed. 'Anybody would say he was right to get rid of me!'

'Miss Rachel!' Mrs. Bloom was calling from downstairs. 'You're wanted on the 'phone; leastways, it's that other name—Miss Damayris.'

'See who it is, Ray!' Damaris begged. 'I can't speak to anybody just now.'

'Could M. Antoine have changed his mind? Perhaps he feels he was too impatient.' Rachel went leaping down the stairs.

'No such luck! He'd never change his mind,' Damaris said hopelessly.

Rachel came running up the stairs again. 'Marry! It was Madame Roskova. She told me not to trouble you just now; I think she knew what had happened.'

Damaris sat up, pushing back her damp curls. 'Roskova? From the theatre?'

'She said so. "I am with Antoine," she said.'

'Gosh! What did she want with me? Tell me every word, Ray!'

'She said, "Is the little girl Damayris at home?" I said you were and I'd give you a message. She said, "I am with Antoine. Tell the little Damayris I wish to speak to her. Send her to me to-morrow morning at eleven." And she gave me the address; I wrote it down for you.'

Damaris stared at the slip of paper. 'That's where she has her school. I say, Ray——'

'What does she want you for, Marry?'

'I can't imagine. But just suppose she—she sympathized a bit and thought it was rather rotten for me! Suppose she took me into her school! That would be marvellous luck, you know; there's no one better in London. I won't go to Uncle Jean Berthelot till I've seen her.'

Her voice had lost something of its tragic despair, and Rachel's spirits rose in tune with hers.

'It may not be the end of everything, after all,' she said.

CHAPTER XXVI A NEW IDEA

‘So I have two girls come to see me!’ Madame looked at them in amusement. ‘You are little Damayris, my dear; I have seen you at rehearsal. Who is the other?’

‘Her sister, Madame. I try to take care of her.’

‘You have no mother?’

‘Only Rachel. But she’s a jolly good imitation of a mother,’ Damaris said.

Madame laughed. ‘Sister-who-is-almost-a-mother, you may stay, since you have come. What is your name?’

‘Rachel Ellerton, Madame.’

‘And yours, if you are sisters?’ Madame’s eyes twinkled, as she turned to Damaris. ‘Damayris is pretty; did you make it?’

Damaris coloured. ‘The Countess of Kentisbury made it for me. We thought Ellerton wouldn’t do.’

‘And you live in the house of Madame the Countess?’

‘She’s been very kind,’ Rachel said. ‘Her housekeeper takes care of us; we live in her part of the house, Madame. Our friends said we weren’t old enough to go into rooms.’

‘I understand. I was puzzled when I heard your address was the big Kentisbury House. But your own name, my dear, since Damayris was made for you?’

‘Damaris, Madame—Mary Damaris Ellerton. My family, and especially Rachel, wanted me to keep Damaris for use at home.’

‘Damaris! That is pretty.—Damayris! Yes, it is a good name for you. I shall call you Mary Damayris. Now, my dear! You went home in despair, because Antoine was angry? I was there; I saw what happened. Perhaps you are right about your little pirouette; if you had said it to me I should have laughed and made them all try it, and if the effect had been good I should have put in your turn. But Antoine will not do it; you were wrong to say it to him. He will not have you back in the *corps de ballet*; that is finished. What are you going to do?’

Damaris, rather breathless with the speed of the words, stammered out her plan of asking M. Berthelot’s advice about a school.

Madame nodded. ‘That is wise. You will go on and work?’

‘I want another chance!’ Damaris cried. ‘I’ll try my very hardest! But will anybody have me now? Won’t I have to wait and go on working? He told me to come back to him in a year.’

‘And you said you would. He will expect you.’ Madame’s lips twitched. ‘Oh, very good, Mary Damayris! You will go on. Yes, well, I can help you. Do not go to Jean Berthelot. I will teach you myself.’

‘Oh, Madame! He said it was the best thing he could wish for me, that you might see me and take me into your school!’ Damaris cried. ‘Indeed, I will work! I’ll do my very best!’

Madame gazed at her thoughtfully. In the letter of introduction from M. Berthelot, on which Antoine had scrawled the London address and which he had handed to her, had been the words: ‘Here, if I mistake not, is your Goose-Girl. But try her first and see if you think so too. She is full of music. One day she must make new dances for us.’

‘It was the music,’ Madame remarked. ‘The music demanded a pirouette, you said?’

Damaris grew scarlet. 'I shouldn't have said it. You must think me terribly impudent, Madame!'

'Perhaps not. Have you your shoes? Then change them and tell me what dance you would make to this music. Listen, my dear! Have you heard this before?' and she went to the big piano.

'It's a lovely tune for dancing. I've heard something like it, but not quite the same. Doesn't it come into our—the dance of the village girls?' Damaris caught back the word and bit her lip.

Madame nodded. 'It has hurt you, losing your place in the ballet?'

'Some day I'll go back,' Damaris said, not quite steadily. 'I've had a taste of the theatre, and it's been snatched away from me. I feel like a little boy who's lost his apple.'

Madame laughed. 'I thought you would say you felt shut out of heaven! And you talk of apples!'

'Shut out of heaven's all right,' Damaris agreed. 'But I daren't be sentimental or I shall howl, Madame. I'm still heartbroken about all this.'

'Howl?' Madame queried.

'Cry—weep,' Rachel explained.

'Ah! It is braver to laugh. Now, Mary Damayris, tell me the dance for my tune. Yes, you have heard an echo of it in the village dance, but only just a memory. This is the whole of it.'

'May I hear it again—once or twice?' Damaris asked shyly.

Madame nodded approval and played the air again.

'Oh, may I dance it now?' Damaris cried, in growing eagerness. 'It's a wild, marvellous thing!'

'Dance, then,' and Madame watched her intently.

'I like your dance, Damayris,' she said, when Damaris paused.

'We will work at that till it is really good; there is much to do to it, of course.'

'Oh, I know! I can improve it,' Damaris said eagerly. 'That's only my first idea!'

Madame agreed. 'It is the dance of the Goose-Girl, when she runs in from the hills. It is not the dance we had planned for her, because it is yours; but it is excellent, and I should like to see it finished. You must work at some dance; why not your own?'

Damaris looked at her, wide-eyed. 'My dance is good enough for that lovely music, Madame?'

'It is what the music says to you. You could not do another dance to that music; you would put in pirouettes where there were none!—Well, I will not tease you, child!'—as Damaris, colouring, gave her a piteous look. 'You will come to me each day and we will work. I like your dancing and I like the dance you have made. You shall make others and we will work on them. Why not? It is good practice. Listen! Have you heard this?'

'Never.' Damaris stood by the piano. 'I'd like to make a dance to that.'

'You shall. It is the Goose-Girl's great dance before the King. The dance is not made yet, only the music. Antoine is leaving some of the solos to me. Shall I put in your ideas? Or would you feel I had stolen them from you? I have my plans, naturally, but I am waiting till the Goose-Girl is chosen.'

'I'd be terribly proud!' Damaris cried. 'I'd feel I had a part in the ballet! Oh, Madame! If you'd use even one half of an idea of mine, I'd be so happy!'

'We'd go to watch and Marry would feel a little bit of her was on the stage, after all,' Rachel added.

‘Good! You will come every day and we will work on your dances. Your ideas are fresh, and they are very good. There is material in you that we can use,’ Madame said heartily.

She dismissed the girls at last, with an encouraging final word.

‘Do not be too downcast, my children! Mary Damayris, you shall add some dances to our ballet. I shall help you, but they will still be your dances.’

‘This,’ Rachel said firmly, as they left the studio, ‘is the time for celebration; where’s a café for ices? Marry, what a good thing we didn’t ring up Maid last night!’

Damaris was sober and a trifle overwhelmed. ‘There’s more to tell her now. It’s a big thing, Ray! Madame’s really pleased; if she uses my dances I shall feel as you’ll do when your first book is published. Even now, I know how you felt when Mary said she liked your story.’

‘It’s the same idea,’ Rachel agreed, drawing Marry’s hand through her arm and pressing it to her side, since no other caress was possible. ‘I’ll make stories and you’ll make dances. We’ll go to the first night, Marry, whatever it costs! How proud we’ll be when some great dancer does your dances!’

‘But if I could have been there too, in the crowd!’ Damaris winced. ‘I can’t have everything, but when I see another person warning the Goose-Girl—*my* part!—I shall want to slay her!’

‘Will you feel the same about the one who does your dances?’

‘The French girl, Léonie, who’s perhaps to be the Goose-Girl? Rather not! That’s different; she’s *soliste*. I never aspired to that! But I hope she’ll do them nicely; I shall want to throw things at her, if she makes a mess of them! Will you tell Maid, Ray? Write her one of your Specials!’

Rachel’s ‘Specials’, sent only on great occasions, were much prized at the Hall. She wrote the whole story of Antoine and Damaris, of Madame and the new dances, and begged Maidlin not to come or to invite her and Damaris for the week-end at present.

‘Marry’s still feeling sore, although she’s so bucked about the new work. Leave us a little while to get used to the idea that she isn’t dancing herself! She was so happy and thrilled; she doesn’t want to talk about it yet.’

Maidlin, understanding always, explained the new situation to Cecily, Mary, and Rosamund, and left the girls to themselves.

‘Still doing the Goose-Girl’s dances?’ Rachel asked one day. ‘Don’t you know them inside out? Or do you keep changing them?’

‘Madame won’t let me; she’s very firm! They’re finished, and I’m not to put in even one more pirouette; and then she grins, to tease me,’ Damaris groaned. ‘I want to alter things; I don’t feel they’re as perfect as she says. We’re doing the other parts, besides the solos, now; the bits she and Antoine had prepared. It’s rather fun.’

‘Do you mean the dances with the shepherd?’

‘And the Prince. She brings in a boy from her class. She’s good with boys, and there are one or two who will be first-rate some day. I’ve danced with several different princes and shepherds.’

‘You must know most of *The Goose-Girl*, by this time.’

‘It will be much more interesting to watch, when the time comes, if I know the dances,’ Damaris said. ‘I’m jolly grateful to Madame.’

CHAPTER XXVII THE CHALLENGE

The telephone bell rang, and Damaris, just returned from her lesson, went to answer it. She had settled into a steady routine of morning classes and afternoon and evening practice, rigidly refusing to let her mind dwell on the rehearsals that might have been.

'Roskova speaking. I want Mary Damayris.'

'Speaking, Madame.'

'Oh, my child, come here quickly! We need you. I will tell you when you come,' and Madame rang off.

'She sounds agitated!' Damaris murmured. 'What can have upset her? It's a fag to have to go back! Ray! Where are you?'

'She's out, Miss Dammy,' Mrs. Bloom called from the kitchen.

'Bother! Please tell her I've had to go back to Madame. She's sent for me, by 'phone. I don't know what she wants.'

'My child, ask me no questions, but do as I say!' Madame was obviously excited, but whether with pleasure, anxiety, or distress Damaris could not tell. 'Change your shoes. Now we will have the Goose-Girl. First her entrance solo.'

'If you want somebody to watch, there's no need for him, or her, to hide behind that screen,' Damaris remarked, as she changed. 'It won't make me nervous; I love doing the Goose-Girl! Who is the unseen audience?'

Madame gave her a sharp look. 'I did not say there was anybody, my child.'

'No, but there's a screen that isn't usually there!' Damaris retorted. 'How are they going to see me through it? I'd much rather they'd come out into the open!'

Madame began to play the well-known music; the clear notes, meant for the flute, which introduced the Goose-Girl.

Damaris, true to her nature, forgot the mysterious circumstances and lost herself in the joy of the moment. She ran in from her corner and became the wild untamed girl from the hills, whirling, leaping, in the mad dance she had herself devised.

She did not see the screen pushed aside, as a man stood to watch her every movement. Prejudiced, critical at first, his face changed as she forced her way past his defences, broke down his very natural objections, and won her rightful place with her dance.

'Bravo!' It broke from him without reserve. 'Madame, you were right. The child will do. We are saved!'

'M. Antoine!' Damaris swung round and stared at him. 'Mon Dieu, that screen was needed! I couldn't have danced if I'd known!'

'Tell her!' He looked at Madame. 'There is no time to talk.'

'My dear, Léonie is ill and cannot dance. You must be the Goose-Girl.'

Damaris sat down suddenly. 'I? Madame—Monsieur—are you mad?'

'Our poor Léonie!' A groan escaped him. 'She has never been strong; now she is dying—her inside—they are cutting her up at this moment—'

'Appendix,' Madame said curtly. 'Ought to have had it out long ago; obstinate girl! She'll be all right, but she can't be our Goose-Girl. You will take her place.'

'But—isn't there an understudy?' Damaris stammered.

Madame turned on her. 'You are the understudy. Have I not trained you for it? In two days more I should have told you, and you would have gone to the theatre to rehearse with the rest. I have not been anxious about Léonie, because I had you. Antoine was doubtful; one can forgive him! He said you would put in pirouettes when you felt like it. I told him he spoke like a fool, and now he has seen you he knows it is true.'

'Oh no! Please—no!' Damaris cried. 'He's right, and I don't blame him one scrap! I still can't believe that he'll have me!'

M. Antoine strode to her and laid a hand on her shoulder. 'One thing I am afraid of. Your dance is beautiful; but you have not yet appeared on the stage. Will you lose your head and be afraid?'

Damaris stiffened and looked straight into his eyes. 'No, Monsieur, not that. I may fail because I'm not good enough, but not because I'm afraid.'

'Good!' He released her and stood back, his face clearing. 'Then you will be our Goose-Girl?'

'You really mean it?' Damaris looked from him to Madame.

'We are most anxious,' Madame said. 'There is so little time to train any one who is new to the part. You know the music; you have made the dances. Most certainly we want you, Damaris.'

Damaris threw back her head in gallant acceptance of the challenge.

'I'll do my best, Madame.'

'Good!' M. Antoine cried. 'Come to rehearsal at two o'clock. Bernard will be there; you shall have extra practice with him—he will want it.'

'My goodness!' Damaris sat down again hurriedly, as the only way of expressing her feelings adequately. 'I'm to dance with Bernard? Martin Bernard himself?'



'All is well!' Madame said quietly

'He will like you. You will make a good partner for him. And—mon Dieu!—you are fair! It is right for the part. I never liked Léonie's black hair. I must go. Madame, you have saved *The Goose-Girl* by training this child!' and he hurried to the door.

Madame turned to Damaris when he had gone. 'My dear, I am glad. If you had refused he would never have forgiven you. You had no time to think, but your whole career turned on one

moment. Now you are made; you will do well in this part and every one will hear your name. I could have wished nothing better for you.'

Damaris collapsed on a couch in a state of shock that was only partly acting. 'Madame, I am stunned! You really think I can do it?'

'I know you can. Why not? You have done the work often—and they are your own dances.'

'Yes, it makes a difference,' Damaris admitted. 'But I'm such an outsider! Won't people say it's frightful cheek?'

'You must have a beginning,' Madame said briskly. 'It is far better for you to dance first in a new ballet. No one can compare you with Karsavina or the young Russian girls, or remember how Pavlova danced in this part. *The Goose-Girl* is new; you will create her—and people will like her, and you! There is no tradition behind her, you understand; you will make her. Already you have made her dances.'

'Yes, I see all that,' Damaris said unsteadily. 'If I began as Columbine or the Swan Queen, everybody would make comparisons at once. But surely I ought to start in the *corps de ballet*, Madame?'

'You will dance in the *corps de ballet* later, or I shall be much disappointed in you,' Madame told her. 'You must do it; it is discipline—it gives control, and you need it. If you think you will take only solo parts, you are greatly mistaken. If I am to help you, as I hope to do, all through your career, you must let me guide you.'

'Oh, I will! Please don't let me go on alone! I should feel all at sea!' Damaris cried in alarm.

'It is well said.' Madame looked at her in approval. 'You will dance and every one will see and applaud you, but always there must be the teacher in the background to tell you where you are wrong. Well then! You will dance the Goose-Girl and you will make your name. Then you will dance in the *corps de ballet*, in *Sylphides*, *Lac des Cygnes*, *Petrouchka*, and *L'Oiseau de Feu*; all the beautiful favourites. Now and then we shall choose you as *soliste*, in parts which will suit you. You could do the young girl in *The Rose* now; but *Thamar* is not for you yet. If you will be humble and not lose your head, I can lead you to a high place as a dancer; *The Goose-Girl* will help you greatly. But you must not think this means that you will always lead. —Now, my child, go and tell your pretty sister who tries to be your mother! Say to her from me that if she wishes to watch you at rehearsal she will be admitted; I shall give the order.'

'I haven't words to thank you, Madame,' Damaris stammered.

'You will thank me best when you are my good Goose-Girl,' Madame laughed. 'I shall come to see and I shall scold you and tell you all your faults.'

'But what about clothes, Madame?' Damaris paused on her way to the door.

'Clothes? My child, there are none!'

Damaris rocked with sudden laughter. 'Oh, Madame, please! I will not dance on that great stage in nothing at all! Besides, it would be silly! Our girl came from the hills; she would be cold.'

Madame laughed. 'I meant, no clothes that must be fitted, petite. The Goose-Girl wore a goat-skin tied round her middle, no doubt; but we will give you a coarse cotton gown, short and perhaps a little tattered. It will leave you free to dance. You have beautiful arms, my child.'

Damaris laughed again. 'I'll love to dance in a tattered gown! But let it be short, Madame! And at the court?'

‘A white silk robe, with a long cloak hanging from your shoulders. This robe too will be short; you are a slave whose gift for dancing has been trained, and you are now a dancer for the King. You are not a court lady whose gown trails on the floor.’

‘I hope not, if I’m to dance! Make it a sort of tunic, with a cloak I can fling round me, Madame!’

‘We will keep you in white.’ Madame nodded. ‘The Princess wears purple and red and blue——’

‘What, all at once? She’ll be a gorgeous sight!’

‘She has lovely robes and she uses them well in her dance. She is very dark, with long black hair.’ Madame looked at her Goose-Girl’s short yellow curls, remembering Antoine’s comment, and nodded. ‘Yes, you will look your part very well. Will you like your clothes, my dear?’

‘Very much, Madame. I must tell Rachel!’ and Damaris hurried away.

CHAPTER XXVIII REHEARSAL

‘Ray! Rachel Mary Ellerton!’ The shout rang through the great house.

Rachel hung over the stair-rail. ‘Marry! What did Madame want?—Oh, Marry, what’s happened?’

Damaris rushed up to her and seized her, whirling her into a wild dance. ‘Ray! I’m the Goose-Girl! Not a villager or a slave; I’m the heroine! Oh, Ray, I simply don’t believe it!’ She collapsed breathless on the bed.

‘I don’t believe it!’ Rachel retorted. ‘Are you crazy? What’s sent you off your head?’

‘That’s how I feel. But it’s true! Antoine was there himself. Léonie’s down with appendicitis; being operated on at this moment. He was tearing his hair. They’ve given the part to *me!*’

Rachel gazed at her. ‘Marry, you don’t really mean it?’

‘Oh, but I do! I’m to go to rehearsal at two o’clock, and you may come, if you like. You’ll believe it then; and perhaps I’ll believe it myself!’

‘You’re to dance the solos?’

‘Well, didn’t I make them up?’ Damaris retorted. ‘It’s only fair, after all.’

‘They really think you’re good enough?’

‘I don’t! But they seem to think so. I’ve less than a week to rehearse; they open on Wednesday—we open on Wednesday!’ she cried, exulting.

‘Then I must write to Maidlin.’ Rachel turned to her desk, her eyes ablaze.

Damaris sprang up. ‘No, Ray! No, please don’t!’

‘What do you mean? It’s glorious news, Marry!’

‘Yes, but—after last time—I can’t bear it. What if anything goes wrong? I should die, if we had to own up again.’

Rachel paused. ‘But Maid must come to your first appearance, Marry! She’d be terribly hurt, if you didn’t tell her. And Papa Berthelot too; you promised.’

‘I don’t mind your telling him; he doesn’t know about that other time. But the home people—see, Ray! Do this for me! Tell Maid I’m dancing in *The Goose-Girl*, after all; don’t say more than that! She’ll think Antoine has relented and taken me back into the *corps de ballet*. Say somebody has dropped out and they’re using me in her place. I can bear that.’

‘But Maid will come, because it’s your first time, and she’ll have a fearful shock!’ Rachel protested.

‘She’ll live through it. It will be a pleasant shock—I hope! Please, Ray! If they all know I shall funk it. I shall worry till I make myself ill.’

‘We can’t risk that.’ Rachel gave way unwillingly, but she dared not argue at the moment. She wrote to Maidlin and to M. Berthelot, and then hurried to the theatre with Damaris.

It was strange to sit at the back of the great empty place and watch all that went on. Madame Roskova nodded to her in encouragement and assured her all would be well. M. Antoine bullied everybody, the orchestra, the solo dancers, the unfortunate *corps de ballet*.

The laughing Prince and the jealous Princess were there, and seemed well cast for their parts, for the Prince made jokes with every one who was not dancing, and the Princess was a handsome girl with black brows and eyes, and long black hair. Rachel realized the point of M.

Antoine's remark, which Damaris had repeated, when she saw Damaris and the Princess together, for the Goose-Girl's yellow curls were a complete contrast to the swarthy Princess.

'Marry looks far better than a black-haired Léonie could have done,' she said to herself. 'She'll suit the part of the northern barbarian maiden! It really is a bit of luck for them to get her!'

She watched the solo dances, spell-bound by their beauty now that they were shown on the big stage to the music of the orchestra.

'And Marry made that!' she whispered, at the end of the girl's dance before the King.

Then she looked at Madame in incredulous amazement, for the whole crowded stage, and then the orchestra, broke into murmurs which swelled to cries of 'Bravo! Well done!'

'Good child!' Madame moved across and sat by her. 'She has never danced quite so well before. And it is a wonderful dance. The thing I hoped for is happening; she feels the joy of the theatre and the crowd and the big music. She will do better every day, and by next week she will be a marvel.'

'Oh, Madame! You really mean it? It looks marvellous to me, of course,' Rachel cried.

'Oh, I mean it, Sister-Mother! She will make you very proud. When she has an audience, they will give her much, will inspire her to new efforts. She will make her name with this part. Bernard likes his new partner,' and she chuckled. 'I know the boy well. These two will dance excellently together.'

It was odd, to Rachel, to see Damaris stand with the great dancer's arm round her; to see her go to him, with radiant welcoming face, choosing him and turning from the laughing Prince; to see him seize her in their dance and hold her up—light as a snowflake, she looked. 'All this can't help changing Marry. I hope—oh, I hope she won't go away from us altogether!' she almost prayed.

Dismissed at last, Damaris came running to her. 'Tea! I've had none and I'm dying. Take me out and feed me, Mother! Good thing you're here to take care of my inner woman! Oh, Ray, isn't it fun? Bernard's priceless—but marvellous to dance with! He's heard what happened before, and he keeps asking solemnly if I want to do another pirouette! Antoine heard him, and he tried to look grim, but he had to give in and laugh. And the Prince kept telling me I'd be turned out if I did so-and-so. They're all teasing me; but it *is* sport!'

'Don't any of them object to a beginner being given such a big part?'

'They seem to think it's all right, just as Madame did. And they know I made the dances. Ray, did you hear—when I'd danced before the King?' Almost shyly she looked up at Rachel, sudden colour in her face.

'I did. I was fearfully thrilled and proud. They liked your dance, Marry.'

'They like them all. They don't seem to understand that I didn't have to make them—not really.'

'What do you mean? You *did* make them!'

'No, the man who wrote the music made them; I only discovered them—dug them out of his music. You couldn't do anything else to that music.'

'Nobody seems to have known that, all the same,' Rachel remarked. 'It had to be you. Someone else would have found quite different things in the music.'

'They seem to like what I found,' Damaris said happily.

'Other people will like it too,' Rachel assured her. 'You weren't at all nervous, Marry? That seems marvellous to me.'

'Only for the first minute. I forgot everything as soon as we started.'

‘Maidlin hopes to come, and she’s so very glad they’ve taken you back,’ Rachel said, when Damaris came in from her lesson next morning. ‘She rang up, to give you her congratulations. Mary will have to stay with the twins, but she’ll come another night. Cecily is spending a week with her Guide friend, Mrs. Michael Marchwood, in London, so Maid is writing to tell her, and Cecil may bring the friends. The Earl and Countess are dining out that night and can’t possibly put it off, but Rosamund will come to see you being a beautiful slave before long. Everybody’s frightfully glad you’re having another chance.’

Damaris grinned. ‘In the *corps de ballet*, of course! Dear people! I’m glad they can’t all come to first night. I’ll be more used to it soon. They’ll have shocks when they see Thursday’s papers—if the things condescend to mention me!’

‘They may put a line at the end—“The part of the heroine was played by an unknown dancer.” I hope you don’t expect more than that?’ Rachel teased.

‘Not much more! They might say “was *well* played”, don’t you think?’ Damaris hinted.

Rachel laughed. ‘See that it is well played, then!’

CHAPTER XXIX

MAIDLIN FOR COMFORT

‘To-night!’ Damaris exulted. ‘Oh, Ray, I’m thrilled! I am looking forward to it!’

‘That’s a good thing! I’m glad Maid’s coming to hold my hand!’

Damaris looked at her quickly. ‘I say, old girl, are you frightened?’

‘Not a scrap. Not about you; you’re lovely in the part. It will be marvellous, and you’ll enjoy it. But I’m so terribly thrilled, and it’s so hard to be the one who looks on!’ Rachel pleaded. ‘Marry, be a sport and let me tell Maid about the Goose-Girl, now that the time has come. I can’t bear her to have that shock! She ought to know. She has been so good to us, Marry!’

Damaris wavered. ‘I wouldn’t like to hear wild yells from a box, because Maid had fainted. All right, Ray! Tell her as soon as she comes to town, if you like; and ask her to come early! I’ll have to be at the theatre all afternoon; it will be a rotten time for you, if you’re feeling nervy. They say they won’t let me out of their sight, for fear I’ll lose my head and not turn up! I’d like to know you had Maid’s company. But don’t tell her till she’s safely in town, and swear her to secrecy until it’s over. I don’t want anyone else to know. To-morrow will do for them, but Maid’s rather special.’

She went off to a final rehearsal, humming ‘Shepherd’s Hey’ under her breath.

Rachel ran to the telephone. ‘I want Maidlin, please. Rachel speaking.’

‘I’ll put you through to her. She’s in the Abbey,’ Mary responded.

‘Sorry to keep you waiting, Rachel. How is Damaris?’ Maidlin asked, a moment later.

‘Oh—Maid!’ Rachel’s voice was shaky. ‘She’s all right; terribly thrilled and happy. But—Maid!’

‘Rachel, what is it? Is anything the matter?’

‘No—yes! Maid, are you busy this afternoon? Couldn’t you come and have tea with me and hold my hand till the time comes? Marry doesn’t seem to have any nerves, but I’m fearfully worked up! I shan’t see her after about two; she’ll be at the theatre. I don’t know how to bear it alone, Maid.’

‘I’ll come,’ Maidlin said. ‘I’ll take you out to tea and we’ll comfort one another. I’m thinking about Mary Damayris all the time too. You’re sure she’s all right?’

‘Absolutely, Maid. Looking forward to it. *I’m* the coward!’

‘Of course, Rachel! But “coward” is the wrong word,’ Maidlin replied. ‘I shall come by train; you can meet me at Paddington at half-past three. The car will come to fetch me at night. Don’t worry, Rachel! I’m sure it will be all right.’

‘I know it will,’ Rachel said fervently. ‘But I wish it was over!’

‘It was terribly hard not to tell Maid!’ she said, as she turned away. ‘But she might have been tempted to tell them at the Manor or to ring up Rosamund.’

She was on the platform when the train came in, and she seized Maidlin and dragged her away. ‘Maid! I can’t bear it another minute! Oh, Maid, Marry isn’t one of the crowd to-night! She’s dancing the Goose-Girl!’

‘In *The Goose-Girl*?’ Maidlin began, bewildered.

‘No! She *is* the Goose-Girl—the heroine! All those lovely solos, and the duets with the shepherd and the Prince! They chose her last week!’

Maidlin sat down suddenly on a hard waiting-room bench. ‘Rachel! What do you mean?’

‘Léonie went down with appendicitis and they had no Goose-Girl. Madame Roskova had trained Marry as understudy, without explaining what she was doing, and Marry and I are so new to it all that we didn’t understand. They challenged Marry to take the part; and you know she can never resist a challenge! She’s been rehearsing since last Friday, and they’re delighted with her. I’ve watched, and she’s lovely in the part, Maid! She begged and prayed Antoine not to tell anybody, so the papers have just said that Léonie was ill and a new English dancer would take her place, giving no name. Marry was determined about it, and Antoine said it would be good publicity to make a little secret of it. It was only for a few days.’

‘I read about Léonie, of course, but I never dreamed of this! Damaris is really playing lead, to-night?’ Maidlin looked dazed.

‘She wouldn’t let me tell any one, because that last time was such a blow. She didn’t want a crowd of home people; they can see her later, when she’s used to it. We’d promised to tell Papa Berthelot, so I wrote, but he can’t come to-night; le petit Jean’s not too well—nothing serious, but Papa won’t leave Annette. He hopes to come, and to bring Madame Bonnet, next week. Maid, do you wonder that I’m thrilled?’

Maidlin’s hand reached out and clasped hers. ‘Rachel, I’m terrified!’

‘I don’t think I am,’ Rachel said reflectively. ‘I’ve seen her do it so often now. I’m worked up to a tremendous pitch of excitement, Maid, but it’s more thrill than fright.’

‘We have to live through the next four hours somehow,’ Maidlin groaned. ‘I know now why you said you couldn’t bear it alone. Rachel, I’m so bucked that you sent for *me!*’

‘But there’s nobody else.’ Rachel gave her a queer look. ‘Don’t you know? Marry and I have no one but you. Heaps of friends, the best in the world; and we’re very grateful. But you belong to us. I couldn’t bear anybody else to-day.’

Maidlin caught her hand again, in a quick foreign gesture of deep feeling. Then she sprang up, decision in her tone. ‘Tea, now, at once! We’ll go to one of the big places in Edgware Road and find a table in a corner. Then—yes, I think, a bus! If we spend two hours walking the streets we’ll be tired out. The front seat of a bus, and a good long ride; and we’ll talk about Marry Damayris; it won’t matter where the bus is going—we shan’t notice! It’s the best way to pass the hours.’

‘It’s brilliant!’ Rachel cried. ‘But we must be home in time for me to dress. Madame Roskova’s kept seats in a box for us. She’ll be there, but she won’t worry us.’

‘I’d like to meet her,’ Maidlin agreed. ‘I must change too, of course; you said we’d be in a box, so I brought a frock, but my case isn’t heavy. We mustn’t let Mary Damayris down! You must have heaps to tell me, but there’ll be time on the bus.’

Her programme was carried out, and the interval before the evening gave opportunity for all her questions to be answered.

‘I *am* glad I came early!’ she said. ‘Not only would I have had a terrific shock, but I’d have had so much to ask, and there would have been no chance of hearing everything. How does Damaris look? Will they make her up too much?’

Rachel laughed; the relief of having someone to talk to was enormous. ‘No, she’s herself. They tried the effect of two long yellow pigtails, but they had to smooth down her own hair to fit the plaits, and it was such a complete disguise that Madame wept and stormed and refused to allow it. Marry’s shy of arguing with M. Antoine, but she pointed out that she isn’t a goose-girl out of Grimm or Hans Andersen, and that there was no need for her to dress as if her name was Gretchen. It’s more likely to have been Gudrun, or Sieglinde, or Etheldreda, or

Brynhild! The barbarians may even have been British. She said the wilder she could look the better, for the village scene; the dance she has made is wild enough! So they left her curls alone. You'll recognize her all right!

'I'm glad. How does she get on with her partner?'

'Martin Bernard? They're good pals,' Rachel said laughing. 'She calls him "The Great St. Bernard", after the hospice you took us to see, from Annecy.'

Maidlin laughed. 'What does he call her?'

'"My pirouette". He shouts—"Where is my little pirouette?" They tease her all the time about being kicked out of the *corps de ballet*. His real name is Bernard Martin, you know,' Rachel explained. 'But "Bernard" can be a French name, if you don't say the "d", and he thought it was better for the stage. He says he was choosing a name when he saw his own in the directory—"Martin, Bernard"; you know how they put the surname first! He thought it looked well, so he just turned his name round; made it pirouette, as he said to Marry! He has a dear little wife, called Margery Martin, who writes dear little poems; she's been coming to rehearsals—to watch the new Goose-Girl, I think—and I've been sitting with her. We're quite pally; she doesn't like being called Madame Bernard—she says she's Mrs. Martin!'

'I am so glad you've fallen in with such jolly people!' Maidlin exclaimed.

'I'm both glad and thankful. It might have been so different,' Rachel agreed.

'I shall take you to have some dinner before we go in to change,' Maidlin said presently.

'I shan't be able to eat, Maid.'

'Then I won't sit with you. I can't have you breaking down at the moment of our Goose-Girl's entrance! Is somebody feeding Damaris?'

'Oh yes! They'll take care of her. She's being teased and petted and having a thoroughly good time.'

'Don't you want to be with her?' Maidlin asked.

'Better not. I'm so shaky. I might work her up too. She'll forget the Goose-Girl when *Lac des Cygnes* begins; it comes first, you know; the new ballet wouldn't make a whole programme alone. Marry loves it so much that everything else will go out of her head. I couldn't forget, so it's better I should keep away.'

When they went in to change, after an early dinner, a letter was waiting for Rachel.

'Good wishes from somebody?' She laughed unsteadily. 'I'm getting terribly nervous, Maid!—Oh, Maid!' she shouted. 'Just look!'

Maidlin ran to her. 'Rachel! They've accepted your story!

Your first! Oh, my dear, I am so glad!'

'Five guineas, for first British serial rights—what does that mean?' Rachel was half-laughing, half-crying. 'Ask Mary to tell me, Maid! Isn't it just too marvellous that it should come to-night?'

'How glad Damaris will be, when she hears! Rachel, that makes to-day perfect!'

'I feel like that.' Rachel laughed tremulously. 'But we must dress, Maid. We mustn't be late.'

'Put that precious letter away safely. Or are you going to take it with you and look at it between the acts?'

'No, to-night belongs to Marry. I'll show it to her when we come home.' There was an unusual touch of colour in Rachel's face as she hurried to change.

Madame Roskova was waiting for them in the box when they reached the theatre.

'I am overjoyed to meet you, Madame,' Maidlin said.

‘And I, to meet you, Miss di Ravarati,’ Madame Roskova responded, with sincere cordiality; and once more Rachel remembered that her cousin was well known.

‘Sister-who-tries-also-to-be-a-mother, how pretty you are to-night!’ Madame glanced at the bright dark eyes and burning cheeks, and the yellow silk frock.

‘I’m terribly excited, Madame, but not really afraid.’

‘Tut! There is no need for fear. Our child is a marvel; she will do well.’

‘Look, Maid! How lovely of them!’ Rachel whispered, pointing to a line on the programme. ‘We didn’t know they’d do that.’

‘It is only right. I said it must be there,’ Madame explained. ‘I do not want praise for our little girl’s work!’

Maidlin was reading the notice. ‘Dances by Tatiana Roskova and Georges Antoine. The Goose-Girl’s dances by Mary Damayris.’

‘That’s only fair,’ she agreed. ‘How kind of you, Madame!’

‘Hush! Here is *Lac des Cygnes*.’

‘Will Damaris have been able to see it?’ Maidlin asked, as the curtain fell.

‘She was to watch from the wings,’ Rachel said. ‘The Swan Queen and the Prince are the Prince and Princess in *The Goose-Girl*, but they’ve time to change during the first act. Marry and Martin Bernard are the only soloists in the village scene.’

She was white and tense, her thoughts with Damaris, waiting somewhere behind. It was all she could do not to spring up and run to her. She was very glad Maidlin was there.

The lights went down. Rachel gripped Maidlin’s hand. ‘Oh—Maid!’

‘Steady, Ray!’ Maidlin whispered, holding her tightly.

In suspense which was almost agony, they watched the conquering King, the despairing villagers, the triumphing soldiers, and waited for those notes on the flute which would call Damaris into her new life. Madame Roskova glanced at them and smiled.

‘There!’ Rachel murmured, and brushed her hand fiercely across her eyes. Absurd to let tears spoil her view, when she was aching to see Marry—to reach out to help her!

‘Here she comes! Oh, pretty girl!’ Maidlin whispered.

Damaris, in her coarse little tattered robe and with flying curls, ran on, tossed her crook into the crowd of village friends, and stood poised, listening. The orchestra broke into the music, and she began to dance, the wild, whirling, leaping dance of the girl from the hills.

A rapt silence filled the theatre. Then came a thunder of applause, and everywhere people pointed out that line on the programme to their neighbours.

‘Oh, beautiful!’ Maidlin cried. ‘How she has come on! Rachel, look at her—enjoy it—it’s all right! She’s gripped them from the first moment!’

‘Yes, it is all right now!’ Madame exclaimed. ‘The audience has gripped her also. Now she will be at home with them, and she will be happy. Do not be frightened any more, Sister-Mother!’

There was no doubt of the crowd’s opinion, as the applause rang through the great theatre in waves of delight. Damaris, recalled for an instant from her *Goose-Girl*, shot one startled look into the darkness and gave a quick, shy little bow.

Then Bernard, the shepherd, came running in, chasing her; seized her and swung her into the *pas de deu*.

‘But this is wonderful!’ Maidlin whispered. ‘I wouldn’t have believed our Damaris could dance like that!’

‘Bernard inspires her,’ Madame said. ‘They work together well. They must do *The Spectre of the Rose*, quite soon. It will be worth seeing.’

‘She can act, too,’ Maidlin added, as, warned by a village girl, Damaris drew back in surprise and dismay, and gave her partner a look of horror as she turned to run back to the hills.

When the curtain fell on the little white figure, lying in the midst of the crowd, while the shepherd knelt above her and cursed the King, the roar of applause broke out again.

Rachel’s lips quivered. ‘She looks so tragic. To leave her hills and her geese and be dragged away as a captive! Marry feels it very deeply.’

‘Poor little girl,’ Maidlin laughed. ‘Rachel, her fortune’s made!’

‘I’m a little frightened about that,’ Rachel confessed. ‘I’ll try to take care of her, but you must help me, Maid.’

‘If it doesn’t go to her head, she’ll be all right. But it’s enough to unbalance any girl.’

‘She isn’t eighteen yet,’ Rachel said unsteadily.

Madame had slipped away and the second act was half over before she returned. Rachel and Maidlin, relieved to be alone, gripped hands and waited tensely.

Damaris looked older as she wandered in the King’s garden and broke into a sad little dance of longing for home. Her silk tunic had gold embroidery and a gold band held back her curls, so that they no longer hung round her face. ‘I mustn’t be too shaggy in the palace,’ she had said.

‘This music was written specially for her,’ Rachel whispered. ‘She begged for something sad, to show how she was feeling, and they put in this little tune. It’s a lovely thing.’

‘A lovely little dance. She’s a genius,’ Maidlin murmured. ‘She knew what was wanted!’

Each dance, as it came, was greeted with delighted applause; with the shepherd, with the laughing Prince—after a moment of shy indecision, when he had to woo her to join him—and then the great moment of the dance before the King, when every one else had failed to please him.

It was the climax of the ballet. The audience held their breath; could she do it? Had she shown her best, or had she more to give? What had she made of the great opportunity?

The tense silence broke in a roar of joy. The clapping would not be stilled. They—those unseen people, the all-important public—were shouting her name, waving programmes, standing up to call for an encore.

Damaris stood, the lights upon her, uncertain what to do. The noise went on. She bowed and looked doubtfully at the orchestra. They began to repeat the music, and the audience sighed in relief, and settled down to enjoy the dance again.

‘Great child, this!’ Maidlin heard a man in the next box exclaim. ‘Where has she come from?’

‘We must see her again. Every movement is a joy. Do you suppose she really made the dances?’

‘The programme says so!—Here comes Bernard! They’ll have another dance together.’

‘All is well!’ Madame said quietly from behind, taking her place again. ‘Our child has not failed us. She is made. It is what I hoped for.’

Maidlin gave her a radiant look. ‘Thanks to you, Madame, in part at least.’

Rachel sat with bent head, her shoulders shaking. That last roar of delight, and the encore, had been too much. All those people shouting like that—for Marry!

‘I never saw the dance with Bernard—or the jealous Princess,’ she owned afterwards. ‘When I was steady enough to look at Marry again, she was kneeling before the old man, being crowned, and they were breaking into the dance of triumph round her. But I saw her run to the shepherd and choose him, and I saw their last marvellous dance together.’

The curtain fell on the final tableau, and Rachel sighed and relaxed. ‘That’s safely over!’

‘Oh no!’ Maidlin said quietly. ‘It’s only just begun.’

Madame turned to them. ‘That is true. I hope our little Damayris will realize it. Her struggle is yet to come. She has done well, very well indeed; better even than I had hoped. She has made herself known to-night. Now she has to live up to her new reputation, and that is hard at times. She must not follow this success with failure; people will expect much from her and she must not disappoint them. It will mean constant striving, endless work. And, as I told her, the real test is not in this new part, but will be when she comes to dance in *Les Sylphides* or *Lac des Cygnes* and has to challenge comparison with all the great ones who have gone before. There are so few roles, so many dancers eager for them. She will be chosen, because of the work she has done to-night, but she will have to be very good to keep her place. If her next big part is a failure, she will not have many more chances. It is a ruthless world and she must struggle for her place. But all that is good and will help her to keep on her highest level. She cannot afford to slip from that for one single moment. You will tell her all this, Sister-Mother?’

‘Oh, I will, Madame! Thank you very much!’ Rachel said fervently. ‘I know she’ll work hard.’

‘And always; hard and always! That is the rule for her. Now they will call for her,’ Madame said, as the great theatre rang with applause.

CHAPTER XXX

A MARVELLOUS NIGHT

The great curtains parted and a white figure appeared, looking very small and shy. All the principals had been out to bow, but the calls for 'Damayris' still went on. There had been violent argument, Damaris insisting that everybody must go, but M. Antoine would not have it.

'They are calling you by name. Go, child!' he said urgently.

Damaris heard and had to believe it—'Damayris! Mary Damayris! We want Damayris!'

Colour rushed to her face, then died away, as Antoine thrust her forward.

Martin Bernard, with laughing eyes, took her hand. 'Come, my pirouette! But this is for you, not for me.'

He led her between the heavy folds of velvet and then drew back, leaving her alone. The clapping broke out again, the cries of 'Well done! Bravo!'

'It's the shouting crowd all right!' The thought flashed through her mind, as she remembered the day when 'Mary Damayris' had been born.

As she bowed again and again, her searching eyes found Rachel and Maidlin in their box. She gave them a radiant smile, bowed once more to the house, and slipped away.

'No more. I won't go out again. If you say I must, I shall swoon in front of them all.'

To the congratulations she gave tired smiles of thanks. 'It has taken me by surprise. I didn't expect anything like this.'

'It is an ovation, but you deserved it,' the Princess said heartily.

To all suggestions of supper parties Damaris was firm in refusal. 'My friends are waiting. Please let me go! I'm very tired.'

Madame and Antoine escorted her to the door when she was ready, and were relieved to see the big car waiting.

'Mon Dieu, where did she find it?' Antoine exclaimed. 'I was afraid her sister would meet her and they would walk to the bus!'

'Do you not see, my friend? Maddalena di Ravarati is there. She is her cousin,' Madame said. 'Our child will be well cared for.'

'Oh, good! She was right to go. She is more worn out than she knows.'

While they waited in the car, Maidlin had said a quick word of warning to Rachel.

'Rachel dear, this may change everything. You'll let us help and advise?'

'May we come home on Sunday? Marry's dancing again to-morrow and on Saturday; not Friday—they have changes of programme, and she isn't needed on Tuesdays and Fridays. We'll want to talk things over. M. Berthelot will look after her interests and see to contracts and salaries; he must be her agent, of course.'

'That's a good beginning. I'm a little alarmed by such a very big success,' Maidlin confessed.

'I'm terrified! But Marry's sensible; she won't lose her head.'

'It's a great test for her. I'd be sorry if we lost her altogether,' Maidlin said wistfully.

'Maid, there's no fear of that.' Rachel suddenly found herself the comforter. 'Marry loves you and home too much. We feel the Abbey is home; do you mind?'

'We hope you always will.—Is this Damaris?'

‘Yes, with a large and noisy escort.’ Rachel laughed unsteadily. ‘Oh, Marry, you were wonderful, kid! We all love Mary Damayris! But weren’t you terrified?’

‘Absolutely, when they clapped and I’d stopped being the Goose-Girl. Maid, it was lovely of you to stand by Ray! Was she fearfully frightened? Did you like it, Maid? Was it all right, Ray?’

‘Damaris dear, you gave a wonderful performance, and your dances are perfect,’ Maidlin said. ‘The others will want to see you; and I want to come again. Rachel, you’d better bag that box for to-morrow and Saturday!—Now, girls, here’s home and bed for you!’ as the car drew up before Kentisbury House. ‘No, I won’t come in. It will take me an hour to get home. You can think of me, ringing up Rosamund and sitting in Mary’s room, and telling them all about the Goose-girl! But I hope Mary Damayris will be asleep long before that. Congratulations, Damaris dear! Your fortune’s made. You must think what you’ll do with it.’

‘Oh, I know that all right! Tell you on Sunday!’

‘Oh?’ Maidlin raised her brows and looked at Rachel.

‘I don’t know! But I know that Marry’s going to bed, now at once.’

‘I’ll tell *you* before Sunday, but not to-night,’ Damaris said.

As they sat down to a welcome supper, Rachel laid her letter before Damaris, her face alight. ‘Perhaps I ought not to tell you my tiny thrill to-night, after your enormous triumph! But I can’t bear to——’

‘Ray! Whoops! They’ve taken *our* story!’ Damaris sprang up and seized her in her arms and danced her round the room. ‘Oh, what a night! What a marvellous night! Oh, joy! I am so glad!’

‘How jolly nice of you!’ Rachel exclaimed, much touched.

‘Not a bit! I hope you noticed I said *our* story! I’m far more bucked than I was about all those mad yelling people!’

‘Marry, don’t be soft! You’ll never have another night quite like this one! Your first triumph!’

‘And yours!’ Damaris retorted. ‘You’ll never have your first story accepted again! You’ll have heaps more letters like that, and I’ll have lots more shouting crowds, but this is the first for both of us. On the same night—oh, *whoops!*’ and she danced again.

‘Finish that milk and come to bed!’ Rachel commanded, laughing. ‘There’s a very hot bath ready for you and I’m going to give you some quite unprofessional massage. I’m sure you must ache all over.’

‘Angel! It will help me to sleep. I’m frightfully tired,’ Damaris owned.

In the dark Rachel slipped her arm round Damaris. ‘Marry, thank you for a great treat. It was a very happy evening. Your dances were beautiful!’

‘Ray, how lovely of you! I was happy too. I’m so thankful to have you to come back to, Ray! And I am so glad about your story! Good-night!’

Rachel lay with great gratitude in her heart. But she could not sleep, and she knew that Damaris was awake also.

At last Damaris spoke. ‘Ray, you’re as wide awake as I am.’

‘I don’t mind. I’m too happy to sleep.’

‘Same here. Shall we talk?’ Damaris whispered.

‘If it won’t wake you up still more. Would you like some milk and biscuits?’

‘No, just to talk to you. Ray, I suppose this will mean we’ll make a bit of money presently?’

‘You will. M. Berthelot will see to it.’

‘He won’t let me be cheated; you’ll look after that! Will it be a good deal, Ray?’

Rachel peered at her. ‘I’ve no idea. It ought to be more than a girl in the *corps de ballet* would earn, anyway. What do you want to do?’

‘It’s to-morrow, so I’ll tell you. I want to buy a car; a little one.’

‘A car!’ Rachel felt a tinge of disappointment at what seemed a childish anti-climax. ‘I should think that will be possible, Marry.’

‘You don’t see it yet.’ Damaris crept close to her and spoke vehemently. ‘You know what horribly independent minds we’ve always had?’

Rachel laughed. ‘We are that way inclined! Well?’

‘We can’t go on living in Rosamund’s house and going to the Hall for week-ends and using their car—not now. I’ll have to be in town and we’ll need to have rooms or a flat; but on the nights I’m not dancing, and at weekends, I want to go home, Ray. At present, if they’ll have us, we’ll go to the Hall; but I want to save up, and some day we’ll buy, or rent, a scrap of land from Lady Quellyn, as close to the Abbey gates as she’ll allow, and we’ll build a little house, just for us two, Ray—a very little one—and it will be home, with Crossrigs for holidays. A wee bungalow that we’ve planned ourselves, almost in the Abbey grounds; and Crossrigs made comfortable, with electric light and gas and water put in; and our own little car to run us out of town. That’s what I’m dreaming of, Ray. We’ll go all over the world and I’ll dance across Europe and in America, and then we’ll settle down close to Maid, and you’ll write wonderful books, and I’ll have a school and a studio in town, and make up new ballets and train girls to dance. Do you like my plans? Ray, what’s the matter?’

‘Oh—Marry!’ Rachel’s sudden grip had almost hurt her. ‘Marry, I’m so thankful! I told Maid you wouldn’t lose your head, but I never imagined you’d be so wise. I think I’ll get up and say my prayers again!’

‘Oh—Ray!’ Damaris half laughed. ‘I’m so glad you care about me so much! Ray, I can see the difficulties and—and the temptations that I may come up against. I want you to hold on to me, and I want to feel linked up with home, and Maid, and the Abbey. It will keep me safe; it’s all so new and big and frightening. I love it; to-night it was wonderful, when they cheered and clapped. I’ll never be happy away from theatres now! But, all the same, I must have home and the Abbey in the background, to keep me from going off my head.’

‘To keep you balanced. Marry, you are jolly sensible! I’ll love the little house at the Abbey gates!’

‘I’m glad you like my plans; I’ve been wanting to tell you, but it seemed so far off. To-night’s brought our little house much nearer. Tell Maid about it, Ray!—I can go to sleep now!’ Damaris sighed happily.

CHAPTER XXXI. HOME IN THE BACKGROUND

‘Can I speak to Maidlin, please?’ Rachel was at the telephone early next morning.

‘Maid speaking. How is Damaris?’

‘Sleeping like a baby. We couldn’t sleep at first, and she told me all her plans. Oh, Maid, she’s safe! May I tell you?’

‘Quickly, Rachel dear! But don’t break down; you sound as if you might.’

‘I won’t weep into the ’phone! But I’m so very thankful. We needn’t be afraid.’ And Rachel outlined the ideas Damaris had whispered to her.

‘Rachel, what a dear she is! Oh, I’m glad too! She won’t get into any trouble while she has home in the background. I’m so thankful that she wants us!’

‘Those were her words—“Home and the Abbey in the background.” I could have cried for joy.’

‘Rachel, I do congratulate you on the way you’ve done your job,’ Maidlin said earnestly. ‘You’d have been wasted as a secretary.’

‘My job? I don’t understand.’

‘Congratulations on Damaris and what you’ve made of her.’

‘I? Madame Bonnet and all the rest did it.’

‘They turned her into a dancer, but you made her what she is. She looks up to you and leans on you. You’re turning her into something rather fine.’

‘Maid, do you mean it? Have I really helped?’ Rachel’s voice shook.

‘You’ve kept her just herself, unspoilt and simple and natural. We owe that to you. You’ve done a very big piece of work—for her, and for us, and perhaps for the world, for she’ll have a great influence on people. You must hold on to her still and keep her as she is.’

‘I’ve felt so useless—so much in the background,’ Rachel said unsteadily.

‘Like home and the Abbey. That’s rather nice, Rachel.’

‘I’m glad you aren’t here, Maid. I’m going to——’

‘Ring up later, Ray. Give her our love.’ And Maidlin rang off hastily.

Rachel was steady again before she heard Damaris calling, but her eyes were bright as she ran to the bedroom.

‘Marry dear, congratulations! Aren’t you very happy?’

‘I feel jolly fine! Who’s been paying you compliments? Your eyes are all shiny.’

‘Maid, by ’phone. I’ll fetch your breakfast.’

‘You ought to have had yours in bed. I’m sure you were awake longer than I was! Why should you wait on me?’

‘Much longer. You were sleeping like a cherub.’ Rachel went to fetch the tray. ‘Look, Marry!’

‘Strawberries!’ Damaris gave a shout. ‘This is a celebration! When did you get them?’

‘Before I met Maid yesterday. I forgot them at night. I haven’t had my share yet; the bowl looked so luscious that you had to see it before I took any.’ Rachel sat on the bed and set to work.

‘Good thing you forgot last night!’ Damaris chuckled. ‘I might have been greedy and upset my tummy. I suppose I’ll have to be careful now! It wouldn’t do to be writhing in agony

because I'd made a pig of myself, and leave King Antoine waiting for his Goose-Girl! Bother!

'Or Martin Bernard without his pirouette. There's a lot depending on you now. I shall take them away if you eat too many.'

'Mother! What did Maid say?'

'She loved your plans. Everybody's coming to-night. Now that's enough, Marry!'

'Just that big juicy one! Have a heart, Ray!'

'Take it!' Rachel carried off the bowl, laughing to herself. 'What a baby she is! To think she's the same Damaris who talked so wisely last night and danced so beautifully! I hope she'll keep her child-side.'

'What have you got there?' Damaris sat up in bed. 'Telegrams? Who's sent congrats?'

'Everybody. Here you are!'

Damaris tore open the envelopes. '*Hearty congratulations. Cecilytom.*' How good of her! '*Splendid. We are proud to-day.*' That's from the Manor. '*Well done! Looking forward to to-night. Mary.*' Isn't that kind? '*Good work. Rosamund and Geoffrey.*' That's from Kentisbury. '*Congrats and love to you both. Maidlin.*' I like that one best, because Maid's included you, Ray. How like her! Here's one from Annecy—'*Milles félicitations, ma file. Je viens samedi. Papa, Annette, et le petit Jean.*' The whole family! How sweet of them! And this is from Madame Bonnet; oh, aren't people kind! But how could they know in Annecy, Ray? It was only last night!

'I expect M. Jean Berthelot rang up Papa very late, after the show. I saw him in the stalls, and he was just terribly thrilled. He couldn't wait to write a letter.'

Damaris laughed. 'They are dears! Le petit Jean must be better if Papa's coming on Saturday. I'm so glad! I hated to think of the adorable little man being worried.'

'To say nothing of Annette. I'm glad too,' Rachel agreed.

Damaris picked up another envelope. 'This—I say, Ray! This is from school! How *could* they know?'

Rachel looked at the telegram. '*Thousands of congrats! Love from Philippa and the whole of Dorothy's.*' And this is from Miss Allen; she's thrilled too!

'Miss Allen was the first to put it into my head. But how—Ray, what did you do?' Damaris shouted.

'I sent a wire to Philip yesterday, saying, "*See to-morrow's papers about Goose-Girl. Damayris is Damaris.*" I thought it was only fair.'

'Philip must have thought you quite mad,' Damaris chuckled. '*Damayris is Damaris!*' Well, well!—The papers!' She sat up again hurriedly. 'Gosh! I'd forgotten the papers! What do they say?'

'I saw you'd forgotten.' Rachel ran from the room and came back with her arms full of newspapers. 'I ordered them when I fetched the strawberries. Now, Marry, find your first press notices! Don't be nervous; they've been kind to you. I couldn't wait; I had to look!'

'You think of everything! Good thing you're here! I'd have gone crazy if I'd had to wait!' Damaris grasped the papers, while Rachel leaned on the end of the bed and watched her face.

Damaris reddened and chuckled. '*"An amazing first performance"*—glad they think so! I thought it might have been better myself. "*This promising young English dancer*"—so they guessed "*Damayris*" was meant to be English! Good thing I didn't call myself Marie de Maris! I was rather tempted to do it. "*Astounding invention; artistic sensitiveness; wonderful new dances.*" I'm glad they liked the dances, but the invention was the composer's, not mine.

The dances were all there, in his music.—Oh, here’s a description! “Her golden curls”—what tripe! They’re not; they’re plain yellow. The man doesn’t know gold when he sees it. They looked positively insipid under that gold fillet; I told Madame I ought never to wear gold on my head, but as I’d been spared the pigtails I didn’t say too much about anything else. I was so glad they didn’t turn me into a German fairy-tale! This one’s better—“This delightful tom-boy, full of the joy of life. A refreshing and stimulating performance”! Not too bad; that man has some sense! Well, it’s very kind of them all. Not one says it was impertinent of me to think I could dance.’

‘Did you expect that?’ Rachel laughed. ‘I didn’t! You’ll have to be prepared for interviewers. Maid says they’ll come.’

‘Whoops! Send them all to me! I shall tell them about your story.’

‘Marry! If you ever dare to mention it——!’ Rachel cried.

‘“The proudest night of my life,” I shall say, and I shall tell them it was because of you.’

‘Then I’ll take good care that I see the interviewers first,’ Rachel retorted. ‘I’ll tell them your statements aren’t to be trusted.’

‘And I’m doing it all again to-night! Seems queer, doesn’t it?’ Damaris said reflectively.

‘How do you feel about that?’ Rachel asked anxiously. ‘Once was all very well, but won’t you get bored?’

Damaris shot a look at her. ‘No, old girl. I love doing it too much. But you mustn’t come every night. It would be frightfully stale for you.’

‘When you dance I shall be there,’ Rachel said quietly.

‘Then you’ll tell me, if I begin to go off? Madame will do it too; I’m going presently for her to slay me for all the points that were bad last night. There were plenty of them! I’ve stacks of work to do on those dances yet. You must keep me up to the mark, Ray.’

‘You can be sure I shall! I’ll be your artistic conscience.’

‘And my everything else!’ Damaris shouted. ‘My mother, and my keeper, and my stern maiden aunt! Oh, marvellous, Ray! With you, and Maid, and home, and the Abbey, all holding on to me, I shall pull through!’

As they drove home on Sunday morning Rachel asked, ‘What was Maid talking about on the ’phone, just before you went to the theatre last night? You said you’d tell me later.’

Damaris looked sober. ‘A lovely idea, and it’s for you as well. She asked if I had a dressing-room to myself, and I said I had, but it was about the size of a hat-box. So Maid said she’d heard stage stars always had a collection of signed photos of celebrities in their dressing-rooms, and I said: “Yes, thanks, Maid! I’ll have a big one of you, all roses and chiffon, with your whole name signed across the corner.” She said: “I’ll give you one, but that isn’t what I meant”; I’d never supposed it was! She’s going to give me a little picture of the Abbey, painted by that friend who does the May-Queen pictures and the ones Rosamund is so proud of, to hang in my room at the theatre. I know what she means, of course, but isn’t it a lovely idea? I’m to choose what I’d like it to be, and you’re to have one too, to hang in our wee house, when it’s built.’

‘That’s lovely of Maid! What shall you choose?’

‘The garth; it’s the heart of the Abbey. Unless you want that?’

‘I’d like to have the gate-house,’ Rachel said. ‘I love the story of the very old monk who lived in it and gave help and kindness to all who came to him.’

‘That will be beautiful,’ Damaris said dreamily. ‘The garth and the gate! The heart of the Abbey and the way into it! And both of them reminding us of Maidlin. We may meet queer

people and see queer things, but we shan't go far wrong with Maid and the Abbey in the background.—Here we are!

Maidlin and Cecily were waiting on the terrace and came running to meet the car.

'Oh, Damaris! Mary Damayris has given me the biggest thrill of my life!' Maidlin cried. 'Joy spoke to me last night, and it was because of you!'

'Spoke to you?' Rachel and Damaris shouted together. 'Not by telephone?'

'By the Atlantic telephone. I nearly died when they said, "Please hold on. New York wants you." The papers had paragraphs about the new Antoine ballet, and Joy couldn't wait for a letter. Ivor rang up for her; he'd done it before, on business; and Joy spoke to me herself. It must have cost them pounds!'

'Gosh!' Damaris spoke in a tone of awe. 'Am I worth all that?'

'You're world-famous now,' Cecily laughed.

'What did she say, Maid?' Rachel cried.

'She said, "Maid, what does this mean? I've been reading about *The Goose-Girl*. Isn't Mary Damayris the name your Damaris had chosen? Why has this new girl bagged it?" She sounded fearfully upset, for your sake.'

Damaris chuckled. 'What a chance for you! What did you say?'

'I said, very gently, "It *is* my Damaris, Joy. I'm terribly proud of her. I was there, and I saw her being the Goose-Girl." I heard her gasp, and then she wanted to hear all about it. We had only a minute or so, but I'm writing a long letter. She just had time to ask how the children were, and to send you her warmest congratulations. She must have been really worked up and thrilled before she'd 'phone from America!'

'It's the biggest compliment I've had!' Damaris declared.

'Last night Marry and I gave our first supper party,' Rachel said. 'We could afford to be late, as to-day's Sunday. It was for Madame Bonnet and Papa Berthelot, from Annecy, and we asked Madame Roskova and M. Jean Berthelot to meet them. We went to a restaurant and did the thing properly.'

'Madame is asking Papa and Madame Bonnet to her flat to-day, to meet the Great St. Bernard and Margery Martin,' Damaris added. 'Papa's in the seventh heaven of joy, at the thought. Madame Roskova and Madame Bonnet met years ago, in the old days of the Russian Ballet; they were telling stories the whole time. They knew Nijinsky and Pavlova and were at school with Karsavina; it was marvellous to hear them!'

'Miss Baldry's coming next week.' Rachel took up the breathless tale of their doings. 'I shall have to look after her. We mustn't lose her in London!'

'Miss Allen wrote me a lovely letter from school,' Damaris said. 'She's coming to see *The Goose-Girl* in the holidays. And Philippa's going to tease her family till they give her a week-end in town.—Here comes the usual rush of twins!'

'Aunty Dam! Show us you being the Goose-Girl!' Margaret shouted.

'She's Aunty Damayris now. It's her new name. I like Aunty Damayris!' Elizabeth cried.

Damaris gave a hand to each.

'I've left the Goose-Girl in London. Have a dance with me instead. Come and join us, Ray! Twins, dance round Aunty Ray, because her story's going to be printed in the paper!' And she began to chant a French nursery rhyme—*Cadet Rousselle*. 'It's nearly the same as Mulberry Bush! Here we go-round in a ring—round Aunty Ray!'

Rachel broke from within the ring and seized a twin by each hand also. Maidlin and Cecily ran to join them, and they all danced wildly on the lawn.

‘Oh, it’s jolly to be home again!’ Damaris laughed happily.

‘Then don’t go away! Stay with us now!’ Margaret shouted.

‘Silly girl! She can’t be the Goose-Girl, unless she goes to London,’ Elizabeth argued.

‘Then come back! Come again soon, Aunty Dam!’

‘Thank you, Margaret. You can be sure I’ll do that,’ Damaris cried, laughing.

‘She’s Aunty Damayris,’ Elizabeth said firmly.

[The end of *Damaris Dances* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]