

GUARDIANS *of the* ABBEY



ELSIE J. OXENHAM

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GUARDIANS OF THE ABBEY

ELSIE JEANETTE OXENHAM

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To
my niece
ELSPETH WENDY
with all good wishes
and love

CHAPTER ONE

A Great Occasion

“Not bad. In fact, jolly good! One more go,” and the schoolgirl began to dance again across her clay pipes, deftly crossing her feet and placing heel and toe in the angles.

The Abbey ruins lay peaceful in the afternoon sun. She had laid her pipes neatly in front of the chapter-house doorway, where the westering light shone upon her. Whistling a little tune, a version of “Greensleeves,” she was absorbed in her practice of the difficult step, her mop of dark hair waving wildly as she hopped round and over her pipes. She was nearly sixteen, ex-May-Queen at the big school in Wycombe; her name was Joan Fraser, but she was known as Marigold, from her choice of flower and colour as Queen, or as Littlejan, to distinguish her from her godmother, an older Joan, the owner of the Abbey.

The bell pealed at the gate, and Littlejan snatched up her pipes. “Tourists! I’m off. I’d love to stay and help Mrs. Watson; she’s getting past the job. I’m sure she pants and wheezes when she goes up the dormitory steps! But she might be hurt, if I offered.”

She paused in the shadow of an ancient arch and watched the old woman, as she went to open the gate. “Aunt Joan’s too kind to turn her off, but she’ll have to do it soon. I’d better disappear; those people will be coming. Oh well! I’ve worked off some of the excitement—and I didn’t break my lovely pipes!”

She ran down a dark stone passage, through a little garden, gay with yellow button chrysanthemums, and by an old gate to the lawn of the Hall.

“Perhaps Rosalind will have arrived—oh, she’s here! There’s the Kentisbury car—oh, cheers! Hi, Rosalind! Nice of you to come!”

A girl of sixteen, carrying a violin-case, was stepping from the car. She had long yellow plaits hanging to frame her face, and under her coat she wore a frock of deep blue silk.

“Marigold, what is it all about? Aunt Rosamund wouldn’t tell me; she just said you wanted me for the week-end. I was here till Monday! What has happened? I brought the fiddle; is it for dancing you want me?”

“Not this time. But I’m jolly glad to see the fiddle; I’ve been swotting at ‘Bacca Pipes’ in the Abbey, without any music but a rather feeble whistle of my own. You can play, and I’ll work in earnest.”

“Of course I will. But that wasn’t why you asked me to come?”

“No, I’ll tell you about that.” Littlejan took her arm and led her up to the terrace and into the house, while the chauffeur carried in a small suit-case and then drove away.

“Tea will soon be ready. Sit down and I’ll tell you about tonight.”

Rosalind allowed herself to be pushed gently into a big chair beside the wood fire. “I’m full of curiosity,” she said solemnly.

“Like the elephant’s child,” Littlejan grinned. “This is what has happened and what’s going to happen. Dear, darling Aunt Joan rang up Mary-Dorothy and said she’d like Jansy and me to have a bit of a treat; she said I’d had a rotten time last week, with the shock of Alan’s operation and the rush to York and back.”

Rosalind nodded; she had been staying at the Hall when the bad news had come and Littlejan had been whisked off to York, not knowing whether Alan, her small brother, would be still alive when she reached him. He was recovering now, and Littlejan no longer needed to

worry on his account, but the whole affair had been a bad shock, and Rosalind, in some ways old for her age, could understand that a pleasant happening to fill her thoughts would be good for her.

“Jansy deserves a treat too, after all her work, teaching the week-end school,” she said. “What does Mrs. Raymond want you to do? It’s lovely of you to include me.”

“Aunt Joan specially mentioned you. She said—‘See if you can get Rosalind Kane to go with you.’ Such fun, Rosalind! She told Mary-Dorothy to book a box and take us to see Mary Damayris in her new ballet! You’ll like it, won’t you? They say the music’s glorious.”

“I’ll love it! I’ve never seen a real ballet, but I’ve heard about Mary Damayris. Everybody says she’s wonderful.”

“Quite marvellous. I’ve seen her dance several times. She’s been here for week-end rests once or twice, but mostly when she has time she goes to the Pallant, to Maidlin Robertson, who’s her cousin, you know. It was here, in this house—in this very hall—that Mary Damayris told Maidlin she wanted to be a dancer. Before that she was just Dammy Ellerton—I mean Damaris, of course!—and she’d planned to keep hens and bees on their tiny farm in Cumberland, with Rachel, her sister. But they’d been in France, and people there had seen Damaris dance and had made her go to a good teacher, and so—well, she turned into Mary Damayris and took the world by storm! But it all began here, in this very room. So we almost feel Mary Damayris is related to us. You know that Mrs. Watson, in the Abbey, is her aunt, don’t you?”

“The caretaker?” Rosalind asked, startled. “But how? Or why? She’s such a funny old thing; quite nice, but not the sort of aunt you’d expect a great dancer to have.”

“Oh, I don’t know! Ballet dancers come from all kinds of homes. Mrs. Watson belongs to the farm in Cumberland. She was a children’s nurse in London for years, and then she got this job at the Abbey. She’s Maidlin Robertson’s aunt too. Maidlin was living with her when Lady Quellyn brought her to live here and discovered she had a voice and had her trained. Mary Damayris and Rachel come sometimes to see Mrs. Watson, but she was never at the farm when they were there and they don’t know her very well. Still, she is their aunt.”

“What a queer story! It’s interesting,” Rosalind said, with grave approval. “I’ll like to see Mary Damayris dance. Are you keen on ballet?”

“Not really,” Littlejan admitted. “It’s so terribly different from our dancing. I’m a folk-dancer all through. But I’m keen on Mary Damayris and I love to watch her. Jansy feels just the same.”

“Janice! You aren’t good at remembering,” Rosalind scolded.

“I never shall remember. She’ll always be Jansy or Jan to me. But I do try to call her Janice at school, as she’s so keen on it. Hi, Jan! Let me introduce you to Lady Rosalind Kane!”

A much younger girl, of nearly thirteen, came racing down the stairs. “I’m always glad to see Lady Rosalind, but I’d much rather it was Nanta Rose who had come.”

“Nanta Rose has come. Marigold’s only ragging,” Rosalind assured her.

“If I thought you wanted us to ‘Lady’ you, nothing would induce me to do it,” Littlejan grinned at her. “But as I know you hate it, I do it now and then, as a joke.”

Rosalind’s father had been the Earl of Kentisbury, but only for a few days, and in common with her sisters she disliked and resented her unnecessary title. “It’s a joke that people who like me never make,” she said with dignity.

Littlejan collapsed. "Oh, I say! I'm frightfully sorry! Don't be a brute, Rosalind Atalanta Kane!"

"I call her Nanta Rose," Jansy proclaimed. "It's her baby nickname, but I like it."

"She's going to play for my 'Bacca Pipes' practice after tea. I've been dancing in the Abbey, but tourists came, so I had to scoot," Littlejan said.

"Mother used to do that," remarked Jansy, whose mother owned the Abbey. She was very like the elder Joan, with dark red hair worn in two little plaits for school but left hanging loose at home. It lay in curls on her shoulders now, as she led the way to the dining-room for tea. "Mary-Dorothy's waiting for us. She's as keen to see the new ballet as we are," she said.

Mary Devine, writer of books for girls, was also secretary and helper to Joy, Lady Quellyn, the owner of the Hall. In Joy's absence in New York, she acted as hostess and housekeeper and cared for Littlejan and Jansy, who lived there during term to be near their school. She welcomed Rosalind warmly; it was less than a week since Rosalind had left the Hall, after spending ten days with the younger girls at half-term.

"A pity we couldn't have Jean too. Then our half-term party would have been complete," Mary said. "But her mother needed her this week-end."

"Her mother's a stodgy old-fashioned Scot, and she didn't want Queen Jean to go to the ballet," Littlejan remarked, waiting on Rosalind with hot scones and bread and butter. "Jean was mad; she'd have loved it. But her mother doesn't like ballet, especially for schoolgirls. I can do that 'Bacca Pipes' figure now, Mary-Dorothy; I've been practising in the Abbey. After tea Rosalind will play and I'll show you."

"You're very neat," Rosalind commented, when, in the big hall after tea, Littlejan had danced across her pipes. "I've never tried myself, but Virginia can do it. I love to watch her."

"Your sister is a beautiful dancer," Mary said. "Now you had better go and dress, girls. We haven't much time."

"Whoops! Come on, Jan! Look, Rosalind! I didn't step on them!" Littlejan caught up her pipes and held them to show they were not broken, and then raced away upstairs.

"Come and dress us, since you're in your blue frock already, Nanta Rose!" Jansy cried. "Now for the ballet and Mary Damayris! I do love to see her; I could go on watching her for ever!"

"Did you ring up Rachel and ask her to come and sit with us?" Littlejan asked, as they set out in the car, in a state of high excitement.

"Rachel is Mary Damayris's sister. She takes care of her; she writes stories, too," Jansy explained to Rosalind. "She's nice; they're both as nice as one another."

"I tried, but she was out," Mary said. "Perhaps we'll be able to get hold of her before the show."

However, they were held up by traffic blocks and they only reached their seats as the music began.

"Never mind. We'll ring Rachel tomorrow. We may be able to speak to Damaris too and tell her how much we enjoyed her dancing," Mary said.

"I'm quite sure we shall enjoy it," Jansy chuckled.

CHAPTER TWO

The Challenge

The heavy curtains were falling, so slowly. The scene on the brilliantly lighted stage was plain to everyone in the theatre. What they saw was fixed in their minds for ever. It would haunt one of the audience for her whole life.

A girl lay on a stone bench, in blue robes, her golden hair trailing to the ground; a Sleeping Beauty. Towards her crept stealthily the villain of the piece, an ugly dwarf, a knife glittering in his hand. It was all part of the ballet.

Above, directly over the unnoticing girl, hung a heavy mass of scenery, and by some mischance this had come loose. It shook in a sudden blast of wind from somewhere off-stage, and began to fall.

A white figure darted across the stage; a slim girl in a short tunic, with waving yellow curls. She hurled the Sleeping Beauty aside just in time, throwing herself upon her. The dwarf leapt back into safety.

The curtains were already being lowered. The heavy beam caught the curly-haired girl, pinning her down. She lay stretched beneath its weight.

In one of the boxes a child screamed.

The curtains fell, and the startled audience saw no more. There was a moment of horrified silence, and then a hubbub of questions.

"Is she hurt? Is she dead? It was Mary Damayris, who did that lovely dance in the first piece——"

"Please let me pass!" A girl, dark-haired and white-faced, was making her way from a corner of the dress circle.

"Please let me go to her. I am her sister."

Silently they let her go. She reached the gangway, and then ran like the wind through the corridors.

"Is she dead? She saved Daphne's life. Has she given her own?"

Someone was running by her side; a man.

"I am a doctor. I can help, if you'll show me the way."

"Round here. Thank you." She raced on, her face white but steady.

He glanced at her, as he kept pace with her, and admired her courage. "You are her sister?"

"Yes. In here."

The startled doorkeeper let them in. "Miss Rachel—oh, my dear——"

"This is a doctor. Where is she?"

"They haven't moved her," said the old man. "They're afraid——"

"Good!" said the doctor. "How do we get to her?"

Rachel dived down a passage, and the stage lay before them. Then, at last, she stopped and leaned against the wall, breathless and shaking.

The doctor went forward, thrusting aside Georges Antoine and Madame Roskova, who were kneeling by that slim white body. The beam which had done the harm had been lifted away, and Damaris lay unconscious.

The doctor's eyes seemed to take in everything, while his practised hands ran lightly over her back and limbs.

“See to that other girl; she’s going to faint. Phone for an ambulance. This means hospital, or——”

“She must have the best, as if she were a princess,” Antoine jerked. “We will pay. What is best for her?”

“My nursing-home. I can give her my whole attention there. Where is her plucky sister? Will you come with her?”—to Rachel.

“Oh yes, please! I must be with her. She isn’t dead, then?” Rachel asked brokenly.

“No, certainly not. But there’s injury to that hip. I may have to operate. My card!” and he handed it to Antoine. “She’ll be safe in my hands.”

Antoine glanced at the card. “We’ll trust her to you, Sir Robert. Thank God, you were in the house. She is very precious to us, for herself as well as for her art. And she saved Daphne Dale’s life.”

“I’ll do everything that can be done. She’ll be under my personal care, and I’ll give her the best nurses I have.”

“You must go out and speak to them, Antoine,” said Madame, looking up from Daphne, who was sobbing wildly in her arms; and Rachel and the doctor became conscious of the rising tumult from the audience. “Say there has been a small accident and crave their indulgence for a short time. We must finish the programme. Daphne must carry on for Damayris; she is her understudy.”

“Not tonight,” Daphne moaned. “Oh, I can’t! Not tonight, Madame!”

“My child, you must,” Madame said firmly. “The programme is only half over. We cannot send people away.”

“I can’t!” Daphne shuddered.

Rachel went across to her. “Daphne! You must do it, to please Damaris. She’d want you to take her place.”

“She took my place, under that awful thing!” Daphne shook and sobbed again.

“Yes, well, now you must take hers. It’s hard, but it’s what Damaris would want. You can’t let her down.”

“If it is too much for her, we can put in Ella Delamere.” Madame looked up at Rachel. “She has had a bad shock, this one. We do not want her to go on and then fail.”

“She won’t fail. She’ll think of Damaris and she’ll do her best. Damaris would rather Daphne danced her part than Ella,” said Rachel.

“Perhaps we could put on ‘Rainbow Corner.’ That is Daphne’s own part. She would do it better than one in which she understudied Damayris. Antoine, tell them we shall give them ‘Rainbow Corner’ in a few moments, to close the programme. It is always well received, and it is the ballet which Damayris herself gave to us.”

As the manager disappeared there was a movement behind Rachel and she turned quickly. It was the ambulance men. They listened to the doctor’s instructions, then lifted Damaris on to the stretcher very gently.

Sir Robert Duncan took Rachel’s hand and drew it through his arm. “Come along! We’ll soon have her in bed and more comfortable,” he said cheerily. “You must be as brave as you were at first; and as brave as she was. It was magnificent.”

“Her leap to save Daphne?” Rachel asked unsteadily. “Damaris would never think of herself, if she saw a thing that had to be done.” She caught her breath. “She always accepts a challenge.”

“She accepted this challenge very fully. What do you call her? Not Mary Damayris, I think?”

“Damaris; her own name. The other is only for the ballet.”

“Damayris—Damaris! I see. Damaris what? You are——?”

“Rachel Ellerton. She is Mary Damaris Ellerton.”

“We know her as Mary Damayris. It’s surprising to find she has another name.” He was making Rachel talk, for her own good, while the men lifted the stretcher very carefully.

“Can you save her?” Rachel whispered.

“Her life? Oh yes, I think so. She’s strong, or she couldn’t have lived the strenuous life of a dancer for three years. We’ll do everything for her, and her good constitution will pull her through.”

“Yes, but—can you save Mary Damayris, as well as Damaris?” Rachel’s terrible fear found utterance.

He glanced at her. “You mean—will she dance again?”

“Yes. It means all the world to her.”

“I can’t say. I haven’t seen her injuries. We’ll do everything,——”

“But you don’t think it’s likely?” Rachel stared at him, her eyes wide with terror.

“My dear, I can’t tell you. It’s too soon to say. She is very badly hurt; you may have to be thankful for her life. If she cannot dance, she will have to face the biggest challenge of all, and you will need to stand by her.”

“Thank you,” Rachel said under her breath, as he helped her into the ambulance, to sit and gaze at Damaris during the short tragic journey.

It was striking nine as they reached the nursing-home. Less than an hour ago Damaris had appeared before those blue curtains to bow her thanks for the tumult of applause which had greeted her dancing in the first piece of the evening. Less than an hour!—Rachel said to herself. And life was all different. It had stopped, and then had gone on again, but in a new and frightening form. “In a different key,” Rachel said brokenly to herself. “In a minor key. What is before us? What will Marry do?”

CHAPTER THREE

The Bravest Thing

Mary, looking white, held sobbing Jansy in her arms. "Hush, dear! They'll take good care of Damaris."

Littlejan sat erect, tense with excitement. "Oh, marvellous! She saved that other girl; she never thought of herself. Oh, Mary, you don't think it killed her, do you?"

"I don't know," Mary said unsteadily. "But I'm certain everything will be done for her. Yes, it was magnificent, but it may have cost her——" She pulled herself up. "It was the bravest deed I've ever seen."

"It was simply splendid. Oh, I hope she'll be all right!"

"You were going to say—'cost her her life,' weren't you, Mary-Dorothy?" Jansy sobbed. "I'm sure she's dead, lying under that awful thing!"

"I'm not," Littlejan said stoutly. "I was staring hard—I saw the thing coming down and I was petrified; I couldn't move. I don't believe it touched her head or her back; it only fell on her leg. I'm sure she's not dead. She's a heroine! She couldn't be dead, right on top of being so marvellously brave!"

Rosalind Kane said nothing. Leaning back in her corner she looked as white as Mary, seeing the possibilities as clearly as Mary did.

"Rosalind, wasn't it wonderful? Don't you believe she'll be all right?" Littlejan pleaded.

"Yes, but—I don't know——"

"Hush! Here comes somebody," Mary said.

Georges Antoine appeared before the curtain and made his speech, begging for patience from the audience and announcing a change in the programme.

"With your kind permission we shall give you the fairy ballet, 'Rainbow Corner,' featuring Daphne Dale and Irina Ivanovna, in place of the advertised item. Miss Damayris will unhappily not be able to dance again tonight."

"Is she dead?" A man had risen in the stalls and his question rang out clearly.

A murmur of agreement came from the whole house.

"Certainly not," Antoine said sharply. "We are caring for her. She is slightly injured, but she is in the doctor's hands and we shall do all possible for her. I crave your indulgence for a few moments."

He disappeared, and a buzz of talk filled the theatre.

Mary spoke quickly. "Girls, do you wish to stay, or would you like to go home? You've seen 'Rainbow Corner.' How do you feel?"

"Oh, let's go!" Jansy cried. "I keep seeing that awful thing falling on Mary Damayris!"

"If you don't mind, I say home, too, Mary-Dorothy," Littlejan said. "I don't feel in the least like fairy ballets tonight. I've seen the bravest thing I ever imagined; I don't want silly fairy stuff. What about you, Rosalind?"

"I'd like to go, please. I don't want to see any more."

"I feel the same," Mary agreed. "But there's just one point. 'Rainbow Corner' depends on Daphne Dale, and Daphne was the girl whose life Damaris saved. If she dances again tonight, she will be doing another very brave thing."

"I didn't think of that," Littlejan admitted. "I say, Mary-Dorothy, I don't know how she can!"

"Shall we wait a few minutes and see how she faces up to it?"

"Yes, I think we'd better. But not for long; I don't want to see it all through. I wonder if they've told Rachel?"

"I expect she saw it happen. Isn't she always in the house when Damaris is dancing?"

"Every night? I don't know, Mary-Dorothy."

Mary sat thinking, not seeing the tragic widow on the stage, when the curtain went up, or the teasing fairy in the rainbow skirt, with whirling golden plaits, who was Daphne Dale. The fairy's face was set, and she looked white in spite of her make-up, but her dance, made by Mary Damayris specially for her, was as beautiful as ever, and thunderous applause greeted the first fall of the curtain and acknowledged the brave effort she had made.

"Plucky child! After such a shock!" said many a one in the audience.

Mary had been watching Rosalind anxiously, fearing lest she might faint. She touched Littlejan's arm. "I'd like to go home, Marigold. Do you mind?"

"No, I want to go. Daphne Dale was wonderful, but I've had enough. Can we find Frost? It's earlier than we told him to come."

"He was going up to the gallery to watch. I shouldn't wonder if he's kept an eye on us and we'll find him waiting when we go out."

She was right. Frost, with set face, met them at the entrance, put them into the car, and whirled them off through the lighted streets and the dark country roads towards home.

Jansy, worn out, crept close to Mary, who held her tightly, and presently fell asleep, with a tired sigh.

Rosalind, in her corner, had nothing to say. An irrelevant thought ran insistently through her mind. "This wasn't what Mrs. Raymond meant. It was to be a treat; instead it's been another shock and a bad one. When she hears about it she'll be sorry Jansy and Marigold were there and saw it happen."

"I've been thinking," Mary said in a low tone to Littlejan, as they left town behind. "The accident will be reported in the papers. It can't be hushed up; Damaris is too well known, and everybody saw what happened. Maidlin, and indeed all the family, will have a horrible shock if they hear of it first in that way. I'm afraid we'll need to break it to them."

"Oh!" Littlejan exclaimed in dismay. "Yes, it's true; they ought to know before they see the papers. But it's a dreadful thing to have to do, Mary-Dorothy!"

"It would be more dreadful, if we didn't do it." Rosalind leaned forward from her corner. "Can I help? We mustn't leave it all to Mary. Ought Aunt Rosamund to be told? Does she know Mary Damayris and her sister?"

"That's very kind," Mary said gratefully. "It really would help. Oh yes! Rosamund is fond of the girls. They lived in the Kentisbury town house until a few months ago, when they moved to rooms of their own. She must be told, certainly. If you will speak to her it will ease things for me. I'll ring up Jock Robertson and ask him to tell Maidlin, and I'll tell Joan, and Jen."

"Won't Rachel ring up and tell Maidlin?" Littlejan suggested.

"Not yet, I think. She won't want to leave Damaris. Did you girls mind losing the last two little scenes of the ballet?"

"I didn't," Rosalind said, with emphasis.

“I didn’t want to see any more,” Littlejan acknowledged. “I was glad to come away. I can’t help wondering about Mary Damayris.”

“I’m thinking just as much about poor Rachel,” Mary said. “But she’s brave. She’ll help her sister.”

“That other girl was brave too,” Rosalind remarked. “It can’t have been easy to dance again.”

“No, terribly hard. She’ll break down when it’s over. But that’s part of their training—the show must go on.’ Daphne was very brave,” Mary agreed.

“Mary-Dorothy,” Littlejan began, after a pause, “is there any chance that Damaris might get over it but not be able to dance any more?”

“That’s what I’m afraid of, all the time.” Mary almost whispered her great fear, and Rosalind nodded.

“Oh, Mary! I should think she’d rather die!”

“It would be a tragedy for both Damaris and Rachel,” Mary said sadly. “But we won’t think of it until we know. It will be some time before they can tell; at present we want to hear if her life is saved.”

“She cares for dancing more than anything else in the world; I’ve heard Maidlin say so. She won’t have anything left to live for.”

“She’ll find something,” Mary said, more confidently than she felt. “She’ll have Rachel. They’re very fond of one another.”

“She’ll have one thing, anyway,” Littlejan exclaimed, with sudden energy. “She’ll remember that she saved the other girl’s life. Surely that’s something rather big, Mary-Dorothy!”

“I hope it will comfort Damaris to remember,” Mary assented, but she sounded doubtful.

“You don’t think she’ll care much about having saved Daphne, if it means she can’t dance any more herself?”

“What do you think, Marigold?”

“I don’t know. I can’t imagine it. She’ll feel awful, of course, but I should think she’d like to remember she’d been a heroine.”

“I hope so,” Mary agreed. “Rachel will have to keep reminding her about Daphne.”

“Are they friends—Damaris and Daphne?” Rosalind asked.

“Oh yes! Damaris has helped Daphne a great deal.”

“She’s done more than help her now,” Littlejan observed. “I say, Mary-Dorothy, I’m glad Jansy’s gone to sleep. She was fearfully upset. So was I, but I kept seeing the splendid side of it.”

“Yes, stick to that,” Mary said, and they lapsed into weary silence.

As they entered the big doors of the Hall the telephone rang, and a moment later a maid met them, looking relieved but surprised by their early return. “A call for you, Miss Mary. Miss Rachel Ellerton wants you.”

“Rachel! What does this mean?” Mary exclaimed. “I’ll come at once. Jansy, run off to bed; we’ll bring your supper up to you.” And she hurried to the telephone.

Jansy was only half awake. Littlejan and Rosalind looked at one another and then took her between them and hustled her gently upstairs.

“We’ll put her to bed,” Littlejan said. “The poor kid’s just about done in.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Breaking the News

“Oh, Mary!” Rachel’s voice broke.

Mary interrupted her. “Rachel dear, don’t try to tell me. We were there; we saw what happened. How is Damaris?”

“I saw you. Will you tell Maidlin for me, Mary? I don’t think I could bear it. But Maid must know before she sees the papers.”

“Dear, of course I will. I’ll be glad to feel we’re saving you one little thing. Tell me about Damaris, Ray!”

“Sir Robert Duncan, the great surgeon, was in the house, and he went to help; Marry is in his private nursing-home. He says I may stay here tonight; he may have to operate. The thing caught her hip.” Rachel’s voice broke again, but she steadied herself bravely and hurried on. “He thinks he’ll be able to save her, but he can’t say till he’s examined her. He’s being more than kind. It was his idea that I should phone; I couldn’t think clearly. I felt Maidlin must be told, and I didn’t know how to do it. Then I remembered I’d seen you and the girls, and I thought I could ask you to help; I guessed you’d go home early.”

“None of us had any heart for more ballet. If there’s the smallest thing we can do, don’t hesitate to call on us. Don’t let Damaris want for anything; you have all of us behind you; the whole clan. We’ve been very proud of Damaris, and we’re prouder than ever tonight; tell her so, when she can understand. And—Rachel dear! Take care of yourself, for her sake. She’s going to need you badly. Don’t break down! Sir Robert will save her now, but presently the saving may have to be done by you.”

“I’m afraid, Mary-Dorothy!”

“I know. But you’ll pull through, you and Damaris together. You aren’t the sort to go under, whatever happens. We shall be thinking of you, and praying for you, Rachel. You wouldn’t like me to come to keep you company?”

“Oh, Mary, how kind!” Rachel cried. “It will help me, just to remember you offered! But not now; I’m going back to the nursing-home. If you knew how frightened I feel!”

“But you’ll like to be near her. She’ll want you when she wakes, Ray.”

“Yes; oh, I must be there. But it’s the future, Mary. Do you think this is the end of everything for Damaris?”

“Rachel dear, if it’s the end of one career for her, it will be the beginning of another. Damaris has too much courage to give up everything at twenty-one.”

“You are a comfort, Mary-Dorothy!” Rachel said unsteadily. “But it will break her heart if she can’t go on dancing, and of course that’s what we’re all afraid of.”

“She’ll find something else, and you’ll help her. She’s too brave to go down altogether, and you’re too strong to allow it. You’ll pull her through and yourself too. Our best wishes and prayers will be with you. Now you must go back to her! We’ll tell everybody; don’t worry about any of that. God bless you both, Ray dear!”

She turned from the telephone, to find Littlejan and Rosalind waiting for her anxiously.

“Jansy’s in bed, and her supper’s gone up to her,” Littlejan explained. “Tell us, Mary-Dorothy! Had Rachel seen us?”

“Yes. She asked me to help, by telling Maidlin for her. I’m thankful she did; she’d have gone through it all again, in telling the story to Maid. Come up to Jansy’s room! She’ll want to hear all there is to tell. It isn’t much so far.”

Sitting on the bed, while Jansy ate sandwiches and drank warm milk, Mary told Rachel’s story. “Sir Robert Duncan, the great doctor, was in the theatre and he went to help. Damaris is in his private nursing-home, and Rachel is staying there, to be near her. Everything possible will be done for her, so you can all go to sleep knowing she is in good and kind hands and is being cared for. She is injured, of course; the beam caught her hip, but it didn’t touch her back or her head, so there is much to be thankful for.”

Her tone was determinedly cheerful and she looked encouragingly at Jansy. But she would not meet Littlejan’s eyes, or Rosalind’s.

All too well they understood her fear. A dancer’s hip! Littlejan thought of the intricate movements of ballet, the amazing suppleness needed in joints and muscles. Rosalind remembered the wonderful whirling figure of Damaris in the first play of the evening, the radiant life, the exuberant energy and, above all, the joy of the dancer.

“What if she can never dance again?” The thought haunted both girls, as they went soberly down to supper.

“Off you go to bed Marigold,” Mary said presently. “Rosalind is going to help by ringing up the Castle. Then she’ll come too.”

“Couldn’t I do something?” Littlejan asked wistfully. “I could tell them at the Manor. Or—oh, Mary-Dorothy! Let me tell Aunty Joan! It was her treat to us! I’d like to thank her for sending us.”

Mary looked at her curiously, as Rosalind went to the telephone. “Joan will be sorry you were there, when she hears what happened.”

“That’s why I want to be the one to tell her. I’m not sorry! It would have happened whether we were there or not, and because we were there you’re able to help Rachel a lot. Besides, it was the most splendid thing I ever saw. I want to tell Aunty Joan how wonderful Damaris was, and that we aren’t sorry we were there.”

Mary gave her another appreciative look. “That’s a good thought, Marigold. Yes, you must certainly tell Joan, if that is how you feel. You shall speak to her when Rosalind has finished. That leaves me only Jock Robertson and Jen. You girls are really making it easier for me, and I’m grateful.”

Rosalind came back, looking white and tired. “Aunt Rosamund was upset, but she’s glad to be told before it gets into the papers. May I go to bed now, please?”

“Yes, my dear, and thank you. Marigold will come in a moment. She begged to be the one to tell Mrs. Raymond.”

Littlejan talked at express speed into the telephone, then answered a few questions from troubled Joan.

“I’m glad Rachel rang up before we told people,” she said to Mary, when she returned. “We can say so much more now. Aunty Joan wanted to know what’s being done for Mary Damayris, and thanks to Rachel I was able to tell her. She was glad to hear about Sir Robert Duncan. We’re to give Rachel her love next time she rings up.”

“Aunt Rosamund said that too,” Rosalind leaned on the gallery rail. “She sent her love to both of them.”

“I’ll tell Rachel, if she rings again. Now run off to bed, girls, and don’t talk more than you can help,” Mary said.

Rosalind paused at the door of her room, which was next to Littlejan's. "You know Mary Damayris. Suppose she can never dance again? What will she do? Will she be brave enough to face up to it?"

"I can't imagine," Littlejan said sincerely. "I think I should die."

"She was wonderfully brave, when it happened," Rosalind began.

"Yes, absolutely marvellous. But this is much harder; terribly hard! She has Rachel to help her, of course. It's rough on Rachel too. I should think they'd both want to die—Oh, I forgot!" and Littlejan hung over the gallery railing. "Mary-Dorothy!"

"Go to bed, Marigold!" Mary said severely.

"Yes, but you'll tell Frost they're taking care of Mary Damayris, won't you?"

"Frost? Did he ask?"

"Rather! When you'd gone to the telephone he said—'You'll tell me the news of our little lady, won't you?' He saw what happened; I think he felt as bad as we did. He knows her, doesn't he?"

"Oh yes! And he has seen her dance so often, when he has driven us to the theatre. I'll tell him, Marigold."

"He'll be glad to hear she isn't dead," and Littlejan went soberly to her room.

CHAPTER FIVE

Damaris Wakes

"My car will be at the door in a few minutes." Sir Robert turned to Rachel, as Damaris was carried away. "I shall be busy with your sister; no, I'm afraid you can't be with her just now. You must trust her to us for a while. Wouldn't you like the car to run you home, to collect a few things for the night and to tell your parents? The accident will be reported in the papers, and your friends would have a nasty shock. They should be told. Then the car will bring you back, and you shall see your sister as soon as it is wise for you to do so."

With quivering lips Rachel thanked him. "You think of everything! We haven't any parents, and we live in rooms, but there are people I could ring up. Our cousin—you'll know her name; Madalena di Ravarati, the singer, but she's Mrs. Robertson now—has been very good to us and we owe all this dancing to her. Lady Kentisbury has helped us too. Oh, thank you for being so thoughtful! It would have been dreadful if they'd heard it first from the papers. You are being more than kind! I don't seem able to think clearly yet."

He pushed her gently into a waiting-room and made her sit down. "Drink this, my child. You've had a bad shock too. Yes, drink it up; do as you're told. I can't go to your sister till I've seen you pull yourself together. I don't want a second patient on my hands."

Rachel drank hastily. "Oh, please go to her! Indeed, I'm all right now; that stuff's nasty, but it helps. Please go to Damaris quickly!"

"They're not quite ready for me. My nurses know what to do. But I'll go as soon as I'm satisfied that you are yourself again."

Rachel rose. "If your car's there I'll go at once. Then you won't worry about me."

"That's the spirit!" he said admiringly. "Get on with what has to be done; that's your motto, isn't it? You aren't going to lie about fainting and weeping, and keeping me from my patient!"

"I hope not," she said gravely, as she followed him out to find the car; to drive to their rooms—to phone to Mary Devine—to collect a few things for the night. Then the car carried her back to the nursing-home and presently she was allowed to go upstairs.

Damaris lay, looking white without her make-up, her yellow curls flung across the pillow. Rachel, with trembling lips, sat by the bed to wait.

It seemed a very long while. The nurse moved about quietly, keeping one eye on the patient. Sir Robert had gone out, as soon as his work on Damaris was finished, to an urgent case, leaving a message for Rachel that her sister was doing well and she must not worry too much.

Not worry! There was nothing else to do! Was this the end of Damaris as a dancer? Her short career had been triumphant. Was it to be all over in three happy years?

"What will she do? What shall we both do?" Rachel asked herself.

The nurse touched her shoulder. "She's going to wake."

The dark eyes opened slowly and Damaris looked up. Rachel bent and kissed her gently but did not speak.

Damaris looked at the nurse, who was watching her carefully. "Where?" she whispered. "Why?"

“You fell and were hurt a little. We’re taking care of you,” Rachel explained, and the nurse nodded approval.

Suddenly the brown eyes filled with horror, as memory began to return. “Daphne? Oh, Ray, was I in time?”

Rachel caught her breath. Damaris had not thought of herself; that would come later.

“Yes, you were in time, Marry dear. You saved Daphne; she would have been killed. She’s all right, and she carried on for you and finished the programme. She was very plucky; everybody says so. They gave ‘Rainbow Corner,’ and Daphne and Irina were recalled over and over again. Madame sent round a note, in case you asked what had happened. Now couldn’t you go to sleep?”

Damaris lay quiet and it seemed almost as if sleep would come. But her eyes opened again, wide and anxious. “Did people see? Did the curtain come down in time?”

“I’m afraid not. People saw what happened. They know how brave you were.”

“How ghastly!” Damaris murmured. Then she added, with a flickering grin—“But good publicity, Ray!”

“The very best,” Rachel said quietly. “You’ll be a perfect gift to the Sunday papers. *‘Dancer Heroine saves Friend!’* that sort of thing—heaps of it!”

“Awful! Beastly!” Damaris whispered. “But jolly good for business. I bet Antoine and Madame are pleased!”

“They’re pleased with you, but not because of the advertisement.”

Damaris grinned again and once more lay silent. This time she fell asleep, and the nurse looked relieved.

“She’ll sleep for hours now and it will do her more good than anything. I’ll report to Sir Bob; I’m afraid we all call him that, though not to his face! Go and rest, Miss Ellerton. I’ll watch your sister and I’ll call you, if she wakes, but I don’t think she will. You’re almost falling asleep yourself.”

Rachel was, indeed, worn out with overstrain and fatigue. “Are you sure she’ll be all right?” she pleaded.

“Quite sure. I’ll call you, if she wants you.”

“Yes, please,” Rachel said gratefully, and crept away.

She threw off her frock and took up her dressing-gown. Then, changing her mind, she undressed properly and went to bed in earnest, but left gown and slippers ready in case of a sudden call.

None came, and she slept restfully for hours, too weary even to dream of the horror behind and overhanging her.

The memory of it returned as soon as she woke. She sprang out of bed, threw on a few clothes and her blue gown, and ran to the room where Damaris lay.

The nurse who met her was a stranger, but equally kind. “Your sister is sleeping nicely. Look, Miss Ellerton! Aren’t they lovely?”

The room was filled with flowers; great golden chrysanthemums, masses of brown and white, even some roses, though it was mid-November.

Rachel’s eyes widened. “Oh, beautiful! From friends?”

“From all sorts of people. I kept the cards. They must have raided the florists, even though the shops were closed.”

Rachel glanced at the cards. From Madame Roskova; from Georges Antoine; from John Grandison, the composer; “from Daphne, with love”; and many others.

“Poor Daphne!” Rachel thought. “She’ll be feeling this badly. I wonder if I could help her?”

“People have been calling and inquiring all morning,” said the nurse. “I’m glad all our patients aren’t such favourites! Sir Bob was here an hour ago, and he wished me to tell you he is satisfied with your sister’s condition and he wants her to sleep as much as possible. Also, the telephone is at your disposal, if you care to use it.”

“Thank you very much,” Rachel said gratefully, and after she had finished dressing and had forced herself to eat the meal provided for her—and after discovering how very hungry she was—she went to the telephone and rang up Maidlin, her cousin, at the Pallant.

“Maid, Rachel speaking. Marry is going on well and is having a long sleep; they say she’ll be much stronger when she wakes.”

“Oh, Ray, dear! That’s splendid news. How good of you to ring! We’ve been thinking of you, but we didn’t like to call you at the nursing-home.”

“No, better not. They’re being so very kind; I don’t like to give them any more bother. People have been ringing up to inquire, but I feel it’s hardly fair.”

“We were sure you would ring us, if there was anything to tell.”

“Yes. Thanks for trusting me. Marry said a word or two to me—asked if she’d been in time to save Daphne, and if the curtain had come down, or if people had seen what happened. Then she fell asleep, and I was ordered off to bed.”

“I’m glad of that. Did you sleep?”

“Like a log, for hours. Nurse promised to call me if Marry woke. I was about done in, with shock and worry. Will you be speaking to Mary-Dorothy presently?”

“I could do easily. Do you want to send a message?”

“I wonder if she’s told Aunt Ann. If not, could she do it rather carefully? Aunt Ann’s very frail now.”

“I expect Mary-Dorothy has told her, but I’ll pass on the message,” Maidlin promised. “Ray, would it help if I came to town tomorrow and we had lunch together? Don’t you want a chat?”

“I don’t know that I do,” Rachel cried, her voice breaking. “I’m so terribly afraid about the future, Maid. And at present there’s nothing to say.”

“It would be good for you to talk,” Maidlin said. “You’re having to keep it all bottled up. But we’ll wait until you have more to tell.”

“Thank you, Maid. Are the twins all right?”

“Yes, splendid. They’re more interesting every day. I hope when Damaris can be moved you’ll come here and be part of our family.”

“It won’t be for some time, Maid dear. But thank you again. Sir Robert is quite satisfied with the way Marry is going on.”

“That’s comforting. I’m glad.”

“Maid, I’m sorry those girls were there, Littlejan and Jansy and another one. They must have had a horrible shock. Will they be any the worse for it?”

“Mary says Jansy was badly upset, and I think Rosalind Kane was too. She’s artistic and very sensitive. Marigold, like the wise and well-balanced girl she is, keeps her mind firmly on what she calls the splendid side of it—the heroism of Damaris’s self-forgetfulness, and the fact that she saved Daphne’s life and risked her own. I’ll ring them up and give your latest news.”

“I’ll ring you again, as soon as I’ve anything to tell. You didn’t mind my ringing Mary-Dorothy the first time, did you? I just felt I couldn’t——”

“Rachel dear, we understood that. I’m glad you spared yourself one little thing. Mary told Jock, and he told me this morning.”

“That was the best plan,” Rachel agreed, and rang off, to go and sit by Damaris again, dreading her next awakening for fear, with greater strength, she should be able to think more clearly and to ask questions which would be hard to answer.

CHAPTER SIX

Damaris Asks Questions

The nurse, with authority in her tone, turned Rachel out of the room and advised her to go for a walk.

“Sir Bob will be coming to see your sister and he can’t have you here while he attends to her. And I must feed her and make her ready for the night. After all that is done you shall be with her again for a short time. I’ll tell her you are coming presently.”

Rachel went to her room and sat drearily by the window. Then, seeing the foolishness of it, she sprang up and went for the suggested walk.

“Nurse was right. She doesn’t want me ill too, and I’ve had no exercise. I’ll walk home; it’s only about a mile. I’ll tell Mrs. Ellis the latest news.”

“Home” meant their rooms in a quiet street. And here Rachel found letters awaiting her, dropped in during the day by sympathetic friends who had thought she might be there. There was a wild note of distress from Daphne Dale, pleading passionately to be allowed to see Damaris. Rachel wrote a brief reply, to be posted on her way back, trying to comfort the frightened girl and saying she was sure Sir Robert considered that Damaris would live and recover, to some extent. Then her lips pinched, and she closed the letter quickly.

“Yes, but to what extent?” she said to herself. “How much will be left to Marry? If it’s very little, how can I help her to bear it? And anything will seem very little to her, if she doesn’t recover completely.”

She hurried back, fearing lest Damaris should be asking for her, and yet dreading the next meeting.

The nurse beckoned to her. “We’re ready for you, Miss Ellerton. But I can’t let you have very long. Sir Bob is pleased with Miss Damayris, but he wants her to keep quiet and to sleep again. Don’t let her get excited.”

“It’s easy to say it!” Rachel said to herself, as she hurried upstairs.

“Marry dear, you’ve had a lovely long sleep,” she said, bending over the bed. “And you look splendid; ever so much better.”

“I feel a wreck,” Damaris told her. “And—and he hurt me, Ray. He couldn’t help it; he apologised. Ray, what’s happened to me? Did I break my leg? I asked him, but he used words I didn’t understand; I think he did it on purpose. In plain English, Ray—what did that thing do when it knocked me down?”

“It caught your hip,” Rachel said steadily. “It’s not your leg; it’s higher up than that. But just what harm it did I can’t tell you. I don’t know if Sir Robert is sure himself; he may know now, but he didn’t at first. I haven’t seen him today.”

“I see.” Damaris lay staring at her.

With a great effort Rachel steadied herself and looked back at her quietly. “It’s no use asking questions, Marry dear. If you’ll do what they tell you and just rest and sleep, soon you’ll be stronger and they’ll know more, and perhaps then they’ll tell us. Do you see your lovely flowers? Did Nurse show you the cards?”

“Yes, they’re beautiful. It’s kind of everybody. Ray, won’t I be able to walk?” Damaris whispered.

“Oh, Marry dear! I’m sure—quite sure—you’ll be able to walk! Sir Robert is very clever; he’ll know how to help you.”

“I wouldn’t like to live in a bath-chair,” Damaris murmured, a catch in her breath. “Or—or to stump along on crutches.” Her voice was brave, but her eyes met Rachel’s, in terrified appeal.

“I don’t believe it’s as bad as that,” Rachel said stoutly. “Marry, don’t think of such things. It won’t help. I’ve been home, just for a walk, and I collected some letters. I might read one or two of them to you. I’ll fetch them.”

She hurried from the room and found the nurse waiting outside, as she had hoped.

“Nurse—oh, Nurse!” she pleaded, in feverish haste. “She’s talking about needing to live in a bath-chair or going about on crutches. Tell me what to say to her! She will be able to walk, won’t she?”

“Sir Bob believes she’ll walk all right, but he’s doubtful if she’ll ever dance again.” Nurse spoke definitely, having first made sure the door was closed.

Rachel caught her breath. “That’s what I’m dreading! But she hasn’t asked about dancing yet. You think I can tell her she’ll be able to walk?”

“You can set her mind at rest on that point. The hip will mend; she’s young and strong and has everything in her favour. But it may never be supple enough for that highly specialised dancing.”

“Perhaps exercises and massage will help,” Rachel said, with quivering lips. “I’ll tell her she isn’t going to be a cripple, anyway.”

She went back to Damaris. “I didn’t bring the letters; they can wait. Marry dear, I had a word with Nurse, and she’s quite sure you’ll be able to walk. So do stop worrying over those crutches! You won’t need them; or the bath-chair.”

“Only perhaps at first, as an aid to recovery,” Nurse said cheerfully, coming into the room. “No one has suggested you’ll be crippled, Miss Damayris. Why didn’t you ask me, if you were worried?”

Damaris looked into Rachel’s eyes. “I preferred to ask Ray. There are other things, but if I’m not going to be lame all my life, that’s something.”

“Enough to go on with,” Rachel agreed. “Now you’ll go to sleep, won’t you, Marry dear?”

“Try,” Damaris whispered, relaxing suddenly. “Tired, Ray.”

“I know you’re tired, but you’ll sleep that off. Maid sends her love, Marry; I’ve been talking to her.”

“Good! Give everybody my love.” And Damaris drifted into sleep again.

Rachel watched her, in great relief. But the day of reckoning was merely postponed. It must come, when Damaris was strong enough.

“What will Marry do?” she said to herself, as she went to bed. “And what shall I do? How can I help her? If only I could see ahead, for the next few months! And yet—no, I don’t want that. Oh, I’m frightened!”

Nurse had seen the look with which she left her sister. She came to the bedroom door. “A drink of hot milk, to help you to sleep, Miss Ellerton.”

“Oh, thank you! That’s very kind. I don’t feel much like sleep,” Rachel owned.

“This will give you a good start. You must sleep, for our patient’s sake. You are the only person she wants. You’re the one to help her.”

“I feel that. But I don’t know how to do it. I will try, Nurse; thank you. And, please, my name’s Rachel. Can’t you forget ‘Miss Ellerton’?”

“I daresay I could, if I tried hard.” Nurse smiled and left her, knowing that a very little something she had added to the milk would do its work.

Rachel went to bed with a new feeling of friendship, and slept for hours without a dream or movement.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Rainbows to the Rescue

Joan took quick action on hearing Littlejan's story of the accident. She arrived at the Hall on Sunday morning, when the rather subdued household were preparing for church, and carried off all three girls in her car for the day. She herself wanted Jansy, she explained; Alastair, the second brother, brought back from school for a few days, wanted Littlejan; and—"Though I haven't asked her, I'm quite sure Rosamund wants Rosalind; or if she doesn't, we do."

Rosalind smiled rather wanly; she had not slept well.

"I expect Virginia wants me more. Couldn't I go home? I know you live near Rainbows, as well as near Kentisbury."

"I'm dying to see Rainbows New Village," Littlejan proclaimed.

Joan seized her chance. Her one desire was to give the girls something new to think about and if possible to wipe out the results of last night's shock. Jansy's eyes were heavy and her mother knew she had been badly frightened.

"It's early yet. Suppose we drive round by Rainbows and hand Rosalind over to Virginia and have a look at the village?"

"Oh, marvellous!" Littlejan cried. "We'd love it!"

"Rainbows is between Dorking and Kentisbury," Rosalind explained. "It won't be much out of your way, will it?"

"Very little. We'll certainly do it," and Joan took out her maps and planned their road.

"Oh, isn't it funny?" Littlejan laughed, her face bright and eager, as the red and white and grey cottages came in sight, scattered among the brown and russet trees of the park, each house approached by its small brick path.

Rainbows itself, a white mansion, stood on a hill, surrounded by park land. One corner had been set aside for the new village, and the trees and undergrowth had been cleared; there were tree stumps everywhere and in some places piles of building material, bricks and stone and timber. It was a scene of desolation, but the cottages were pretty, and the gardens full of chrysanthemums and late dahlias showed how the residents were already trying to make their village beautiful.

"Which is your house, Rosalind?" Jansy asked with interest, and her mother saw in relief that the cloud had lifted from her face.

"This way, please. Here's Periwinkle Place; the white one with the pointed gable and blue curtains."

"Periwinkle Place! How fascinating!" Joan laughed.

"All the houses have names. There are no real streets, so there can't be numbers. The cottages are just dotted about. That grey one, under the cherry-tree, with cherry-coloured curtains, is Margery Paine's sweet-shop and the children's club. I help in the shop when I'm not at Kentisbury," Rosalind said, with shy importance.

"The cherry-tree is a lovely red," Joan exclaimed.

"You should see it in blossom-time. There's Pouffy at the window—the big cat. He's watching the birds."

"But where is everybody? The place is deserted. Have they all run away?" Littlejan asked.

“Most people go to church, in the old village. It’s about a mile away; we walk through the park. I expect other people are cooking their Sunday dinners. Virginia will be at church, but I’ll wait here for her.”

“Well, I say! If everybody’s busy, couldn’t we get out and have a look round? Would we have time, Aunty Joan?”

“We can spare half an hour,” Joan agreed. “Would you like that, Jansy?”

“I’d love it, Mother. I want to walk on those funny red paths.”

“I want to make faces through the window at that huge cat,” said Littlejan.

“The shop is called Polly’s, because Margery’s nickname is Polly Paine. The house is Cherry-Tree Cottage,” Rosalind explained. “I’ve got a key, if I can get into our house to find it, but I don’t know if Margery would like me to show you her shop——”

“Oh no! We couldn’t go in without her leave,” Joan said. “But we’ll look through the windows and Littlejan shall make rude noises to the cat. He’s a beauty!”

“This is the children’s club-room. You can see the small chairs and the low table. They come here to look at books and pictures and play puzzle-games, and I take their pennies and keep the register, and if they come with dirty hands I send them home.”

“What a jolly job! Isn’t it fun?”

“It is fun,” Rosalind admitted. “I didn’t want to be sent away to school, but Virginia didn’t want me to do nothing but music, so they decided to let me stay at home if I helped Margery in the shop for part of each day.”

“Much more fun than school! I don’t know, though,” and Littlejan changed her mind hastily. “School’s all right. I like it no end. Now let’s go to the other window and be rude to the cat!”

“He’s called the Pouffe, because he’s so big,” Rosalind said. “He’ll want to speak to me.”

At the sight of her the great creature—tabby-striped above and all soft white below, with dazzling snowy breast and legs, and with streaks of brown and yellow on his flanks—opened a wide pink mouth and said something several times. Then he rose on his hind legs, stretching to his full height, and clawed the window with large soft hands, yawning widely and speaking again.

“Gosh! How huge!” Littlejan cried.

“He’s showing off his white underneath,” Jansy laughed, tapping on the window in the region of the Pouffe’s non-existent waist. “He’s proud of all those soft curly bits.”

“Can’t he get out? It’s sad for him to be shut in,” Joan said.

“His little window in the kitchen is always left open. But he likes the sun on these front windows. I don’t think he really wants to get out. If his friend Jane comes, he’ll go with her and have a game; he loves the garden. This is the shop; you can see the counter and the bottles and boxes of sweets.”

“A very nice little place,” Joan commented, while the girls lamented because it was Sunday and they could not be customers for Margery Paine.

They said good-bye to the Pouffe, who watched them through half-closed sleepy eyes, and went on to look at the other cottages, the playing-fields, and the mansion on the hill.

“Mrs. Dering isn’t here just now,” Rosalind explained. “She’s getting better after a dreadful riding accident, last spring. She’s staying in her little house at the seaside. She inherited all this, and she didn’t know what to do with it, but she wanted to share it with somebody. The three things she liked best were music and home and friends, so she decided to give those to people. She built the cottages, so that she could give homes in the country to

people living in towns—I mean, so that we could buy or rent them; it's not a charity! Virginia pays rent for our house, but Margery is buying hers by degrees; she's going to be married, so she'll need to have it made bigger. There's always music at Rainbows; concerts by the orchestra, and Virginia conducts and teaches country-dancing. As for friends, nobody could be near Mrs. Dering and not feel friendly. So she gives her three best things to everybody who comes here."

"And you help with the music?" Joan smiled at her. "I like the sound of your Mrs. Dering. I hope I'll meet her some day."

"I play in the orchestra and for Virginia's dancing class."

"I bet you do!" Littlejan and Jansy spoke together, for they had danced to her music joyfully.

"I'd like you to come to our house and have tea or something." Rosalind looked shyly at Joan. "But I don't know how to get in, unless I break a window. Virginia's sure to have locked the door."

Joan laughed. "We won't break windows! That's a kind thought, but we must hurry on. You've entertained us beautifully by showing us round."

"But we can't leave you sitting on the doorstep!" Jansy cried. "If you can't get in, what will you do, Nanta Rose?"

"She'll go and talk to the cat," said Littlejan.

"I shall walk through the park, to meet Virginia and Margery," Rosalind declared.

"Sure?" Joan smiled. "Then jump into the car, girls. Alastair will be wondering where you are, Littlejan."

"It's queer, isn't it, Mother?" Jansy exclaimed, as they drove away.

Joan saw with joy that the new interest of Rainbows had done what she had hoped and Jansy looked herself again. "What is queer, Jan?"

"Lady Virginia and Lady Rosalind living in that tiny house in this village. Lady Rosalind helping in the shop, and I suppose Lady Virginia cooks the dinner."

"It's clever to be able to cook the dinner," Joan observed. "Virginia is only nineteen. She does well to run her house and look after her sisters, as well as helping in the village."

"There are the other two that we don't really know; Lady Amanda and Lady Araminta," Littlejan remarked.

"It *is* queer, Mother," Jansy insisted. "This doesn't seem the right place for them."

"It's all right when they're at Kentisbury," Littlejan agreed.

"The Castle is their proper setting," Joan assented. "Their father didn't leave them much to live on, I imagine, and though he was the Earl, it was only for about a week, and he was ill and never knew the title had come to him. Everything had to go to the new Earl, who married our Rosamund and made her his Countess. For a while Lady Virginia and the others were too proud to take anything from their uncle, and they preferred to stay here in their cottage; but they are all friends now and the girls often go to the Castle. In the spring Virginia will marry her baronet, and I shouldn't wonder if Mandy and Minty marry soon too; they're very attractive girls. At the moment they're content to stay here. But I agree that it is an odd setting for an Earl's daughters, Jansy."

"Mother! About last night!" Jansy said suddenly, as they drew near home.

"Yes, Jan? I'm sorry you saw it happen. But you won't help anybody by letting it weigh on your mind."

"No, I know; I'll be sensible. But it was horrid to see it." And Jansy shivered.

“Is there any news?” Littlejan asked wistfully.

“Not yet. We’ll tell you when we hear any more. Be sure, both of you, that if we can help we shall do it. You’ll help most by keeping well and jolly and going back to school tomorrow and working hard.”

“Yes, Mother. I’ll do it,” Jansy promised.

“Mary Damayris was a heroine, Aunty Joan. She was just terribly brave,” Littlejan said earnestly. “What will she do, if she can’t dance any more?”

“I don’t know, Littlejan. But she’s brave, as you say. She’ll find something else.”

“I should want to die.”

“Not if you were really brave,” Joan said, as they reached the gate and Alastair came running out to meet Littlejan.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Trouble in the Abbey

Leaving Jansy and Alastair, who were about the same age, with Littlejan, Joan went to the telephone and rang up the Hall.

“The plan has worked, Mary-Dorothy. The girls are bright and happy again. We came round by Rainbows, and they were thrilled; Rosalind showed them everything, and the new interest carried them right out of the other trouble. They haven’t forgotten, but it won’t burden them so completely now. They’ll tell you all about Rosalind and her village at night. Jack will run them home about seven, and they can go to bed in good time and be ready for school tomorrow.”

“It was a good thought,” Mary responded gratefully. “I was afraid they’d brood and be unhappy all Sunday.”

“So was I. We left Rosalind with her family, so perhaps you would pack her case and give it, and her violin, to Jack. We’ll send them to her tomorrow.”

“I’ll do it. Thank you for your great help.”

“I knew what Jansy would be like. Something had to be done,” Joan said. “Littlejan is old enough to be more matter-of-fact and to see both sides of the tragedy. But I was sure Jansy had had a bad fright and I didn’t want her to think about it too much. Once they’re back at school they’ll be all right. I was sorry to take them away from church, but I felt they would be re-living that scene in the theatre during the service.”

“I’m sure you were absolutely right,” Mary said. “I’ve told the story to Mrs. Watson in the Abbey; we forgot her last night, I’m afraid. She was upset, of course. She’s very frail now.”

“Yes, she ought to give up the job. But she’s begged so hard to be allowed to keep on that I hadn’t the heart to turn her out. And I don’t know just the right person to put in her place.”

“There’s Miss Jenkinson in the village, who has taken over when Mrs. Watson has been ill.”

“She’s the only one we can fall back on. But she’s not young, and she is such a stick, Mary-Dorothy! I don’t like having the Abbey shown by somebody with no feeling for the place. Ann Watson may be slow and wheezy, but she does love the Abbey.”

“Yes, she does the job well. But she’s getting past it now.”

The news of Rachel’s talk with Maidlin was awaiting the girls when they reached home. And the following evening, another message from the Pallant told how Rachel had rung up Maidlin again, to tell of her second conversation with her sister.

“Apparently Damaris was afraid she was going to be a cripple for life, and have to go about in a bath-chair or on crutches,” Mary said. “Rachel asked the nurse, who assured her there was no fear of that. Damaris will be able to walk. So Rachel could ease her mind on that point.”

“Well, that’s something to be thankful for!” Littlejan remarked.

“But will she be able to dance?” Jansy asked wistfully. “Can she go on being Mary Damayris?”

“I don’t suppose anybody knows that yet. And Damaris didn’t ask,” Mary said gravely.

“Then she’s frightened about it.” Jansy’s lips quivered.

“I wonder if Rachel’s had a chance to remind her what a big thing she did when she saved Daphne’s life,” Littlejan pondered.

“I don’t know, Marigold. We must wait till we hear more. But she’s going on well; we can be glad of that.”

“I wouldn’t like to be Rachel just now, Mary-Dorothy,” Littlejan said suddenly, as a result of long thought, after Jansy had gone to bed.

“She must be having a very hard time,” Mary agreed. “I wish we could help, but I don’t see what we can do. Maidlin suggested going to town to take her out to lunch, but Rachel begged her to wait, saying she might have more to tell later on.”

“She won’t know where she is or what she’s up against yet,” Littlejan assented. “It’s really terribly rotten for her.”

Messages came from Rachel to Maidlin each night, but they told no more. Damaris was gaining strength, but was not yet having visitors. Madame, Georges Antoine, and Daphne Dale had all begged to be allowed to see her, but Sir Robert had refused permission, and Damaris herself did not want to see anybody; Rachel was definite on that point.

Rachel spent every day at the nursing-home, but had now gone back to her lonely rooms to sleep, since Damaris was no longer in danger, she explained on Friday night.

Mary Devine at once rang up to suggest that she should come to town for a few days, to be company at night.

“Things here will go on all right. We don’t like to think of you alone, Rachel,” she urged.

Rachel’s reply was emphatic, however. “Please don’t do it, Mary-Dorothy. I do appreciate the offer and the kind thought, but I couldn’t bear anybody in Marry’s place; not even you. The two of us have been alone together here; we’ve slept together—we haven’t a second bedroom. I am lonely, but I’d rather get through this time on my own—honestly I would. I know you’ll understand.”

“I do understand. I’d say the same myself,” Mary admitted. “But I do so hate to think you’re alone, Ray. Can you get on with your writing? How is the book going?”

“Oh, it’s stuck,” Rachel said simply. “Too many real things are happening. I’ve no time to think about make-believe.”

“Try to get back to it. You’d be happier.”

“Thanks, Mary dear. But I’m afraid it’s no use. The book seems silly and futile. I’m sure it’s no good.”

“That will pass. You’ll go back to it again. Is there any more to tell tonight?”

“Marry’s improving steadily, but no one will give any opinion about the future. She’ll need to be here for some time yet.”

And with that Mary had to be content. Maidlin thanked her warmly when she heard of the offer, but agreed that Rachel must have her way.

“She can’t talk about things. I should feel just the same,” she said. “It’s bad for her to keep it to herself, but we can’t insist on comforting her. Sometimes it hurts to be comforted! I know Rachel will come through, if we leave her alone.”

“Shall I go and tell Mrs. Watson that Mary Damayris is so much better that Rachel can be away from her at night?” Littlejan asked on Saturday morning. “Or have you told her already, Mary-Dorothy?”

“I was going to her today. Yes, run and tell her, Marigold. There’s just time before the Abbey opens.”

“I’ll come too,” Jansy said, and they ran off together to the old gate in the wall.

Passing through the Abbot's garden and going down the tresaut passage, they came to the cloister garth and crossed it to the little rooms in the outer wall which were Mrs. Watson's home.

"She's nowhere about, but it's only just time. She wouldn't expect tourists on the tick of ten," Littlejan remarked.

She knocked on Mrs. Watson's door, but there was no reply. She knocked again, looking worried. "She can't be down in the village. Perhaps she isn't up yet."

"Mother wouldn't like that," Jansy said, wide-eyed. "What if anybody came? Saturday's often a busy day."

"I hope Mrs. Watson isn't ill. Look here, Jan! I'm going in to see if she's all right."

"Oh, Marigold, do you think we'd better?"

"I think we must. The door isn't locked."

Littlejan peeped in. Then she gave a cry. "She's here. She's fallen down; she's ill. Jan, run for somebody; Mary-Dorothy—anybody!"

Jansy turned to rush home. Then, with great presence of mind, she snatched up the telephone which linked the Abbey with the Hall.

Littlejan bent over the old woman. "She isn't dead. She's breathing, but I don't like the sound of it. Oh, why doesn't somebody come?"

Then she heard Jansy's clear little voice, frightened and tremulous, but insistent. "Mary-Dorothy! I want Mary—oh, Mary-Dorothy, please come! Mrs. Watson's ill. We found her lying on the floor. I heard Marigold say she isn't dead. Thanks, Mary. Yes, we'll wait here."

"I forgot the phone. Good for Jansy!" Littlejan muttered. "Well done, Jan! We can't do anything. We daren't try to lift her. She's only just breathing; she might stop altogether."

"Could we cover her up?" Jansy suggested.

"That's a good idea. Bring her quilt—and a pillow. Poor old thing! She does look bad!"

They made the old woman as comfortable as they could, slipping a rug under her as far as possible, without moving her. Then they waited anxiously for help to come.

Mary was followed by a strong young maid, and the gardener was just behind.

"We'll get her into bed, Miss Mary," said the man. "Or shall we take her to the house?"

Mary was kneeling by Mrs. Watson. "To the house, please. I'm sure Mrs. Raymond would wish it. She must be nursed there, though I'm afraid——"

"She do look bad," the man agreed. "Not a scrap o' strength in her these many years."

Very carefully he drew the frail body on to a hurdle from the gate-house meadow, on which the maid had spread rugs and blankets. They lifted her and carried her away.

Mary followed, but turned first to the girls. "Marigold, you might ring up the doctor. You may catch him before he sets out on his rounds."

"Right, Mary-Dorothy! Wait for me, Jan!" Littlejan, with suddenly sparkling eyes, was asking for the number.

When the message had been given, she turned to Jansy, her face full of glee. "Now, Jan! I'm terribly sorry about Mrs. Watson, but everybody will be very good to her. What about the Abbey? Mary-Dorothy's forgotten, but it's after ten and this is Saturday. There may be troops of tourists here at any moment, and there's no time to fetch anybody. You and I must be the caretakers for today, and show the Americans round. Are you game?"

"Rather!" Jansy's eyes danced. "For sure we must. We know it all, quite as well as Mrs. Watson. Oh, I do hope several lots of tourists come at once! Then there'll be some left over for me. I'd love to show people round quite on my own!"

“You ought to know the Abbey, if anybody does, since it belongs to your mother,” Littlejan agreed. “Of course we know the Abbey, dates and all. We’ll hope for the best, and the best means heaps of business and lots of people. It will be sport! Queen Jean will gnash her teeth when she hears about it!”

CHAPTER NINE

The Caretakers

“I wish we weren’t in school things!” Littlejan mourned. “I’m nearly sixteen, and I can look quite grown up, when I like. But in a tunic I look about eleven. *Why* are we in school things on a Saturday morning?”

“Because we like it and it’s easiest,” Jansy said conclusively.

“Exactly, Jan dear. Just sheer laziness! You couldn’t rush to the house and smuggle out some decent clothes, I suppose?”

“Not without being caught by Mary-Dorothy. Do you think Mrs. Watson is going to die, Marigold?”

“I shouldn’t be a bit surprised. She’s very old and shaky. I’m not being heartless; I think it would be the nicest thing for her. She hasn’t much to live for; she can’t go on in the Abbey any longer, and I don’t see what else she can do.”

“That’s true, but we’d miss her. She’s been here since before I was born. The Abbey would seem odd without her.”

“There are things to do, before anybody comes,” Littlejan said vigorously. “Those priceless manuscripts must be put out in the cases in the refectory. Mrs. Watson sleeps with them under her bed, doesn’t she?”

“I don’t know about under her bed, but I know they aren’t left in the refectory all night.”

“Couldn’t be, of course; far too precious. We’ll poke round till we find them and then we’ll arrange them in the cases.”

They soon found the parchments in a strong metal box; it was, indeed, under the bed, and Littlejan chuckled.

“I thought so! I should sleep on them myself. The keys will be under her pillow; yes, right first guess! She hasn’t made her bed; poor old thing, I’m afraid she’d been lying there some time. We’ll tidy up for her presently, but we’ll get everything ready for the tourists first. Are you good at giving change, if people come when I’m down in the tunnels with a party?”

“I could manage to count a shilling out of a pound note,” Jansy said solemnly.

Littlejan grinned at her. “I apologise. You’re the champion arithmetician of your form, aren’t you? Come on! We’ll lug all this stuff up the refectory stair. I wonder how the old lady managed it?”

“She didn’t,” said Jansy. “Didn’t carry that heavy box, I mean. And we aren’t going to, either; it would be mad. I’ve seen Mrs. Watson packing up for the night; she carries the things in that basket and puts them into the box in here.”

“Oh, right! Here goes!” Littlejan unlocked the box and they laid the treasures carefully in the basket, carried it up to the refectory, and arranged the parchments in their cases on the table, listening all the time for the bell at the entrance gate.

“We might have rung Michael and Cecily, to fetch Mary-Dorothy,” said Jansy, referring to the old bells of the Abbey, which hung on the wall of the refectory.

“There’s nothing in the code about giving the alarm. Mary wouldn’t have known what it meant. The phone was quicker. There! That’s ready. Now we’ll tidy the rooms and make them look nice.”

The telephone was ringing as they reached the garth. Littlejan ran to answer it.

"It's all right, Mary-Dorothy. We aren't lost. But the Abbey can't look after itself. Jan and I are going to do it today—Yes, perfectly well. Of course we can! Don't be unkind. You can find somebody else by Monday, unless you'll let us stay at home from school to be guides to the Abbey—No, I was afraid you wouldn't. But we can do it for today. There's no match at school—Oh well! If you must. But tell her we shall be quite all right and we want to do the job."

"Mary-Dorothy doesn't like our being here alone, and she's going to ring up the Manor and tell Lady Jen," she explained to Jansy.

"If there's anybody in the world who knows the Abbey as well as Mother does, it's Auntie Jen," Jansy conceded. "But she'll be busy with the twins. I shouldn't think she'd have time to be a guide."

"She'll know how we feel. I don't believe she'll butt in," Littlejan said, with complete faith in Jen Marchwood's understanding. "How old was your mother when she did this job, Jan?"

"Fifteen. It was Grandmother's job, really, but Mother did most of it. Then Auntie Joy inherited the Hall, and the Abbey was given to Mother for her own; and they went to live at the Hall. Mother and Auntie Joy went to school and were Queens of the Hamlet Club; and Mrs. Watson was found to be the caretaker. She lived in the village, but her husband had died and all her people have died since she came to the Abbey—except Rachel and Damaris and Auntie Maidlin. Mother taught her about the Abbey, and I've often heard her say how well Mrs. Watson did the job, because she loved the Abbey so much."

The bell clanged, and the girls jumped and looked at one another.

"You go, Marigold!" Jansy cried, with a sudden attack of shyness, of which later she was much ashamed.

"Rather! I'll take this lot. You wait for the next," Littlejan said valiantly.

She pulled her very short tunic straight, ran a hand over her dark curly mop, and marched to the gate. "Will you please come in? I'll show you the Abbey."

Jansy, safe in Mrs. Watson's kitchen, listened admiringly. The visitors were three ladies; not Americans—at least, they had no American accent. They went out on to the garth and looked about them.

"How quaint!" the eldest one began to gush. "What a delightfully quaint old place!"

Jansy, her mother's daughter, retired into a dark corner and felt sick. Years ago Joy had remarked that it made Joan see red when anybody called the Abbey "quaint."

"This is the monks' burial ground; the cloister garth." Littlejan's tone was almost a rebuke. "Those are the remains of the cloisters, which once went all round the garth. This is the way to the refectory, the most perfect part of the Abbey that is left."

"If she says the refectory is quaint I shall scream," Jansy vowed.

But the ladies, exclaiming in delight again, were too far off for her to hear their words, which was perhaps fortunate. They vanished up the refectory stair, and Jansy began to dust the kitchen, wondering if she was quite so anxious to have a party all to herself.

The bell rang again, and, flushed and shy, she opened the gate and saw a lady and a small boy.

"Please come in! Yes, one shilling each; thank you. I'll show you round."

The lady looked at her in amusement. "But——" she began.

The boy exploded. "No, I say! You're not the caretaker, are you?"

Jansy guessed he was about her own age. She said, with great dignity, "I'm part of the caretaker, for today. My friend is busy with other people."

"But you're not going to take us round!" the boy began aggressively. "Guess I don't want just a kid girl for a guide!"

"My dear, are you sure——?" the lady protested.

Jansy looked up at her, wishing, not for the first time, that she was taller. Everybody said she would begin to grow soon, but it did not seem to happen.

"The caretaker has been taken ill. The Abbey belongs to my mother, and I've known all about it since I began to be able to think," she said, with immense dignity.

"Then you must be little Miss Raymond! Didn't I see you at the May-day ceremony?" her client exclaimed. "Weren't you maid to the new Queen, who wore the pretty pale blue and green train; the Rosemary Maid?"

"Queen Jean; yes, I was her maid," Jansy assented. "I do know about the Abbey, really and truly."

"Of course you do! We'll be delighted if you will take us round."

Abashed, the boy subsided, and followed and listened in respectful silence. Jansy told her stories well; she was interested, and she passed on her enthusiasm to the strangers. They left at last, having thoroughly enjoyed their visit, with warm thanks for the trouble she had taken and congratulations on her knowledge of the Abbey.

Jansy raced exultantly back to the garth. But Littlejan was busy with another group of ladies, so she had to keep her excitement to herself. They had met at the door of the chapter-house, but as each was in charge of a party, only a wink had passed between them.

The bell at the gate clanged again, and Jansy, reassured now as to her own powers, ran to open it. "We're having a busy day!" she said to herself.

Then she gave a cry. "Oh—Dickon! President! Oh, how nice of you to come!"

"It was a sudden idea, so I didn't ring up," said Cicely Everett, the President of the Hamlet Club. "Dickon has been teasing me to bring him to see the Abbey again; he's only been once before. Today seemed suitable, so we rushed off. But where is Mrs. Watson?"

Dickon and Jansy looked at one another. They were very good friends; Jansy had spent many a day at Broadway End with Dickon and Cis. His birthday was the day after hers and they were the same age, so they were practically twins, and their mothers had seen to it that they had many chances of making friends. Both families kept a private hope that more than friendship might come of the intimacy one day; it would intrigue Joan and Cicely mightily if their eldest children should see fit to marry.

"What sport!" Jansy's eyes sparkled. "I'm the guide for today; I'll show you round. Mrs. Watson's ill; they've taken her to the house. Marigold's busy with a crowd, up in the refec., so we'd better start somewhere else."

"No—I say! Have you really bagged the job, Jan?" Dickon asked, with a wide grin.

"Just for today. I'm afraid they'll send us back to school on Monday," Jansy said mournfully. "It's fun being a guide. My first lady had a boy about our age and he tried to be cheeky. But I squashed him, and he came round with me like a lamb."

"We couldn't have a better guide," the President said. "If anyone knows the Abbey it's likely to be Joan's daughter. Your mother took me round on my first visit, you know."

"I've heard the story. But there wasn't nearly as much to show then," Jansy remarked.

"No, you've all added so much to the Abbey. Dickon's keenest on the underground passages, I'm afraid. I remember dancing here for Sir Keith Marchwood, long before anyone

dreamt that Joy and Jen would be called Marchwood one day,” and Cicely’s eyes rested on the smooth turf of the garth. “We did ‘Newcastle’ and ‘Sellenger’s’ for him. And Joan once had a moonlight dance here; we did ‘Newcastle’ then too.”

“Mother and Aunty Joy danced a minuet on the garth, and Sir Antony Abinger saw them and was so pleased that he left the Abbey to Mother and the Hall to Aunty Joy,” Jansy began.

“He was Joy’s grandfather, though she didn’t know it at the time. Now what will you show us first?”

“Cellars—tunnels,” Dickon suggested. “You couldn’t manage to bury us, so that we’d have to be rescued, could you?”

“I shouldn’t think of burying you,” Jansy said haughtily. “Come to the chapter-house, then. That’s the way down.”

As they came back from their visit to the tomb of the old lay-brother, Ambrose, they ran into Littlejan and her group of ladies.

“Gosh!” said Marigold. “It’s the President! And Dickon! How jolly nice of you to come while Jan and I are in charge!”

“They’re my visitors,” Jansy retorted. “You stick to your own lot!”

Littlejan grinned at Mrs. Everett. “You’re in luck!”

“Dickon and I, to have Jansy as guide? Or Jansy, to have us as her tourists?” Cicely asked.

“I’m not sure. Both, I think,” and Marigold led her party on through the tunnels.

CHAPTER TEN

An Unexpected Visitor

"Aren't you going to see anybody but us?" Littlejan asked, when, her visitors having gone, she joined the President, Dickon and Jansy. "Lady Jen would want you to go to the Manor."

"You can give her our love. She's busy with the twins, and we ought to hurry home. We've told Cis to take charge of Ted and Shirley." Cicely Everett smiled. "Nurse is there, but Cis is quite useful too; she plays with the little ones so well."

Small Cicely was eleven years old and Jansy knew her at school. "Cis ought to be a maid some day, and then Queen," she said.

"She'll never be much of a leader; she's too quiet—not in the least like me! But she'd be a nice maid for somebody," said the President.

"My first lady this morning called me the Rosemary Maid. She'd seen Jean crowned last May. It was rather a nice name," Jansy remarked.

"I shall call you Rosemary Maid," Littlejan proclaimed. "It's a ducky name."

Dickon thrust a cake of chocolate into Jansy's hand. "That's your tip," he said blandly. "Caretakers always have tips."

"I don't want a tip!" Jansy flared up at once.

"You take it, Jan," Marigold cried. "Don't lose a good chance! We haven't made any plans for dinner, you know."

"We can trust Mary-Dorothy to feed you. She's always on hand when she's wanted," the President said. "Yes, take the chocolate, Jansy. Dickon really wants you to have it." And they went to their waiting car.

"We'll see what Mrs. Watson has in her larder. At least there'll be eggs and bread and butter," Littlejan began.

"Here comes Mary-Dorothy, with a big basket." And Jansy raced across the garth. "Oh, Mary-Dorothy! It has been sport! Who do you think has been here? The President and Dickon! I took them round, all on my own."

"How is Mrs. Watson?" Littlejan asked.

"Oh, sorry! I forgot," Jansy said penitently.

Mary put down her basket on the cloister steps. "Bring rugs and cushions and we'll have a picnic. Put on your coats, girls; the sun's disappearing. I'm not needed for half an hour and I want to hear all you have been doing. Mrs. Watson is still unconscious and her heart is very weak. The doctor has sent in a nurse, and he'll send another to sit with her at night; no one will listen when I offer to do it! So she's being well looked after. I rang up and told Maidlin and she's driving over this afternoon to see her. But she can't do any more than we're doing, and unless there's a big change her aunt won't know her. Jen came to have a look at her, but she said she wouldn't butt in on you two unless you asked for help, as she knew you were perfectly capable of showing the Abbey to anybody."

"Nice of her; jolly nice! I knew she'd understand how keen we were," Littlejan said. "Oh, what a lovely picnic! You are an angel, Mary-Dorothy!"

"Start on those patties and sandwiches," Mary ordered. "What's this about the President?"

They were still telling their story and enjoying meat patties and egg sandwiches when the bell rang.

"Bother! Oh, bother!" Littlejan groaned. "People ought not to come in the dinner-hour! Shall I tell them to wait till two o'clock? I was enjoying my lunch so much!"

Mary and Jansy were already bundling the picnic goods into the basket. "In the little room, Mary," Jansy cried. "We can't get to the kitchen without being seen from the gate. When Marigold takes the creatures up to the refec., we'll go into Mrs. Watson's rooms."

"Yes, that's best. Run along, Marigold; we'll be out of sight in a moment. I'm sorry about your lunch, but you can finish afterwards."

"Rosemary Maid, you'll have to take the next lot, so hurry up and finish your grub!" and Littlejan gulped down the end of her sandwich, wiped her fingers, and went with dignity to the gate.

"Why did she call you that? It's a new name for you," Mary said.

Jansy was explaining, when they heard a shout from the entrance.

"It's someone Marigold knows," Jansy cried, and crept to the corner of the cloisters to see.

Then she, too, gave a shout. "It's Rachel! Oh, how is Damaris? Oh, Mary-Dorothy, it's Rachel!"

Mary hurried out. "Rachel dear! This is a great surprise! How is Mary Damayris?"

Rachel gave her a straight look, full of meaning. "I think perhaps we're going to lose Mary Damayris. But Damaris is going on well. I've come today because she was so anxious that I should; I'll tell you presently. But I want to see Aunt Ann too. I had a postcard from her, and the writing was so shaky that I felt—what's the matter? Is she ill——?" The startled looks passing between the other three had told her there was trouble.

Mary spoke quickly. "Rachel dear, she's very ill. We found her lying on the floor, and the doctor fears a stroke. We've taken her to the house and she has a good nurse. You can see her, but she won't know you. We're doing all we can for her."

"Everything happens at once," Rachel said brokenly. "I was afraid of it. She's been frail for so long. Perhaps the news of Marry's accident was the last straw."

"Come and have lunch with us!" Littlejan took her arm and spoke coaxingly. "We were having a picnic in the cloisters. I'm sure you're hungry. Were you going to ask Mrs. Watson for some eats?"

"We thought you were a tourist. We're so frightfully glad you're not! We flung the feast out of sight; it won't take a second to set the table again!" Jansy cried, and rushed to spread out the food. "There's heaps left, and we're going to make tea. Come and picnic with us!"

Mary was putting on the kettle and piling a tray with cups. "Make Rachel eat something, Marigold. Don't let her talk," she said.

"A picnic?" Rachel asked doubtfully.

"Oh, we're not being heartless beasts!" Littlejan understood at once. "But Jansy and I are looking after the Abbey for today, so we can't go to the house for grub."

"We're the new caretakers," Jansy explained. "We've had four lots of people already."

"We found your aunt just at ten o'clock, so there was no time to fetch anybody," Marigold added.

"So these two took charge nobly and are doing the job well," said Mary, bringing the tray.

"I ought to do it. It's my job, if Aunt Ann is ill," Rachel began.

"Your job is with Damaris just now. When you're ready we want to hear about her. Never mind Mary Damayris! It's about Damaris herself we are anxious."

"Damaris was a heroine," Littlejan said firmly. "I hope you've told her so."

"I don't know that I have, yet," Rachel admitted.

"It's good that you were able to leave her, to come here," Mary said. "The kettle's boiling," and she hurried to the kitchen.

"This is very pleasant!" Rachel sighed, as she gazed across the green garth at the old grey walls and felt the peace of the ancient place. "I'm glad to have a quiet hour here. This week has been a big strain. The news about Aunt Ann wasn't really a shock; I was prepared for it at any time. But these last few days in town have been very difficult."

Mary handed her a cup of tea. "I'm sure you're ready for this."

"I've had a lovely lunch. Are you sure I haven't eaten someone else's share? I meant to beg something from Aunt Ann."

"Mary-Dorothy always brings too much. We've all had plenty," Jansy said.

Rachel put down her cup and looked at Mary; they had been very great friends since Rachel's first story was written, and even before. "I had a strange talk with Damaris early this morning. She begged me to come here and seemed so eager about it, and so restless, that Nurse said I'd better humour her. So I came at once, and she wants to hear about it when I go back. I'd like to stay with Aunt Ann, but I simply must go back to Marry."

"Of course you must. She is your job just now," Mary reassured her. "We'll do everything for your aunt, but only you can help Damaris."

"But why did she want you to come?" Jansy asked, wide-eyed.

"It wasn't just to ask for Mrs. Watson, I bet," said Littlejan.

"No. When I went to her this morning I saw at once there was something troubling her. Nurse said she had been restless and hadn't slept. I begged her to leave us alone, and then I asked Marry what was the matter. She asked me if I thought she'd be able to go on dancing." Rachel's lips quivered, but she looked at Mary bravely and steadily. "She said she'd been wanting to ask me for days, but she hadn't had the courage. I told her that nobody knew yet; I was glad I could say it! She said—'Well, if I can't ever dance again, I shall want to get right away. I couldn't stay in town and see theatres and know other people were dancing. I'll need to have quite a different sort of life; a new start. It's the only way I could bear it.' So I said, would she like to keep hens and bees, at the farm in Cumberland; that was Maidlin's first plan for her, before we went to France and she became a dancer. But Marry said no, that would mean college, if she did bees and poultry properly, and she couldn't settle to a college life now. I'm sure she's right in that. After the excitement of her stage career she'd never settle down to class work."

"No, I don't think she would," Mary agreed. "Had she any other ideas?"

"Just that Aunt Ann must be getting past work and perhaps we two could come here and take care of the Abbey," Rachel said simply. "She wanted me to talk it over with Aunt Ann, and then with you and Maidlin, and to ask you to consult Mrs. Raymond."

"What a marvellous idea!" Littlejan shouted.

"I'm sure Mother would love it, if you would." Jansy's eyes were shining in delight. "You'd be tons better than Miss Jenkinson. You do love the Abbey, don't you?"

"Oh, I love it! And it does seem as if we ought to take on Aunt Ann's job," Rachel said, looking at Mary doubtfully. "But it will be some time before Damaris could come here, and—and it means giving up her career entirely."

"But if she has to do that, anyway!" Jansy urged. "She'll want to do something, won't she?"

"She'll have to do something, if we're to live."

“It wouldn’t spoil your career,” Littlejan remarked. “You could go on writing books and stories. Often nobody comes here for days.”

Rachel looked grave. “Mary-Dorothy, is it a silly idea?”

“Not silly. It’s rather a beautiful idea,” Mary said. “But so much lies behind it. You’d both be giving up so many things. Does Damaris realise what it will mean to her never to dance again?”

“No,” Rachel said at once. “I’m certain she doesn’t. She’s speaking of it quite calmly. She doesn’t really think it’s going to happen. This plan is only if it does happen.”

“That’s what I feel,” Mary agreed. “In many ways it would be a good idea. You’ll need a job, and the Abbey needs you. It wouldn’t interfere with your writing, and it would give you a country life, which you like.”

“We’re country girls,” Rachel said. “So far as I’m concerned all this London business, and travelling, and the theatre and the excitement and the late nights, and the endless rehearsals, and applause, and preparation—it has all been for Marry’s sake. It’s not natural to me. My place is with her; but my real home is on the fells, in Cumberland, or here, in the country. I’ve enjoyed Marry’s triumphs and her wonderful success, but if she gave it all up and wanted the country again, no one would be happier than I. I’d say good-bye to London and theatres with the greatest possible pleasure.”

“I’ve always suspected that,” Mary observed. “But your work, apart from Damaris—your writing—can be done at home. It means the ruin of all Mary Damayris’s hopes.”

“I know. It can only happen if Mary Damayris has to die,” Rachel said sombrely.

The four looked at one another and thought it all over.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Rachel Passes with Honours

“You can’t come here at present,” Mary said at last. “The Abbey must have another guardian for some time, while Damaris recovers and you see how well she is likely to be. But Miss Jenkinson could take charge during the winter, when there are very few tourists, and by the spring you’ll have more idea how things are going. I’m afraid Damaris has a hard time before her; she hasn’t really accepted the idea of giving up her dancing yet. But she’s brave, Rachel, and you’re strong. You’ll pull her through.”

“I shall try,” Rachel said soberly. “But I don’t feel sure I shall succeed. If I can make her see it as a challenge she may respond.”

“Make her see that she’s been a heroine once and she can be one again,” Littlejan suggested, her eyes kindling.

“I’ll try, Marigold.” But Rachel sounded burdened by the task before her.

“I believe you could be happy as the guardian of the Abbey; it’s a nicer title than caretaker or guide,” Mary said. “You’d have your writing in the background. But honestly, I can’t see Damaris settling down in the Abbey, after the thrills of her strenuous life. I don’t believe she would be contented.”

“She’d need to find something else,” Rachel said at once. “If she’s strong again and her wonderful energy comes back, the Abbey wouldn’t be enough.”

“Perhaps she could find out about hens and bees without going to college, and keep them here,” Jansy began. “She could have a car and rush about delivering eggs and honey.”

“Or she might get a job with Mr. Edwards on the farm,” Littlejan added. “I’d love to be a land girl and learn to milk.”

“What about teaching?” Mary asked. “Damaris trained Daphne Dale as her understudy. Couldn’t she teach dancing?”

“She’s a good teacher,” Rachel assented. “But from the way she spoke this morning I’m afraid she may react against ballet altogether, if she can’t dance herself. She said she’d want to go right away.”

“At first, perhaps,” Mary agreed. “I can understand her feeling. But she might come back to it, as a teacher and a maker of ballets. Everyone says she has a great gift for creating new dances.”

“I’m sure she has, and I shall urge it on her.” Rachel sat staring across the garth.

The others watched her anxiously. At last she looked up. “I want to see Aunt Ann presently, and Maidlin, if she comes. But there’s something I’d like to do first, if no visitors butt in on us. Would you two”—she looked at the schoolgirls—“let me take you round the Abbey, as if you were tourists, and see if I know all the important points and tell me the details I leave out? Then you’d know if I were fit for the job.”

Jansy sprang up with a shout. “Oh, fun! Come on!”

Littlejan’s dark eyes were sparkling. “A sort of oral exam! We’ll tell you if you’ve passed the test! Oh, do be the guide to the Abbey, Rachel! Pretend we don’t know anything and tell us it all from the very beginning. Come on, Jan! We’ll be American tourists. Come outside and ring the bell for the caretaker!”

Mary laughed and took up the tray. “A fine idea! I’ll vanish with the picnic basket.”

“We’ll wash those cups later, Mary-Dorothy,” Jansy called after her.

“You forget you’re an American tourist, Miss Raymond,” said Littlejan sternly.

She rang the bell, marched in, and stood on the garth, exclaiming effusively—“Oh, how charming! What a quaint old place! How very inter-*est*-ing it looks! I’m sure there are quaint old tales about these dinky places! Please tell me all about it!”

In spite of her trouble, Rachel had to laugh. “That’s not necessary, Marigold Queen!”

“Ex-Queen, please! Jean’s the Queen now. And Jan is the Rosemary Maid; isn’t it a jolly name for her? We may as well do the thing properly! This old place is just cute! It’s too quaint for words!”

“Littlejan, do stop! I shall die!” Jansy groaned.

“I’ve been taking lessons. There’s nothing like being observant. Rachel can tell Damaris what a good tourist I am; it may make her laugh. Now I’ll be good, Rachel. I’d like you to pass your test with honours!”

Rachel knew the Abbey thoroughly. She had spent a summer at the Hall, while Damaris went back to school to take matric., and she had wandered among the ruins and had heard all the stories, from Aunt Ann, from Mary, and from Jen Marchwood. She told her history well and won warm approval from the critical schoolgirls. They asked many questions, but never found her at a loss, and they hailed her with delight as an excellent guide.

“Passed with distinction!” Jansy said solemnly. “I shall tell Mother.”

“With highest honours,” Littlejan added. “You do it jolly well. You and Damaris would be marvellous guardians for the Abbey.”

Rachel knew they were qualified to judge, so she was really relieved by their verdict. Cheered by this, but looking grave as she thought of her aunt’s illness and of the future for them all, she said good-bye to the girls and went off to the Hall, to have a look at Aunt Ann and a serious talk with Maidlin.

“Now we’ll wash up, unless any tourists come,” Littlejan said. “Quite likely we won’t have anybody, as it’s turning cold and drizzly. We’ve had quite a busy day so far.”

When everything was tidy they sat in Mrs. Watson’s dingy little room, reading her morning paper and waiting for visitors. But the midday drizzle was turning to rain and nobody came to disturb them. The Abbey closed at four in winter, because the passages and stairs were so dark and dangerous; so before long the girls put on their coats and prepared to make a damp dash for home.

“I vote we take the Abbey books with us in the basket,” Jansy said. “They can’t stay here all night.”

“No point in putting them under a bed unless there’s somebody in the bed.” Littlejan approved of the idea. “The Abbey can look after itself; no one can run away with the chapter-house or the refec.! But the manuscripts had better go to the house.”

They packed the big basket and carried it between them, and were hailed with relief by Mary-Dorothy. “Wise girls! I was wondering what to do about these things. They’ll be safe here, and on Monday Miss Jenkinson will come to live in the Abbey for a while; she knows there won’t be much to do during the winter months. There must be somebody in charge, and she can do it well enough for the present. She isn’t anxious to take it on as a permanent job, but Joan may be able to make other arrangements presently.”

“Won’t Rachel do it? She’d be a lovely guardian,” Littlejan began.

“That depends on Damaris. We have to wait and see.”

“How’s Mrs. Watson?” Jansy asked. “Did Aunty Maid come?”

“She came, and she took Rachel away with her, to drive her to Wycombe for her train. Maid was surprised to find her here, but very glad, and they had a long talk. Mrs. Watson is just the same; she didn’t know them.”

“Did Aunty Maid think Rachel and Damaris should come and live in the Abbey?”

“She liked the idea very much, for Rachel, but she felt, as I did, that Damaris would find it hard to settle down here after her thrilling life in town.”

“Beastly hard,” Littlejan admitted. “But I hope she’ll do it somehow. I’d love to see her and Rachel guarding the Abbey! But it’s not a very nice place for them to live in, is it? We’ve been sitting in Mrs. Watson’s little room, and it’s frightfully dark and gloomy.”

“Mother will think of that. She’ll do something about it,” Jansy said confidently.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A Sanctuary for the Future

Rachel, going to the nursing-home to break the news of Aunt Ann's illness, was hailed with relief by the nurse.

"I'm glad you've come, my dear. Go to your sister quickly. She is very restless and I can't quiet her. We may have to ask you to stay with her tonight."

"I'll do anything that will help!" Rachel, tired and overwrought already, flung aside thoughts of herself with her damp coat and hat, and ran to Damaris.

"Dear, what's the matter? You look so hot! Are you worrying about something?"

"Ray—oh, Ray!" Damaris stretched out her arms. "Say it isn't true! It isn't true, is it, Ray?"

Rachel's heart went cold, but she steadied herself with a tremendous effort. "Isn't what true, Marry dear?"

"That I'll never dance again. *Never?* I didn't think what I was saying this morning. It came on me suddenly what it would mean. It couldn't be true, Ray! I'm only twenty-one. It couldn't mean the end of everything!"

"But it might be a new beginning!" Rachel cried.

Damaris drew back and gazed at her. "Then—you do think it?"

"Marry, I don't know. Nobody can tell yet. Sir Robert doesn't know himself. That's the truth, Marry," Rachel said desperately.

"But you think—you all think—that I won't be well enough to go on as a dancer?"

"We have to wait and see, Marry dear. Honestly, it's too soon to say. You'll spoil your chance of getting better, if you fret yourself into a fever," Rachel pleaded.

"I see." Damaris gave her a frightened look. Her lips quivered and she threw one arm across her eyes. "Thanks, Ray. It's—it's horrible for you, too."

"It's ghastly for me!" Rachel broke out. "I'd do anything in the world to help, and there's so little to be done."

"Stay here tonight, Ray. Don't go away! I want you," Damaris whispered.

"That will be all right. I'll ring up Mrs. Ellis; she'll be expecting me. Marry, I've a lot to tell you. Will you listen?"

"Oh, yes! Anything's better than thinking," Damaris said drearly.

Rachel told of her visit to the Abbey and of their aunt's illness; of the schoolgirl caretakers, the picnic, the testing of her Abbey knowledge, and of the talk with Maidlin.

Damaris gazed at her wide-eyed. "They put you through an exam? And you passed with honours? What fun! Jolly useful, if——" The shadow filled her eyes again, but she hurried on. "Is Aunt Ann going to die?"

"Mary-Dorothy thinks so. We've been expecting it, Marry."

"She's been getting more and more groggy. She played a dirty trick on us and Maidlin once."

"Never mind! Things were too hard for her. She hadn't the education to cope with them, and she took the easy way and told fibs, and then she found herself in a mess. Maidlin made us see we ought to be sorry for her, not angry."

“I know all that. But it does explain why we don’t feel worse now. I’m sorry for the poor old thing, but we’ve never felt in the least as if we were related to her.”

“No, I suppose we haven’t,” Rachel agreed reluctantly. “I wish we cared more—now.”

Damaris lay staring at her. “Would you like to be the caretaker at the Abbey, if—suppose —”

“Littlejan and Mary call it ‘Guardian of the Abbey.’ It’s a nice title.” Rachel interrupted her firmly. “Oh, yes, I’d like it! I love the Abbey. But we may not want that sort of life. Even if you can’t do everything, all your marvellous movements, there may be a great deal you can do quite well. And there’s teaching——”

“No!” Damaris cried. “I won’t stay in ballet unless I can do it properly. I couldn’t bear to have people saying—‘Poor girl! She was really good before her accident. Now, of course ——!’ I couldn’t bear that. I *was* good, Ray? I know I was very good——”

“Dear, of course you were. You’ve been simply wonderful. You know it as well as I do; and as well as all those shouting crowds who greet you every night.”

Damaris looked at her with trembling lips. “What if it never happens again? Ray, I’m not a baby! But it has been my life, and I have loved it.”

Rachel slipped an arm round her shoulders and sat close to her. “You’ve had a marvellous time. Only one girl in a thousand has what you’ve had for three years. At least you can be thankful for that.”

“But you believe it’s over now!” Damaris hid her face.

“I hope not,” Rachel said stoutly. “But I do feel you have the most wonderful time to look back on; you’ve had what comes to very few people.”

“I won’t go on in any half-and-half way,” Damaris whispered. “I couldn’t bear it. If I can’t be as good as I have been—and I shall know, Ray! I know too much about it to cheat myself—if I can’t dance properly I’ll give it all up and clear out and do something quite different. I won’t have people pitying me because I’m not up to what I used to be. That would kill me. And I don’t want to teach other people. I’d rather quit altogether. It would be quite a change to be a caretaker!”

“Oh, Marry!” Rachel half sobbed the words.

“I mean it. I couldn’t stay in London, and we’ve always liked the country. You’d be all right! You’d go on with your books, and they’ll be marvellous and you’ll be famous. I’ll look after the tourists.”

“That wouldn’t be enough for you,” Rachel said unsteadily. “You’d have to find something else. I don’t know what it would be, but you’ll find it when the time comes—if it comes. Marry, I was thinking, on my way home in the train, of a thing I’d like to tell you sometime. I didn’t expect to do it quite so soon, but I think perhaps it will help. I don’t often talk about my work; it seems a job to get on with, not to talk about, but——”

“Your writing, do you mean?” Damaris interrupted.

“Yes. Sometimes I get completely stuck and I can’t see what ought to come next. And then ——”

“But you must know what’s going to happen? You’re making up the story!” Damaris argued.

“I have a general idea, but that’s all. I know where I ought to get to, but often I don’t see how I’m going to do it.”

“How rum! I supposed you thought it all out before you started!”

“Well, I don’t; other people may, but I don’t, and Mary-Dorothy doesn’t, for I asked her. Often the next bit—the next incident or piece of talk—is quite vague. So I stop and think about it, and presently I see one thing that must be put in, one tiny step on, and I think—‘I can do that bit, anyway, even if it’s only a sentence or half a paragraph.’ And by the time I’ve done that scrap, a wee bit more is clear, so I add that, and before I realise it I’m well away into the next chapter. The story itself has told me how it should go on. Often I’m surprised, but I carry on, and it turns out to be the right thing to have done.”

“Must be quite exciting,” Damaris commented.

“It would be rather dull to know all that was coming,” Rachel said.

“Yes, I guess so. But what has it to do with me, Ray?”

“Just that I feel we can’t see far ahead, just now, but we can see one or two steps. If we take those, believing them to be right, I’m sure we shall see others when we’re ready for them.”

“I see.” Damaris lay quiet, her face hidden in Rachel’s arm. “And to be caretakers—I mean guardians!—of the Abbey is the first step?” she asked presently.

Rachel felt her trembling with the effort of this acceptance of their narrowed future. “It may be. It isn’t yet,” she said. “The first step is to be brave and get you well again. We mustn’t do anything that will put you back. If you work yourself into a fever over what may never happen, you’ll go back days or weeks. Just now we have to hold on, and wait. But the future isn’t blank. There’s always the Abbey, and the dear people there would really like to have us. It would be like going home. We’ve been homeless wanderers for so long. The Abbey would be a real refuge, a sanctuary for us. And it does seem as if we ought to take our aunt’s place. If the Abbey turns out to be our job, we’ll take that next step and see what comes of it. The way will open for you; you’ll find your work—I’m sure of it. But the Abbey may prove to be the first step towards it.”

“I see,” Damaris whispered again. “We’d need to have a job, of course. We haven’t much saved, have we?”

“Very little. But we have the old house on the fells; Maid is still paying us rent for it, rather than let it go out of the family, and I’m sure she’ll be willing to keep it on. We couldn’t live there, unless we found some way to make it pay; it’s no use as a farm, now that the fields are gone. But we can live at the Abbey, if we do the work, for there’ll be a salary and the little rooms rent-free, and light and so on, and no rates; I’m sure all those things are part of the Abbey expenses.”

“Sounds quite a good job,” Damaris murmured.

“It’s a job to do for Mrs. Raymond and she’ll always be over-generous. I’d love to work for her.”

“Oh, yes! She’d be a lovely boss. But—oh, Ray! The change—the difference!” Damaris broke down and cried helplessly.

Rachel’s arms tightened round her. She saw so plainly all that Damaris was seeing—the big theatre—the tense crowds—the orchestra—the roar of cheering—the curtain calls.

She said no more. It was useless to ask Mary Damayris to face calmly the thought of her own disappearance from that thrilling life. Mary Damayris might have to die, but Damaris must live on; and it really was a part of her that would need to go. Rachel held her tightly, all her love and sympathy in that warm grip, and waited.

Damaris grew quiet at last. “Sorry, Ray! I’m an ass and an infant,” she whispered. “I’ll try not to do it again.”

“You’re neither an infant nor an ass. You’re very brave, and you’ll go on being brave,” Rachel said, with determination in her tone. “But—oh, Marry dear! It’s hard for me too. I need your help and you need mine. Don’t let us make it worse for one another!”

“I’ll try,” Damaris murmured. “I’ll remember about you; you’re having a simply rotten time, doing everything. I will try not to be a baby, Ray.”

Rachel kissed her and held her closely. “That’s being brave,” she said. “Marry, we’ve talked enough. Nurse is looking at me reproachfully. I’ll come back later.”

“You must be frightfully tired.” Damaris kept her thoughts resolutely turned away from herself. She eyed her sister anxiously. “You look absolutely green. Do you feel sick?”

“No—yes—I don’t know. I am tired,” Rachel admitted.

Nurse took her by the arm. “Off you go! Find something to eat and then lie down in the waiting-room and rest. You’ve had a long day. I don’t want another patient on my hands.”

“Ray, don’t be ill!” Damaris cried, in an agony of sudden fear, realising all at once how much Rachel meant to her. “I can’t do without you, Ray!”

“You’re going to do without her, right now,” Nurse assured her, and she hustled Rachel from the room. “Now, my dear, obey orders! Your sister will be all the better for having to think of somebody besides herself; it won’t hurt her. She’s strong enough now to realise what you are going through on her account. Take care of yourself, if only for her sake. She’ll make an effort to pull herself together for your sake. It will help you both. Don’t worry about her.”

“She really is brave, Nurse,” Rachel pleaded.

“So are you,” Nurse said decidedly, and left her to feed and rest.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A Difficult Time

It was the beginning of a hard time for the Ellerton girls. Damaris had gained sufficient strength to be conscious of her condition and to be afraid for the future; Rachel was heartbroken on her account, but knew she must not show it.

Offers of help came continually from Mary at the Abbey and from Maidlin at the Pallant. Jen at the Manor and Rosamund in her Castle, and Joan, were anxious to help too, but felt that Maidlin and Mary had first claim.

But all the offers were steadily, though gratefully, refused. There was so little anyone could do. The girls were together and they must bear their trouble alone. Rachel would not leave Damaris for week-ends in the country; she met Maidlin for lunch in town, but she had not much to tell and she did not want to talk.

“We can only go over the same ground time after time,” she explained. “It doesn’t get us anywhere. We have to wait, and talking is no use.”

The quiet passing of Aunt Ann Watson was no shock to anybody. Everyone had felt that she must go soon, and from Joan down to Jansy there was a sense of relief that she had been able to stay at work till the end. She had loved the Abbey and had given long happy years to its service, and everybody was glad it had not been necessary to pension her off and send her to spend her last days in exile, in the village or at the Cumberland farm.

“She had what she wanted.” Littlejan summed up the situation. “She didn’t have to see someone else doing her job and probably not doing it as well as she did. She didn’t want to retire, and she didn’t need to be shoved out. There’s nothing to be sorry about.”

A cordial letter came from Joan Raymond to Rachel, warmly welcoming the thought of her and Damaris as Mrs. Watson’s successors, if, later on, they were willing to consider the idea seriously. Nothing could be done at the moment. Miss Jenkinson, from the village, was prepared to carry on during the winter months, when there were often no visitors for days at a time. Littlejan and Jansy were begging to be allowed to help again on Saturdays, the only possibly busy day, if they had not urgent school engagements. So for the present the Abbey had its guardian. But Miss Jenkinson felt the work would be too much for her in the summer, when she usually took in boarders, so some other plan might have to be made by April or May. If Rachel and Damaris really wished to live in the country, when that time came, Joan would like nothing better than to hand over the Abbey to their care.

Rachel read the letter to Damaris and then put it away carefully, treasuring it and feeling very grateful. “The future isn’t quite blank. We’ve a job offered to us, even if it’s a small one,” she said to herself. “And it seems more and more as if we should want to get away from town.”

Damaris persisted steadily in her refusal to have visitors. Madame Roskova, Antoine, Martin Bernard, her partner, and particularly Daphne Dale, begged urgently to be allowed to come, but she would not see them. They kept her supplied with beautiful flowers and sent expensive fruit and sweets, and she asked Rachel to write notes of thanks, but she grew so distressed at the thought of talking to any of them that Sir Robert upheld her wishes and forbade visitors.

“We can’t have her running a temperature and putting herself back. If that is how she feels we must humour her,” he decreed.

“Madame and Daphne would cry,” Damaris said. “I won’t have them weeping over me, and I know what they’re like. And Antoine and Bernard would be sorry for me; I don’t want that either. I’d much rather be left alone.”

“It’s hard on them, and especially on Daphne,” Rachel remarked. “But it shall be as you wish, Marry dear.”

“Do you think I’m funking?” Damaris demanded.

“No, not yet. It’s probably too soon for you to see people. But you can’t funk it for ever. You’ll have to see them some day.”

“If that other life is finished, I don’t want to have any more to do with it,” Damaris said, with quivering lips. “I want to cut it right out and get away from it all.”

“I couldn’t agree with you more,” Rachel assured her. “A new start in quite a different life will be best. But you must think of these other people. They’ve been very kind and they’re tremendously keen on you. I’m sorry for poor Daphne. She wants to see you so much. She feels that you blame her—not for what happened, but for being all right when you’ve been hurt.”

“Oh, tosh! It was an accident. She couldn’t help it.” But there was an uneasy note in Damaris’s voice.

“It’s unreasonable, of course. But so long as you won’t see her Daphne will be unhappy and worried.”

“Is she dancing well?” Damaris asked, her lips pinched.

“Yes, now. She failed once or twice, and Madame sent her off to her sister at the seaside bungalow for a fortnight.”

“I remember Elsa, and the caves and the island, and the noisy black dog.”

“And the black cat who sat on me and washed his white front feet,” Rachel added. “Elsa would be very good for Daphne. I’m sure she nursed her and talked sense to her, and since Daphne came back she’s dancing as well as ever.”

“Good!” Damaris said wearily. “I wondered about her.”

“But I don’t think she’s happy. You could make her happier,” Rachel said, and left her to think it over.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Rebellion

“Come to your sister, my dear.” Nurse woke Rachel from an uneasy sleep.

“Nurse! What’s the matter? It’s after midnight!” Rachel tumbled out of bed, shaking back her loose hair.

“She hasn’t slept. Perhaps you can quiet her; she’s asking for you.”

“I’m glad I’m here.” Rachel pulled on her blue gown and groped for her slippers.

“I’ll bring you a cup of tea. You may be able to persuade her to have one too. I’ve offered it, but she refused.”

Rachel hurried to the other room. “Marry, dear, what’s wrong? Why aren’t you asleep?”

“I was thinking,” Damaris looked flushed and her yellow curls were in wild disorder, as if she had tossed on her pillow. “I wanted you, Ray. I know I’m a brute and it’s the middle of the night, but—oh, Ray! Perhaps you can help. Why did it happen, Ray?”

Rachel had feared this, knowing it must come. Damaris had too much depth to accept the ruin of her career without rebellion.

“Because you were brave enough to forget yourself and rush to save another girl.”

“It’s beastly hard on me.” Damaris stared at her. “Why should I be hurt and my life spoiled, because I helped somebody else?”

“Your life may not be spoiled. It may be better than ever, in time,” Rachel said steadily.

Damaris gave an impatient movement. “I want to go on dancing. That’s my life. I know Sir Bob thinks I’ll never dance again. I asked him today, and he was quite jolly and cheerful about waiting to see, but I knew what he really thought. Ray, *why*? Why couldn’t I have saved Daphne and have escaped myself? Why”—and the great question came out in a rush—“why did God let that thing fall on me? I was only trying to help. And I’ve always tried to be good and decent to people. I didn’t deserve this to happen to me.”

“Oh, Marry dear!” Rachel almost sobbed. “God didn’t do it. He didn’t want the thing to fall on you. I’m sure He was as sorry about it as we were. He certainly didn’t make it fall on you on purpose.”

“Then why didn’t He stop it?” Damaris muttered rebelliously. “One second would have done it. I’d have been out of the way in another second.”

“Or you might have been one second later, and you’d have been safe and Daphne would have been dead.”

Damaris stared at her. “Dead! That would have been ghastly!”

“It would,” Rachel said grimly. “Things are bad, but they’d have been worse if Daphne had been killed. Even you must feel that, Marry dear.”

“Yes, but—if we’d both escaped!” Damaris whispered. “If—if that thing had been held back for one second longer, I’d have been all right as well as Daphne.”

“If it had been one second sooner, Daphne and you might both be dead. You flung her out of the way in time.”

“And spoiled my own life. I don’t see why. Doesn’t God care about all of us? Me as well as Daphne?”

“Now, Marry, don’t lose your balance and your common sense!” Rachel said sharply. “God gave you the greatest chance that can ever come to anybody and you took it; the chance

to save another person's life. How many people get that chance? And what does even your career matter beside the fact that Daphne is alive today and that it's thanks to you? You remember Elsa's letter, that I've read to you several times?"

Damaris hid her face. "I'm a brute and a coward. I'm glad I saved Daphne. I wouldn't have liked her to be killed. But—oh, Ray! My career matters to me. I do want to go on. And—and I know now that I never shall. Ray, I can't bear it! Help me, Ray!"

"Don't start by blaming God." Rachel spoke quietly, holding her in her arms. "I don't know—nobody knows—how much He has to do with accidents. Some people say He sends them for our good. Other people, and I think I'm one of them, believe they just happen and we don't know why, but that He helps us to bring good out of them. In any case, we all know that's true; God can help us to bear the hardest thing and to bring good out of it. And He gave you a chance to do a magnificent deed. He put it into your mind, all in a flash, to run to Daphne and you responded, and her life was saved. It was a challenge, and you accepted it and rushed to the rescue. You ought to be proud and happy. I know it's very hard, in your case, because the results are so much worse for you than for almost anybody else. But you took up the challenge, as you always do, and you can do it again. Another one is meeting you now—to face up to what has happened, and, if it must be, to build a new brave life. You're twenty-one; your life isn't over. You had chosen a career, but if it is taken from you you'll find a new one. I know, dear!" as Damaris quivered in her grasp. "It's terribly hard, but you'll do it. You're brave, and when anything faces you, you always meet it pluckily. Do you remember at Hikers' Halt, before we had really started giving teas, how that whole party of hikers turned up, ten of them, and asked for food, and with no experience at all you cried cheerfully, 'I'm quite sure we can!' That was like you. Now you must do it again. We must go forward into an unknown life, saying gaily, 'I'm quite sure we can!' What about it, Marry? You won't go back on all your past and lie down and die, because you're sure you can't?"

Damaris lay very still. "I thought, that time in France, that life had challenged me to be a dancer. So I went ahead and did my best, though it seemed such a wild idea for one of our family to go on the stage."

"And you made good. You've been marvellous. Now life seems to be challenging you again. Can't you meet the new demand, dear?"

Damaris quivered again. "I'll try. I'm tired, Ray. I'll think about all this, but not tonight."

"No, not tonight. That's sensible," Rachel agreed. "When you think it out you'll be brave and go ahead."

"I don't know. I still think it was jolly hard."

"Of course it was! Everybody feels that. But can't you keep thinking about being a heroine? That's what Littlejean Fraser says; she keeps on calling you a heroine."

"Nice kid!" Damaris said wearily.

"I'm going to sit beside you, but we won't go on talking," and Rachel slipped from the bed, where she had been crouching, to a chair. She held her sister's hand. "Marry, I know what we'll do; we'll go for a walk on the fells, up to Grisedale Tarn. I often put myself to sleep that way. You listen, while I tell you the story. We're starting out from the farm. The old black cat wants to come with us, but I kiss his head and push him through the gate, and he sits on the wall among the ferns and watches us go. The path runs beside the garden hedge and then along by the beck. The water's brown and bubbling, falling over the rocks in little white splashy waves. You want a drink, so we stop and find the folding cup, and we each have some

beck water, straight from the side of Seat Sandal. Then we go on, and soon we're on the long green slope; we look back, and we can see Grasmere and presently the end of Rydal Water."

Damaris could see it all. She followed step by step in her mind, and soon, led by Rachel's imagination and vivid memory, she was climbing the slatey rocky cliffs towards the gap in the stone wall.

She gave a tired sigh and fell asleep.

In great relief Rachel relaxed and lay back with closed eyes. Damaris had slept just in time. For up there beside the tarn, when she had rested after the climb, she had been wont to practise the steps and movements remembered from her baby days in New York, which were rigidly forbidden by the strict aunts at the farm. Rachel had been dreading a cry—"And then I used to dance!" She was grateful to see Damaris asleep.

Nurse touched her arm, and pointed to the door. Very quietly Rachel slipped away. "Will she be all right now, do you think?"

"Yes, she's very sound asleep; she was tired out. You have helped her a lot. Back to bed, my dear, and try to rest again."

"You'll call me, if she wants me?"

"I certainly will. I'll watch her carefully. You can do more for her than any of us, just now."

"I'm glad." And Rachel went wearily off to bed, to put herself to sleep by crossing her beloved fells and climbing the long slopes of Helvellyn to Striding Edge and the summit.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Call of the Abbey

“What is this Abbey, of which your sister talks all the time?” Sir Robert asked.

“A beautiful ruin in the country, at the foot of the Chilterns. Our aunt was the caretaker, but she has died, and the job is offered to us, if we care to take it,” Rachel explained. “Damaris is craving to get away from town and all that reminds her of her stage life.”

“H’m! Caretakers?” and he eyed her curiously.

“To act as guides, showing tourists round the Abbey. There are interesting stories to tell. I know it must seem odd, to anyone who has only known us in town—Damaris as a famous dancer. But there were times when all that life seemed very strange to me. We’re really country girls, and the country is where we belong. We grew up at a farm on the Cumberland fells, though we were sent away to school near Liverpool.”

“And you think you could go back to country life, after the excitements of town?”

“I could, at any moment. And Damaris seems to be longing for it. She’s sure the quietness and peace of the Abbey would help her.”

“She is probably right,” Sir Robert agreed. “She is nearly well, so far as her hip is concerned, but her mind is sick. If she is to build up a new life and find happiness again, it is her mind we have to heal now.”

Rachel thought of Damaris as she had been since that talk at night—very quiet, asking no difficult questions, no longer openly rebelling, but unhappy and depressed, keeping her trouble shut up within herself. Rachel had tried to make her talk—to see people—to write letters; but in everything she had failed. Damaris had accepted the ruin of her career; she knew she would not dance again; but she was quietly heart-broken. During the day she kept up bravely, though she was always grave; but Rachel and the nurses suspected that she cried at night, though they had never found her doing it.

“I’m sure you’re right, Sir Robert,” she said. “I’ve been wondering if it wouldn’t be a good plan for her to go to the Abbey, as soon as you think she is fit, and see if it helps. Plenty of friends have begged us to go to them, but she doesn’t want to do it. It means being with people, and she wants to be alone.”

“That isn’t good for her,” Sir Robert remarked. “But for a while quietness may be what she needs. If she is craving for it, we must let her try it. Her instinct may be sound; probably she is not ready to be a guest and be fussed over, even by the best of friends.”

“She’s afraid of that and of being pitied.”

“Yes, I can see that. I imagine that for years she has lived with her nerves strung up to a high pitch of excitement—thrilled and lively and very happy. Isn’t that so?”

“It is,” Rachel acknowledged. “It’s been a very exciting life, and it was all new to us. Damaris has revelled in every moment of it.”

“But there hasn’t been much time for rest and recovery and quiet?”

“None at all,” Rachel admitted. “You think she has overdone it and this is the result?”

“She’s feeling the effects now. The accident has forced quietness on her and she has gone to the other extreme. I wouldn’t call it a nervous breakdown, but the continued excitement of the last three years is taking its revenge, and she will probably need a long while to

recuperate. Her craving to be alone is a natural reaction. I am thankful to hear of this Abbey, which may be exactly right for her. What sort of place is it? Will she be comfortable?"

"Oh yes! The rooms are small, but they're warm and cosy, and we'll have them to ourselves, which is what she wants."

"Do you know anyone in the neighbourhood?"

Rachel laughed. "Oh, Sir Robert! The dearest people in the world live in the big house, five minutes' walk from the Abbey; the ruins are in the garden of the Hall. Our rooms are connected with the Hall by telephone. I can have help at once, if I need it."

"That will do. I don't mind the place being humble and quiet, if you are in close touch with friends. It sounds very suitable, and I don't wonder she is craving for it. After Christmas we will let her try it. You won't over-tire her? Are there stairs and steps?"

"None that she will need to use. I shall do the work. All she'll need to do will be rest and wander about and enjoy the quietness."

"For a while that will help her; she'll be walking by that time, and once she starts she has only to keep on and practise, being careful not to overdo it. I should like to see her much—very much—better in herself, and I believe a quiet time in a place she loves will help her to that. When she is stronger we will see about massage and exercises, which may bring back much of the power she has lost."

Rachel looked straight into his eyes. "Will she ever dance again?"

He looked back at her. "I doubt it; not in a way that would satisfy Mary Damayris. She has a very high standard. But we will do all we can."

"She won't want you to try, unless you have much more hope than you have at present," Rachel said steadily. "She'll ask to be left alone."

"We'll see about that later. She isn't ready for treatment yet. She won't settle down for ever as a caretaker, you know. She'll have to find some new job, or she won't be happy. After the thrills of the stage, she won't be satisfied with a country life, unless something catches her interest and fills her mind."

"I'm afraid of that," Rachel confessed. "I could settle down in the Abbey, but I don't believe she will, unless she finds something else as well."

"Are you sure of yourself? Won't you be longing for a wider life in a few months? You are very young to restrict yourself to a ruined Abbey."

Rachel coloured. "I love the Abbey, and I may have other things to do. It won't be only the Abbey, for me. I've—well, I've done a bit of writing, and I hope to go on with it some day. I haven't been able to think about it lately, but I may get back to it in time."

"Then you'll be all right, and I hope for your great success," he said heartily. "You couldn't have a better second string. But it will be harder for your sister, unless she writes too?"

"She's sure she never could. I feel she ought to have a story to tell, after all her experiences, but she always says she has nothing to say."

"Perhaps it will come. Or she may find something else. Tell her she shall go to her Abbey as soon as she is ready for the journey, in a few weeks' time. It will give her something new to think about. I shall take her there myself, and then I shall see the sort of place it is."

"You are more than kind," Rachel said gratefully. "She can come to town to see you; our friends will lend us a car. You'll want to keep an eye on her, but we can't trouble you to come to Whiteways."

"Right! I'll see her safely there and then she shall come to me to be inspected."

"I'll show you round the Abbey, if you can spare time." Rachel smiled at him. "When you see it you'll want to know all about it."

"Good!" Damaris said wearily, when she heard the verdict. "I'll be glad to get away. Everyone's been very kind, but I'm sick to death of this room. I'll be better once I'm at the Abbey. Sir Bob really has a lot of sense!" She had heard the nickname from the nurses and used it to the great man's face, to his amusement.

"But you won't leave town without seeing Madame and Daphne?" Rachel asked anxiously. "They want to come so much, and Madame has been so good to us. Daphne's still very unhappy about you. You ought to see them."

Damaris moved uneasily. "They'll weep and wail, and it's no use. I'll see, Ray; I don't want them yet."

Then one day, just before Christmas, Rachel came to the couch where Damaris lay by the window, gazing with bored eyes at the endless stream of traffic.

"Marry dear, Daphne's been here. She couldn't stay; she was rushing to rehearsal. But she wants me to ring her up. She's crazy to see you; says she must—she's quite determined about it. She wants to tell you something. I should let her come. Something has happened, and Daphne's different, all at once. She didn't look in the least like tears; she was radiant and sparkling with excitement, and, of course, looking very beautiful."

Damaris stared at her. "Golly, how odd! Perhaps she's been given a big new part and she wants me to know." She bit her lips for a moment. Then she went on steadily, "I hope it's that. Madame and Antoine used to depend on me, but now they've only Daphne. I don't want their ballets to suffer; I hope she'll make good and do the things I hoped to do. Yes, I'd better see her and get it over. Will you tell her?"

"That's brave," Rachel said quietly. "You are plucky, my dear."

"Got to be," Damaris gave her a wry grin. "I'm not spending the rest of my life moaning and groaning, and I'm only twenty-one."

"You've done more, and lived more, for twenty-one than heaps of people do in their whole lives," Rachel reminded her. "And if you're really going to pull something out of this mess, by taking up the new challenge that's been flung to you, you'll add another big bit to the pile of things you've done already."

"You sound as if I was a rubbish-heap!"

"Oh, not rubbish! A pile of treasure, of things conquered and trophies won," Rachel retorted, and hurried away.

"Gosh!" Damaris murmured. "What ideas that girl does have! No wonder she writes stories!"

Daphne, slim and beautiful, with golden plaits wound round her head, came that afternoon. Rachel met her at the door and had a hurried word with her.

"Daphne, don't call her Mary Damayris! It would be too hard. All that life is over for her. Call her Damaris. You will remember, won't you?"

"I'll try, but we always think of her as Damayris," Daphne pleaded. "Won't she be able to dance again, Rachel?"

"She doesn't think so. I don't believe Sir Robert thinks she will, either. He said, 'Not in a way that will satisfy Mary Damayris.' It's better to face it."

"Madame says they'll find out how much she can do and have parts specially planned for her."

"Marry wouldn't like it. She says Madame must depend on you now."

“Oh, but——!” Sudden colour flooded Daphne’s delicate face. “But Madame won’t have me much longer! Where is Damayris, Rachel? I must tell her!”

“So it’s that, is it?” Rachel said. “I guessed it from your face this morning, but Damaris doesn’t suspect anything. Come and tell her! And do be careful about her name, Daphne! If you call her Mary Damayris it may just break her down.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Young Snake

“Oh, Damayris, my dear, I’ve got the most wonderful thing to tell you! And I do thank you most awfully, and more than ever now, for saving me from being squashed by that frightful thing!” Daphne rushed across the room and threw herself on her knees by the couch. “You don’t look a bit ill, old girl! Are you really better?”

“Oh, heaps! I’m all right. And I’d simply have loathed to see you lying squashed under the thing,” Damaris retorted. “It would have been beastly for everybody. What’s happened to you, child? Are you going to play lead in something new? What is the thing? And what’s your part?”

“No, it’s not that. Oh, Damayris, I’m so happy! It only happened last night; it hasn’t been in the papers yet. I had to tell you myself. I’m going to be married! Wish me happiness, Damayris dear!”

Damaris sat up. “You—you young *snake*! You traitor! You’re going to desert Madame and Antoine? You’ll give up the stage? Was it for that I saved you? I thought it was for ballet! You’ll go and marry the first wretched man who asks you and fling up your career? Oh, you—you little viper! You utter slacker!” she raged.

“Oh, Damayris, don’t!” Daphne cried, laughing and crimson. “Don’t be mad! And he’s not by any means the first. But he’s the first I’ve cared about; he’s the only man in the world for me, and he says I’m the only girl in the world for him. Look at my ring, Damayris—diamonds! Aren’t they lovely?”

“Deserter!” Damaris fumed. “What will Madame do without either of us? You little rotter! I wouldn’t have believed anyone would be so base! All for a horrible man and a few diamonds! They’re probably paste, anyway. Oh, you blighter!”

“Damayris, how can you? It’s the most marvellous thing that we’ve found one another! We both knew at once——”

“They aren’t paste,” Rachel said, relieved to see that “Damayris” had been overlooked by Damaris in her wild indignation. “Who is he, Daphne? A millionaire?”

“I don’t care who he is. I’m bitterly disappointed in you, Daphne Dale, and I just wish I’d let that thing fall on you and crush you to a jelly.”

“Oh no, you don’t!” Rachel said. “As Daphne says, she’s even more glad now than while she was a mere dancer. You’ve saved her for a long life of happiness, we’ll hope. Tell us about him, Daphne!”

“He’s nearly a millionaire, if not quite. I don’t know exactly,” Daphne owned. “He’s Richard David Dandy, the young American, who’s been about the theatre so much lately. I’m going to call him Dicky D. or Dandy Dick. Madame knows his people; he has a lovely place in Virginia, not far from New York——”

“An American!” Damaris wailed. “It gets worse and worse! And—*what* will your name be?” She eyed Daphne in horror. “Are you going to be Daphne Dandy? Oh, my hat! My only aunt! Daphne Dandy!” She lay back on her cushions and laughed till she cried.

In the next room two nurses looked at one another. “We haven’t heard that before. This new girl has worked a miracle,” said one.

“It will do our Damayris all the good in the world,” the other agreed. “Sir Bob will be pleased.”

“It’s a very good name,” Daphne protested. “I tell Dicky D. the reason I’m marrying him is so that I shan’t have to alter the initial on my undies.”

“To change the name and not the letter is change for worse and not for better’,” Rachel quoted, and shook her head at her. “Well, Daphne Dandy-to-be, we hope you’ll be very happy. Will you live in America?”

“I don’t hope anything of the kind. I hope she’ll be intensely miserable, however nice her Dandy man may be,” Damaris vowed. “Madame had better come to see me and we’ll mingle our tears over Daphne’s ghastly treachery.”

“Our home will be over there.” Daphne looked at Rachel. “But we shall be in London a lot. I must see Elsa sometimes.”

“What will Elsa-of-the-ferry say?” Rachel asked.

Daphne grinned. “She can’t say much. She’s going to do it herself.”

“Get married?” Rachel cried.

“Desert the ferry? Well, you are a pair of slackers!” Damaris growled.

“Elsa has been half engaged for some time to young Rodney Barron, the only son of Admiral Sir Rodney Barron of Barronscourt, who owns her island. She pays him a pound a year for rent; he told her it was called a peppercorn rent. Rodney’s in the Navy, and he met Elsa when he was on leave. Now the old Admiral has died and Rodney has to stay at home and see to the property. It’s a jolly place, at the foot of the hills; Elsa will have her work cut out to look after it, but she’ll do it all right—she’s a good business woman. Rodney hasn’t left the Navy yet, but he’s going to, and then they’ll be married and live at Barronscourt.”

“And will Elsa-of-the-ferry be Lady Barron? Was the Admiral a baronet?”

“Oh yes! I call Elsa ‘my lady’ in my letters now.”

“But she can’t just drop the ferry and her caves!” Damaris protested.

“She’ll find someone to show the caves, and she’s had a boy for the ferry for a long time. The bungalow will still belong to her, and she’ll keep an eye on things and see that the job is done properly. They have a car, and it’s only a few minutes’ run from Barronscourt to the ferry.”

“I don’t agree with it at all,” Damaris said crossly. “Both of you throwing up your jobs to please interfering men! Slackers!”

“You’re talking rubbish and you know it, Damaris Ellerton,” Rachel remarked. “Daphne and Elsa will be far happier in their new lives, if they really love Rodney and Dicky D.”

“Don’t worry about that!” Daphne laughed. “We’re all four very happy and very pleased with life. Damayris dear!” and she hesitated, looking doubtfully at Damaris. “Why don’t you do it too? I know people have asked you.”

“They didn’t get that length!” Damaris retorted. “I headed them off, or Ray did it for me. I didn’t want any of them. There wasn’t one I cared about.”

“Oh, Damayris! Not one?” Daphne urged. “It would be such a marvellous thing, if you married!”

“Well, I’m not going to. I’m going to live in the country and be a caretaker in some ruins,” Damaris said defiantly.

“Oh, you mustn’t! What ghastly waste!” Daphne wailed. “You could teach, if you can’t dance! You’re a wonderful teacher!”

"I'm not going to teach any more girls, to have them go and get married just when they have their big chance! You call it waste; that's exactly what I feel about you and your American. I'll never forgive you, Daphne Dandy!"

"Oh yes, you will!" Rachel said. "You're talking a lot of nonsense and you don't mean a word of it."

"She'll get no wedding-present from me! We can't spare a penny for her now, and anyway, I don't feel like giving her anything."

"There's only one present I'd care to have from you," and Daphne looked straight into Damaris's dark eyes. "I don't want silver cruets or spoons; Dicky D. can give me those. I want one of those big photographs of you as the Goose-Girl, signed across one corner—'With love from Mary Damayris.' I'd value that more than anything you could buy."

"Oh, but I haven't any love left for you, Daphne Dandy!" Damaris had winced at the reference to her famous part, but she hurried on, thrusting the thought behind her. "I couldn't possibly put that on your photograph!"

"Then don't give me anything at all. That's the only thing I care about."

Damaris scowled at her. "I don't love you one scrap. What does Madame say about it? No, don't tell me! I'll ask her myself, and we'll abuse you together and comfort one another. You arrange it, Ray. I'd like to hear Madame's opinion of Dandy Daphne!"

But Madame, when she came joyfully next day, was philosophic and not at all indignant. "It has to be, my child," she said. "Girls will marry, and in the life we lead they have so many opportunities. Daphne is far too beautiful and attractive to remain a dancer for long. Richard is a good lad and will make her happy. They are satisfied with one another and I am glad. I felt responsible for Daphne; now she will be looked after. It is well for her to have a husband."

"But Antoine and his ballets, Madame!"

"Antoine will find other girls. We have several who are promising. For some time I have been expecting to lose Daphne; men have been trying to run after her, but she kept her head better than I thought she would do, and she held them off and waited till she knew her own mind. I am content to lose her, if it is for marriage, though she has been a very pretty dancer. She did well, but she had not your ideas. She could only interpret, not create; and even so, she did only what she was told."

"She's a rotter and a deserter!"

"It is only what I did myself," Madame said placidly. "I cannot complain. I left the stage for marriage and had twenty years of home life. Probably I shall go back to it soon and live at Sandylands, as I did before, and then I shall see our Elsa, who will be reigning at the big house. Life is odd, n'est-ce pas, my Damayris? But you—what will you do, my dear? Antoine vows he will have special parts for you, if you will come back to us."

Damaris shrank and coloured. "Please tell him I do not wish that, Madame. I couldn't bear it. Everyone would say—'Poor girl! Before her accident she was quite good. Now she can do only these small parts.' No, I'm going right away, to live in the country. I can't bear to be near theatres now."

Madame looked thoughtful. "Well, try it, my dear. No one will urge you to anything from which you shrink. Perhaps later you will come back. You teach well, and the dances you made for us were beautiful; we should like you to give us more. You have something which Daphne has not and never will have. We shall not easily forget the Goose-Girl, or the Widow and the Fairy."

"What does Irina Ivanovna say about Daphne? They were always pals."

“She laughs and says no man will tempt her from her art.” Madame smiled.

“If Irene Jones falls in love she’ll have an awful time deciding what to do! She’s cut out for tragedy parts; she’d never have clashed with nice simple girls like Daphne and me. If she ever has to choose she’ll have a really big tragedy of her own.”

“She will keep men at bay till she is ready for a change. But you, my dear! Will you be happy in a country life?”

“Happier than I should be in town,” Damaris said defiantly. “We’re going to live in the most beautiful old place and be its guardians,” and she launched into a description of the Abbey, its age, its peace, its stories, and of their past connection with it and their future duties.

Madame listened with interest. “It sounds good,” she said. “You may be happy there. You, Sister-Mother”—it was her old name for Rachel—“you will be content, with the past and its histories and with the new stories you will write. But you, Damayris, what will you do? You, too, are an artist; you want to create beauty. You have done it for us, and for the world, in your dances; what is to come now?”

“I’m bothered if I know,” Damaris told her. “Perhaps something will turn up. If not, I’ll keep the Abbey swept and dusted, and as soon as I can manage the steps I’ll be the guide, and Ray can write all day and turn out masterpieces by the dozen.”

“They won’t be worth much, if they come by the dozen,” Rachel remarked.

“It is not enough,” Madame said decisively. “There is too much beauty in you, my child. You must bring it out, or you will not be happy. Is there any way you could add to your Abbey? Anything it lacks, which you could supply?”

“I’m afraid not,” Rachel said. “It’s very complete.”

Damaris looked wistful. “I’d love to do something for the Abbey! Even the thought of going there has made me better; quieter, you know. I felt awful for a week or two, when I knew”—she paused, wincing at the thought.

“As to that,” Madame said firmly, “you have always to remember Daphne and her happiness, and what might have been, but for your courage and swift action, my dear.”

“Daphne! She’s a slack little pig! I told her she was a young snake. I didn’t save her life just for her to marry an American!”

Madame laughed. “I rejoice to see you so much better, Damayris. Go to your Abbey and rest and build up a new life. Perhaps you will find something to do for your ruins and then you will be happier. And some day you may know what Daphne feels and then you will forgive her.”

“Get married, do you mean? Only if I meet somebody I like better than anyone I’ve seen yet!”

“That, certainly. But it may come.” Madame smiled.

“There’s one thing you could do, if you really have so much creative instinct to work out of your system,” Rachel remarked.

“Mocker! It was Madame who said that,” Damaris retorted. “What could I do?”

“What I said was true,” Madame said serenely. “If Damayris is to be content she must make beauty in some way. What can she do, Sister-Mother?”

“Take our rooms at the Abbey in hand and make them fit to live in. They’re warm and cosy, but terribly gloomy and ugly. Our old aunt was satisfied, but I’m not. If we’re going to live there, they’ll have to be cleaned up.”

“I’m not a house-painter!” Damaris protested. “We’ll have flowers, even if we can only get wild ones, and we have our pictures, from our old rooms; but it will cost a lot if we alter

curtains and things. Aunt Ann's choice was definitely ugly. And I don't see what we can do about the walls. Madame, can you believe this? She hated the lovely old stone, in her living-rooms; she said it was all right for the Abbey, but she couldn't bear cold grey walls to her parlour and bedroom—said they gave her the creeps! So Mrs. Raymond had them colour-washed for her, rose-pink, which went all faded and soiled. Can you imagine it?"

"Mrs. Raymond hated the pink walls," Rachel added. "But she said it was Aunt Ann who had to live with them and she wanted her to be happy."

"Mrs. Raymond never went into Aunt Ann's rooms, if she could help it. She couldn't bear the walls," Damaris grinned. "They were re-done every now and then, but Aunt Ann always chose rose-pink. Perhaps in time we could clean them down, Ray, and get the colour off. Don't you think the cool grey of the stone would be restful?"

"I do," Rachel agreed. "We'll ask if we may try our hands at cleaning the place. But not at once; you must be a good deal more fit before we tackle that job. We'll have to endure the pink walls for a few months, anyway. And we can't afford new curtains just now. We'll have to put up with Aunt Ann's dark brown ones. Our improvements, even for the time being, mustn't cost anything. It will give you something to think about. If you can create a beautiful place for us to live in, it will be really worth while. My only doubt about the Abbey is how we're going to bear Aunt Ann's ideas of furnishing and decoration. No one could call her rooms pretty, and I do like to live in nice surroundings!"

"Perhaps Damayris will find some way to make your new home beautiful," Madame said. "If it is not beautiful, assuredly neither of you will be happy. You must see what you can do, ma petite." And she kissed Damaris and left her.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Big Difficulty

“Thank you for all your kindness, Madame,” Rachel said earnestly, as they went downstairs. “We can never repay you for what you and M. Antoine have done for Damaris during these last few weeks. We couldn’t have afforded the comforts of a place like this, nor the special care Sir Robert has given her. We are more than grateful; we were speaking of it last night. Damaris asked how we were going to pay for everything; I told her you said we were not to think about it, and she was deeply touched. We don’t like taking so much from anybody, but there really has been no choice. We couldn’t have done all this for her.”

“Tut, Sister-Mother! She had to have the best. We told Sir Robert she must be cared for as if she was a princess. She was hurt in our employment, saving another of our girls. What would you have had us do?”

“It’s been a difficult time,” Rachel said, with deep feeling. “But it has been much easier here than it would have been in hospital, and that’s all we could have afforded. We both thank you very much, Madame. If there is any way we can repay you I hope you will tell us.”

“Cure our Damayris and give her back to us, my dear. That is all we want. But cure her mind as well as her body. Just now she does not want to come back. We want her; never let her forget that.”

“I’ll try,” Rachel said soberly, “but I’m afraid it’s the one thing I can’t do, Madame. She’ll never come back unless she can be as fine a dancer as she was, and I don’t think it’s possible.”

“I should not mind if I saw her happily married, like little Daphne. Girls should marry, and they are happier so. But it seems she has no thought of that?” Madame gave Rachel a keen look.

“Not just now.” Rachel returned the look quietly.

“Then think over what I said to her. She is creative, a maker of beauty; she must find some vent for her gift, if she is to be content and settle down.”

“I’ll remember, but I don’t see what she can do,” Rachel admitted. “You’ve hit on our big difficulty—what Damaris is going to do at the Abbey. My way is clear, but hers is very vague. The quietness will help her, but when she is well again she’ll want something more and I don’t know how to give it to her.”

“Something to fill her mind,” Madame assented. “Perhaps it will come, the thing she has to do, once you are in your Abbey.”

“I’m hoping for that. To go there seems the first step, since she wants it so much; for the next we have to wait.”

“It will come,” Madame said, with conviction. “Our Elsa knew nothing of her ferry or her caves when she went home to live in her cottage by the sea. She meant to tend babies and look after gardens and do errands, to earn money for her food. But she found her ferry and then her caves, and she has done excellently. There may be something waiting for Damayris which she can only find by going to look for it. But, Sister-Mother, I thought you would go first to friends, for a few months. Is there no one who wants you? What about the cousin who is a singer?”

“Heaps of people want us,” Rachel owned. “There’s been a perfect howl of protest because we insist on going at once to the Abbey. Maidlin, our cousin, is almost hurt that we

won't go to her house and be petted and fussed over; I've had an awful time coaxing her to leave us alone for a while. We've said we'll go later on. I think I have convinced them all that Damaris needs a quiet time alone, but it's been hard work. There are other friends too; Lady Kentisbury wanted us at the Castle, but it's full of babies; Lady Marchwood begged us to go to the Manor, but she has new twins, as well as several more small children; we'd be welcomed at the Hall, next door to the Abbey. We shall be all right, Madame; there will be friends close at hand."

"Good! I hope you will be happy and that Damayris will find her way," Madame said heartily.

There had, indeed, been a storm of protest over Rachel's announcement, by phone or letter, that Damaris refused to be a guest anywhere and that they were determined to go straight to the Abbey and live quietly there.

"But—Christmas! At least, come to us for Christmas!" Maidlin wailed.

"Too many babies," Damaris retorted, when she heard. "I'm all for babies, but just now I can't enthuse about even Maid's twins. As for the Countess's Double-Two—four infant girls would be too much for me at present. We'll stay here in peace, if Sir Robert will keep us."

"He doesn't want you to leave for at least a month longer," Rachel said. "By the end of January he thinks you'll be ready for anything."

"There will be Christmas parties at the Castle and the Pallant and the Hall and the Manor, and they'll have country-dancing in the old tithe barn," Damaris said grimly. "I know them! We'll stay here, out of all the fuss. They can send us presents, if it will ease their minds."

Gifts, flowers and fruit arrived in quantities, not only from the Abbey clan, but from friends at the theatre, and from Madame and Antoine, from Daphne and Elsa Dale.

On Christmas Eve some magnificent red roses and a pathetically grateful note came from Richard Dandy, thanking Damaris for the gift of the life so dear to him and trying to put into words a little of what he felt for Daphne.

Damaris handed the letter to Rachel. "Rather nice of Dicky D. I like the boy. And he's terribly keen on young Daphne."

"It's a beautiful letter. I'm so glad he had the sense to make it only a letter," Rachel said. "I was afraid he'd send you a diamond tiara, which wouldn't be a scrap of use to you."

"I could have pawned it. But I'm glad he didn't. I'd have felt awful."

"As if he were paying you for Daphne's life."

"As if that were all my dancing was worth," Damaris retorted. "He evidently has some sense."

"Or Madame took care he shouldn't do anything mad," Rachel added. "I expect he consulted her."

"He says he hopes some way will turn up in which he can show his gratitude." Damaris looked at the letter again. "He begs me to tell him if there's anything he can do, now or ever. I couldn't, of course, but it's nice of him to say it."

"Very kind and very suitable," Rachel agreed. "But there's nothing he can do, and if there were, we couldn't let him do it."

"That's how I feel," Damaris assented.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Young Novice

On Christmas Day Rachel laid a parcel on the bed beside Damaris. "From Mrs. Raymond; just come. It's addressed to us both."

Damaris eyed the parcel in surprise. "It's something big. Whatever has she sent us?"

"I can guess what my share is, though I never meant her to give it to me. I consulted her about an idea I'd had, but I didn't tell you for fear she'd turn it down. I like to be sure of things before I talk about them."

"You always do! What's it all about?"

"I don't know what yours is, but she has evidently included you." Rachel opened the parcel and showed yards of soft white material, wrapped in tissue paper and cardboard.

"Golly! Is it a wedding-dress?"

"No, ass! Here's yours," and Rachel handed her a flat package addressed "Mary Damaris Ellerton."

"But I want to know about your wedding-dress!" Damaris protested.

"Idiot! It's to make working overalls. I'll tell you in a moment. Let's see your present!"

Damaris tore open the package and gave a whoop of joy, as she held up a delicate pen and ink drawing of the interior of the chapter-house, showing the beautiful vaulting of the roof and looking through the arched door and windows to the garth.

"The Abbey! Oh, lovely! To make us want to go there! Here's a letter"—and she skimmed through Joan's note, while Rachel read the few lines enclosed to herself.

"It's drawn by a friend who stayed at the Hall last summer, Robert Quellyn, Sir Ivor Quellyn's cousin. He had an exhibition of drawings in town and Mrs. Raymond bought several. We're to hang this in our rooms when we get there. In the meantime we're to look at it every day. Isn't it a kind idea?"

"It's beautiful," Rachel exclaimed. "And we have the water-colours of the Abbey that Maidlin gave us years ago. I like this drawing *very* much! The lines are so clear and good. The artist must be first-class."

"I'll show it to Nurse and Sir Bob. They think we've gone mad over the Abbey. Now tell me about your dress!"

"It's obvious I can't show people round the Abbey in the sort of clothes we've worn in town; they'd be quite unsuitable. And I won't do it in old shabby things. I need a uniform, so I asked Mrs. Raymond if I might wear a white overall, made like a monk's robe, hanging straight, with a girdle. She liked the idea and said it would look better than colours; I wouldn't care to see a guide in a pink pull-over or a green jersey, and she feels the same. So we've agreed I shall have a white gown, that I can fling over my frock when people come."

"You'll be always washing and ironing!"

"I like washing, and this soft stuff won't need much ironing; it's a sort of crêpe and it won't crush. It's better than I'd have bought for myself! Mrs. Raymond wanted to be sure I'd have something good, so she chose it for me. I shan't get dirty; I shan't wear it for cooking or housework! It had to be either black or white, and as the monks wore white I can have white too."

"Something in that," Damaris admitted. "You'll look better in white than in black, with your dark hair. I'd look rather well in black, but it wouldn't do for you. You should have a black head-dress; you could tie up your head in a black scarf and leave long ends hanging down."

"No, I shan't go as far as that; I'm not going in for fancy dress. But a white overall will be useful. Perhaps I'll look like a young novice; I've no idea what they wore!"

"Or a choir-boy, in a surplice. Rather a nice idea!"

"Mrs. Raymond's going to send me an embroidered gold badge to wear on the front, saying—'Abbey Guardian.' She suggested 'Abbey Guide,' but I asked her to make it 'Guardian,' and she liked it much better."

"Posh! Can't I have a white gown and be a choir-boy too?"

"If you're needed as a guide, I expect you can. But you're not going to do any work for some time," Rachel said decisively. "You can keep out of sight when tourists come. I shall make my uniform before we go to the Abbey; there'll be time. Mrs. Raymond's sent a pattern, and enough material for three gowns; so I can lend you one, if you want it. Isn't she a dear?"

"Super. She thinks of everything," Damaris agreed. "I love my picture! It makes me long to be there."

Letters from Mary Devine told of Joan Raymond's house-party for Christmas, with Littlejan and her small brothers spending the holidays with Jansy and Joan's four other children, John, Jennifer, Jimmy and Baby Jill. And then came the story of the New Year folk-dancing, with its week-end school, its party, and its performance of the Folk Play.

"Jolly good thing we stayed in town," Damaris commented. "I couldn't stand all that fuss and row."

Her nerves were still badly on edge, as her craving for quietness showed. After the strenuous life of the theatre, with its thrills and applause and publicity, this demand for solitude was foreign to her nature and told its tale of shock and exhaustion.

Rachel, very anxious, suspected that the strain of adjustment to a new life had much to do with her sister's desire to be alone, which was so unlike her. Damaris, saying nothing, was quietly fighting a battle within herself, and she was growing very tired. She would not break down and weep over her hard fate; but she had a daily struggle to keep brave and, to some extent, cheerful, and it was wearing her out. Her surroundings—the nursing-home and the lack of new interests to fill her mind—were all against her; she had too much time for brooding, and by the end of January Rachel was longing to get her away to the Abbey, since that was what she craved for so deeply.

The only thing in which she took any interest was the making of the "novice" gowns, as she called them. She watched Rachel at work and presently insisted on being allowed to help, and sewed long white seams and turned up hems, looking less restless than she had done for weeks.

"It makes me feel we really are going to be Abbey Guardians," she remarked, as Rachel tried on the first finished robe, with its gold badge on the breast. "That suits you, my dear!"

"I'm glad you think so," Rachel said, more deeply grateful to Joan even than she had been before. "It does seem to bring the Abbey nearer, doesn't it?"

"I wish we could go tomorrow!"

"Oh, but I've two more gowns to make yet! You're being the greatest help; I want them finished before we go."

Everybody, but especially Joan, wrote welcoming letters, assuring the girls they were to come at the earliest possible moment. Mary's letter included a special message for Damaris.

"We know you don't want to be bothered with visitors, and we'll leave you alone in the Abbey. But I do hope Damaris will feel able to make an exception for Littlejan. She is growing up and she is full of admiration for Damaris, who is her heroine just now. Littlejan is looked up to by so many younger girls at school, and particularly by Jansy at home; it is very good for her to give hero-worship to someone in her turn. She was intensely moved by the self-forgetfulness and sacrifice of that leap to save Daphne Dale; it has made a deep impression on her. Don't let Damaris think she will talk about it and embarrass her; she is far too shy to say anything of what she feels. But she'll want to see you both, and if there is anything she can do she'll be eager to do it. She's very busy at school, so she won't have enough free time to be a nuisance to you; and her own good feeling would keep her from troubling you too much. But if Damaris can bear to have one visitor, I hope she'll choose Queen Marigold."

Rachel showed the letter to Damaris, who lay and thought it over. "Nice kid," she said at last. "I'll be glad to see her. She was there that night, then? Isn't that what Mary-Dorothy means? How ghastly for her!"

"I thought I told you. But we haven't talked much about that night. Mrs. Raymond sent Marigold and Jansy, with Mary-Dorothy, to watch you dance, as a very special treat; and Lady Kentisbury's niece, Lady Rosalind Kane, was with them. They were watching from one of the boxes; I saw them, but I wasn't able to speak to them. I rang up Mary-Dorothy afterwards, and asked her to tell Maidlin for me, as she'd seen what happened."

"What rotten luck that the kiddies were there!" Damaris said. "A special treat!—jolly hard lines! Tell Mary-Dorothy I'll be glad to see Queen Marigold, Ray. I don't really know her, but I've liked what I've seen of her. Will Lady Joy be home from America, with all her kids? I don't want to see troops of children rushing about. Don't they expect the family soon now?"

"They did," Rachel said, looking grave. "But there's a letter from Maidlin and she says they've had bad news. One of the girls who went to help Lady Joy with the children is in hospital with typhoid, and Lady Joy won't leave her alone in New York, so they've put off their home-coming. And Maid hints at something more. If the illness lasts long, it may not be safe for Lady Joy to travel and they may have to be there for several months, until after—well, you can guess."

"Another little Quellyn coming? It may be ages before they come home. Decent of them to stand by the girl!"

"They would, you know. They wouldn't come away and forsake her, whatever it meant. Lady Joy will be all right in New York, but she might not be all right crossing the Atlantic."

"We may be completely settled at the Abbey, before we see them," Damaris said. "I'm sorry for Lady Joy, but so far as we're concerned it's rather a good plan. There'll be only Mary-Dorothy and Queen Marigold and young Jansy. Suits me! I wish we were there and done with all this!"

"Soon now, I think," Rachel assured her quietly.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Home at Last

“At last!” Damaris sighed, as the car crept under the great arched gate-house and round the Abbey meadow to the door.

Their departure had been delayed, as Sir Robert insisted on bringing her home himself, and his days were very full. But in the first week of February he was able to snatch a few hours; and with an eye on his patient, as she lay stretched on one seat, he talked cheerfully with Rachel and refused to listen to the words of thanks she tried to say.

“We’ll help you in and put you to bed, young lady,” he said, as the car drew up at the entrance. “No wandering about ruins tonight; you’ve had enough for one day. Tomorrow you may poke into all the corners, but tonight you’ll go to bed and stay there.”

Mary Devine met them at the gate. “Home at last! Everything is ready for you. I’ve sent Miss Jenkinson away, and I’m going to leave Marigold here, just in case any visitors turn up. It’s not in the least likely, but one must be prepared, and you don’t want to act as guide today. Can I help?”

“I can walk perfectly well,” Damaris protested. “And I want to sleep in the little room that opens off the cloisters, please.”

“We’ve had endless arguments.” Rachel looked at Mary. “I don’t want her to be out there by herself.”

“Let me see!” Sir Robert took command.

“This is Miss Devine, our dear friend who lives at the Hall,” Rachel explained. “Nice of you to come to welcome us, Mary-Dorothy! Sir Robert, there’s a cosy little bedroom, opening off the kitchen; I want Damaris to have it. The other room is out here, reached from the cloisters.”

Sir Robert’s eyes widened as he saw how tiny their future dwelling would be, but he made no comment. He followed Rachel to the cloisters, and gave an exclamation of delight at his first glimpse of the green garth and the grey walls and arches.

“Beautiful! I begin to understand. Yes, I see; a pleasant little room, but too far away. For a night or two our patient must put up with the other bedroom; I insist on it. Later, she may sleep here, but she must rest and recover from the journey where she can have you close at hand.”

A schoolgirl in tunic and blazer, with a mop of dark curly hair, rose from the cushion on the steps on which she had been sitting, busy with home-work, and wandered along the cloisters to be out of the way.

Mary had followed Rachel and the doctor. “We’ve turned the store-room, off the kitchen, into a second bedroom, so that you and Damaris can be together, Rachel,” she explained. “We didn’t want you to have to come out to the cloisters, if you felt you must see her in the night.”

“Oh, how good of you!” Rachel cried. “All that trouble, just for us! Isn’t that kind, Sir Robert?”

“It sounds much more suitable,” he agreed. “Let us see these other rooms; this is too far away, for the moment. Your sister is already so much inclined to be solitary; she needs you near her. I must come back and see your ruins in detail,” and he stepped out on to the garth and gazed up at the wide beautiful windows on the south side.

“That’s the refectory; a lovely light hall,” Rachel said. “It’s much later than the rest of the Abbey.”

“Yes, I see; Perpendicular period. Those fine Early English arches, with the lancet windows above; what are they?”

“The arches are the chapter-house door and windows. The lancets above belong to the monks’ dormitory.”

“And the church?”

“Gone, thanks to Henry the Eighth. But we have pictures of it, and there’s a wonderful Saxon crypt.”

“I must certainly come to see it all properly. Now may we go to your rooms? And then I must hurry away.”

As they entered the rooms in the outer wall of the Abbey, made from the refectory of the lay brothers, Rachel gave a little gasp, for the faded pink, so loved by Aunt Ann, was gone, and the walls stood grey and cool and beautiful. The rooms were small, and opened out of one another. First came a sitting-room, which Aunt Ann had called her parlour, large enough to have housed Joy’s piano in the old days and still to have space for a table; then a tiny kitchen, and beyond these a good bedroom, all with long lancet windows facing the gate-house meadow. Though not big rooms, they looked home-like, with the electric light switched on, for the day was dull grey. A fire was burning in the parlour, and tea was spread on the round table, with a bowl of snowdrops as an added welcome.

Sir Robert nodded approval and went to look at the bedrooms. One was just large enough for a camp bed, but the other was a bigger room, not only comfortable, but dainty and pretty as well. There were snowdrops here too, and an electric stove made a warm glow in one corner. The curtains and quilt were green, with a pattern in gold, and daffodils stood in a green jar by the bed.

“Oh!” Rachel cried. “How pretty! Daffodils so early?”

“Marigold saw them in town and brought them home for you. Jansy found the snowdrops in the woods. I hope it will do,” and Mary looked anxiously at the great doctor.

“Excellent! Couldn’t be better, if she wants to live here. I can well believe it’s a fascinating place.”

“We have a room waiting for her at the house and she’ll be welcome there at any moment,” Mary said. “Rachel has only to ring up, and we’ll come and fetch Damaris and be good to her.”

“Then I can be happy about her. I’ll bring her in and put her to bed.”

“I shall get up and go to the other little room as soon as you’ve gone,” Damaris vowed.

“Not when you’ve seen your room in here. You wouldn’t be so silly as to leave it,” he told her.

“Oh! I say, it’s rather jolly!” Damaris exclaimed. “I thought it was dark and dingy. What have you done in here, Mary-Dorothy?”

“Just cleaned down the walls and given you new cushions and curtains,” Mary said cheerfully. “We’ve had the greatest fun planning it for you—Marigold and Jansy and I; but we’ve only carried out Mrs. Raymond’s wishes. It’s her doing. If you keep the door open you’ll feel as if you are in the other room with Rachel.”

“I believe everything’s new! It’s all different,” Damaris marvelled. “It used to be so gloomy. Mary-Dorothy, have you spent pounds to make it nice for us?”

“Mrs. Raymond’s orders,” Mary smiled.

“I’m relieved to see you have electric light,” said Sir Robert. “With that and the telephone you should be both safe and cosy.”

“There has to be light in the Abbey, because some of the passages are so dark,” Rachel explained. “Mrs. Raymond used a torch when she showed tourists round, but she had electricity put in a year or two ago, and we switch on for visitors at the dark corners and in the underground passages. But there’s no light in the little cloister room; we use a candle or an oil lamp in there.”

“The more reason for your sister to sleep here for the present,” he agreed.

And then he was gone, refusing tea, but vowing he would return to be a tourist as soon as possible.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Guardians of the Abbey

“Now is there anything I can do?” Mary asked. “If not, I’ll leave you, and Marigold will follow me as soon as the Abbey is closed to visitors.”

“Only tell us all about everything!” Damaris cried, sitting up in bed and shaking back her yellow curls. “The whole place is changed! Was it Aunt Ann who made it seem so dark and gloomy? What has happened to those ghastly pink walls?”

“It’s all been altered and cleaned down, just for us,” Rachel said, her tone full of almost reverent gratitude. “We never dreamt you’d do it. We thought in time we might be able to cheer things up a little, with flowers and pictures; but we never once imagined we’d find it all done for us. It’s the most beautiful thought, and the loveliest surprise, Mary-Dorothy. I couldn’t say much before Sir Robert, but I was bursting with astonishment and joy!”

“You must write to Joan and tell her. She never liked the pink-washed walls, but your aunt chose them, and Joan was anxious she should be comfortable. But she was sure you two would prefer the bare stone, and she rejoiced in the chance to give it to you. If this is to be your home, it must be fit for you to live in. There are some small rooms, not much more than cupboards, in the walls beside the entrance, and these have been cleaned out and are for you to use as box-rooms. You must have more trunks, besides these cases?”

“Our landlady is keeping them for us,” Rachel explained, her eyes lighting up. “I’ve been bothered about that. Marry has heaps of stuff; she doesn’t care even to look at it just now, but she might want the things some day. And I have books and papers; rejected manuscripts and so on.”

“Keep them. You’ll need them yet,” Mary said. “Frost shall fetch them, and you’ll store them in the cubby-holes where the lay brothers used to work.”

“That’s an enormous help. I couldn’t imagine where we were going to put them.” Rachel’s eyes were wandering round the parlour, which she remembered as a dark and gloomy place. The curtains here were a delicate soft pink, and the light had a red shade, throwing a rosy glow around. The old chairs and couch had fresh covers of rose-patterned cretonne; the table-cloth, under the white tray-cloth, was crimson. “It *is* pretty!” she said happily. “We’ve been longing to get here, but never, in our wildest dreams, did we imagine the house could look like this! It’s home, really home. I shall write to Mrs. Raymond tonight. She never even asked us if we’d like bare walls; she knew! It’s the most tremendous compliment. That old stone is quite beautiful and so restful, and all the colours look so gay and pretty against the grey background!”

The cups and plates on the table, ready for tea, were of green pottery, with yellow inside the cups, and with a squat round tea-pot and fat little milk-jug to match.

“Oh!” Rachel cried in delight. “Pottery like yours, Mary-Dorothy! Oh, how kind! I’ve always longed for some!”

“Jen brought them for you. She loves giving pottery to her friends,” Mary explained. “We haven’t given you any pictures; you’ll have your own, when you unpack. But we have given you a picture-rail, as you couldn’t put nails in the stone wall. Maidlin gave you each an Abbey water-colour, didn’t she?”

"They'll look perfect in here!" Damaris cried. "Mine was the garth; Ray's was the gate-house. Then there's my Christmas present from Mrs. Raymond, a lovely drawing of the chapter-house, Mary-Dorothy. And we've picked up some others. Ray was struck all of a heap by a big water-colour of Grisedale Tarn in a shop window; it beckoned to her and she dashed in and bought it. They had one of Helvellyn—Striding Edge—and Grasmere, and Ullswater from Glencoin; so she came home singing for joy and laden with Lake District. They'll look gorgeous on these dark walls! They're not originals; nothing posh like that—just prints. But the most lovely soft colouring, all greys and greens and blues and purples."

"We must send for them tomorrow," Mary said. "I want to see them hanging here."

"Is the cloister room made pretty too?" Damaris asked wistfully. "I meant to bag it, but Sir Bob is right—I don't want to leave all this cosiness. My green and yellow room makes me think of primroses."

"Of Maidlin, as she was the Primrose Queen," Rachel said. "You can see the other room and you can choose, but I think you should stay where you are, and let me sleep in that spot of a place next to you and use the cloister room as a study."

"That's a good idea," Mary said. "This little corner only holds a bed; you couldn't possibly live in here and you aren't meant to try. But you could use it for sleeping and make the other your day-room. If you decide on that, Joan will want to give you electric light in there too; it could be done very easily. Your bathroom is here; tiny, but a real one, boarded off the kitchen. It's green, with white paint," and she laughed. "The man insisted that a bathroom must be green, and I wasn't strong-minded enough to argue with him."

The open door showed a glimpse of green and white, and Rachel gave warm approval.

"It's delightful! The touch of green tones with Marry's green curtains. And I love the red and pink in this room! The whole place is gay and cheerful, and prettier than I'd ever have believed it could be. We're terribly grateful! We'll be very happy here; we couldn't possibly help it."

"We hope you will. The grey walls are dark, but the flowers and bright curtains everywhere are a good contrast and the grey is very restful. We've given you blue curtains and covers in your work-room, to make a change."

"I saw them. I loved them at once," Rachel said happily.

Mary laughed. "Marigold insisted on the red and pink in here; she said a red lamp was so cheerful. Jansy begged for the green and gold in the bedroom, to look spring-like. So I demanded my share and chose blue for the cloister room."

The door was pushed open and Littlejan's dark mop appeared. "Mary-Dorothy, you are a gossip! It's closing-time, and I'm going home to tea."

"Oh, please come in!" Damaris cried. "It's our fault; we made her talk. Won't you make tea for us, Mary-Dorothy, and have yours with us, both of you?"

"Not tonight," Mary said firmly. "You ought to rest. Some day we will come, if you ask us."

"Queen Marigold, did Ray really pass with honours, when you gave her a test?" Damaris asked gaily.

Littlejan looked across at her through the open door, as she lay on her pillows, her curls tossed back from her face.

"Highest honours, and credit in architecture and ancient history," she assured them. "I really do know the Abbey and so does Jan, and we both passed Rachel with distinction. It's marvellous to see you in there! You look so nice with the grey wall behind you. Miss

Jenkinson was an awful stick; the stodgiest guide you can imagine. ‘This is the refectory, where the monks took their meal of herbs. That is the pulpit, where the reader sat.’ Just like that!” She mimicked Miss Jenkinson’s dry tones. “Rachel will do it better than that.”

“Wait till you see her in her uniform! She looks so good and demure!” Damaris chuckled.

“Uniform? For the Abbey? What a marvellous idea! I shall come and stare at her quite soon. I say, you don’t look a bit ill! I’m glad!”

“I’m not ill,” Damaris assured her. “Now that I’ve escaped from prison I’m going to do as I like.”

“Oh, Marry! No one could have been kinder than Sir Robert and the nurses!” Rachel protested.

“It was prison, all the same. I was shut up, and I’m sick of it. You’ll come back and talk another time, won’t you, Queen Marigold?”

“I’ll love to! But you don’t have to call me that; Marigold’s quite enough. We’ll clear out; you’re tired. But I shall come back. Come on, Mary-Dorothy! What a gossip you are!”

“What a chatterer you are!” Mary retorted, as they went off across the garth together.

Rachel looked at the round table. A fruit cake stood on a green plate; butter was in a green dish, and apricot jam in a green jar; she had seen that the larder was stocked with tinned goods, flour, eggs, and other stores.

“Everything ready for us! How kind they are!—What’s that?”

From overhead came the bells of the Abbey,—two high notes and one low, repeated three times.

“Is that for us?” Damaris cried, from the inner room. “What does it mean? I know they’ve a code for the bells.”

Littlejan’s dark head appeared in the doorway again. “That’s ‘Welcome Home’; two Cecily’s and one Michael. Cecily’s the contralto bell and Michael’s the deeper one. We’ll give you a copy of the code, so that you can ring for people. I’ve always wanted to use the bells! Nice that the first time I do it should be for you. I’m glad!”

“Marigold, I shall have to cry, because you are all so kind!” Rachel exclaimed.

“Oh, don’t do that! Laugh instead! Heaps jollier and much more sensible!” and Littlejan was gone, racing across the garth after Mary.

Rachel prepared a tray and carried it in to Damaris. “Did you hear what that nice girl said?”

“Yes, and I heard what you said! Don’t you go crying over kind people; they don’t want that. She’s a jolly kid; I like her. I’m glad she rang our bells.”

“It’s been a real welcome home,” Rachel said, deep gratitude in her voice.

After tea, when all was tidy and quiet and Damaris seemed to be asleep, Rachel took her coat and slipped out into the Abbey.

“Oh, it’s good to be here at last!” she whispered, and crept to the chapter-house and then round into the sacristy, to look at the rose window.

She was crossing the garth by the dim light of a half moon when she saw Damaris in the cloisters.

“Marry! You’re supposed to be resting!”

“I am resting,” Damaris retorted. “It’s restful just to look at all this and feel the silence and peace. Isn’t it wonderful, after the noise in town?”

“But Sir Bob told you to stay in bed tonight!”

“That’s why I’m here. It’s glorious to be able to defy Sir Bob and do as I like.”

“Marry, you are bad!”

“I want to be bad, really wicked. I’ve been good for so terribly long. There’s an owl; they live in the Abbey, I believe; there’s another. Oh, Ray, I’m glad to be here!”

“I assure you *I* am! Have you put on enough clothes? It’s a draughty place.”

“I’m all right; I’ve got my big coat. I had to see the garth again. It’s beautiful, Ray.”

“I feel the same,” Rachel owned.

They stood together and looked about them happily. Then Rachel brought cushions and for half an hour they sat on the cloister steps and talked in hushed voices; after a while they fell silent and sat enjoying the stillness of being at home.

“I’ll never want to go away from this happy place and our beautiful peaceful little house!” Damaris murmured at last.

“I wonder!” Rachel said to herself. “I feel just the same. I wonder if we shall always stay here?”

“Ray, aren’t you glad those ghastly pink walls have gone?”

Rachel laughed. “I am! I love the grey stone, with all the colours showing up against it. It’s so cool and quiet.”

“Town seemed so noisy and—and so *hot*, somehow, although it’s the winter,” Damaris remarked. “Such a lot of rowdy people, all so excited! I feel we’ve come to a new world.”

“So do I, but that sounds odd from you. You used to like the noisy crowd.”

“I don’t want it just now. I want this—all this quietness and rest.”

“I believe you’re right. I’m more glad than I can say that we have the Abbey.—Marry dear, come back to bed. You’ve had a tiring day.”

“I’ll come, now that I’ve had a first look at it all,” Damaris agreed.

“It’s almost as if it were our own,” Rachel said, wonder in her tone. “Mrs. Raymond has trusted it to us. We have to take care of it and make new people love it. And at night, when they’ve all gone, there’ll be nobody here but us. In a way it is ours, Marry. We’re its guardians.”

“We’ll be jolly good ones; at least, you will. I don’t know that I can do much.”

“We’ll see about that later.” Rachel stood on the steps and looked across the moonlit garth. Then she put her arm round Damaris and drew her away to bed, and settled down herself to write to Joan.

The telephone rang. Startled by this reminder of the outside world, Rachel took the call. Mary-Dorothy, perhaps? Or Sir Robert Duncan?

“Is that Rachel? Joan Raymond speaking. Have you arrived safely?”

“Oh, Mrs. Raymond, how kind! We’re feeling absolutely at home. Damaris stood the journey well and she’s so glad to be here.”

“Good! I felt I must hear about her. Do you like your little house?”

“It’s perfectly beautiful. I’m in the middle of a letter to you, telling you how much we love it.”

“You’re sure you wouldn’t rather have had pink walls?” There was a laugh in Joan’s pretty soft voice. “I thought perhaps I ought to have asked you.”

“We’re so proud and touched that you didn’t feel it was necessary to ask! We were dreading those pink walls, but we never dreamt you’d have had them changed for us. We love the quiet grey stone.”

“I hoped you would. I love it too.”

“And all the colours look so pretty against the real Abbey background. It’s quite delightful. What was it like when you lived here, Mrs. Raymond?”

“The walls were bare, but we hadn’t such pretty curtains as we’ve given you. Ours were old and shabby and dull. Your aunt begged so hard for pink wash that I gave in, though I rather loathed the look of it. But it was her house and she was so happy with her pink wash!”

“We’re very happy to be without it.”

Joan laughed. “I believe you. I shall come and see you when you’ve really settled in. Good night! Good wishes to you both.”

“Thank you so very much!” And Rachel went back to her letter, cheered by the friendly talk.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Rachel's Problem

Rachel wandered towards the Abbey from the gate-house, looking grave.

"Thinking out a new novel?" A cheery voice hailed her.

She swung round and faced tall curly-haired Jen Marchwood, from the Manor, next door to the Hall. Jen's car stood at the gate; she was walking up the drive, a twin of five months old on each arm.

"Come and look at my boys, Rachel! I've been wanting to see you, but we're having a little trouble with the beginnings of our first teeth and we've not been very happy lately. This is a good day, so we seized the chance and drove round to hunt for you. These people are getting heavy, so we had to come by car. My dear, how nice you look in that white robe! Quite monkish; so suitable!"

"Oh, Mrs. Brown!"—The nickname dated from their first meeting, when Rachel had called Lady Marchwood "Mrs. Brown" before she knew her real name. "What beautiful babies! I do want to see them." And she brought cushions, so that Jen could sit on the cloister steps, holding her children in her lap.

"These are Christopher and Bernard; Chris and Barney. It is such fun to have two at once! I had only three when I met you first, six years ago, and now I've seven," Jen boasted. "Five big fair boys and two little dark girls, Rachel. I want one more boy; I've always said I must have six boys, so that when they're grown up they can do morris together. And I wouldn't mind if we finished with another girl. Everybody I know has a girl called Rose; Cecily Rose, Dorothy Rose, Shirley Rose, Jillian Rose. I'd like to have one too. But I can wait for her; I want my sixth boy first."

Rachel was laughing helplessly. "Oh, Mrs. Brown! Aren't seven enough?"

"Nine would be nicer," Jen said serenely. "I've made you laugh, anyway, and that's worth doing. What were you looking so grim about? A story in a mess?"

"Only our own story." Rachel looked at her gravely.

"What's wrong? Don't you like the Abbey? Or is Dammy-Marry not so well?"

"We love the Abbey, and we're very happy to be here. Marry gets stronger every day; the quietness is doing what we hoped, and we're very grateful to the Abbey. Her nerves are steadying and she's much more herself. She had a very bad shock, you know, and a second one when she realised she wouldn't dance again."

"You think she won't?" Jen asked soberly.

"She says she can't get the right position for her hip. She knows a lot more about ballet than Sir Robert Duncan or his nurses."

"She does, of course. But the power may come back. And she's grieving over it?"

"The thing I was afraid of is happening," Rachel broke out. "She loves the Abbey, but she hasn't enough to do. She has too much time to think; she wanders about, and she loves it all, but she's so much better that she wants to begin doing things. When I feel that way, I haul out my book and re-read and correct what I've done; or I try to write a short story. But Marry has nothing like that behind her, and she's realising that just to be in the Abbey isn't going to be enough. I knew it would happen."

“She wants a job. Would she come to the Manor and help me with the children every morning? She could give Rosemary and Mike baby lessons; I’d be thankful to have her.”

Rachel looked thoughtful. “It’s a kind idea, and she’s a good teacher. But I don’t think she’s ready to be with children yet. Her nerves are stronger but she’s still irritable at times, and then she turns silent and goes off by herself.”

“She couldn’t stand the noise in our house,” Jen said decidedly. “You can’t keep five small kiddies quiet, and only our two big boys go to school. Rosemary is seven and she’ll go soon, but she’s never been strong and we’re not hurrying her; she’s shy and she shrinks from school. No, that idea won’t do; Dammy-Marry must find something quieter.”

“She’s been working in the Abbot’s garden, weeding the flower-beds, and she’s enjoyed it, but there isn’t very much to do.”

“And you aren’t having tourists, I suppose?”

“Only one party since we came. It’s too early in the year, I think. I don’t feel we’re earning Mrs. Raymond’s good salary, but there has to be somebody in charge.”

“The Abbey must have its guardians,” Jen assented. “You’ll be busier presently. Can Damaris do weeding? What about the stooping?”

“She sits on a mat and clears as far as she can reach. Then she moves on to another bad spot,” Rachel explained. “Old Jim Baines, who looks after the Abbot’s garden as well as the gardens at the Hall, is glad to be saved some of the work.”

“Damaris had better help him at the Hall. Weeding is always a soothing job.”

“It won’t fill her mind, I’m afraid, and that’s what she needs—something she can be really keen on,” Rachel said. “She can weed all day and still go on brooding.”

“Could she give teas to your tourists? You know all about giving teas, after your days at Hikers’ Halt!”

“Would Mrs. Raymond allow it? The Abbey never has given teas.”

“You know why, don’t you?” Jen asked. “We’re so near the village, just down the lane, and several folk there do teas and lunches. Joan doesn’t want to compete with them; she doesn’t need the extra to be made from giving meals, and they do. She might allow it, in your case, but that has been her objection. It would have been too much for Aunt Ann, too.”

“We won’t ask her. I’m sure she’s right,” Rachel agreed. “People would choose to have their tea in the Abbey and it would spoil the village trade. There’s another objection, Lady Marchwood.”

“I’d rather be Mrs. Brown!” Jen pleaded.

Rachel laughed. “Marry might be recognised, if she did teas, and people might say things that would upset her.”

Jen gazed at her. “Very true, my dear. Mary Damayris has been in the picture papers and shop windows. The public would be thrilled to find her as their waitress. She’d have to disguise herself. Could she black her face?”

Rachel rocked with laughter. “Oh, Mrs. Brown!”

“Like the old guisers, the disguised people, who did the Folk Plays in the villages. No? Well, she could alter her looks easily, without a black face. She has only to tie up her head in a bag. Everybody knows her mass of yellow curls; if she swathed a blue scarf round her head no one would know her.”

“It wouldn’t need to be blue. Her eyes aren’t blue, in spite of her hair,” Rachel observed.

“One expects blue eyes, but I remember Dammy-Marry’s are dark, like yours. A green or yellow scarf, then.”

“Green. Yellow would be too much like her hair. It’s quite an idea; I’ll suggest it to her. She’s very anxious not to be accosted by strangers as Mary Damayris; we were speaking of it last night, and I said she must keep out of sight, if anybody came. She’s sure people would pity her and sympathise with her.”

“Won’t her friends come to look her up? I suppose they know where she is?”

“No,” Rachel said quietly. “We begged Sir Robert not to give anyone our address. We told people they should hear later on, but that we wanted to be left alone for a while, and Sir Robert agreed. We told Daphne Dale and Madame about our new job, but we didn’t say where the Abbey was.”

Privately Jen thought the friends in London would soon find the Abbey, if they set out to look for it. But they would probably be considerate and leave the girls to themselves for a time.

“I’ll think over your problem. I may have a brainwave,” she said. “Advise Dammy-Marry to tie up her hair, if she really wants to bury Mary Damayris. Where is she? I haven’t seen her anywhere?”

“She’s gone to the village to register a letter for me.” Rachel’s colour rose.

Jen looked at her eagerly. “A new story? Oh, well done! You have been quick!”

“Just a scrap I wrote in town and corrected since we came here. It’s short, but it relieved my feelings at the time. I’m going to see if anybody likes it,” Rachel said quietly. “My typewriter came with the other luggage and I use it in the cloister room, where it doesn’t worry Marry. Won’t you come and see our pictures? The colours look so pretty on the dark walls. And thank you so very much for our beautiful cups and plates! We bless you every time we use them. We’re both in love with them.”

“I thought they’d look better than Aunt Ann’s cracked white ones. I love buying pots.” Jen lifted her sleeping sons carefully and followed Rachel into the sitting-room. She stood before the water-colour of Ullswater, remembering her visit there with Maidlin.

“We saw this. Henderson was as proud of the view as if he’d had a share in making it. Yes, these are lovely, Rachel; I don’t wonder you were tempted. Is Helvellyn really like this? Have you been on that knife-edge place?”—as she looked at Striding Edge.

“Oh yes! Marry threatened to dance up there, but I put a stop to that. It’s not as bad as it looks. This is the tarn above our farm; but what a climb! You’ll know Grasmere.”

“I love them all. And your Abbey pictures look just right in here. A Robert Quellyn sketch too! How did you get this?”

“Mrs. Raymond sent it to Marry for Christmas, when she gave me the stuff for my gowns.”

“What a good idea on Joan’s part! It’s a lovely drawing; Rob Quellyn is very clever. And you look like a good little acolyte; you ought to carry incense!”

“Marry calls me a novice, or a choir-boy.”

“You look very pretty, whatever you are. Your Aunt Ann made me think of a little old black rag-bag.”

“I know,” Rachel said quietly. “That was why I wanted a uniform.”

“Very wise of you! But I must take my boys home. Give our love to Dammy-Marry and say we’re all glad she’s safely here. She can walk as far as the village? Well done!”

“She takes a stick, to please me, but I don’t believe she uses it. Oh yes! She’s walking all right now.”

“That’s wonderful. She’s made a fine recovery. Have you seen much of Queen Marigold? She was looking forward to your coming.”

“Not yet. There have been school events, and she’s been late home. Mary-Dorothy has come to see us, but not the girls. Mary thinks Jansy is a little bit afraid to come.”

Jen nodded. “Jansy is sensitive and she’s still very much of a child. She had a bad shock when she saw the accident, and I expect she doesn’t quite believe Damaris is all right again. Littlejan is more matter-of-fact and much older. Jansy will come some day. Good luck to you both! I hope your problem will solve itself. Will you tell me something?”

“If I can,” Rachel said in surprise.

“Two years ago I saw Damaris dance one evening; it was just before that day when you met Jandy Mac and were so good to her; and I came home and told Maidlin you had seemed worried. Maid was very much upset, but she knew of no trouble, and everybody decided I had been mistaken.—Then there was something wrong?”—at the look on Rachel’s face.

“A man,” Rachel said simply. “A horrible creature; I couldn’t stand him. Neither could Marry, fortunately, but for a while he haunted her and we couldn’t get rid of him. He cooled off at last and we had no more trouble. But things were bad just at that moment. There were others, of course, but this one was the worst.”

“I’m glad you choked him off. You should have put me on to him! I’d have settled him for you!”

“I’m sure you would!” Rachel laughed. “But I dealt with him, though I didn’t enjoy doing it.”

“Dammy-Marry has no thoughts of marriage?”

“Not at present,” Rachel said quietly.

“Pity! It would solve your difficulty.”

“She’ll have to find some other way, Mrs. Brown.”

“She’ll do it,” Jen said, as she carried her boys back to the car.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Aunt Ann's Crocuses

"May we come in? It's Marigold and Jansy. We want to show you something. It's the Rosemary Maid's secret, so I made her come."

Rachel looked up eagerly. "Oh, please come in, Marigold and Jansy! We're very glad to see you."

In spite of all she could say, and in spite of their love for the Abbey and their joy in being there, Damaris was growing more depressed and silent every day. She felt herself useless, and a letter which had come that morning, accepting Rachel's story almost by return, offering three guineas a thousand words and asking for another, had increased her gloom.

"I'm glad, of course, and I think you're a genius, my girl," she had said. "You'd better stick to shorts; I believe you're a short-story writer, not a novelist—a sort of Katherine Mansfield. You'll soon make your name, if you go on at this rate. But I'm no use. There's not a thing in the world I can do. When the season starts in earnest I shall stain myself a gypsy brown and tie up my head, as Lady Jen suggested, and I'll take on the Abbey business, while you turn out masterpieces by the dozen. If only there was something for me to do, right here and now!"

Rachel echoed the wish heartily, for she was really worried. She welcomed the schoolgirls, as she would have welcomed any new interest. It was early on Saturday morning, and they were free from school duties for once.

"We want you to come out with us, into the gate-house meadow," Littlejan coaxed. "Both of you, if Rachel has time, but we specially want Mary Damayris—oughtn't I to call her that?" she asked anxiously, as Rachel looked at her quickly.

"It's all right." Damaris spoke up at once. "Yes, please, Marigold; I don't mind at all. What are we going to do in the meadow?"

"Jan has something to show you. Have you been out there this morning?" Littlejan asked eagerly.

"Not yet. What is there to see? The meadow never seems very interesting."

Jansy had been eyeing her from the doorway. It was true that she had been afraid to come. Ever since that November night she had seen before her eyes the picture of Damaris struck down by the heavy beam, lying broken beneath it; it seemed impossible that she should be well again, showing no sign of the accident, and Jansy had shrunk from seeing her. Now, suddenly, the terrible sight had gone, and Mary Damayris stood before her in a green frock, tying a green scarf over her curls.

"There! Better be on the safe side. Nobody would connect me with Mary Damayris and the Goose-Girl, would they?"

"No, I don't think they would." Littlejan considered the transformation in her appearance. "But it suits you. You look frightfully jolly."

"How brave she is!" Rachel thought, turning away to hide her quivering lips. "Talking of it like that!—I'll come later, Marigold. I've things to do, and we may be busy, as it's a fine Saturday."

Jansy took Damaris by the hand and drew her to the door. "I'm glad you're all right. I've thought about you a lot. Do you like your green and gold bedroom?"

"I love it. I feel I ought to dream of primroses and daffodils. You chose the colours, didn't you? Jolly clever of you to guess what we'd like! We love the red and pink in the parlour too."

"I'm glad you call it the parlour!" Littlejan exclaimed. "Mrs. Watson always did. It sounds much more like the Abbey than sitting-room! There's a real parlour across the garth, next to the chapter-house, you know. It was the place where the monks were allowed to talk."

"Ray and I talk in our parlour," Damaris said solemnly.

"Come over here! I'm going to show you something that will cheer you up," Jansy coaxed. "It would cheer anybody up."

"Lead on! I can do with any amount of cheering up!"

"Well—look!" They were in the meadow by this time, and Jansy led the way to a sheltered corner in an angle of the gate-house wall. She knelt and drew aside the untidy winter grass and showed a group of golden crocuses, just opening to the February sun. "There! Did you know they were there?"

"I certainly didn't! They don't show in the long grass. Couldn't we pull it off, so that people could see them? They look such a bright spot of colour, in that corner. You're right, Jansy; the very sight of the plucky things is cheering."

Damaris was on her knees, clearing away the rank grass.

"There! Everybody crossing the fish-stream will see them and say—'Oh, how pretty!' How did you know they were here?"

Littlejan stood looking down at the flowers. "Tell her, Rosemary Maid. That's Jan's school name," she explained. "She was maid to the Rosemary Queen, last May."

"They're Mrs. Watson's crocuses; your Aunt Ann." Jansy looked at Damaris. "She had one given to her, years ago, and she stuck it in this corner, and next year there were two, and now there's a big clump. She showed them to me, when I was quite a little girl, and I look for them every year. I showed Marigold two years ago; that was the first February she was here."

"Your Aunt Ann was terrifically keen on them. She really loved them," Littlejan remarked. "So we thought we'd clear away the grass, as she used to do. She'd like to feel somebody still cared about them."

"I care for them. I'll clear away the grass every year." Damaris stood staring down at the flowers. "Little golden soldiers! I wish there were more, and some of the lovely purple ones. Think what it would look like if there was a row of them all along under the Abbey walls!—a thread of gold and purple against the grey! Why shouldn't there be more? We could get some and put them in."

"Oh, do!" Littlejan and Jansy spoke together. "It would look simply marvellous!"

Damaris gazed at them, her dark eyes widening. "Why shouldn't there be flowers, instead of all this grass? Why shouldn't there be a lovely garden, to welcome people to the Abbey? Why shouldn't it be beautiful out here, as well as inside?—Why shouldn't *I* be the one to make it beautiful?"

She stopped, breathing quickly, overcome by her idea.

"You should!" Littlejan shouted. "Oh, you should! You've plenty of time! Aunt Ann couldn't have done it, but you could! Oh, Mary Damayris, do take on the job!"

"A welcome to the Abbey, with flowers," Jansy cried. "It could be so pretty, if you'd take the trouble! Oh, would you do it? Make this field into a lovely garden, Mary Damayris!"

"I believe I could make it beautiful." Damaris stood, looking across the meadow with her artist's eyes. "Not set beds of geraniums and lobelia, and those yellow calceolaria things—I

don't mean that; but just a mass of simple flowers in lovely colours, instead of the plain grass. Would your mother let me try, Jansy Raymond?"

"I'm sure she would. But you'll have lobelia, won't you? You'll need some of that particular blue," Jansy pleaded. "It's such a gorgeous colour!"

"We'll have to ask Mrs. Raymond, but if she's willing I believe I could do it. Come and tell Rachel!—Oh, Ray, I've found my job! Something to do for the Abbey—a big thing to add to it, to make it even more beautiful!"

"If you've found that, you've been clever." Rachel stared at her, amazed at the change in her. "I thought nothing could make the Abbey more beautiful. What are you talking about, Marry?"

Damaris, eager, excited, full of life, as she had not been for months, poured out the story of Aunt Ann's crocus corner and the idea that had grown from it.

Rachel looked interested. "It could look lovely, and I'm sure you could do it. You could have help with the digging; your job would be the planning and designing, arranging the colours and the heights of your plants, and so on. It's quite in your line, when you come to think of it."

"Designing a ballet of flowers, instead of people." Littlejan grasped her idea.

"That's what I meant," Rachel assented. "But don't get too keen till you hear what Mrs. Raymond says. She may not want the Abbey changed, and it would change it entirely. She's used to the stretch of grass and the gray walls rising out of it; she may not want flowers there."

Damaris looked at Jansy in despair. "Will she feel that way, do you think?"

"What will she say, Rosemary Maid?" Littlejan asked.

"I don't know. But we'll soon find out," Jansy said eagerly, and looked at Damaris. "Our car's coming this afternoon, to take me home for the week-end, and Marigold's coming too, as there's nothing on at school today. Mother's coming in the car, because she'd like to see Rachel. She says if you don't want to see people she won't bother you, but she wants to know how Rachel likes being in the Abbey and if she thinks you'll want to stay, and all that sort of thing. We'll tell her your idea and see what she says. She'll be here at three o'clock, and if there are Americans being shown round she'll wait till they've gone."

"That's your chance to tell her all about it, Marry," Rachel said. "Don't get too thrilled till she's given you leave to try."

"We'll all tell her and beg her to say yes," Littlejan said. "Come and look at the field and decide what you'll have in your garden!"

"Much better not, till you know if there's to be any garden," Rachel warned them.

But the three, afire with the great idea, were off to the gate-house meadow, at first to chatter all at once, then for two to listen respectfully while Mary Damayris, her gift for colour and design blazing at full height, described what she would do with the big field, if permission were given.

"We must leave some grass, to make a contrast to the flowers. And we'll have seats; I'm sure the monks would like resting places in their garden! You can do your home-work, sitting out here, and Ray can write stories, and Mary-Dorothy can read her proofs, on the seats in the garden, once the garden is made!" Damaris proclaimed. "We might enlarge the fish-stream and have a pond, with water-lilies and gold and silver fish," and she told her plans for the beds of flowers.

"It will look lovely. You've gorgeous ideas," Littlejan said happily. "If you can really work in all, or nearly all, the flowers of our Queens, it will be a real Hamlet Club garden."

“Marigolds for you, and forget-me-nots for Mirry, and a bush of rosemary for Jean, and violets for Mother, and primroses for Aunty Maid, and real roses for Aunt Rosamund, and wallflower and cowslips for Aunty Jen, and poppies and bluebells and hyacinths and honesty, and some heather and lilac—oh, Mother must say yes, when she hears you’re going to put in all the Queens!” Jansy cried wistfully. “And one tiny bit of lobelia for me, although I’m not a Queen!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

A Message from Ambrose

Joan, having tea with Mary at the Hall, looked troubled when the great idea was put to her. She had heard from Mary that Damaris seemed depressed and that Rachel was worried. This girl, full of eagerness, showed no sign of depression; she had seen a vision and she was afire to translate it into reality. To damp her excitement and thrust her back into idleness and gloom was more than Joan could bear. And yet—did she want so big a change in her Abbey?

Damaris read her thoughts in her face. “You don’t like the plan,” she groaned. “Oh, well—! It was too much to hope for, I suppose. I’ll tell Rachel it’s all off.”

“Don’t be in such a hurry,” Joan protested. “Remember this is a new idea and I’m not used to it yet. I like that stretch of green between the gate-house and the Abbey.”

“But you have that—the stretch of green—when you come to the gate and look through at the garth,” Littlejan urged, “It’s all just the same. If the gate-house stood in a sea of flowers, the green of the garth would be a change and would look twice as beautiful.”

“There’s something in that,” Joan admitted. “The garth would be restful after the flowers outside, a pleasant contrast. But ought we to change the Abbey, Marigold? We’ve tried to keep it as it used to be in the days of the monks.”

“Oh, but—oh, wait a moment! I must fetch something from the Abbey!” and Littlejan was off, racing through the garden and down the tresaunt.

Joan raised her brows. “Do you know what she’s after, Jansy?”

“Haven’t the foggiest notion, Mother, but it’s sure to be something worth while. Marigold’s always sensible.”

“Don’t look so downcast, Damaris,” Joan said gently. “I haven’t decided yet. If any of you can convince me that this ought to be done I shall be delighted for you to try.”

Damaris shook her head. “I can’t, Mrs. Raymond. I just thought it was a marvellous idea. But I’ve no arguments about it.”

“Who wants to argue?” Jen Marchwood appeared at the door. “I couldn’t have Joan so near and not come to have tea with her; we don’t see her at her Abbey too often. What’s the matter with Dammy-Marry?” She eyed Damaris anxiously; she had come to the Abbey one afternoon, and had been shocked by the listless weary girl she had met, but today there seemed something new, a fresh touch of depression.

“You may be able to help us,” Joan remarked. “Damaris has had an idea and she’s going to be terribly disappointed if I can’t fall in with it. I’d like to know what you think.”

“I can tell you,” Jen said promptly. “I should agree, whatever it is, if it’s anything that will make her look more cheerful.”

“All the same, you’d better hear what it is,” and Joan told of the crocuses and the idea they had brought. “The question is, will it spoil the look of the Abbey? And ought we to make such a big change from what it was in the days of the monks?”

Jen looked thoughtful. “It might not spoil it. I can imagine it looking very attractive.”

“A sort of welcome to the Americans,” Jansy put in anxiously.

“They aren’t all Americans,” her mother pointed out.

“But they’d all like to be welcomed with flowers!”

“I think Jansy’s right. It would look welcoming,” Jen said. “I should let Dammy-Marry try, Joan. It won’t be deadly, if it’s a failure. Let Mr. Edwards from the farm plough up the meadow and let her see what she can do. If you don’t like the result he can plough it up again and sow it with grass seed, and you’ll have a real lawn; at present it’s merely a rough field. You can soon put back the grass, if you miss it too much. But you have your lawn inside the Abbey. Why not try having flowers outside?”

“Oh, Lady Marchwood, how lovely of you!” Damaris cried, her face alight with hope. “Mrs. Raymond, if you’ll let me try, I really will make it beautiful!”

“Do you know much about gardening?” Joan asked.

“A little; rather a lot, really. We did a good deal at home—at Crossrigs—and the things I planted always grew; Uncle said I had green fingers. Ray helped with the vegetables, but I messed about with the flowers, and they used to look lovely.”

“Sounds promising,” Jen observed. “Where’s Marigold? What does she think?”

“She’s frightfully keen,” Jansy assured her. “She’s dashed off to fetch something from the Abbey; we don’t know what it is. She gave a yell and rushed away and told us to wait.”

“Most mysterious! But here she comes, so we shall soon know all about it,” Jen said placidly.

Littlejan hurled herself into their midst, waving a slim white book. “It’s all right! I knew I’d read it somewhere! Oh, dear Lady Jen, how nice of you to come, at the exactly right moment! I say, everybody, you remember old Ambrose, the lay brother in the Abbey, who fell in love with Lady Jehane but couldn’t marry her?”

“Remember Ambrose? Do we ever forget him? We owe heaps of things to Ambrose!” Jen exclaimed.

“Yes, well—where did he meet Jehane and talk to her?”

Jen and Joan stared at her blankly.

“In the Abbey, I supposed,” Jen began. “What are you doing with Ambrose’s book?”

“But I always thought it was odd that she was allowed to be in the Abbey, except for going to church,” Joan added. “Have you found something that we’ve forgotten? I haven’t read that little book for twenty years!”

“I read it only the other day.” Littlejan had dropped into a chair and was hurriedly turning over the pages, which were covered with spidery writing. “It’s terribly hard to make out, and the spelling’s comic, but it is in English, of a kind, and there’s something——”

“But what has it got to do with Mary Damayris and making the meadow into a garden?” Jansy demanded.

“It used to be a garden!” Littlejan gave a shout of triumph. “She won’t be changing it; she’ll be putting it right. It’s been allowed to go back to being a field, but in Ambrose’s day it was a garden. He says so; he says he met Jehane—‘Near the gate-house, in the pleasaunce, where be roses and lilies and gilly-flowers.’ If that’s not a garden, I don’t know what it is.”

“Does he really say that, Marigold?” Joan asked, in deep interest.

“Here it is, Godmother. Please read it for yourself.” Joan and Jen studied the manuscript thoughtfully, while the rest eyed them in acute suspense.

“Perhaps Ambrose wants his garden put back,” Jansy murmured. “We were by the gate-house when Mary Damayris had the idea, and that was where he lived and where he’s buried. Perhaps he put it into her head.”

“Perhaps he’s been waiting for somebody to come who loves gardens,” Littlejan assented.

“What are gilly-flowers?” Jansy asked, an anxious eye on her mother.

“Wallflowers; or might be stocks or pinks, Rosemary Maid. I looked them up in a flower book at school. If they’re pinks, funny old names for them were Pagants or Blunket.”

“Oh, Mary Damayris, do have some blunkets in your garden!” Jansy laughed.

“Or Sweet John; or Sops in Wine,” Marigold added.

“I like blunket best,” Jansy asserted firmly.

Damaris was too deeply troubled to take part in the discussion. Until Joan made her objection she had not realised how great was the hope which had seized her. She caught her breath as Joan looked up from the old book.

Joan smiled at her. “Don’t look so frightened, my dear. You may try what you can do. We shall only be restoring to the Abbey a beauty it has lost. Ambrose makes it plain that in his day the gate-house stood in a garden, not in a field. You shall give us back his garden.”

“Oh, Mrs. Raymond! It will be beautiful! I know it will,” Damaris cried, her lips quivering in the sudden relief.

“I’m sure it will. But I’d like to hear your ideas before you start. Mr. Edwards shall plough up the meadow, as a first step, and you must think out your plans carefully. Then you shall tell me all about it.”

“She’s told us some lovely ideas already,” Jansy began eagerly. “The flowers of all the Hamlet Club Queens, Mother, and some lobelia for me——”

Joan checked her. “Damaris must tell me herself, when she is ready, Jansy.”

“Ambrose says he gave Lady Jehane a forgette-me-notte nosegay, spelling ‘forget’ and ‘not’ with extra letters at the end. He would, of course,” Jen said.

“Forgetty-me, notty!” Littlejan grinned. “I noticed that.”

“I always wondered how Jehane managed to give her jewels to Ambrose without being seen by anybody,” Joan remarked. “If he was on duty at the gate-house and she met him there, it’s much easier to understand. And if the gate-house stood in a beautiful garden, with lilies and roses, it’s all most suitable and romantic.”

“It will stand like that again, if I can manage it.” Damaris drew a deep breath of hope. “I’ll do my very best!”

“You mustn’t overtire yourself at first. Ask Mr. Edwards to lend you a man when you want heavy work done. Don’t dig and do yourself harm. You won’t be able to have many flowers for this summer, unless you buy plants that are well started and put them in,” Joan said. “It’s not sound gardening, but you can begin preparing for next year by choosing and setting your own seeds. You have no greenhouse, but I’m sure Mary-Dorothy, and Joy, when she comes home, will let you keep your seed-boxes in the greenhouses here.”

“Oh, surely! Joy will want Damaris to use the houses,” Mary said quickly. “And she can consult our gardeners. They’re good workers; they’ll give her advice, I know.”

Damaris had been sitting in a happy dream, her face aglow. Now she looked up. “When will Lady Joy be home? I’d like to have a flower-garden to welcome her, even if I have to buy plants for this year.”

A look passed between Joan, Jen, and Mary. Then Joan said quietly, “Joy can’t come home this spring. She has been kept too long, by a relapse on the part of her invalid. She daren’t travel now; we shall not see her till June, at the earliest.”

“June! This is February. We can surely have some flowers by June,” Damaris cried. “*Would* you—oh, *would* you all keep it a secret from Lady Joy? I’d like it to be a surprise. Don’t tell her anything about the garden! Oh, *please!*”

“We might do that for you,” Joan assented. “‘Traveller’s Joy’ will have a pleasant shock when she sees flowers where she expects a green meadow. Promise, everybody!”

“I’ll have heaps of flowers for her!” Damaris vowed. “I’ll plan with that in mind. Next year I’ll do it properly and have my own baby plants; but for this year I can surely buy stuff somewhere.”

“We can spare you things from the Manor. We always have to thin out heaps of seedlings,” Jen observed. “When you know what you want, come along and talk it over with our gardeners.”

“We can do the same, I am sure,” Mary said. “And Joy has gardening books, giving the dates of different flowers; she’d be glad to lend them, I know.”

“That’s terribly kind!” Damaris cried joyfully.

“Have you any baby lobelias, Auntie Jen?” Jansy pleaded. “Mary Damayris is going to put some in for me, because they’re such a lovely blue.”

“Oh yes, we can give her baby lobelias! And if there are things we can’t produce she’ll be able to buy them in the village or in Wycombe. But she’ll need to plan carefully, and she’ll make mistakes at first,” Jen said solemnly. “Baby things will grow into giants and other poor babies will be crowded out or left in the background; some silly things will die and leave spaces, and others will turn into great clumps and fight with one another. But Dammy-Marry will learn by experience; we all make mistakes at first.”

“That’s why I want her to plan carefully,” and Joan rose. “I’ll go and have a chat with Rachel. I want to see how she looks in her white gown.”

“Like a novice or a nun, or a very pretty, very good little choir-boy!” Damaris called after her.

“I can quite believe it,” Joan agreed, laughing.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Lobelia and Marigold

Jansy followed her mother to the Abbey. Damaris was going also, when Littlejan caught her for a private word.

“You won’t forget the lobelia Jan’s so crazy about, will you, Mary Damayris? I’ll tell you a secret, but don’t breathe it to anybody. Jan hasn’t the faintest idea, nor has Aunt Joan nor anyone at all, except the Hamlet Club at school. We’re having a meeting next Saturday and we’re going to tell everybody then. By the time your garden’s in flower, lobelia will be a Queen’s colour, as much as my marigolds and Mirry’s forgetty-me-nottys; I shall always call them that now! The Club’s going to have Jansy for the new Queen, next May-day. Isn’t it marvellous? Another Queen from the Abbey!”

“Gosh! How glad everybody will be!” Damaris realised the importance of the event to all the Abbey clan. “Mrs. Raymond’s girl as Queen! That’s awfully fine! But is she old enough? I should have thought she was too little to be Queen.”

“She’s thirteen. It’s young, but I was only fourteen. Jan’s well on for her age, although she’s so small; I expect she’ll start to grow soon. She’s in quite a high form and she takes a good place in it. The Club likes the Rosemary Maid. She did rather a big thing for them last year—I’ll tell you the story some day. She’ll make a good Queen, and I’ll be there to help.”

“That will make a difference,” Damaris admitted. “I’m glad. Everyone will be pleased. And will she wear lobelia blue? She’ll look lovely!”

“She’s always said she would, if she was ever chosen. She’ll be called Lob, but she won’t mind. But she’s not expecting it, so you’ll be frightfully careful, won’t you? It’s to be a surprise, even to Aunt Joan and Lady Jen and Mary-Dorothy. Nobody knows but the Club at school.”

“I won’t say a word. I shall think of nothing but my garden,” Damaris said. “But I won’t forget the lobelia, now that you’ve explained. We’ll have a border of it, along the path leading to the barn. Lobelia and marigolds mixed would make a blaze of colour.”

“And everybody going to the barn will think of Jan and me!” Littlejan chuckled. “Your garden’s going to be marvellous, full of lovely ideas!”

“Jansy has ideas, if you like,” Damaris retorted. “It was she who started all this, by taking me to see Aunt Ann’s crocus corner because it would cheer me up. And Jansy said that about Ambrose wanting somebody to put back his garden; and about flowers being a welcome to tourists.”

“Yes, she has good ideas,” Littlejan assented. “I’m terribly keen to see her as Queen.”

Mary came from the house, her arms full of books. “Have a look at these, Damaris. I’d like to know which you think most helpful. Keep them for a few days.”

“On gardens?” Damaris cried. “Thanks, Mary-Dorothy! I shall work up gardens as I did matric.”

“My dear, how nice you look!” Joan exclaimed, when Rachel met her on the garth.

Rachel laughed. “My uniform feels very official with its badge, and it’s most convenient. It doesn’t matter what I wear underneath.”

“I used to wear a blue pinafore. I like your white much better,” Joan told her.

“Thank you again so very much for our beautiful little house,” Rachel said earnestly. “We are so proud and happy in it. It’s a real home.”

“I’m glad. I felt it must be made fit for you,” Joan agreed. “Your Aunt Ann didn’t care, but I knew you would.”

She stayed only a few moments in the Abbey, as a party of tourists arrived; but it was long enough for Rachel to assure her that they would be happy in their new job, if only Damaris could be persuaded to settle down.

“I think that will be all right.” Joan smiled at her caretaker. “She’s to try her hand at her garden, and already she looks happier.”

“Oh, that is kind! She really will make it beautiful!”

“It’s going to be lovely, Rachel; just like it was for Ambrose and Jehane,” Jansy said.

“Ambrose and Jehane?” Rachel sounded dazed.

“Damaris will tell you all about it. Now there’s a call for you, and I must take Jansy and Littlejan home. I shall come soon to hear all the plans.” And Joan and Jansy went back to the Hall.

“It’s true!” Rachel said to herself that night. “She’s different already. Oh, I am thankful!”

Damaris had books spread over the parlour table, and, in wild enthusiasm, was dashing from one to another in search of dates of flowering and facts for her garden.

“I know which book is best already,” she announced by supper-time. “This one’s worth all the rest put together. I shall ask Mary-Dorothy if I may keep it for a few weeks and give the others back to her tomorrow.”

“I should keep them for a while. You may find useful points in them,” Rachel advised.

“If I can bag a few lupins and hollyhocks in their very early stages from one of the gardens, I’m going to mass them against the Abbey walls; big clumps of blue and red and yellow. They’ll get all the afternoon sun.”

“I like the sound of that.” And Rachel watched her happily while she prepared a meal, and then swept the books out of sight. “You shall work in here and I’ll use the cloister room. Then we shan’t disturb one another,” she suggested.

“I don’t want that clicker of yours coming between me and my garden,” Damaris retorted.

“The typewriter’s an extremely useful clicker, my dear.”

“I know, but it does make a row. My job isn’t as good as yours,” Damaris said soberly. “Yours will bring in cash; mine will only make the Abbey beautiful.”

“And isn’t that more worth doing than earning a few extra pounds? Where’s your artist side?” Rachel demanded. “Perhaps you’ll make the Abbey so beautiful that people who have been will come again, to see it. But don’t spend much, Marry; don’t be too ambitious! We can’t spare a great deal, and garden stuff costs money.”

“I know. I’d like to have the path to the barn paved with big stones, as well as edged with Jansy and Littlejan; but paving’s expensive, I expect. It will have to stay a field path.”

“Edged with Jansy and Littlejan?”

“Lobelia and marigolds, dafty.”

“Oh! What a blaze of colour! And so easy to do!”

“Anyone will give me lobelia and marigolds. It’s to be the deep blue kind; young Jan is very particular about that. With white eyes, if possible; but not pale blue. All right, Ray; I won’t spend a lot. We can’t hope for roses and lilies this year; but we can have heaps of small stuff.”

On Sunday afternoon Rachel asked leave by telephone and they went to the Hall to see Mary Devine. Damaris made her report on the gardening books and returned those she did not expect to use, and begged large sheets of paper, brown and white, from Mary; and at night she settled down to draw voluminous plans of her garden, with careful measurements.

Rachel watched her in great content. This was the real Damaris, come back to her. The life in town was not forgotten, but with the new big interest it had fallen into the background, and the bitterness had gone.

Very thankful, to Jansy and Littlejan and Joan, Rachel took out the manuscript of her book and began to re-read and correct the chapters she had done.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Maidlin Brings Lilies

That was a memorable week for the new guardians of the Abbey. "This is none of us!" Damaris proclaimed, at the end of it. "We're tons richer than we were last Sunday!"

On Monday Jen Marchwood came to the Abbey, bringing a portable wireless. "It won't take up much room, and you ought to hear the news. We don't need it; we have several others. This is a good little chap, and there's a place in the village that will charge your batteries. I thought you might like good concerts too. What's the matter?"

"Marry's afraid of music," Rachel said grimly. "It would remind her of too many things. At any moment she might hear music she had danced to, and she couldn't bear it. I promised before we left town that we wouldn't have wireless; we knew Aunt Ann hadn't one. But if I have only the news, she won't mind. It's very kind of you, Mrs. Brown."

"There are gardening talks," Jen reminded her. "And for myself, I quite often enjoy the Children's Hour, which is a regular event in our household. Also, Maidlin is singing for the B.B.C. this afternoon. You ought to hear her."

"We'd like that! Marry will listen to Maid. Thank you very much indeed, Lady Jen."

"Where is Dammy-Marry? Posting another manuscript?"

Rachel laughed. "I don't turn them out as fast as that. She's watching Mr. Edwards ploughing up the meadow."

"I heard the motor plough. It won't take him long. If she objects to the portable I'll remove it."

"I don't think she will. I can put it in the cloister room, if it worries her. Thank you very, very much! I've missed the wireless since we came here."

On Tuesday Mary Devine looked in, and laid a book on the table. "I've been doing the week's shopping in town. I thought you'd like to have your own copy of this, Damaris. You'll want to mark it, and turn down pages, and put references in the margins."

Damaris gave a whoop of joy. "*The* book? Mary-Dorothy, you angel! I'd just begun to realise that I mustn't mark Lady Joy's copy and that I wanted to do it badly! Oh, how good of you to think of it!"

"Only a small gift for Rachel, I'm afraid." Mary smiled and laid a box of pencils beside the book. "I know how quickly they go done, and I saw the sort you use, Rachel. These may keep you going for a time. I hope they'll write lovely stories for you."

And she hurried off through the Abbey before the girls felt they had thanked her half enough.

On Wednesday Maidlin's car drove under the gate-house arch and up the roadway to the entrance.

"Rachel! Damaris! I'm not a tourist. I can't have you shutting me out of your lives like this," she scolded gently. "I'd have come before, but the children haven't been too well; oh, just bits of cold, but I didn't want to leave them. They're at home with Nurse Honesty today."

Rachel came running out. "No twins at all? Oh, Maid, how nice of you to come! I know it seems unkind, but until last Saturday we just didn't want to see people. Everything's different now." There was a ring of joyful relief in her tone.

Maidlin, their cousin and only relative, gave her an eager look. “Joan told me. I am so glad! I was troubled about you, but I couldn’t see how to help. But now—oh, here’s Damaris! My dear, how well you look!”

“Have you heard about my garden, Maid?” Damaris flung out her hand towards the brown field that had been the gate-house meadow. “Can’t you see it covered with flowers? Primroses for you, violets for Mrs. Raymond, tall blue things massed against the Abbey wall. We can’t have Ambrose’s roses and lilies this year, because we don’t want to be extravagant, but we can manage gilly-flowers, or blunkets, as young Jansy calls them.”

“What an awful word!” Maidlin laughed in delight, at sight of her eager face. “But I’ve brought your lilies,” and she turned to the car.

While Damaris watched with widening eyes, the pretty girl in blue who had driven the car jumped out and began to lift big pots from the back seat.

“We had no room for twins today—at least, not for Marjory Joy and Dorothy Rose,” she said. “I’m Lindy; Belinda Bellanne, you know. You remember me from school, don’t you? I help Maid with the twins and drive her in the car, and she teaches me to sing. There! Lilies for the Abbey garden! All well started last autumn; six pots of them.”

“They were meant for our terraces, but we feel they’ll be more useful here,” Maidlin explained.

“Oh, Maid! Your own lilies!” Rachel cried. “Oh, you shouldn’t——”

“We think we should. We’ve heaps of other things. They’ll flower in June and July. Will you put them near the gate-house; where Ambrose and Jehane used to meet, Damaris?”

Damaris began to jig for joy, then stopped abruptly. “Better not do that, perhaps. Maid, you are the world’s first angel! I did want my lilies! Perhaps I can scrounge a rose or two, to go with them. Thanks a million times!”

“As for Rachel, we thought she’d like to have twins,” and Maidlin drew a big basket from under the seat of the car. “We’ve so many sets of twins in the clan. But if it’s too many I can take one back. They’re quiet now; exhausted, I think. They screamed for the first part of the way. Look, Rachel!”

“Is it cats?” Damaris grinned, gloating over her pots of bulbs. “You haven’t forgotten Ray and her cats, then.”

“I was sure Rachel would never settle down unless she had a cat.” Maidlin threw back the lid of the basket.

“Oh!” Rachel cried softly. “Oh, what tiny pets! What little angels! Oh, Maid, are they really for me?”

Two fluffy balls lay curled up close to one another, one black, the other golden.

“They look lovely together,” Damaris conceded. “Keep them both, Ray; such a jolly contrast, like my marigolds and lobelia.”

“I couldn’t possibly part with either of them, if I may really have them both,” Rachel exclaimed. “Are they brothers or sisters?”

“No, they aren’t related. The golden boy came from a place in town; I had to go up on Monday, and I knew they generally had ginger kits. The black is a little girl; do you mind? She’s going to be long-haired; she’s fluffy already. We’ve had them for two days, and they’re good friends,” Maidlin explained.

“We heard you sing on Monday. We loved it. You’re as good as ever,” Damaris remarked.

Maidlin lifted out the black girl and laid her in Rachel’s cupped hands. “A daughter for you! She’s interesting; she’s a descendant of the Mother Superior, who lived and died in the

Abbey years ago. I rang up and asked Joan if her Mrs. Black had any family, and she sent this child. Mrs. Black has two or three families every year; she's a grand-daughter of the old Abbey cat. Joan took a kitten from here when she settled in Sussex."

"A real Abbey kitten! Oh, please let me have them both!" Rachel rubbed her cheek on the soft black baby, and then handed her to Damaris and took up the golden child. "This one's beautiful. I am proud!"

"What will you call them?" Damaris asked. "Beauty and the Beast? Peter and Pauline? Night and Day?"

"Miss Nigger and the Angel," Rachel said promptly. "Miss Nigger, for my dear old cat at Crossrigs, who died years ago, and the Angel, because no other name would do for anything as pretty as this."

"Miss Nigger will give you endless families in a year or two," Damaris grinned. "But I expect Mr. Edwards will take them off your hands. They always have troops of cats on farms."

"It was kind of you to remember, Maid," Rachel said earnestly. "I haven't been able to have a cat of my own for years, and there's none here now, for Aunt Ann didn't like them. It will feel like home to have cats again."

"I knew you couldn't feel quite at home without a cat," Maidlin agreed. "You'd better give them some milk and let them explore. We're going on to see Mary-Dorothy."

"Miss Nigger and the Angel mustn't claw up my seeds!"

"They will, Damaris dear. You'll have to put up with it, for Rachel's sake." And Maidlin went back to her car, which Lindy had been turning carefully in the roadway.

"Bring your twins for us to see!" Rachel called. "We can't desert the Abbey!"

"Oh, I shall! I love to show them off. They're big girls now; a year and a half old. They talk all the time. Their father's terribly proud of them!" And Maidlin and Lindy drove away.

Damaris extravagantly rang up the Pallant that evening. "Maid, you are a jewel! Ray's blissfully happy with her babies. It was lovely of you to think of it. I want to thank you, on my own; she's been such a brick, and I haven't known what I could do to please her. You've made her entirely and absolutely happy."

"Good!" Maidlin responded. "Have the twins settled down?"

"Rather! Any cat would love Rachel at once. They had a glorious game, racing all over the garth, and they looked a picture. Miss Nigger does most of the chasing, being a woman; then the Angel turns on her and they have a rough-and-tumble. They're going to mean more to Ray than you can imagine."

"I'm sorry for your seeds. Can you bear it?"

"They may dig up every seed I put in," Damaris vowed. "It's worth it, to see Ray laughing at them till she cries. And thank you so very much for my lilies, Maid. You're the kindest person I know."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Roses from Rosamund

Thursday of that week brought Rosamund, from Kentisbury Castle, with her car full of nurses and blue-clad baby girls. Big Twins were now a year and eight months old, while the Tinies were ten months.

“We can’t stay,” the Countess explained. “It’s a long ride for our littlest ones, but I thought you’d like a glimpse of them. Damaris, my dear, here are your roses, for Ambrose and Jehane.”

“Lady Kentisbury!” Damaris gasped. “Oh, how kind everybody is! I never dreamt——”

“Housewarming gifts,” Rosamund said briskly. “Joan made your house pretty for you; we can’t be left out! I haven’t brought many roses, for you’ll enjoy choosing your own, but for this year these will do. There’s Etoile de Hollande, rich dark red—Shot Silk, a glorious pink—Emma Wright, a lovely orange, and one or two more. How are Rachel’s twins settling down?”

Rachel came out with her arms full of sleepy kittens. “Aren’t they darlings? May I see yours? Oh, Lady Kentisbury, what dear babies!”

“They are, but don’t let them hear you say it. Rosabel thinks quite enough of herself already. You must see our boys next time.”

“Pussy!” said a big baby suddenly. “St’oke Pussy! Oh, st’oke dear little Pussy!”

“Say please!” said the elder twin severely.

“Oh, please st’oke Pussy! *Very* please!”

Rachel carried the kittens to the car, while Damaris, with glowing face, received the pots of roses from the chauffeur.

“Gently, then. They’re only babies. What’s your name?”

“Yosabel. Yosabel Kane,” said the twin who had scolded her young sister.

“And you’re Lady Yosalin, I suppose?” Rachel looked at the small girl in the blue bonnet who was stroking the Angel with one hand and Miss Nigger with the other.

Solemn blue eyes stared back at her. “*Rosalin*,” said Lady Rosalin distinctly, her tone a definite rebuke.

“*Rosabel*!” cried the elder, not to be outdone.

“That’s better. You can do it when you try. They have trouble with their Rs. Unfortunate, isn’t it?” Rosamund sighed. “But they’re learning. The tinies are Rosanna and Rosilda. *Very please*’ is rather good! Well done, Rosalin!”

“It certainly isn’t the family to have trouble with its Rs!” Rachel agreed.

“I brought little cat-collars with bells, for your infants,” the Countess said. “Scarlet for the black baby and green for the gold one. If you can induce the children to wear them, it may save the lives of the robins and sparrows on the garth. It’s a joy to see you here,” and she looked at Rachel. “Maidlin and I are sure that the Abbey takes hold of certain people, to carry on its traditions. I believe you and Damaris are the right sort to serve here and be the guardians.”

Rachel’s face lit up. “That’s what we’d like to do. The Abbey has certainly taken hold of us. We’ll do our best to keep the traditions.”

“Ask Maid to tell you more of what we feel about it,” Rosamund said. “You look truly official in your nice gown!”

And then she was gone, with her car-load of daughters, cutting short the thanks the girls called after her.

On Friday Littlejan and Jansy ran through the Abbey on their way home from school, and thrust a flat package into Rachel's hands.

"One for each of you from both of us. Lady Jen chose them when she was in town last week; you told her which shop yours had come from. A man in Wycombe has been framing them for us, in white to match your other ones. You've room for them, for we looked to see. You've no pictures in your work-room or in Mary Damayris's bedroom yet."

"Oh, Marigold! Jansy! How perfectly lovely!" Rachel cried, tearing off the paper and gazing hungrily at a painting of Rydal Water. "Dear little Rydal! We love every corner of it!"

"You've been there, haven't you?" Jansy asked anxiously. "Aunty Jen was sure you had."

"We've walked beside it dozens of times," Rachel assured her happily.

"Lady Jen said you'd know them both," Littlejan added.

Damaris caught up the second picture. "Windermere, from Orrest Head, by all that's wonderful! The Langdales, as large as life and quite as queer! How did you girls know that we used to go to the very spot where this was taken, when we wanted to think things out?"

"Really? Did you really?" Jansy cried, in delight.

"What tremendous luck!" Littlejan commented. "We didn't know, but we like those weird lumpy hills and the bit of water in front."

"We like them too," Rachel laughed. "It's a place we've always loved. You're perfect dears, both of you."

"May I have the Langdales in my room?" Damaris begged. "I'll hang them opposite the door and I'll leave the door open, so you'll see them all the time."

"You may," Rachel agreed. "I shall find a place for Rydal in here, with the others. It mustn't be banished to my work-room."

"Mother says she hopes you'll go back to your farm for holidays and see all these lovely places again," Jansy remarked. "It's your home and you mustn't forget your way about. She can always find somebody for the Abbey for a few days."

"That's very kind," Rachel said warmly. "Perhaps we'll go at a time of year that isn't busy. It would be jolly to see Helvellyn again."

"I had the most dreadful shock today, Marigold and Jansy," Damaris said solemnly. "I went to the Hall and dug out an old trunk, that's been in an attic for years, since before we went to France. My blue shorts were in it, and it's obvious I must have something of that kind; I should soon put my knees through any skirt, with the amount of kneeling I'm doing! And—do you know? I couldn't get the things on! I couldn't even get into Rachel's, and they were bigger than mine. I'm heaps larger than I used to be."

"Oh, hard lines!" Littlejan laughed. "But you've done such a lot of exercises. I expect they made you grow. What will you do?"

"Buy a very large pair of corduroy shorts," Damaris told her. "Ray agrees I mustn't wear out all my frocks. She hates shorts for herself, but she doesn't mind seeing me in them."

"You'll look jolly nice, I expect. Will you come to the party in the barn tomorrow?"

"I don't think so," Rachel began, with a doubtful look at Damaris. "We're not keen on dancing at present."

"Oh, but this is different! It's country," Jansy began.

"It has music," Rachel said briefly.

Littlejan looked at Damaris. “It will be rather a jolly party. Do make Rachel come! And come yourself too.” And she seized Jansy’s arm. “Come home to tea, Rosemary Maid!” and they raced away.

“What’s to be special about it?” Rachel wondered. “I feel we’d better not get drawn into their dancing.”

“They’re going to tell young Jansy that she’s to be the next Queen,” Damaris explained. “It’s a deadly secret; even her mother doesn’t know, or Mary-Dorothy. You’d better go; it would please them. I’ll keep out of it. But I’d like to see that kid’s face, when she hears she’s the new Queen!”

“Jansy! I shouldn’t have thought she was old enough!” Rachel exclaimed. “She’s a jolly kid, but she seems far too young.”

Damaris repeated the explanation Littlejan had given. “Marigold told me last Saturday, but she made me swear not to say a word. So be jolly careful, if we see any of them tomorrow.”

“I won’t say anything. Marigold would like you to be there, Marry.”

Damaris shook her head. “Better not. If they did ‘Shepherd’s Hey’ I should merely die,” and she turned abruptly and went out to the garth, where Miss Nigger and the Angel were leaping on one another and rolling over and over, locked in a tight embrace.

Marigold, crossing the garth on her way to the barn next day, called a word to Rachel. “Do come! Rosalind and Lady Virginia are going to play for us and their music’s simply marvellous.”

“Damaris feels the music might be too much for her,” Rachel explained. “It’s all right; she’s out in her garden. Come and see how lovely your pictures look! Who are Rosalind and Lady Virginia?”

“Lady Kentisbury is their aunt. We ought really to say Lady Rosalind, as they’re sisters, but she doesn’t like it and she asked us to let her be just Rosalind. Her baby nickname is Nanta Rose; her whole name’s Rosalind Atalanta Kane. She’s our new Abbey fiddler; her music’s gorgeous for dancing. Rosalind’s a few months older than I am—seventeen in March; Lady Virginia’s being married next month. Come and have a look at them! Rosalind was with us in the box that night,” Littlejan added.

There was no need to say more. Rachel knew very well which night was meant. “I saw someone was with you, and Mary-Dorothy said it had been Rosalind Kane. Thanks for telling me, Marigold. Perhaps I’ll come for a few minutes.”

“Won’t Mary Damayris come too?”

“I don’t know. We must leave it to her.”

“Young Jansy hasn’t guessed. She’s not a scrap suspicious. She’ll have a ghastly shock,” Littlejan grinned.

“Not ghastly, I hope!”

“Well, a big shock, then! I do hope you’ll both come. Yes, the pictures look jolly fine; I’m glad. And so do those babies of yours. Fancy Rachel having twins!” and Marigold went off to the barn, whistling “Steam Boat.”

The dancing was in full swing when Rachel slipped into the barn and stood watching near the door. The music had an infectious lilt, and she found it hard to keep still. She looked at the musician, a tall girl with long yellow plaits hanging on her shoulders; as the dance changed, she handed the fiddle to an older sister, whose yellow hair was rolled up over her ears, and took Jansy’s hand and ran with her into a set. Joan Raymond, standing on a chair, was acting as M.C.

“Those two fiddlers are exactly like Lady Kentisbury. It’s a very strong family likeness,” Rachel said to herself. “All the four babies in the car were just the same. What’s happening now?”

She watched with amused interest as Marigold stood on the chair and made her announcement, and saw Jansy’s unbelieving face and heard her cry of wild amazement, as she ran to her mother to ask if the girls really meant it. A big ring danced “Sellenger’s Round,” with Jansy and Joan as the maypole; then Jansy was up on the chair, thanking the Club and saying it was still a long time till May, and if they changed their minds in the interval she would quite understand.

“Plucky infant!” a voice murmured, and Rachel looked round quickly at Damaris.

“I’m glad you came. She is a nice kid, you know. She’ll make a good job of it.”

“And Marigold will back her up. Who’s the fiddler? She plays jolly well, and she’s the image of our Countess.”

Rachel explained and pointed out Lady Rosalind, who was standing beside Jansy, the centre of a congratulating crowd.

“Another of them! Does she play too?”

“Quite as well as the big sister, I should say. Marigold calls the little one ‘our new Abbey fiddler.’ But she’s not exactly little,” Rachel added.

“A tall fair-haired Kane! What’s this?”—as Jansy turned to call new tidings to her mother. “Lady Rosalind’s going to be Queen Jansy’s maid? But does she go to the school?”

“She’s coming next term.” A girl standing near glanced at them, and then looked again. “She’s coming to take the Cookery course. She’ll live at the Hall with Marigold and Jansy.” Her eyes were on Damaris curiously.

“Will you call Jansy Lob?” Damaris asked. “Marigold says you will.”

“If she chooses lobelia for her flower I guess we shall. It’s tempting, isn’t it?”

“Come here, Marry!” Rachel drew Damaris out into the big doorway. “That girl thinks she knows you. She may have seen you in town.”

“I’m off! I only came to see Lob’s little face,” and Damaris vanished.

Rachel knew that Olivia, the head girl, was searching the hall for Mary Damayris, sure that she had seen her. “Marry ought to have had her head tied up,” she said grimly to herself. “Those curls give her away. I shall go home too; I can give Jansy our good wishes tomorrow.” And as the dancing began again, she slipped out and left Olivia wondering if she had dreamt that vision of the dancer she had seen in town.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

A Private Sanctuary

Jansy, beaming happily, received congratulations when she came into the Abbey on Monday evening, after a joyful week-end at home.

"I've a message from Mother," and she looked at Damaris. "She wants to hear your plans and she has some plants for you—lupins and things like that. She'll send the car to fetch you tomorrow before lunch, and when it brings you back it can bring the plants too. She hopes Rachel will spare you and that it won't tire you too much. If you're supposed to lie down in the afternoon she'll see that you do it."

"I'll spare you. You'll evidently be taken care of," Rachel said.

"I shall ask Mrs. Raymond if she'll have an object in shorts about her Abbey. I'd better get her leave before I buy the things."

"She doesn't mind. I told her about your shorts," Jansy said. "She thinks you're very sensible."

"It doesn't matter about resting, really, Mrs. Raymond," Damaris protested, after lunch. "I'm heaps stronger since we came to the Abbey."

"I'm glad the Abbey is doing its duty and helping you." Joan smiled at her. "I hope you don't over-tire yourself in the new garden?"

"No, I've been careful. Mr. Edwards found a boy who loves gardens and is bored by farm work, and he asked me to use him when I could. So I send for Charlie if there's digging or any really heavy work, and he's one big grin of joy all the time he's with me. Frost helps, too."

"Frost? The chauffeur?" Joan exclaimed, much amused.

"He asked if I could use him in the garden, at times when he wasn't needed for the car. When he fetched our luggage from town he carried in the things and put them where Rachel told him, and he offered to hang the pictures for us. I wasn't much good just then, so Ray was glad of his help. He kept looking at me as if he couldn't believe his eyes, or as if I wasn't quite real; later we heard from Mary-Dorothy that he'd been in the theatre that night." She paused.

"He drove Mary and the girls to town," Joan assented.

"He saw what happened, and he seemed surprised to find me on my legs again. He couldn't take his eyes off me at first. When he offered to help in the garden I nearly fell on his neck, and now we're real pals."

"He's a great friend of Jansy's. I'm glad to hear about Frost and Charlie. You won't over-tire yourself, at that rate."

"Oh no! I'm very fit, thanks."

"All the same, you'd better rest for an hour after your drive. I'm going to tuck you up and leave you with a book, and you can read or sleep, as you please. We'll have plenty of time to talk about gardens before tea."

When Damaris came downstairs an hour later, Joan sat darned children's socks, while music came quietly from one corner.

"I always darn to the wireless. I have such a lot of darning to do.—Why, Damaris, my dear! Oh, dear girl, what's the matter?"

Damaris, white and stricken, rushed blindly from the room.

Joan, flinging aside her work, ran after her, but paused long enough to switch off the music.

Damaris had fled to the room she had just left, and Joan found her there, sobbing her heart out on the bed.

Joan gathered her into her arms, saying nothing, but soothing her, with motherly hands stroking her hair.

"I'm sorry!" Damaris gasped at last. "Oh, I am so sorry! To go on like this, when you're so kind! But I couldn't bear it. It was just too much. Oh, please forgive me!"

"Dear girl, *you* must forgive *me*," Joan said vehemently. "I wouldn't have upset you like this for the world. I didn't understand. Was it the music? Nobody warned me. Forgive me, Damaris dear."

"Don't you know what they were playing?" Damaris whispered. "It was *my* music! The Fairy's wood-dance from 'Rainbow Corner' the music John Grant Grandison wrote for *my* ballet. I've danced to it a dozen times, and Daphne Dale much oftener. It's been made into a suite and it's played at concerts. I couldn't bear it; I hoped I'd never hear it again. Do, please, forgive me! I'm a rotten coward."

"On the contrary, you're braver than any of us have guessed," Joan told her. "We've wondered at you, because you seemed to be settling down so quickly. We expected you to be gloomy and miserable for months. If you've kept all this heart-break bottled up and been cheerful and busy to the outside world, you are *very* brave, my dear. You're facing a hard thing; and you're doing it magnificently."

"Ballet gets all through you, into your bones," Damaris whispered. "You feel it, in every part of you. I may put it out of my mind and keep going with other jobs, but it's there, and some tiny thing brings it back—a movement, a sudden turn; it's in my body, and I can't get away from it. I'm reminded all the time."

"I think I can understand," Joan said quietly. "Even our folk-dancing is like that. I don't know about the others, but I remember dances—and there are so many different patterns to remember!—by their feeling, by what I know I ought to do to that particular bit of music, not by my mind. People who don't dance say: 'I don't know how you remember them all.' But I feel them, and I could no more do anything different to certain phrases of the music than I could forget all about country-dancing. And that way of knowing them by the feeling—through one's body, as you say—has lasted, in spite of years of having babies and doing housekeeping."

"Then you do know! I shall never forget, though I can never dance again."

"Are you quite sure?" Joan asked gently. "Doctors can do such wonderful things. Isn't there hope for some time in the future?"

"Not for dancing in public. I could never be good enough. And if I do it just to amuse myself it will remind me too much. I have to live without it, and it had really grown into me, a part of me."

"People can do that, of course. It's like losing one's sight or the power to move about, or speech or hearing. One can go on, but it's a very hard thing to do. I think you're splendid, dear."

"I have tried," Damaris said brokenly. "I haven't let Ray see how much I still feel it. She's been so good and she's helped so much, and she has felt so bad, for my sake. I've made her think I'm quite happy in the new garden. And I *am*! It's been the most enormous help, and I

owe it to you, and to your Jansy, and Marigold. After your great kindness, it's awful of me to be unloading all this on to you!"

"It had to happen sometime. I'm thankful you were here, and that poor Rachel didn't need to comfort you; she's done her share. Damaris dear, if things get too bad when you're at home, go to Jen Marchwood and cry out your trouble in her arms. You'll find her ready to help, and she's very motherly."

"Oh, I know! She's always kind. But you're even kinder, I believe."

"I'm a little older," Joan explained. "I know one thing that might help you. Don't you sometimes feel you want to get away by yourself, even from Rachel? And there's no private place in the Abbey, is there?"

"No; we're together all the time. Ray would be upset if I shut my bedroom door on her. I rush out into the garden and pretend to be weeding, but I can't do that at night."

"There's a little room that's never used. Would you like to have it for your hiding-place? Rachel hasn't a key, for there's nothing there to show to people. I could give you the key. You'd have to explain to her, of course; you mustn't shut her out of your trouble."

"But where is it?" Damaris asked, her voice more normal in its keen curiosity. "I thought we knew the whole of the Abbey!"

"Do you remember a small door on the right, as you go up the refectory stair?"

"There is a door, but we didn't know it could be opened."

"It leads into a tiny room with a very ordinary lancet window—of no interest to anybody. It's called the Abbot's Lodge, though what any abbot could do in there I can't imagine. I have the key, and you shall have it, if it would be any use to you."

"A funk-hole!" Damaris exclaimed. "Yes, I'd like that. Ray has the cloister room for her work, typing and so on. I shall tell her the Abbot's Lodge is to be mine. Oh, you are good!"

"But I hope you won't go there and weep any oftener than you can help," Joan warned her. "You shall have the key. There's no light in the little room; you must take a candle or a torch, if you go there at night."

"Thank you just terribly much! Will you ever forgive me for going on like a baby?"

"Not a baby; a very brave girl, who finds things too hard now and then. Do you know the motto of our Hamlet Club?"

Damaris stared up at her, still lying on the bed. "Isn't it a sort of joke? The words out of *Hamlet*—'To be or not to be'?"

"Yes, but it's not a joke. It's to help our girls, and all of us, to choose the right way in a crisis. To most—to Marigold and Jansy, and many others—it has meant taking brave and difficult action; doing something—'to be,' in fact. I think you are the first who has had to accept the second part of the motto—'not to be'—and to be plucky and carry on, although a bit of your life is denied to you. You're doing it, and you'll make the motto richer in meaning for all of us. Think it over quietly! We're proud of you, you know. Now I want you to have a cup of tea with me and tell me your plans, and then we'll pack your car with plants and send you home, before my husband and children come in for family tea."

"I *am* interested in my garden!" and Damaris pushed back her curls and sat up. "I'm frightfully keen, and I thank you for it every day. It was only—that music. I've made poor Ray promise not to have music on the wireless. I know I'm a coward, but I've been afraid—and you saw what happened. I'm still an awful ass. But I will remember about the motto; and thank you!"

“You aren’t any of those dreadful things! Now wash your face and come down and talk about lupins over tea. I’m going to give you clumps of evening primrose too; a lovely clear yellow and sweet-scented. You should mass them against the walls, among lupins and delphiniums.”

“I haven’t said how glad we are about your Jansy,” Damaris said, when she appeared, washed and brushed and tidy. “It’s nice for you to know your girl is the Queen.”

“Very nice!” Joan smiled. “Her father’s very proud. She’ll be a good little Queen, I really believe. And she’s going to look extraordinarily pretty in lobelia blue.”

She handed a key to Damaris, as she put her into the laden car. “That’s your passport to your private sanctuary. Take cushions or a chair; don’t sit on the bare stone! And tell Rachel all about it.”

“The Abbey’s been a real sanctuary to Ray and me; a place of refuge,” Damaris said, deep feeling in her voice. “The Abbot’s Lodge will be my own inner sanctuary. I do thank you, again and again.”

“You understand that you will have the same salary as Rachel has?” Joan said. “Oh yes, certainly! If you are going to do a whole-time job for the Abbey you must feel it is worth your while.”

“It’s more than worth my while, just for the joy of doing it!” Damaris cried. “You mustn’t dream of paying me as well!”

“Of course I shall. Rachel will work in the Abbey and you in the garden. If you keep that ex-meadow weeded it will be a whole-time job. I won’t let you do it unless you take a reasonable salary. Tell Rachel I said so.”

“Then I shall give Charlie something for helping me. I’ve wanted to pay him. And perhaps some day I could give Frost a present, if I knew what he’d like. It is good of you!”

“Do as you like about Frost. I’m sure you’re right to give Charlie a little. Best wishes for the garden! Good-bye for today!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Dicky Dandy

Rachel drew the pink curtains, switched on the lamp under its red shade, and made up the fire. "That's cosy. We'll have another tea and I'll tell you what happened today. Nurse these children for me while I put on the kettle."

Damaris took the singing golden Angel and Miss Nigger into her lap. "Have you had adventures? In the Abbey?"

"I had an interesting visitor. What's the matter, Marry?" and Rachel looked at her keenly.

"You see too much," Damaris growled. "Oh, all right! I'll own up. Mrs. Raymond's an angel, but she had the wireless on, and the beastly thing played the 'Rainbow Corner' music, and I collapsed and howled like an infant."

"Oh, Marry, dear, I am sorry! Was she upset?"

"Terribly! She was awfully sweet about it. She gave me a new idea. I hope you won't mind." And Damaris showed her key and told of the Abbot's Lodge.

"That little door on the refectory stair? I didn't know there was more than a cupboard in there!" Rachel exclaimed. "We'll take a torch and look at it presently. But *don't* go and cry there all alone, Marry dear! You'll break my heart, if you do that!"

"I shan't do it if I can help it. You can bet on that! I loathe weeping!" Damaris said bitterly.

"I didn't know you were still feeling so bad. You never told me." Rachel's voice was wistful.

"It was the music. You couldn't expect me to hear the Fairy's dance in the wood and not see that little snake Daphne doing it; and she did dance it beautifully! I apologised to Mrs. Raymond, and she understood. I say, Ray! She's going to give me a salary for the garden job. I said she mustn't dream of it, but she wouldn't listen. Isn't it good of her?"

"Marvellous!" Rachel said sincerely. "It will be an enormous help. We'll be able to save for holidays and extras. Mrs. Raymond is kind!"

"One of the very best. I'm to have the same as you, so I shall feel my job is worth while, after all. Now what happened? Who was the interesting tourist?"

Rachel supplied her with tea before she answered. "A tall, dark young American. He came alone, in a large car, and he wanted to see everything. He seemed really interested and more intelligent than some people who come. I never suspected him till he was standing on the garth taking a final look round. Then he turned suddenly and asked where my sister was."

"Gosh!" Damaris cried. "Did you swoon? Who was he?"

"You're as dense as I was. He said, 'I'm Richard Dandy, from Virginia. My future wife calls me Dicky D. or Dandy Dick.' He was disappointed not to see you."

"Young Daphne's millionaire! Did you like him?"

"Very much. Daphne should be very happy. I could see how much he thinks of her."

"I'd have liked to see Dicky Dandy," Damaris said. "Are they going to be married soon?"

"In about a month, and they'll go right off to the States to show Daphne her new home. Later in the year they'll come back for Elsa's wedding. He'll bring Daphne to see you before they go, if possible, but she's very busy; if they don't manage it he'll bring her in the autumn."

"Has she thrown over Madame and Antoine yet?"

“No; she’s still dancing every night, and seeing to her trousseau in between times. But she’ll need to give up presently. He said there was another girl nearly ready to take her place.”

“Ella,” Damaris remarked. “Elladella, we used to call her. Her name’s Elsie Smith, but on programmes she’s Ella Delamere. Elladella’s quite good, but not outstanding, like Daphne. Oh well—! I suppose the world can get on without seeing Daphne and me dancing!” Her lips pinched.

“I’m inclined to think you’re doing a bigger thing here,” Rachel said quietly. “Other girls can dance, but no one else could make the Abbey more beautiful, as you are going to do.”

“Oh, tosh! Anybody can do gardening!”

“Not with your ideas. What plants did Mrs. Raymond give you? Did she like your plans?”

“She seemed pleased. She said she could see it as it was going to look. I think she’d have liked to pay for all sorts of extras, when I said they’d be nice but I knew I mustn’t spend too much; paved paths, instead of gravel or mud, winding among the flowers; and a rock garden, in one corner. Those things, rocks and good paving, cost the earth, I expect.”

“But she didn’t offer to give you everything you wanted?” Rachel asked, approval in her voice.

“No; she stopped herself. But she liked my plans, and she gave me good clumps of things for backgrounds, that will be tall some day. They aren’t much to look at just now.”

“If they were, I suppose you couldn’t move them,” Rachel observed. “I told Dicky Dandy about your garden, and he was thrilled. He spoke so nicely about you; I could see how deeply he feels about what you did for Daphne.”

“I’m glad I didn’t see him, if he talked like that!”

“He begged me to let him know if there was any way he could help. I thanked him and said there wasn’t, as we had everything we wanted.”

“Except crazy paving!” Damaris gave an impish grin. “Perhaps he’d like to hurl paving-stones at me and knock me down again!”

“I didn’t tell him about the crazy paving. If Daphne doesn’t come till the autumn you may have a lovely garden to show her.”

“It will be overgrown and untidy by the autumn. You know what gardens are!”

“Not untidy. We aren’t going to have a messy welcome for our tourists,” Rachel said firmly. “If you can’t keep it under control I shall have to lend a hand. You’ve taken on a big job.”

“Full-time; well I know it! I shall spend my life weeding; the grass that’s been ploughed up is all starting to grow again,” Damaris groaned. “I didn’t expect a salary from Mrs. Raymond, but I know I shall jolly well earn it.”

An invitation to Daphne’s wedding came a few days later. The girls looked at it and shook their heads.

“Everyone would be pleased, if you went. But I don’t suggest it,” Rachel said. “I can’t go, of course.”

“I’m not going. Daphne Dale’s a deserter; a little viper! I should say something rude.”

“Then please don’t go! I shall write a letter of good wishes. I can’t possibly send any present that Daphne would value.”

Damaris said nothing, but picked up a mat and a fork and trowel and went out to weed. She had bought her corduroy shorts and was wearing them with enjoyment, finding them a great convenience.

Rachel looked after her. “Marry could send something Daphne would value! But I can’t ask her to do it.”

Damaris put her head in at the door. “Do something for me, Ray?”

“Anything you like. What is it?”

“Could you dig out one of those photos young Daphne wants? There are some in my trunk, but I can’t waste time hunting for them. There’s masses of weeding to do.”

“I’ll see to it.” Rachel picked up Miss Nigger and whispered in one tiny ear—“Oh, good for Mary Damayris, my dear!”

“I won’t send the young snake my love,” Damaris vowed, as she went back to her task.

Rachel smiled and stroked the golden Angel. “She’ll do it. She is a brick!”

“I’ll pack the photo for you and you can take it to the post with our letters,” she said at lunch-time.

Damaris looked at the picture of herself as the Goose-Girl, and her lips tightened. “Queer! Very queer!” she said, half to herself.

“What’s so queer?” Rachel ventured to ask.

“Everything; life, and all that. And particularly that I can bear to look at this thing and think about it,” Damaris explained.

“Marry, tell me! I’ve often wondered. Hasn’t it really made it easier for you—Daphne’s getting married?”

Damaris knit her brows. “I believe it has. And that’s queer too. I ought to be inconsolable because that little slacker isn’t carrying on. But I feel that if Daphne, quite well and able to dance, can give it all up just for a man, I needn’t break my heart because the chance of it has been taken from me.”

“I’m sure you needn’t,” Rachel said quietly. “Your dancing was a big thing and it was quite beautiful, but it wasn’t as important as all that. Daphne’s giving it up of her own accord, and I believe she’s right and that she has found something better. Anyway, you won’t need to hear about her triumphs, which might have been hard for you. You don’t care about Ella.”

“Care about Elladella? Not two hoots! But I care about my dancing. I haven’t forgiven Daphne yet.”

“Shall I pack the photo this afternoon?”

“No, do it tonight. I’ll post it in the morning.”

It was no surprise to Rachel, when she came in after taking two ladies round the Abbey, to find the photo lying on the table, with a message scrawled across one corner.

“‘With love and good wishes from Mary Damayris.’ Marry is good! And she’s very brave,” she said, as she packed and addressed the picture.

“Do you think Frost would care for one of those photos?” Damaris asked that evening. “I want to give him a present, but I haven’t been able to think of anything he’d like. He’s been such a sport, helping me in the garden.”

“He enjoys it,” Rachel said. “He looks at you and then he turns to me and says: ‘She’s a wonder, that’s what she is’! He knows he’s in luck to have the chance of working with you. Your admirers in town would envy him.”

“My admirers can go and admire somebody else! Frost’s a brick, and he’s been the most enormous help. But I can’t offer him money!”

“Rather not! You’ll make him your slave for life, if you give him a photo of the Goose-Girl and sign it as you did Daphne’s.”

"I can't say 'With love to Frost!'" Damaris protested. "Though it's what I feel about the dear man. But I could say 'With best thanks and all good wishes.'" "

"And sign it 'Mary Damayris'," Rachel added.

"Did you see Frost's face?" Damaris asked next day.

"I did. That picture's going to be his greatest treasure. I'm glad you thought of it," Rachel said heartily.

They had been to inspect the Abbot's Lodge, but had found nothing of interest, as Joan had foretold. It was a tiny room, with one narrow window; there was nothing to show to tourists. Damaris flung a rug and an old cushion on the floor, but refused other furniture.

"When I collapse I do it wholesale," she said grimly. "I hope I won't ever do it, but if I have to take refuge here I shan't want chairs and tables. Mrs. Raymond warned me against sitting on the stone floor, but that ancient mat is all I need."

Rachel kept careful but unobtrusive watch, and was greatly relieved to see that the "funk-hole" did not seem to be used, and that, though Damaris kept the key handy, she never took refuge in her sanctuary. She was resolutely filling her mind with her garden, and was succeeding in keeping bitter thoughts at bay.

Rachel wrote to report progress to Sir Robert Duncan, as she had promised, and suggested that Damaris should come to town for inspection.

"Bother! Why did you?" Damaris grumbled, when she heard. "I don't want to go near London. And I haven't time. It would mean a whole day, and my weeds grow a foot in a single night. Can't Sir Bob wait?"

"Sir Bob was so good, Marry. We can't ignore him now."

"I could!" Damaris assured her fervently.

But Sir Robert chose to come to the Abbey instead, to be shown round every corner by Rachel. He asked questions about Abbey history, and laughed at the antics of the black and golden kittens on the garth. He looked in delight at the sturdy girl who met him by the gatehouse, straight and healthy in her corduroy shorts and green jersey, a green scarf tied over her hair.

"You don't look as if you needed me! What a change your Abbey sanctuary has wrought in you! We must see what a course of massage will do."

"Oh, but I haven't time! It would mean going to town. And I don't want to be mauled about."

"You could get treatment in Oxford, but I'd rather have you under my eye in town."

"Not yet, please. I'm not ready for it," Damaris pleaded. "And I don't want to leave my work for days at a time."

He gave her a quizzical look. "But your dancing, my dear? What about your career?"

Damaris looked back at him steadily. "I don't know what is my real career. But I do know that I can't get the proper position in my hip; I could dance, but not as I used to do. I won't have people pitying me. And I know that the friends here have helped, and have had all this dug up for me, spoiling their grass that had been there for centuries. I can't let them down. I couldn't leave it in this state; you must see that. I've said I'll make it into a lovely garden and I'm going to do it, before I do anything for myself. If I want to leave it later on, somebody else might be able to keep it in order; but I've made the plans and I must carry them out. I couldn't let the Abbey down."

"Well, well! No doubt you are right," he conceded. "It won't hurt you to wait. I hope you don't do digging or other heavy work?"

“Oh no! Charlie, from the farm, digs and carries for me, and he’s one big grin all the time. I thought at first it was with joy at being in a garden, but now I’m sure he’s grinning at me. He thinks I’m the funniest thing he’s ever seen. But he works splendidly.”

“I’m glad to hear of Charlie. Don’t overdo your strength, in your enthusiasm! I rejoice to see you so well.”

“This is a good place to get well in.”

“I believe it; a real sanctuary. I am glad you came. And your sister is a most excellent guide to the ruins,” Sir Robert said heartily.

“I’ve settled him for a few months, anyway!” Damaris proclaimed, as he drove away.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Wedding Gift for Damaris

The Queen-elect of the Hamlet Club and her tall maid of honour came through the Abbey and called for Rachel, Jansy hugging the golden Angel, while Rosalind Kane clasped Miss Nigger to her breast.

“We found your twins trying to run away. They’d gone as far as the Abbot’s garden, so we brought them back. This is Rosalind, and she’s coming to school to be a cookery, so she’s going to be my maid when I’m crowned. Will you and Mary Damayris come to watch? It’s at school, but we’ll take you in a car,” Jansy cried, all in one breath.

Rachel came to reclaim her infants. “I’d like to see Queen Lob crowned,” she admitted. “But I don’t know that Damaris will come; she isn’t keen on crowds. I’m glad to meet you,” and she looked at the fair girl who handed the black kitten to her. “I’m told you don’t want us to call you ‘my lady’?”

“Oh, please don’t! I do hate it. I like to be just Rosalind.”

“I call her Nanta Rose, because it’s her baby name,” Jansy said. “Where is Mary Damayris? Gardening? It looks quite like the start of a garden, doesn’t it? May we go and see?”

“Go and speak to her.” Rachel opened the entrance gate. “Give me the Angel. He might jump away from you and run out through the gate-house.”

Damaris, in working garb of shorts, jersey and green scarf round her head, met them. “No,” she said firmly, in answer to Jansy’s invitation. “Thank you for asking me yourself; I appreciate it. I’d like to see you crowned, and I know you’ll make a jolly Queen. If I could slip in for two minutes I might do it, but it means the whole evening, and your head girl thought I was my own ghost last time. I can’t dodge people all night. And there’s the music,” and she looked at Rosalind Kane. “You’re a musician; you’ll understand. I can’t bear music yet.”

“I told Jansy the music would be too much for you,” Rosalind said. “It would be a pity to upset yourself when you’ve been so—so splendid all through.” Her blue eyes met Damaris’s dark ones shyly, full of admiration.

“Much you know about it! I’m a rotten coward, and I won’t go near music or people who might remind me,” Damaris said brusquely. “Come and see the beginnings of my garden!”

“All the same, you aren’t that,” Jansy declared.

Rosalind said no more, but her look spoke for her, and it helped to soothe the sore feeling that ruled Mary Damayris at times.

The garden was beginning to take shape. Urged on by Jen Marchwood, Damaris had lifted primroses and violets from the Manor park, where they grew too thickly for their own comfort, and had edged the carriage way from the gate-house to the Abbey entrance with a wide bed, in which the transplanted wild flowers were flourishing and spreading.

“Maidlin and Mrs. Raymond!” the gardener announced. “Those were their flowers as Queens”—to Rosalind. “These tiny things among them are baby pansies; Mary-Dorothy gave me a big box, from the Hall, in all colours; they’ll make a good show presently. Round the gate-house itself are wallflowers, for Lady Jen, and some cuttings of rosemary, for the reigning Queen and for Lady Jen’s elder little girl; they’ll soon grow into decent bushes. The

lilies are nearly ready to come out of their pots, and the roses look happy, so I hope they're rooting well. We must always have these beds by the drive full of flowers, for everyone to see."

"Where's my lobelia?" Jansy demanded.

"I haven't forgotten it." Damaris led the way to the path that ran through the garden to the barn. "Here you are! You and Marigold will make a blazing border on each side. I shall pave this path some day; it's inclined to be muddy. But other things must come first."

"Have you any blunkets? It's a lovely word!" Jansy grinned. "If I wasn't so keen on my lobelia blue I'd be the Blunket Queen."

"I'd rather call you Lob than Blunket! I've put some clove pinks among the pansies; I suppose they're your blunkets. Where's Marigold?"

"Gone to Kentisbury, to ride Chestnut," Jansy explained. "The car that fetched her brought Nanta Rose in exchange, to be company for me."

"A poor exchange, but I did want to see the new garden." Rosalind looked at Damaris.

"Her sister's just been married, so she's living at the Castle till it's time to come here and go to school with us," Jansy added. "What's that, Mary Damayris?"

Damaris looked at the gold embroidered badge on the front of her jersey. "I asked your mother if I might have a badge as well as Ray. I'm sure I work quite as hard as she does! Mrs. Raymond said mine had better be 'Abbey Gardener,' and she sent it to me. So Ray has nothing to swank about; not that she ever did swank, but I pretended she did, to rile her. We both have our working kit now."

"Uniform with badges! It looks very official," Rosalind said.

"Abbey Guardian and Abbey Gardener!" Jansy cried, in great delight. "It's just what Marigold and I wanted, when we did the job the day your Aunt Ann was taken ill! We were in school gymmies, and we felt frightfully young. If we'd had white robes and gold badges we'd have felt ever so much better!"

"I bet you would!" Damaris agreed. She looked at Rosalind doubtfully. "Is it childish to be so pleased about wearing a badge?"

"Oh, I don't think so! It shows everybody you're recognised by Mrs. Raymond as her Guardian and her Gardener," Rosalind exclaimed.

"Official; that's what we feel," Damaris nodded.

She held steadily to her refusal to go to the Coronation or any other public function, but she was insistent that Rachel must go. "I want to hear all about it, and you describe things just like a real novelist. You'll make a story of it for me. I shall be all right at home," she said.

So Rachel went with Mary, and carried plimsolls, so that she could dance at Jansy's party after the crowning.

It was late when the car put her down at the Abbey gate and drove on to the Hall. Rachel called good-night and thanks, switched on her torch, and made her way through the gate-house and along the drive between the violets and primroses.

"I can smell 'Mrs. Raymond,' as Marry calls the violets, even in the dark. There ought to be sweet-briar, to welcome our tourists; I must suggest it," she said to herself.

She unlocked the entrance gate. "Here I am, Marry. All right?"

"Come here, Ray! Come quickly!" There was something in the voice which Rachel could not understand.

Suddenly afraid, she ran to the little parlour. "Marry, what's the matter? Is anything wrong? Marry! What is it?"

The table, instead of being laid for supper, was spread with papers and books, seed catalogues and lists with gaily coloured pictures. Damaris was wandering about, her eyes bright with excitement.

“Ray, tell me what to do! I’ve been wanting you for hours; it’s seemed endless ages since the post came! I don’t know—I can’t take it, of course—but if only I could—but he hadn’t any right——”

“Marry, stop yattering and tell me what you mean! Do you want me to shake you?” Rachel cried. “I can see you’ve had letters. What is it all about?”

“It’s Daphne and Dicky Dandy. They were married this morning.”

“We knew it was to be today.” Rachel stared at her. “What has it to do with you?”

“He’s sent me a wedding-present!” Damaris gave a laugh that ended in a sob. “He says he might never have had a wedding, but for me, for Daphne’s the whole world to him.”

“Oh! What a kind idea!” Rachel said slowly. “I said I liked Dicky Dandy! What is the present? Not money, surely?” catching sight of a cheque.

“It’s for the garden,” Damaris explained, an excited catch in her breath. “Oh, I know I can’t take it, but just think! It would make all sorts of lovely things possible, now at once, without waiting and going slowly for years! I said he could throw paving-stones at me; he didn’t hear, but he’s done it, just exactly that! There’s a letter from Daphne too, and she says by the time I read it they’ll be leaving Southampton. She says it’s her fault I’ve had to give up my career and she wants to have a hand in my new one.”

“All very true and reasonable,” Rachel commented. “And since they’re at sea by this time, it seems to me you’ll have to take it. What has Dicky Dandy sent you?”

“Oh, it’s crazy mad!” Damaris cried. “That cheque for a hundred pounds is to be used for tools or anything I can get locally, or for men to help me. But look at this, Ray!—and this!—and another—five of them! Order forms up to twenty pounds on five of the best firms in the country—seed people and rose-growers! He’s put twenty pounds to my credit with each of them, and here are their latest catalogues, and I’m to choose what I like!”

“Twenty—five times over! Marry, he’s sent you two hundred pounds! You can’t spend that on the garden!”

“It doesn’t need to be all at once!” Damaris gave another half-sobbing laugh of excitement. “Daphne says I can spread it over several years, so that if things fail or aren’t a success I can replace them.”

“How wonderfully they’ve planned it! You couldn’t possibly refuse a gift that has been so carefully thought out. It would be ungracious and unkind.” Rachel was looking at the order forms on the business houses, whose names she knew from Marry’s chatter of the last few weeks. “This one is for your rose garden; this is for bulbs for next spring. *What* a happy time you’re going to have!”

“Then you think I could keep them?” Damaris cried, her face lighting up.

“I don’t see what else you can do. You must give Dicky and Daphne Dandy their share in the garden, and some day they must come to see it.”

“And bring all the little Dandys!” Damaris gave a shout of laughter and relief. “I thought for sure you’d say I couldn’t possibly accept his money and I must send it back.”

“It would let him down badly with these firms,” Rachel observed.

“I suppose it would. And if they’re at sea by now it wouldn’t be easy.”

“It would be difficult and very unkind. I’m as independent and unwilling to be helped by outsiders as you are, but I do see how Dicky Dandy feels and I shouldn’t like you to hurt his

feelings. He evidently has plenty of money to give away.”

“Oh, cheers! Then I can go ahead!” Damaris cried joyfully. “I’ve been changing my mind all evening; exulting and making plans, then despairing and composing haughty letters to Dandy Dick, and then deciding to be dignified and regretful but firm, but all the time wanting just to say ‘thank you’ nicely and begin rearranging my garden. I’ll have a rockery in that sunny corner where the wall makes an angle; shall I send for slabs of red sandstone from the Wirral? When Maidlin brought Belinda Bellanne the other day, Lindy raved about the red stones round her old home in the Wirral and said it was a pity I couldn’t pave my path with them. Now I could, thanks to the Dandy people, and I could have blocks of the stuff for a rockery. Lindy Bellanne would be thrilled.”

“For your rockery, if you like. That will be all colours, anyway,” Rachel said. “But don’t have red paving; people don’t want to walk on red paths, when they’re going from a grey Abbey to a grey barn.”

“Right as usual,” Damaris said gaily. “My love of colour runs away with me; you must sit on me gently. But I would like one load of Wirral sandstone for my rockery. Lindy says heather and gorse grow in every crack, so it must be good for rock plants. It’s marvellous to think all sorts of ideas are suddenly possible!”

“It is, and I’m nearly as thrilled as you are,” Rachel said. “But also I’m very hungry. Have you had any supper?”

Damaris, with a yell of dismay, swept books, letters, catalogues, and order forms from the table. “You’re starving! So am I, now I come to think of it. The kettle will boil in two ticks.”

“Take care of that cheque! If it falls into the fire it will be goodbye to your Wirral rockery.”

Damaris put the cheque away carefully. “It’s going to be extremely useful. It will pay for rocks and paving and for a man to put them in their places, if they’re too heavy for Charlie and me.”

“I ask only one thing,” Rachel said solemnly. “Don’t have stone rabbits and birds and comic little men all over the place! They wouldn’t suit the Abbey.”

Damaris laughed. “I won’t! I promise I won’t! I don’t like them, anyway. I shall consult you about all sorts of things, in case I’m tempted to make a fool of myself with this sudden wealth. You’re much better balanced than I am; I go all thrilled over things. But we could have a fish pond, Ray, with lilies and gold and silver fish! You wouldn’t object to that? We have the stream; we ought to use it!”

“Have anything you like, so long as it’s real. But don’t scatter useless garden ornaments all over the place in your excitement.”

“I won’t. Now tell me about the crowning! Did young Jansy look nice? Do we call her Lob now?”

“I shan’t. But I daresay the girls will. She really looked lovely; her little plaits were undone and her dark red hair hanging over the lobelia blue train was so pretty. She had a beautiful robe, with a white lining and white diamond-shaped patterns along the edge, each with a spray of lobelia in it; white flowers for her crown, but a real old-fashioned posy of lobelia for her bouquet. Lady Rosalind made a delightful tall maid and looked at her small Queen in such a motherly way; she played beautifully for the dancing, too. Mrs. Raymond was very proud and happy, and all the other Queens looked so pleased! They danced at the party afterwards, so I joined in and had ‘Epping Forest’ with Mrs. Raymond and ‘Steam Boat’ with Queen Marigold and ‘Soldier’s Joy’ with Maidlin. I saw her dancing ‘The Twin Sisters’

with Lady Kentisbury; most suitable! And there's a new baby in New York; Lady Quellyn has another little girl. Mrs. Raymond brought the news; everybody's delighted, but the family won't be home till June. She's to be Madeline Rose, after Maidlin and the Countess."

"We may have quite a decent garden to show Lady Joy by that time," Damaris said happily. "We must tell everybody about my wedding-present; they'll all be thrilled!"

And the talk over supper was a jumble of Queens and babies, rockeries and paving stones, Jansy and Rosalind, and Dicky and Daphne Dandy.

CHAPTER THIRTY

The Angel Shows the Way

"I go for a day in the country," said Madame Roskova.

"To see our little Damayris? Tell her to come back," Antoine growled. "This Ella is not good, and we have no Daphne now. Tell Damayris we will give her dances she can do, if only she will come back to us, Tatiana, my dear."

"She will not come yet, but I will tell her what you say."

"Tell her of the new ballet and that we have need of her."

"I did not tell her," Madame said that night. "I knew it would make her cry. She will see it in the papers, but that we cannot help."

"How is she, then?"

"Very well. She is making a beautiful garden outside the wall of her ruins, and she is very happy. So long as Damayris can make beauty of some kind she will be content."

Antoine grunted. "It is not enough. She should be dancing, if she is so well."

"She dresses like a boy, in small shorts and bare knees and a jersey, and she hides her hair in a scarf, so that strangers will not know her, and it changes her appearance greatly. Rachel was sorry Damayris had not dressed herself for me, but our girl only laughed and said I had seen her wearing very much less than a jersey and shorts, and, ma foi, it was true! The Sister-Mother took me round their Abbey, and gave me lunch; a most excellent omelette. Rachel is very clever."

"Pah! No English girl can make a good omelette!"

"This girl can. But, to be sure, she has lived in France. It was an admirable omelette. And her coffee is delicious."

"Pah!" said Antoine again. "No English girl can make good coffee."

"This girl's coffee is the very best. Rachel did not waste her time in France and Italy. She wears a white robe, like a little nun, and she looks very pretty. They have a small, droll house, but it is comfortable and their friends have made it very pleasant for them. I did not see these friends, as I could not keep the car waiting too long. Damayris is happy in her garden and she will not leave it just now."

"Did she talk of ballet?"

"Not once. We talked of Daphne and her wedding, but of no one else in town. Damayris talked of her garden and of the stories the Sister-Mother is writing, and Rachel talked of their Abbey and of their plans for their flowers. Damayris will not come back to us until her garden is made; perhaps some day she will return, to teach and make dances, if not to dance herself, but not yet."

Damaris was, indeed, happy in the planning of her garden. Love of colour and design had been fostered in her by her life in the theatre, and these had full play in the new hobby. The wedding-gift which had come on May-day made everything possible, and she was fermenting with joyful ideas.

It was easy to send for red sandstone blocks from the Wirral. Lindy Bellanne had friends who could advise, and when the load arrived and the smooth slabs were piled in their corner, in an angle of the walls, all sloping one way as they would do on their hillside, Lindy came to

welcome this bit of her childhood's home and went down on her knees to stroke the red Wirral stone.

"I really must marry a man who will build me a house in the Wirral!" she said. "I want to sing, of course, but I'd like a little Wirral house with red paths to be my home. Make the rock-garden big, Mary Damayris, so that it can have tiny winding paths and steps among your heather and bluebells. You've plenty of room! I shall come and wander along and think I'm at home again."

"It's lovely stone," Rachel said. "It will make a beautiful setting for rock-roses. But all the same, Marry, have grey for your paths. You don't want too much red."

There was plenty of grey stone to be found locally, but Damaris was not satisfied. "I'm going to have one tiny bit of our home, too. If I can get Wirral sandstone I can send for Windermere granite. *Is it granite, by the way?*"

"A lot of it is slate," Rachel said. "Don't you remember the Grisedale path? And I've heard something about limestone hills."

"Bother! Windermere stone, then, whatever it is! I shall write to Pip Russell."

Philippa, once their particular junior at St. Dorothea's, near Liverpool, and now head girl and a highly responsible person, joyfully accepted the commission and ordered a load of grey rocks in Windermere, and announced her intention of coming to see the garden and the Abbey during the summer holidays. She was so full of interest and sympathy that she talked earnestly to her father and the contractor, and when the load arrived it was such a large one that there was far too much. The rocks were piled in a corner, and a man from the village came to make the paths—not only the track to the barn, but several more, crossing the garden to the rockery and to other points, and surrounding the fish pond. When all were neatly paved with grey Westmorland stone, there was still a pile of rocks in the corner.

Damaris gave a whoop of joy. "A second rockery! For the pink rock-roses that wouldn't show on the red stones! Oh, marvellous! We'll call them Wirral and Windermere!"

Wirral and Windermere they became to everybody, and Rachel often laughed as Damaris arranged her plants. "Those yellow rock-roses will look lovely in Wirral, but the pink ones must go to Windermere. And if that sedum is really as red in July as Maidlin says, it must go to Windermere too; it simply wouldn't show at all in Wirral. It must be exactly the colour of the stone. Wirral can have the blue campanulas that are so like our bluebells at home."

"Give Windermere some bluebells too," Rachel urged. "You can't deny her those! They'll look just right on the grey stone. You do sound absurd, Marry!"

Damaris was buying steadily from her five firms, but not recklessly; her North Country shrewdness reminded her of the probability of failures and she was keeping a good deal in reserve. But chrysanthemums for the autumn and bulbs for early planting were on order, and many plans were forming in her eager mind.

"How I hope Lady Joy will like it!" she said again and again. "If she says 'How beautiful!' I shall feel I've passed with honours as a gardener, as you did as a guide."

"Why are you so anxious to please Lady Joy?" Rachel asked. "You aren't specially keen on her."

"She's the only person in the clan who is going to have a surprise when she sees my garden," Damaris explained. "Everyone else has watched it grow, but Lady Joy doesn't know anything about it. Everybody has promised not to tell her; I'm sure they've kept it a secret. She'll come home expecting to see the meadow, and instead she'll find a garden of flowers. I shall ask her what was the first thing she said when she saw it."

“Don’t be disappointed if she isn’t thrilled at first. She may need a while to get used to the change,” Rachel warned her.

“I want her to shout with joy as soon as she sees it,” Damaris said.

The whole clan was deeply interested in the growing garden and delighted about the wedding-present, and the guardians of the Abbey had many visitors besides tourists. Jen Marchwood walked out on to the garth continually, calling—“Dammy-Marry! Marry-Dammy! How does your garden grow?” Maidlin came bringing bits and pieces from her flowering terraces, to be poked into the crannies of Windermere, and brought Lindy to gaze at the stones of Wirral and be sure they were real, and to talk over their schooldays with Damaris. Joan, her hesitation gone, rejoiced in the colourful beauty beginning to clothe her former meadow.

Mary begged leave to sit in a quiet corner during the evening, when the Abbey was closed to outsiders, and corrected proofs to the music of birds and bees, who were flocking to the garden. Here and there flat red or grey blocks had been left among the flowers and made good seats, reminding Rachel and Lindy of picnics in early days, according to the colour of their stones. Mary delighted in these, and before beginning her writing or correcting she selected her rock with care and regretted that prudence suggested covering it with a cushion.

Rosamund came to the garden also, with her son and heir, Hugh, Lord Verriton, and his Uncle Roddy, only three years older than himself and now just seven years old. She held their hands while they carefully made their way up and down the narrow paths of Wirral, or crouched among the Windermere blocks to watch birds drinking from a hollow at the top of the pile, a natural bird-bath which Damaris had hailed with joy. Then the boys trotted off to try all the stone seats in turn, squatting on red or grey slabs and shouting with excitement, till Rosamund had to laugh and carry them off to the car, before they wore out all the chairs, as she told them.

“You’re like Goldilocks in the Three Bears’ House, trying all the seats and beds in turn,” she said.

Marigold, Jansy and Rosalind, living at the Hall and busy at school, came whenever they could spare an hour, begging to be allowed to weed, and helped in the endless war Damaris waged with buttercup and daisy, grass, clover, and willow-herb, which seemed to think the land had been ploughed up for their express benefit.

“I say, Mary Damayris!” Littlejan cried one day, as they worked together. “Don’t you and Rachel speak French?”

“Mais oui, mon enfant,” Damaris responded amiably. “What then? Italian also, let me tell you.”

Littlejan chuckled. “Talk to us three, that’s all. Mademoiselle told us to find somebody who spoke really good French and listen to them, to get used to the accent. We know the grammar, or at least a good deal of it; it’s the sound of the stuff that’s so difficult. Italian doesn’t matter, though it would be quite useful to know a little. But French would help us no end.”

“It shall be done, mes petites,” Damaris promised. And she would talk only French after that, when they came to work with her in her garden.

But all her joy in her flowers could not wipe out the memory of Mary Damayris and the life in town. Damaris did not allow herself to brood; she turned firmly to new plans when regrets assailed her, and kept herself busy. But the past was there, and at times it surged up and conquered her.

Rachel, making coffee for elevenes, heard a stifled exclamation and saw her sister dash from the parlour, the morning paper flung on the ground. In great distress she looked to see what had caused this trouble, and found the paragraph telling how Georges Antoine and Madame Roskova would produce a new ballet in the autumn and that the leading part would be danced by Ella Delamere.

“Poor Marry! She knows it would have been hers. It had to happen, but it’s hard on her. She’s gone to her little room; I don’t think she’s ever used it before. Could I help? I know she wants to be left alone.”

She was still hesitating when the black kitten came rushing in, her tail swollen to a huge brush, her back standing on end, her eyes wild.

“What’s the matter, silly? Oh, Miss Nigger dear, something’s scared you stiff! What’s wrong, child? Did Marry fall over you? She didn’t mean it.” She caught the terrified little creature in her arms. “Where’s Angel? You’re always together. What have you done with Angel, darling?”

“Ray!” Damaris was calling, and her voice was all excitement, not despair. “Ray, come here! I’ve found something. Bring a torch; two torches! Do come, Ray!”

“Found something? In that little room?” Rachel cried, and dived into their bedrooms for torches. “Where are you, Marry? What have you found?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t; it was your yellow Angel. He’s gone; we must rescue him. There are steps in the wall; come and look!”

Rachel raced after her. “Marry, what is it? How did it happen? Oh, gosh! Just look at that! And we never knew!”

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

What the Angel Found

Damaris stood staring at a narrow doorway in the wall. "I banged against it," she said breathlessly. "I rushed in here, feeling ghastly; you saw that bit in the paper? I knew you'd guess. I flung myself on the rug and howled, at the thought of Elladella creating the new role. I hadn't locked the door, and those creatures of yours must have followed me; they were careering about the garth, as usual. They thought I was a lovely new game, and they began to play touch-last over me. I was feeling rotten and it drove me mad; I jumped up and shooed them off. The black thing was terrified and skipped away, but the yellow brute thought it was still a joke, and he danced all over the place, with me after him. There isn't room for that sort of game, and I tripped over the rug and went down an awful whack, banging my shoulder on the wall. And it opened, and the yellow creature disappeared inside. I can just make out steps, but perhaps he really can see in the dark. I picked myself up and yelled for you. Got torches?"

"Here you are. We'll see where the steps lead to. I daresay we ought to wait for Mrs. Raymond, but I just couldn't." Rachel was ablaze with excitement.

"I'm not waiting for anybody! And you must rescue your baby. Whoops! Here he comes!"—as the Angel dashed out of the mysterious doorway, past them, and off to the garth.

"I wonder what he found in there? He's gone to tell Miss Nigger. Come on, Marry! We'll see this through and tell people afterwards." Rachel led the way in, holding her torch before her. "There can't be anything much, for it must be right inside the wall or it would have been discovered from outside long ago. I don't suppose anybody ever looked carefully at the walls of that little room; why should they?"

"I must have loosened a spring, or a catch, of some kind when I banged on it," Damaris assented. "How many steps, Ray?"

"Only four, going up. Did you hurt yourself?"

"Didn't think about it. This is far too thrilling. I'm all right. Lead the way!"

At the top of the short flight of steps Rachel paused and flashed her light about. "Another tiny room; for one person at a time, or two at most. I wonder what it was for? I say, Marry, look here!"

On the wall opposite the entrance was a rough carving, crumbling in places but recognisable. Below was a stone step, worn away in a hollow.

"It was a crucifix," Rachel whispered. "That hole in the step has been worn by people kneeling to pray. Don't you see, Marry? I know what this was now."

"For the Abbot, a private chapel for prayer?" Damaris asked quietly. "The room down there is called the Abbot's Lodge, Mrs. Raymond said, but she didn't know why."

"This tells us why; it was the Abbot's private chapel, where he prayed alone for the monks and the Abbey, and perhaps for the world. It was his oratory; don't you remember the *oratoires* we used to see in France, with a crucifix and a praying-place?"

"I remember. The Abbot's oratory! Will Mrs. Raymond be pleased, Ray? I'd love to feel we had done something for her. She's been so kind to us."

"I'm sure she'll be pleased. There's nothing more to see. It was just for prayer; it's a very holy place. Come and ring up everybody!"

"It will cause no end of excitement," Damaris remarked. "But I shall lose my hidie-hole."

“No, it will make it better than ever; more comforting, because it leads to the praying-place,” Rachel said quietly.

“Oh, my dears!” Joan cried, when she heard the news by telephone. “Of course I’ll come—this afternoon! The oratory of all the Abbots of the Abbey, perhaps. How very wonderful!”

“The stone where they knelt is worn away. It must have been used by generations of holy men,” Rachel said. “It feels like a place of prayer. I found myself speaking in whispers.”

“I’ll call for Maidlin and bring her with me; she loves every corner of the Abbey. And I’ll ring up Rosamund. Have you told Jen?”

“Not yet. You had to hear first.”

“How nice of you! Then let me tell Jen and ask her to meet us in the Abbey. You tell Mary-Dorothy and the girls. What wonders we shall have to show to Joy!”

The girls were at school, but Mary came hurrying to the Abbey, and then, with an indignant laugh at her own thoughtlessness, went home again without seeing the tiny chapel. “Joan first, of course. Whatever was I thinking of? I’ll come in the evening, with the girls. I’m longing to see your find.”

“It was really the golden Angel who found it,” Damaris told her. “But he wasn’t interested. He came scooting out again in no time.”

Joan, Jen, and Maidlin came early in the afternoon, all thrilled and happy over the new discovery.

“The Abbey keeps growing. I shall never feel sure we’ve seen the whole of it,” Jen proclaimed, as they stood on the garth after their inspection of the oratory.

Joan glanced at Damaris. “We won’t show this to tourists. I’ve given the Abbot’s Lodge to you, and I won’t take it back. We’ll keep the chapel for ourselves; a sacred place. If any of you people should want to use it, for very secret prayer, ask Damaris for the key. There’s no other place in the Abbey entirely private. Have you had to use the Lodge much, dear girl?”

Damaris looked at her gratefully. “Not once, until today. I’ve felt like it sometimes, but I’ve managed to think of other things.”

“That’s brave,” Joan said quietly.

“But just the thought that I could hide there has helped,” Damaris added. “And today I really did bolt to shelter. Something in the paper upset me.”

Joan nodded; she had seen the paragraph. “We’re very grateful that you did bolt in there. You’ve given us a new treasure for the Abbey, and one that I feel we may reasonably keep for ourselves.”

Maidlin was dreamily seeing the Abbot, a very old man, slipping into the outer room and then climbing painfully up the four steps to kneel in prayer. “It’s wonderful; like another chapter of Abbey history. I’m so glad you found it, Damaris dear.”

“Give the credit to the golden Angel,” Damaris said solemnly. “It was you who brought the Angel to the Abbey.”

“We shall think of you as the finder of the chapel, not the Angel,” Jen assured her. “The chapel and the garden! Two gifts to the Abbey from Mary Damayris!”

“And two treasures to show to Joy. But she won’t be home till July. I heard this morning,” Joan explained. “They’ve had a heat-wave and it has upset Joy and the baby, and Madeline Rose has been very poorly. They’re going to have two or three weeks away from New York, in a cooler place, to build her up before the journey.”

“The garden should be looking fairly decent by July,” Damaris said. “Some more of the rock things will be in flower. How I hope Lady Joy will like it!”

“We like it, whether Joy does or not.” Joan, Jen, and Maidlin spoke together, for they had all suffered from Lady Quellyn’s failure to understand at times.

“I’d like to warn Joy,” Joan remarked, as she went to the Hall with Jen and Maidlin. “But I promised to say nothing before I realised how much it was going to mean to that nice girl.”

“We all promised. We can’t break our word to Dammy-Marry,” Jen said. “That really would let her down. We must trust ‘Traveller’s Joy’ and hope she’ll be genuinely thrilled.”

“I think she will be thrilled,” Maidlin observed. “Joy loves beautiful things and the garden is really looking rather lovely. I believe Joy will say so, and Damaris will be satisfied.”

Mary and the schoolgirls were gazing reverently round the oratory when Rosamund drove up in her car and was welcomed by Rachel. She went to join the others, full of exuberant delight in a new Abbey discovery; then, as they had done, fell under the spell of the holy place and spoke in a whisper, as she begged them to leave her alone for a moment, when they turned to go.

“She’ll pray that Uncle Geoffrey may keep well,” Rosalind said quietly. “She’s always a little anxious about him. He’s all right just now, but he’ll never be really strong, she says.”

Rosamund joined them presently. “A sacred place, Damaris, my dear. We thank you and the golden Angel for giving it to us! I shall come and look at it often, and I expect the rest of us will do the same.”

The bell clanged at the gate, and Rachel went sedately to attend to her clients. “I won’t face tourists panting and out of breath,” she said.

The schoolgirls raced away to do their home-work. Damaris, conscious of uncovered curls, dived into the cloister room till the strangers had gone up to the refectory. Then she ran to her bedroom and changed into working-kit for an evening in her garden.

Rosamund walked with Mary to the Hall, where her car was waiting. “Tell me about those girls, Mary-Dorothy! I don’t see as much of them as I should like; I love them both. Are they happy? Have they settled down in the Abbey?”

“Rachel is happy,” Mary said definitely. “She loves the Abbey and she likes her work. She has written and placed two short stories since she came; she is doing really well. She is glad and contented to be here.”

“And Mary Damayris? My Rosalind calls her that, and I’ve heard Marigold and Jansy say it too. Is it allowed?”

“Oh, yes! She doesn’t mind. As the girls say it, it’s a tribute to her courage. You can hear it in their voices,” Mary said.

“I guessed that. How is she settling down? She’s making a wonderful thing of that garden.”

“She loves the garden, and she’s happy in it. But she hasn’t forgotten her life in town. She says she feels like someone who has lost a limb, or whose sight or hearing has gone. She’s carrying on, but she misses her dancing all the time. With Damaris it’s not a case of being entirely contented to be here, but of brave acceptance of a second-best.”

“Brave acceptance of a second-best!” Rosamund repeated. “I’m sure you’re right; she couldn’t forget so soon. Yes, she is very brave. Won’t she ever dance again?”

“She thinks not, but no one can say. Ballet pulls her very strongly still. But she’ll only go back if she feels she can do really well; no second-best will satisfy her there! And she won’t go to hang about the theatre and feel unhappy; she has too much pluck and character for that. She has found a new job and she loves it. That’s all one can say just now.”

“It’s a good deal,” Rosamund remarked. “To accept second-best without lamenting needs courage. It’s the ‘not to be’ of our Hamlet Club motto; she knows the thing she wants is not to be, but she’s going ahead, with what is to be. From all I’ve heard, ballet was a great adventure for her, and she certainly made good. This has been an adventure of a different kind, and she has made good again. She’s a brave child, and her garden is beautiful.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Honours for Damaris too

Damaris stood in her garden and looked all round, trying in vain to see it with the eyes of one who expected rough green meadow-land and had had no warning of a stretch of flowers.

It was July, and Joy would arrive that afternoon. The car from the Hall, and Jen's big car from the Manor, had gone to Southampton to meet Sir Ivor and Lady Quellyn, the children of all ages, and the nurses and governess and luggage.

Against the grey Abbey wall lupins and delphiniums in shades of blue and mauve, and tall yellow evening primroses, stood proudly. The beds bordering the carriage-drive were carpeted with pansies of every colour, and scented with tiny bushes of sweet briar. The Wirral rockery was covered with a drift of blue harebells and yellow rock-rose; Windermere was a sheet of early heather and deep pink stoncrop. The path to the barn was edged with blazing marigolds and lobelia, and behind these bushes of lavender were breaking into flower, making a fragrant blue-grey hedge. Great beds of mixed flowers lay between the paths; round the gate-house stood roses in full bloom, with tall white lilies between them. The old fish-stream of the monks, wandering through the garden, had gay banks of water-forget-me-not, and a long row of sweet peas of every colour hid the thicket of privet which stood between the Abbey and the tithe-barn. Small spaces had been left and sown with grass seed, so there were tiny lawns here and there among the beds of flowers.

"At least there's more to see than when it was all green, whether Lady Joy likes it or not!" Damaris murmured.

"Admiring your work, Marry?" Rachel came and stood beside her. "It's beautiful, dear. You've made a lovely place. Visitors always remark on it. You really have added something wonderful to the Abbey! And you did it all. Isn't it rather satisfying to feel that?"

"With help from everybody and virgin soil to work on!" Damaris retorted. "Gifts from all the other gardens, and Charlie and dear Frost to dig, and two Queens and a Maid to weed for me!"

"The ideas are yours and you carried them out. The world may miss you as a dancer, but it will find you here, for ever, in this lovely garden."

"Worth thinking of, perhaps, when I'm feeling blue. Do you remember that idea about taking the first step and then finding others? You were jolly well right, Ray. I'd never have made this garden if we hadn't come to the Abbey."

"Believing we should find our way. It's true. Your way has certainly opened before you," Rachel agreed. "I'm quite sure people can never afford to neglect that first obvious step, when they see it before them. They don't know what they might miss."

"Here's a car. It's people for you. Bother! Just when Lady Joy's coming home!"

"They won't be in her way," and Rachel went to wait on the tourists, who came in exclaiming over the masses of flowers.

Damaris turned again to her garden, wondering, as she did continually, what Joy would say.

"Hi, Mary Damayris!" A voice hailed her, and Littlejan came racing through the Abbey. "Yes, I know; Rachel's busy with tourists. Mean of them to come just when we're waiting for

Lady Joy! She'll arrive soon now, and I'm sure she'll love the garden. I thought perhaps you'd be feeling nervous, so I came to buck you up. She can't help liking it, you know."

"How jolly decent of you, Marigold!" Damaris exclaimed, much touched. "I was feeling a bit first-nightish."

Littlejan glanced at her. "All worked up and frightened? Like when exam. results are read out? I know!"

"I want to pass with honours."

"Well, don't think about it. You can't alter anything now. You've made it look quite marvellous, and you can't do any more. Think of something else. I'll help you! They're all off their heads at the Hall, because they've good news for Lady Joy, the minute she arrives. There's been a 'phone-call from Quellyn; Plas Quellyn, in North Wales, you know. Robin has a little boy, born last night, and they're going to call him Bobbibach."

"But who is Robin, Marigold?"

"Don't you know? She was here a year or two ago, quite a lot, and she slept in the Abbey, in the cloister room. I used to call on her! Her name's Robertina, and the Castle in Wales belongs to her. She married Rob Quellyn last August, and the baby's to be called Bobbibach; that means little Bobby."

"They couldn't call him anything else! Is that the Robert Quellyn who did my chapter-house picture?"

"Yes, rather! His drawings are marvellous. You're lucky to have one. But he's jolly good at music too."

"Will Lady Joy be pleased about Bobbibach?"

"Oh, tremendously! When school stops, in less than a month, I'm going with my brothers to stay in the seaside cottage near Plas Quellyn for a fortnight, and Mary-Dorothy and Jansy are asked too. We'll bathe and fish and climb and go boating and sailing; it will be a gorgeous holiday. And we'll see Robin and the baby. She knows about you; she went to see you"—she paused.

"To see me dance?" Damaris said quietly. "Most people did. It's all right, Marigold. I can think about it quite well now. It feels like a different long-ago life."

"You're jolly brave! I've a message for you from Aunt Joan. She wants you and Rachel to go to your mountains for a holiday——"

"Fells!" Damaris corrected.

"Sorry! To the fells, then. You can have the little car from the Manor and take turns in driving; and you could add on a few miles and run through the Wirral and see what it's really like, Lindy says. And if—oh, Mary Damayris!" Littlejan said wistfully. "If you would go in the school holidays, Jan and I could live in the Abbey and be its guardians! Would you? We'd love to be real caretakers for a whole week!"

Damaris laughed. "People wouldn't let you two sleep alone in the Abbey!"

"Mary-Dorothy would come with us. She has slept in the Abbey before; she loves it. She'll cook and see to meals, and we'll keep your garden weeded and cut off the dead pansies and sweet peas. We won't let it go to seed! The first week of September would be a nice busy time; we'd have heaps of tourists. Rosalind would like to come too; we could easily make room. Jansy and I could sleep heads and tails in your big bed; Rosalind could have Rachel's; and Mary-Dorothy could have the cloister room. Do say you will! We're looking forward to it already."

“It would need a lot of thinking about,” Damaris said solemnly. “We’d like to see the fells again.”

“Then you will agree; I’m sure you will! Perhaps Rachel will lend me her white gown and badge! Then I’d feel I was really an Abbey Guardian at last. Now I must scoot back; I want to be there when Lady Joy arrives. I’ve given you new things to think about, haven’t I? Don’t forget to ring Cecily and Michael! Lady Joy must come home to the sound of the Abbey bells!” And Littlejan raced away.

“Nice kid!” Damaris said, turning to watch the road again. “Wonderful of her to think of it!”

The lane ran close to the gate-house. The low wall of the Abbey grounds had been made beautiful with flowers growing on top and in the crevices, and blue harebells and yellow stonecrop, white alyssum and rose-pink sedum made a gay show. The gate-house had great buttresses of stone, and Damaris stood in the shelter of one beside a clump of lilies and gazed along the road.

A car came swirling round the corner, followed by another. The first swept past, and she had a glimpse of nurses and babies and luggage. The second drew up, with a sudden scream of brakes, in response to an urgent demand from one of its passengers.

“Oh, look! *Look* at the Abbey! But how beautiful!” and Joy Quellyn was out in the road, followed by her twin girls, while Sir Ivor leaned forward through the window.

“Come and see, Twins! What has happened? Who did it? It’s a wilderness of beauty!” Joy ran to the wall.

“It’s a lovely garden!” cried Margaret. “It’s like magic!”

“Look at the pink rocks in the corner! And there are grey ones, all over flowers, at that side! *It is* pretty!” Elizabeth said. “Can’t we go and see it?”

“You shall, tonight. First we must go home. But I don’t want to leave all this. It’s too lovely! And such a great surprise! I wonder who did it?”

Damaris stepped from her corner. “It’s my work for the Abbey. I begged them not to tell you. But I couldn’t have done it in time, unless everybody had helped. The roses came from Kentisbury and the lilies from the Pallant; the pansies are from the Hall and the lavender from the Manor; and the lupins and others are from Mrs. Raymond. Are you pleased? I’ve been afraid you might not like it.”

“My dear! It’s beautiful! How are you?” Joy cried.

“It’s Mary Damayris! It’s our Auntie Dam!” the twins exclaimed together.

“Not Auntie Dam. There’s no such person,” Damaris retorted. “I’m very fit, thanks. Do you really like the garden?”

“We love it. We’ll come to see it all in detail tonight. Just look at the lilies and roses, Twins!”

“We had to have those, because of Ambrose and Jehane. Marigold will tell you; it was her discovery. If you come late at night you may see George; he’s the hedgehog,” and Damaris looked at the twins. “Rachel puts out bread and milk for him every night. But he comes when it’s half dark, so you won’t see the garden properly. The cats sit and stare at George, but they don’t go near him; I think they went once and pricked their paws and noses.”

“What cats? There aren’t any cats in the Abbey!” Margaret, the hasty twin, declared.

“Or are there, now?” Elizabeth asked cautiously.

“You’re all out of date. You’ll see Miss Nigger and the Angel when you come. I oughtn’t to have stopped you, but I was so anxious to know if you were pleased.” Damaris looked at

Joy.

“I’m overjoyed! I can’t imagine how you’ve done it, but I’m more than glad you did,” Joy said heartily. “The Damaris garden is very beautiful.” She used the name by which the garden came to be known in the family; not “Damaris’s garden,” but “the Damaris garden.”

“Then I’ve passed with honours, too.” And Damaris went back happily into her garden. “Come to the Abbey tonight and I’ll tell you all about it!” she called, as Joy and the twins returned to the car.

And then, remembering Littlejan’s last words, she ran to the garth to ring the Abbey bells, two Cecilys and one Michael, over and over again, because, after two years, Joy had come home.

[The end of *Guardians of the Abbey* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]