

THE  
ABBNEY  
GIRLS GO  
BACK TO  
SCHOOL

E. J.  
Oxenham



COLLINS

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A.G.B.S

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‘She stood on a chair, encouraging and explaining.’

THE  
ABBEY GIRLS GO  
BACK TO SCHOOL

*by*  
ELSIE J. OXENHAM



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TO  
HELEN KENNEDY NORTH  
AND D. C. DAKING  
WITH THANKS FOR  
ALL THEY HAVE  
GIVEN TO ME

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## CHAPTER I

### BAD NEWS FOR EVERYBODY

‘I’ve bad news for you, President!’ Joan Shirley walked into the big hall at Broadway End, where Cicely sat on the settle by the fire, awaiting her and gazing sombrely into the flames.

‘Oh?’ the President of the Hamlet Club looked up gloomily. ‘Well, I’ve some for you too, so we’ll be a jolly pair! But mine’s the same old thing, and I don’t want to go.’

‘You’re off to Ceylon again?’ Joan threw her fur cap and big coat on a chair, and came to sit on the rug at her friend’s feet. ‘Oh, I am sorry, President!’

‘So am I. I’d tons rather stay at home. It was all right the first time or two; but when it comes to every winter in Ceylon, I do get tired of it. Of course, I like to go with Daddy, and he does want me. But I’d like a Christmas at home sometimes!’

‘But you must have a topping time out there?’

‘I do, of course; and I’ve friends there now. But still I miss you all, and the club, and everything. I seem to have made more lasting friendships at school than most girls do. It’s four years since I left, and I’m twenty-one, but I’m still as keen on the old set, and you others who have come in since, as ever I was.’

‘It’s jolly for us that you are. You might have forgotten us all. But I feel the same; I left two years ago, but, nineteen or not, I still want to be back there. I think it’s partly the club that takes us back for meetings, and so we keep in touch and can’t forget. And it made us all so friendly. We owe that to you, President; and also the fact that the club hasn’t fizzled out, as so many school things do. You keep it swinging along.’

‘Although I’m away for months at a time! I wonder you all let me boss things still when I come back! Of course,’ Cicely laughed, ‘I’ve gone on liking it just because you let me boss. If I weren’t the President, I might have slacked off. That’s a confession for you! But I do like running things!’

‘Of course you do, because you can do it. But even you can’t get all your own way, ma’am. Joy was over at school yesterday, on Belinda; that’s the new motor-bike she’s so crazy over; have you seen it yet? She flies all over the countryside, with no hat and an old mack on, looking a perfect sketch, and as happy as in the old days, when she tramped fifteen or twenty miles and came home mud up to her knees. Well, she brought back news from



school that Jen is leaving at the end of this term. That rather upsets your little hopes for next year, doesn't it?"

'Jen leaving? What, for good and all, Joan? But the kid's only fifteen, although she's so tall, isn't she?'

'She's sixteen. She's awfully upset about it, but Joy says there seems no help for it. Her mother wants her at home; they don't seem to care much about education, so long as she's had just enough; I mean, matric and other exams leave them cold, and they see no need for Jen to pass, or to specialise, or anything. Heaps of money, you know, and a big country house, and Jen's the only girl; rather like you and your grandparents here! All they want is to get her through school as soon as possible, and have her home to help her mother and be company for her. There's no chance that she might ever have to work for herself, or anything like that. If she knows a little, and can play and sing a little, and speak French a little, and dance—that's thanks to our club and you—that's all they want. Jen's pretty and smart, and has done well as far as she's gone; she isn't shy and has good manners, and isn't afraid to speak to anybody; she carries herself well and is graceful and moves nicely—thanks again to you and the folk-dancing! So she's just all they want, and she's to go home and be an ornament to society, I suppose. I should think she'd die in a month!' Joan said indignantly.

'Poor kid! How utterly rotten for her!' Cicely, as only daughter of Broadway End, had had experience. 'But I've had school and the club quite close, and could always run over and see some of you. Where does Jenny-Wren live? Isn't it in some wild weird lonely place? How will the child exist?'

'Yorkshire; near Sheffield, I believe; on the moors, somewhere—awfully lonely! She's frightfully upset, and I don't wonder. It's hard lines to know all your jolly school time is over at sixteen.'

'Perhaps she'll pine and nearly die, and they'll let her come back to save her life.'

Joan laughed. 'Jen's too healthy to pine. No, she's a sport, and I believe she'll face up to it and tackle it somehow, but it's awfully rotten for her. You see, they really do seem to need her. She has three elder brothers, all away from home. One's married and living in Glasgow; one's studying medicine in Edinburgh; one's farming out in Africa; and one was killed in a motor smash. Her father has had a serious illness this autumn, and needs some one to be with him and amuse him, as he can't go out much; and the mother isn't strong, and wants Jen's help. Her work seems cut out for her.'

'Poor kiddy!' Cicely said again. 'I wish she lived nearer, so that we could see her through. How she'll miss everything, and all of us!'

'That's what she says. Says she doesn't know how she'll live.'

‘And I wanted her for May Queen next year!’ Cicely wailed. ‘She’d have made such a jolly Queen! She looked topping as Maid of Honour this year; I was sure she’d be chosen next! You’re right, Joan; it does upset my hopes, and I don’t like having to give them up! It’s like when Mirry disappointed me by going and getting married! I’d planned everything for her so nicely; she was to be a great public singer, and all that! And then she went and married the first man who asked her, and settled down to keep house! I don’t know how she could!’

‘But he’s very nice!’ Joan objected. ‘And you know Mirry’s just awfully happy; any one can see that! And she’s got a lovely home! I think you ought to be glad, instead of grumbling!’

‘I don’t like having to give up my plans for people,’ the President insisted.

‘Well, you had to do it in Mirry’s case; she just laughed at you. And you’ll have to do it this time, too. Shall you come over to the dance on Friday? Mirry says she’ll be there, but only to look on; says she won’t dance, but she’s bringing her husband to see the barn.’

‘Oh, I’ll be there!—if only to tell Mirry again what I think of her. And I must tell Jenny-Wren how sorry I’ll be to lose her.’

‘That will please her. Everybody feels the same. She’ll have plenty of partners; everybody will want to dance with her! What are you going to give me, President? I’d better bag you at once!’

‘What’s on the programme? We ought to have some new dances, you know! I’ll have to get out the books.’

‘I sometimes wonder,’ Joan said thoughtfully, ‘whether we get our new dances right when we take them out of the books? We may be missing points.’

‘Oh, I think we’ve got them all right!’ Cicely had never lacked confidence. ‘We always seem to end up all right! Dance “Sellenger” with me. I can only dance that with somebody I really like!’

Joan laughed. ‘I’d love to! I’ve the same feeling. It’s a very—very intimate kind of dance!—to me, at least. I always want to keep it for very special people. I’d like to have it always with you!’—at which Cicely laughed.

But though Joan laughed too, she had spoken in earnest. She had never grown out of her love and admiration for Cicely, though now she was nineteen and no longer a schoolgirl. They were very close friends, with a bond between them dating back to a day before Joan had ever gone to school. Cicely had, indeed, left before that time came, but her close connection with the school, as President of its most prosperous club, had brought her into constant touch with the younger girls. Herself the second

May Queen chosen by the club, she had always kept an elder-sisterly eye on her successors, and Joan and Joy, cousins and co-heiresses of the old Abbey and the beautiful Hall, had both been Queens in their day. Now that they had all, very regretfully, left school, Joy's time was given almost wholly to music, except when she was out roaming in the woods to satisfy her gipsy nature; but Joan, with no such personal outlet, gave much time when her mother could spare her to the good of the Hamlet Club, training new members in the folk-dances the girls so much enjoyed, introducing new dances which she and the President together worked out from the books, and seeing that the old ones were kept up to standard, and helping the reigning Queen in any way she could. Her love and gratitude to Cicely for her introduction to all this had never wavered, and she was often with her in the big house at Broadway End, where Cicely, only grandchild of the old people, reigned supreme, adored by the servants, relied on by her grandparents, deferred to by everybody. As Joan sometimes said, 'When you come to think of it, every single thing Joy and I have has come to us through Cicely. For if she and the Hamlet Club hadn't taught us that minuet, we could never have danced it to Sir Antony, and he'd never have made that will—perhaps!—and how different everything would have been! No Abbey; no Hall; no school; no anything!'

'I'm dancing "Mary and Dorothy" with Jen,' Joan added, as she sat on the rug at Cicely's feet, gazing into the fire. 'She has the same feeling for it; she calls it her first dance, and she danced it with me that first night, at the Hall; in *those* days, you know! So she always wants it with me.'

'Jen's always been keen on you. You were her first Queen, of course, so I suppose you mothered her when she arrived. And then the way you took her home to the Hall, during what you call "*those* days," did something you'll never undo. You adopted Jen, and she's never forgotten it. She'll miss you more than anybody. Poor infant, it is rotten luck; she'll be awfully lonely!' Cicely said sympathetically.

But Jen, condoled with on every hand at the next dance-evening, took an unexpectedly independent view of her misfortune. 'You can't exactly say it's rotten luck to go and live at home with your mother and father,' she said sturdily. 'Of course I shall miss you all, and school, and the club, and our meetings, hideously; I know *that*! I don't know how I'm going to exist without anything at all, and I simply daren't let myself think that I'm never going to see you all again, or the barn; or have any more dancing—our kind of dancing! I haven't taken that in yet, and I'm trying not to. I've got to sit on that idea as long as ever I can. I suppose it will get hold of me sometime, but at present I simply don't believe it. And I can't let any one say it's rotten luck to go home!'

‘You’re sporting, Jenny-Wren!’ Cicely said warmly, as she led her out to be her “woman” in “Newcastle.”

‘But I’m afraid she’ll have some rotten times, though she is so plucky about it,’ she said to Joan, as she met her on the other side of the set. ‘I’d like to help her through, but I don’t quite see what any of us can do.’

## CHAPTER II

### THE GIFT OF THE HAMLET CLUB

Alone in her room, Jen sat face to face with that crushing thought which had haunted her for weeks. She had stifled it for a while, and in the excitement of good-byes at school and the warm welcome from every one at home, it had lain passive and buried happily for some days. Cicely had already gone abroad, but Joan had seen her off, among a crowd of others, all bound for London as a starting-point for various parts of the country; but all the rest were coming back after Christmas. Only for Jen was it a real good-bye. She had clung to Joan with a sudden sob when the moment of parting came. 'I shall see you again some day, Joan? You'll come and stay, as we've planned?'

'Of course I will. And you'll come to us. You're quite at home at the Hall, you know!' Joan had reminded her.

But such visits, though joyful to look forward to, must be postponed till spring or summer, and there were long dreary months to be got through first. Jen, sitting chin on hand on her window-seat and gazing out at the falling snow, realised and faced the horrible truth at last; she was not going back to school. This was not holidays. The jolly happy dancing days at Wycombe were over. She was only an honorary member of the Hamlet Club, no longer an active one. All the old friendships were broken; the old interests must be cut right out of her life. And if life were not to be hopelessly dreary and empty, she must find new interests and friendships to take their places.

She had courage and spirit, and a keenly active mind; but her brow puckered gloomily over the problem before her.

'I've got to!' she said, to the snow-sprinkled hills. 'I've simply got to have something to think about, or I shall die, that's all. But what can I do here? School was so thrilling; always something going on! There's nothing here, and nobody at all to chum with. What do people do in villages, anyway?'

Before her window, beyond the big garden, the hill dipped to a narrow valley, where evidence of 'works' could just be seen in an occasional crane or bit of scaffolding or light railway, though most was out of sight under the brow of the hill. In one corner Jen could just see the clustered cottages of 'Tin Town,' where the workmen lived in bungalows of corrugated iron, a little colony by themselves, with their own shops, chapel, and school for the children; for the valley was in process of being turned into a reservoir, as so

many others in the neighbourhood had been. It was unsightly enough at present, and Jen always walked or cycled in the other direction, where the reservoirs were finished and lay like beautiful lakes in the folds of the hills. But when this one was ready it too would be a long shining strip of water, with a wall and castled water-tower at one end; and 'Tin Town' would pack itself up and remove elsewhere. There were no friends for Jen in 'Tin Town,' though there were plenty of children; and the little old village of cold gray stone, not far from her front gate, could not supply any either. The rector was an old bachelor; the doctor had no family; her only possible friends would have to come from town, an hour's train journey away.

Beyond 'Tin Town' and the valley, the hills rose again, cut up by hedges at first into fields and farms, then bare open brown moor rolling away over the crest. Just now it was beautiful, in a veil of powdery snow, but Jen had known it all her life, had scoured every inch of it with the boys; and she shrugged her shoulders as she gazed out at the emptiness. In summer it was beautiful; even now it had its beauty, and beauty of any kind made an instant appeal to her; but it was familiar, and with her present craving for the excitements of school life, for the full happy days, she found the valley and the hills empty and unsatisfying.

For at school, beyond all the usual bustle of classes and games, of competition and excitement, there had been the added interest of the Hamlet Club, with its Saturday rambles over the Buckinghamshire hills and woods, its evenings for folk-dancing, its constant association of the elder girls who had left with those still in the school. The former Queens and many of the earlier members still came to dance-evenings whenever they could, and attended as a matter of course on ceremonial occasions, when the Queens wore their state robes and their Maids of Honour carried their trains. Jen had been a keen member of the club from her first arrival at school; had learned the folk-dances quickly and with great enjoyment, both in their movements and their music; and her cup of joy had been full, when, Queen Joan's maid, Muriel, being chosen as Queen, she had been invited by Joan to fill the vacant place. Her love and admiration for Joan were great; she had accepted joyfully, and had worn Joan's violet colours with much pride.

She was aware of the suggestion whispered among the seniors that she might be the next Queen; and—'I hope I'm not a baby, but—oh, I would have liked it!' she said to herself, as she sat alone, three days after Christmas. 'I would have tried to be a good one! And Joan would have helped me! If I could have had one more year!'

Christmas had been very quiet. An attack of illness on her father's part had made any house-party impossible, and it had not been thought wise even for Jen to have a visitor on her own account. Her mother had promised that

for later on, and Jen had tried to be as cheerful as was expected of her. She saw clearly that even her mother had no idea how much she was missing the old life, and the first resolution she made as she stared out at the snow was a brave one, for her mother's sake.

'I'll never let them know. For they'd be sorry, and that would hurt us all. I've just got to pretend everything's all right; they mustn't guess. Everything is all right, of course; only—well, there used to be so much, and I don't seem able to find it here! I suppose I shall in time.'

'If I were only nearer! 'she sighed at last. 'If I were like Cicely and Joan, and could go over to school for dance-evenings and rambles! I could stand it if I had something to look forward to! But there doesn't seem anything here! What *do* people do in the country? I'd better'—she laughed a little—'teach a Sunday School class, or get up a girls' club, or a creche; couldn't I start something? There doesn't seem to be anything going on. It's the dullest, grayest, coldest village in the world, I do believe! It will get on my nerves in time. Couldn't I wake things up a bit? What is it, Alice?' as the maid appeared at the door.

'Post's come in, Miss Jen; and there's a parcel for you.'

'Oh? A late Christmas present?' and Jen sprang up. 'That's something, anyway!' and she ran past Alice and away along the corridor, down the wide shallow staircase, to the round oak table in the middle of the big hall.

A wooden box was awaiting her. She attacked it eagerly, and gave a cry of delight at sight of a letter in Joan's writing lying just under the wrapping paper. She opened it eagerly, for a letter from Joan meant more than any present, even one in a big box looking mysterious and exciting.

Joan's letter was short, however.

'DEAR JENNY-WREN,—This is a leaving-present from all of us in the club, but I was asked to see to it and send it off to you. I'm sorry it will be too late for Christmas, but the things didn't come from town till Christmas Eve. I hope they'll arrive safely. They're to remind you of us all, and of the club, and our jolly evenings. I wish there were more; but these are all there are at present. I hope you'll enjoy them; I think they're very good.

'I'll write on my own account in a day or two. This is just to give you best love and all good wishes from the Hamlet Club.

'Yours ever,

'JOAN.'

Puzzled and eager, Jen dived into the straw and shavings that filled the top of the box. 'It's carefully packed!—Records! That's why they asked if



we had a gramophone! What a funny present! What are they, I wonder? Oh! Oh, I *say!* I didn't know you could get them! Oh, how simply gorgeous!

Record after record, as she lifted them carefully out, bore the name of one of the dances she loved so well. She gave a little gasp of joy as she saw one after another.

“Peascods”!—how glorious! My dear “Sellenger”! Oh, old “Butterfly”! And “Ruffy”! Now father will be able to hear what they're like! “Hunsdon House”; I don't know that. “The Old Mole”—how topping! And I was thinking of getting the music! These will be far better. “Sweet Kate”—I could do bits of that for father. “Newcastle”—oh, I *am* glad! And “Paper,” and “Mage”! There's nothing in the world I'd have liked better. I must try them! But there are more yet. Here are some I don't know; but I guess the tunes will be jolly. What's this? Oh, *morris!* How simply perfect! Couldn't I get some one to do “Rigs” with me? Perhaps I could teach Alice! I wonder if she could jump! Here's the “Furry Dance”—and, *oh!* My darling “Jockie”! And I *can* dance *that* alone!

Wildly excited, she ran to the gramophone to try these new treasures. But to stand still when “Jockie to the Fair” began to come out was impossible. Jen's eyes were shining till they almost seemed filled with tears, so full of associations was the tune for her. She had danced this on the cloister garth with Joan; she loved it, with its exultant ringing notes, almost more than any of the other jigs. She bore it for a moment, her feet tapping eagerly; then shut off the music, and raced upstairs for dancing-shoes, bells, and handkerchiefs.

‘I couldn't have stood it another minute!’ and she changed her shoes in breathless haste and pulled the bells up below her knees. ‘But I could never do “Jockie” in heels!’

Jingling gaily, she sped back to the drawing-room, passing Alice with a laugh at her astonished face. ‘The carpet will feel funny. But it's better than a polished floor! Now, you priceless thing, play it again for me! Band records! “Jockie” on a band! How gorgeous!’

Wide-eyed and eager, heedless of Alice and Mabel at the door, she stood breathing quickly in excitement through ‘Once To Yourself,’ handkerchiefs hanging from her hands. Then, with an introductory jump and quick little step, she was into the springing morris movements, her arms swinging straight but easily, her feet light and quick. At the end of the first phrase she stumbled, beginning her side-step and finding it did not fit the music. ‘Oh, it's written for two, of course! Then I must take a rest. Now!’ and to the amusement of the girls in the doorway she went slanting off across the big room waving her hands in circles round her head. But ‘Capers’ drew applause from them, and she turned and laughed to see them watching.

‘I learned that at school. It is jolly, isn’t it? I say, Alice, if you’d get me two little sticks, like hoopsticks. I’d teach you something!’

‘Eh, but it’s canny, Miss Jen! Would ye do it for cook an’ the rest?’

Jen’s eyes danced. ‘You get them all into the back kitchen one night, and I’ll give you a performance,’ she promised. ‘I must show father and mother first, but you shall see it too, of course. I can’t be a whole “side” all by myself, but I can show you a good deal. Perhaps you’d like to learn some country dances? I say, what a perfectly priceless idea!’

With eager happy eyes, she put on one after another of the much-loved dances, and listened with tapping feet and wistful face to ‘Newcastle,’ ‘Sellenger’s Round,’ and ‘Hey, Boys.’ Then she raced away upstairs to her father’s room, where her mother was sitting, to tell of her new treasures, offering to show as much as she could of the dances.

‘Don’t you think I could teach somebody?’ she pleaded. ‘We loved it so at school; I’m sure anybody would enjoy it. Not cook, perhaps; she’s rather’—and she laughed, while her mother smiled, and her father shook his head with twinkling eyes at thought of cook taking to morris dancing. ‘But somebody! Country dances are so easy!’

‘You’d probably find dozens of children down in ‘Tin Town’ who would be delighted to learn. They’d have to come up here for lessons, though; I couldn’t have you going down there at night,’ her mother remarked. ‘But you could have the big back kitchen; we shan’t be using it this winter.’

‘Oh!’ Jen gave a little gasp. ‘Could I really? Do you really think there’s anything in it? I’d simply love it! But could I teach anybody anything? I’ve never tried!’

‘You’ll never try younger. I should have a shot at it, if I were you,’ her father said encouragingly. ‘I shall come to see how your class is getting on. Will you let me join in?’

‘You shall be my partner!’ Jen laughed delightedly. ‘I do believe I will try! The records just make it possible, of course, for even if I had the music I couldn’t play as well as teach.’

‘And anyway, there’s no piano in the back kitchen!’ her mother remarked.

‘I’m going to give a performance there one night,’ Jen laughed. ‘Shall I bring the music up here and do it for father? They all want to see “Jockie.” I’ll get the gram., and show you!’ and she sped away to enlist Alice’s help in carrying the gramophone upstairs, while her parents laughed to see her so much excited.

‘I’m very glad of it,’ her father said warmly. ‘The child has been missing her friends, and we can’t have them here for her in mid-winter. Any new interest will be good for her. She thinks we don’t know, and she’s trying to

hide it for our sake; but there's no denying it's a lonely house for a bit of a girl, when she's been used to crowds and excitement all the time.'

'I've seen it too,' Mrs Robins said soberly. 'We'll encourage this idea of teaching. It will give her something outside herself to think about, and something in the present. We can't have her living in the past and regretting it. This dancing seems to have meant a great deal to her.'

'I think that was probably partly the close friendship with others who were all of the same mind. We heard enough about it in her letters, didn't we?' the father laughed. 'Now we're to see it for ourselves, apparently! It has taken an extraordinary hold on Jen, that's certain!'

'I withdraw!' he cried, laughing and delighted, a few minutes later. 'I said your dancing had an "extraordinary" hold on you, Jen! I take it back; it's not extraordinary at all. I don't wonder you were fascinated by it. Anything jollier or more delightful than that dance I've never seen. What do you call it?'

'A morris jig—"Jockie." I could show you others, but without music, and it isn't the same,' and Jen rested on the end of his bed, her eyes triumphant. 'I knew you'd like it, father! I've tried to show you before, but the music just makes all the difference, doesn't it? Did you like it, mother?'

'Very much. It's so very free and natural. But I must get used to it. It's so very different from ordinary dancing, you know.'

'Oh yes!' Jen laughed. 'It's folk!'

'Is it that you're going to teach the kiddies?' her father asked. 'I'm afraid the jumping will be rather beyond me—and cook!'

'Oh *no!*' and she laughed again. 'I'd just give them easy country dances. You don't start with morris jigs, you know!'

'Well, go ahead, and good luck to you! I like it!' her father assured her heartily.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BLUE-EYED STRANGER

Jen's demonstration of folk-dancing to the servants in the big back kitchen was over, and amid their delighted applause she was resting and explaining while cook refreshed her with cake and lemonade. Making the most of the occasion—'You have to, when so little happens!' as she said—she had put on the blue dancing frock, with its full skirt and short loose sleeves, and the white stockings and low black shoes she had worn for dance-evenings at school. She had danced 'Mother Oxford' and 'Jockie' to the music, and 'Princess Royal' without; had shown bits of country dances, the clapping of 'Peascods' and the movements of 'Sweet Kate'; and had even laughingly danced 'The Old Mole' and 'Rufty' without a partner. Now she was sitting on the big table, rather breathless but very happy, telling eagerly of her plans for teaching the village children or the girls from 'Tin Town' in the big unused back kitchen.

'We'd soon be able to show you some dances right through. I say, who's at the door?' and at loud knocking from outside she slid hastily down, lest a seat on the kitchen table should be thought undignified for the daughter of the house.

Alice went to the door and came back giggling. 'It be the guisers, Miss Jen. Shall they come in?'

'Mummers! Oh, rather! It's years since I saw mummers!' Jen cried eagerly. 'Go and tell mother, Mabel! I'm afraid father can't come down. I've been away from home for several Christmases, you know, and for a while they didn't come round much. But I remember seeing them when I was quite a kid. Oh, what sport! It *is* Christmas, after all!'

At Alice's invitation, a crowd of villagers hustled one another in, and were ushered into the back kitchen, the servants and Jen following and perching themselves on the big dresser to form an audience in the gallery. Mrs Robins preferred to stay upstairs, but sent a gift for the collection and an order that the performers should be entertained with tea and cake. The actual members of the mumming party were few, but they had collected a crowd as they came along, and a rabble of girls and boys had followed to see the fun.

With much half-shy laughter, when it came to the moment of performance, and rough jokes in broadest Yorkshire dialect, with chaff and encouragement from the audience, the King and Queen, with blackened

faces and patchwork garments, stood forth to play their parts. The clown ran round mocking everybody and wrangling with the King, his 'father'; the Queen, an obvious boy in girl's clothes, quarrelled with one and then the other, and was courted by the King, receiving his advances sometimes bashfully and sometimes with scorn, to the delighted jeers of the onlookers. Several boys armed with wooden swords ran in, interrupting the proceedings, and some rough-and-tumble horseplay followed, bearing only the remotest resemblance to a dance. One of the dancers fell dead in the midst of the swords, and the King and clown accused one another, in terrified dismay, of having done the deed; then, each denying it, tried to put the blame on the dancers with the swords. The King called for a doctor, and the Queen, throwing herself on the dead man, wailed in a way that drew enthusiastic applause from the crowd. The doctor appeared, clad in a long coat and very ancient tall hat, and riding on the shoulders of a big boy, who, bending double, represented a horse; with his bottle of magic medicine he tried to bring the man to life again, after a long recitation concerning the marvellous cures he could do; the clown finally did the deed by means of mysterious signs and incantations over the corpse; the dead man sprang up alive and well, and all the party joined in a triumphal joy-dance, at sight of which Jen broke into peals of delighted laughter, for it was the veriest caricature of her beloved ring-dances. Then a black-faced sweep with a big broom came jiggling out to sweep them all away, and the maids went about with refreshments while the hat was passed round.

'They be-ant good guisers!' said cook scornfully, as she dropped in a penny.

'Oh, why not? What was wrong with them? I thought they were simply priceless,' Jen laughed.

'Should be a gra-and sword-dance to finish oop wi',' cook insisted. 'Ye'll have seen t' swords, Miss Jen?'

'Sword-dance?' Jen said curiously. 'No, I haven't. What is it like? Among those new records there's one with two sword-dances on it. I wondered what they were.'

'T' men dance it ivvery Christmas in my village. T' guisers be-ant t' real thing wi'oot t' swords.'

'Men! You don't often see men dancing! Are they as funny as these?'

'Be-ant foony at all!' cook said indignantly. 'Friday I be goin' home to see t' dance. Ask t' mistress to let ye coom wi' me, Miss Jen. Ah'll tak' good care o' ye.'

'I shall,' Jen said, with conviction. 'I'd love to see men do a sword-dance.'

'It be champion! Our men be known for t' dance,' cook said proudly.

While the collection was being taken, Alice came up to Jen, who still sat on the edge of the dresser.

Jen said severely, 'I've put in a shilling, Alice! Isn't that enough? Of course it was worth *pounds* just to see that priceless fooling, but it's rather soon after Christmas, you know! I've had no time to save up again.'

Alice said eagerly, 'Miss Jen, would ye dance again for them? They'd be that pleased, and they'd tell the kiddies an' make them want to coom.'

Jen laughed at the idea. 'It would be a good advertisement, of course. Do you think they'd really like it? I wouldn't mind a scrap, of course.'

Reassured by an enthusiastic chorus, she slipped on her bells again, while Alice brought the records and cook swept the mummers and their followers back against the walls.

Jen's lips were twitching with amusement as she stood forth to dance; she had never expected an audience of this size! But they were from her own home village, just outside the gates; they had known her from her babyhood; and it would please them and interest the children in her invitation, when it came. So why not?

As she waited for 'Once To Yourself,' her eyes ranged over the crowd, and she realised that there were strangers present, however. In the interest of watching the mummers she had not noticed the audience particularly, but suddenly she knew that there were at least two faces she did not know. Then the music called her imperatively to jump and start, and she had no time to wonder.

But between the phrases, standing while the partner who was not present should have done her share, for the record was arranged for two, Jen's eyes sought and found the strangers again; first a tall young man, watching her with intense interest; then, at his side, a girl of about sixteen, wearing a close fur hat and a big fur coat. What was it there was in the schoolgirl's eyes? Not the interest her companion showed, that was certain! She was watching 'Jockie' and 'Old Mother Oxford' very closely, but surely there was something strange, something critical, if not scornful, in her eyes? Between the phrases of her jigs, Jen looked again and again at the stranger girl, and if she could have believed her own eyes, she would almost have thought she read amusement in her face. Did the morris appeal to her merely as funny? If so, she was not worth looking twice at; and anyway, she was a stranger whom nobody knew. Probably she and her brother—the relationship was obvious in the black hair and bright blue eyes and the features of both—had been passing through the village, and had followed the mummers to see the fun. It was cheek, of course, to have come unmasked into a private house, but no doubt they had thought to be unnoticed in the crowd.

Breathing quickly, Jen faced her delighted audience, and strove to forget those critical blue eyes under the close fur hat. 'There are other dances, but I can't do them for you all alone. If I had a partner, I'd show you "Blue-Eyed Stranger" and "Rigs," but they'd be silly done by one.'

From the crowd stepped the blue-eyed girl. 'I could do those with you. If you really want to give a demonstration, you'd better let me help you.'

She threw off her big coat and cap and looked despairingly at her shoes. 'I'll do my best! It's a good thing I never wear high heels. Give me your handkerchief!' and she turned to her brother. 'Now shall we do "Blue-Eyed"?'

With wide eyes, Jen stared at her. 'Do you know—have you learnt——'

'Oh, I'm a folk-dancer! Have you all the records there?'

Too much amazed to speak, Jen found and placed the new record. 'Why didn't you offer to do the jigs with me?' she demanded, as they waited side by side for 'Once To Yourself.'

The strange girl laughed. 'Because your side-step is so bad. I couldn't have borne it. Oh, yes, it is!' as Jen turned on her in wrathful amazement. 'It's awful! Who on earth taught you?'—and then there was no more time for talk. 'We can do it all but the hey. Cross-over next,' said the strange girl.

In a whirl of surprised indignant thought, Jen realised as she danced that this girl had not spoken without knowledge. Her morris was good; she put a snap and vigour into the dance, which Jen found herself striving to match, and failing.

'How hard you dance!' she panted at the end.

'Have you never seen men dance that?' the girl was hardly out of breath.

'Men? No, do they? I've not seen anybody do it but our girls.'

'Oh!' There was a note in the stranger's voice which seemed to say, 'That explains everything!' She said aloud, 'Would you like me to help you in any more? For I oughtn't to be here.'

'Oh, "Rigs," if you would. I tried to teach one of the maids this afternoon, but she couldn't get her hands and feet right.'

'No, she wouldn't, of course. You'd better do the tapping; it's your show, though mine's sure to be better than yours! Have you sticks? Oh, hoopsticks! Yes, those will do! Turn the record over, then!'

This dance, with its jumping and tapping and quick flashing up and down of the stick, brought a roar of applause. The stranger said grimly, 'Put on any others you want quickly. Oh, I know them all!—all that are on records, anyway. We'll do the Furry Dance round the room, and make stars by ourselves. Would you like me to show you side-step? If you've never seen morris, it's time you did. Better come to Cheltenham next August!'

'Why?' Jen demanded, as they circled the room hand in hand.



‘School. You haven’t heard? Oh well, never mind! But you know a jolly lot for such a hopeless outsider! I say, what on earth has happened to your sword-dancers?’

‘My sword-dancers?’ Jen stared at her blankly.

‘In that play. Do you mean to say you don’t know? There ought to have been a sword-dance instead of all that fooling about. Don’t you know *anything*? And yet you’ve mummies in your own village? I say! People are funny! There’s always a sword-dance in the mumming-play; the man has to be killed by the dancers. Something must have happened to yours; those boys just played about with the swords; no movements at all! You ask some of the old people! You’ll find there used to be a dance, but the men who knew it are all dead.’

‘But how do you know so much about it?’ gasped Jen. ‘You seem to know everything!’

The girl laughed. ‘Oh, that’s only the beginning of things! Anybody knows that much; why, it’s the Sword-dance Play! It’s awful to see it messed up as those boys of yours did; I nearly died with laughing! How do I know? Oh, school! Lectures!’

‘I wish you’d tell me a little more!’ Jen said, exasperated. ‘Where are you staying? Where do you come from? Can’t I see you to-morrow? There are heaps of things I want to ask!’

‘I’m sure there are!’ the blue eyes gleamed. ‘But I’m afraid you can’t. I don’t exist, really. By to-morrow I shall be far away. To-night I’m not really here at all. I’m a changeling, and shall vanish with the dawn. I’m a guiser; a mummer! I shall fall down dead at the end of the dance, like the Haxby Tom, and no doctor or Betty will be able to bring me to life again! Now would you like to show them “Kate”?’

‘I wish you’d stay and talk to me!’ Jen urged, when the kick and clap and finger-twist of ‘Sweet Kate’ were over.

‘Can’t be done,’ her mysterious partner was hastily tucking her mane of long black hair inside her big coat and pulling on her cap. ‘I’ve got to go this minute. No, I haven’t any name. Call me’—she laughed—‘the Blue-Eyed Stranger! Good-night! Better come to school next August!’

‘If you’d only tell me’—Jen pressed after her, through the crowd of villagers pushing their way out into the passage.

But the strange girl had reached her brother and was hurrying away at his side. ‘Can we risk it again?’ Jen heard her ask. ‘It’s not the right house, you know. Dare we? I don’t want to give it up!’

‘I’ll manage it for you, kid,’ the man was saying, as they passed out of the door.

And then Jen was left alone, wondering if it had all really happened, or if she had dreamt those last few dances with the Blue-Eyed Stranger.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MYSTERY OF THE MUMMERS

Racing up to her father's room, Jen poured out the whole story of the mummers and her dance with the unknown partner. 'She was a nice enough girl, mother!' in answer to her mother's troubled look. 'She only wanted to help me out, and two can do so much more than one. But she was very mysterious! She was queer-looking, too; very blue eyes and very black hair, and red cheeks; rather like a gipsy, except for the eyes! But I wonder what she meant! "It's not the right house! I don't want to give it up! Dare we risk it again"? And the brother said he would manage it for her. Weren't they queer? And then all she said about the dancing!' and she nursed her knee and stared at her father doubtfully. 'She said I was a hopeless outsider, and my side-step was dreadful, and hadn't I ever seen morris—danced by men, too!—and I ought to go somewhere in August, to school! Wasn't it all queer?'

'She was a proper guiser, it seems to me,' her father said grimly. 'A real Christmas changeling! She did well to come with the mummers!'

'There *couldn't* be anything wrong with my side-step!' Jen said resentfully. 'Why, Joan taught me herself!'

'Yes, but who taught Joan?' her mother queried wisely.

'Cicely, of course; and she knows everything.'

'Oh well, if Cicely knows everything, your side-step must be all right, of course!' her father agreed. 'But then what did your guiser mean? It seems to me the question is, who taught Cicely?'

'Oh, she's always known morris! There couldn't be anything wrong with what she taught us!'

'Then surely it's all right, and you needn't worry about what the guiser said,' her father laughed.

'And anyway, what does it matter?' said her mother.

But it mattered a great deal to Jen, and she thought much and resentfully of the strange girl's words. 'She said other queer things too. I felt as if she knew stacks of things I haven't even heard of. Who is the Haxby Tom, who falls down dead? Why does he do it? Why does the doctor bring him to life again? That sounded like the mummers' play! And who or what is Betty?'

'Dear, dear!' her father laughed. 'I'm sorry we can't solve all these problems! I really don't know who Betty is, nor Tom, Jen dear! Perhaps you'll hear more about your guiser in the morning!'

‘Father!’ Jen hurled herself on her father’s bed next morning, while he was still busy with his letters. ‘The most awful thing! Have you time to listen? Everybody’s talking about it! There were burglars last night at Lowmoor, and all Mrs Carr’s jewellery and loose money are gone!’

‘Good gracious, Jen, is that so?’

‘Not really, Jen?’ her mother exclaimed. ‘Oh, I am sorry! Have they caught the man?’

‘No, and—and they think he must have got into the house with the crowd following the mummers. They went on there after coming here, and the things were missed directly afterwards.’

‘Do they think it was some one from the village, then?’ her father asked sharply.

Jen stirred uneasily. ‘They’re saying—talking about—strangers in the crowd.’

‘Your guisers!’ her parents both turned on her quickly.

‘Jen, I will *not* have you dancing jigs with burglars!’ her father said severely, but though his eyes twinkled there was a troubled pucker in his brows.

‘You don’t think the girl could have had anything to do with it, Jen?’ her mother asked anxiously.

‘No, I’m sure she hadn’t! It’s simply silly. She was quite nice, really, mother; except when she said my step was bad! But there was a man with her—oh, well, I’m sure he was her brother! They were as like as they could be. But nobody knew them, and people will talk. They came in a big car and stopped at the inn; everybody knows all about them now, of course! There were other people too; an older lady and gentleman; and they’d meant to go on to town, but the lady wasn’t well, so they stayed for the night at our wee inn. This girl and the young man went out for a walk, and I suppose they met the mummers and asked what the crowd was, and thought they’d like to see the fun, and so they came along. There’s really nothing in it, you know. Perhaps they’d never seen mumming before. But as the burglary happened at that very time, of *course* everybody wants to make out they had something to do with it, just because they happened to be strangers!’

‘H’m!’ her father said thoughtfully. ‘It was a queer kind of night to go out for a walk! It was snowing, wasn’t it? If they’d been motoring, you’d think they’d have been glad to stay warm by the fire.’

‘Oh, not that girl, father! She didn’t care for any old kind of weather!’

‘The mummers didn’t go to the inn, I suppose? But if they had, these mysterious strangers wouldn’t have had to follow them here. No, they must have been out for a walk. I must say I’d like to know why they were prowling about our village on a dark snowy night!’

‘Do you really think they could have had anything to do with the burglary?’ Mrs Robins looked very worried.

‘Mother, dear!’ Jen remonstrated. ‘Girls who do folk-dancing don’t go in for being burglars!’

Her father lay back on his pillows and laughed. Mrs Robins said anxiously, ‘I do hope they weren’t connected with the affair. If they are caught, we shall have Jen being wanted as a witness, and I should very much object to that.’

‘My dear, what could she bear witness to?’

‘To the fact that these strangers had come with the crowd into this house, and might very well have done the same at Lowmoor. And she could identify them.’

‘Oh, well, any of the servants could do that! They saw the Blue-Eyed Stranger dance with me! But I did hear what that girl said,’ Jen’s face fell, and she hugged her knees in dismay. ‘I don’t think anybody else did! “It’s not the right house! I don’t want to give it up! Dare we risk it again?” “I’ll manage it for you”!—Father, you don’t think she could have been a burglar, do you? I *never* thought I should dance jigs with a burglar!’

Her father and mother looked at one another anxiously. ‘It’s very upsetting!’ said Mrs Robins, in distress.

‘It’s very mysterious! If only Jen hadn’t overheard those words, we could have dismissed the guisers as merely travellers interested in the village mummers. But the girl’s remark implies that they had come here with a purpose, thinking it to be a certain house they were looking for; finding somehow—from the look of our back kitchen, apparently!—that they had come to the wrong place, they go on with the mummers, deciding to “risk it” again, and get into Lowmoor as they had got in here, with the crowd. The burglary follows.’ Mr Robins shook his head. ‘It looks queer, to say the least of it!’

‘Father, you sound just like a magistrate! She wasn’t a burglar!’

‘Very well, then, dear, she wasn’t. But she was up to something, there’s no slightest doubt of that. And it was probably something she “hadn’t oughter” been up to. Are the police trying to trace the car? You may hear more of your guiser yet!’

‘Well, I shan’t tell them what I heard her say! For it might make them think she was a burglar, and I’m sure she wasn’t. Don’t you go and say anything, if people begin asking questions, father! *You* didn’t hear what she said, you know!’ Jen was a magistrate’s daughter, and knew something of the rules of giving evidence.

‘But we must help Mrs Carr to recover her jewellery!’ Mrs Robins remonstrated. ‘Don’t be silly, Jen. If you are questioned you must tell all you

know, of course.'

'I can't give evidence as to what Jen heard,' Mr Robins acknowledged. 'But if she's questioned I can suggest they should ask her just what she did hear.'

'Father, you're not to! You mustn't tell them I heard anything! I shall say I've forgotten!'

Her father shook his head at her solemnly. 'I don't like to think of you dancing morris jigs with burglars, Jen, my child; but I will *not* have you committing perjury!'

'And I said nothing ever happened here!' Jen sighed.

The afternoon brought a visit from the village policeman, full of pompous importance and hardly-concealed delight in this, the chance of a lifetime. Jen had known him all her life, and was ordinarily on extremely good terms with old Billy Thwaites; but she was ill at ease and resentful to-day, as, in answer to his questions, she described the appearance of the unknown man and schoolgirl. The query as to what the girl had talked about while they danced she answered promptly and with would-be innocence—'About the dances, of course. She knew more about them than I, and told me several things I didn't know.' Her eyes met her father's imploringly.

'She nivver towd ye who she'd be, Miss Jen? Nowt o' her name, now?'

'Nowt!' Jen retorted laughing. 'She said she was a changeling—a fairy, you know, Billy!—and she'd vanish with the dawn, and she was just one of the mummers, and a lot more jokes like that.'

Billy closed his notebook and departed, and she hugged her father in great relief. 'You didn't give me away! You're a darling daddy!'

'That's all very well,' he said grimly. 'But this was only a very preliminary inquiry. He's suspicious of your guisers already, and is sure to trace them. If any charge should be brought against them, it would be your duty to tell all you know, my dear. For the moment, there is no harm in reserving your little bit of evidence. There may have been some quite innocent explanation of the girl's words. We will see what happens next.'

They had not long to wait. The very next night the kitchen premises were thrown into a fresh state of excitement by news brought by Alice's young man, who worked in "Tin Town"; and the story soon travelled upstairs to Jen.

She went flying to her father, triumphant and delighted. 'She wasn't a burglar—my Blue-Eyed Stranger! They've found the jewellery, all of it! It was two boys from 'Tin Town,' and Billy says he's always known they were a bad lot!'

'Well! We are having a series of sensations!' her father laughed. 'That's good news about the stolen goods, but I'm sorry about the boys.'

‘There are some very rough characters down in “Tin Town,”’ Mrs Robins said severely. ‘Who were they, Jen? And how did Billy find the things?’

‘He’s sent messages to try to find the big yellow car. *I* should think he’d want to recall them quickly, or he’ll have to apologise!’ Jen laughed. ‘He says he suspected these boys from the first, mother; he’s had his eye on them for a long time. But he talked about the strangers and the car, and made inquiries at the inn and here, just to put people off the scent. He went down into “Tin Town” and talked to people; and there he heard these boys had been spending money, treating their friends and so on; and then he went to one of the mothers and told her he knew Charlie had been in the burglary, and she cried, and gave the whole show away. The boys had to own up and produce the jewellery; they’d hidden it till they’d have time to get it to town and sell it. So that’s that! And my guiser wasn’t a burglar, after all!’

‘No, apparently she wasn’t,’ her father admitted. ‘But what did she mean by those mysterious words, Jen, my child?’

Jen nursed her knee, sitting at the end of his bed, and looked puzzled. ‘I’d like to know! But I suppose I never shall. She’s vanished, just as she said. Billy Thwaites can’t go hunting after them now. It will have to remain an unsolved mystery!’

‘I’m afraid it will. Well, Jen, if you *will* dance jigs with——’

‘Not burglars, father!’

‘No, with changelings and guisers, you must take the consequences. You’re never likely to hear of this strange girl again.’

‘No,’ Jen sighed regretfully. ‘But I’ll never say nothing happens here again! Why, any morning we may wake up and hear there’s been a murder or a robbery!’

‘Jen, dear!’ her mother remonstrated.

‘I sincerely hope we shan’t have any more,’ her father laughed.

‘I’m jolly glad I didn’t tell anybody what I heard that girl say,’ Jen added. ‘There was no need to have everybody babbling about it. Don’t you tell a soul, father! It’s nobody’s business but her own!’



## CHAPTER V

### DANCERS OLD AND NEW

Breathless, excited, eager-eyed, Jen crouched in a corner of the big barn beside cook among a crowd of villagers, while out in the cleared space eight big burly colliers danced, with tramping feet and flashing steel swords. Never in her life had she dreamed of anything like this dance; the music was only that of a concertina, played by a man standing at the side, yet every nerve in Jen's body responded to the amazing rhythm of the tramping feet.

'In big boots, you know, father!' she told him afterwards. 'And great big heavy men, miners all of them, and mostly quite old. Some were gray and some were bald! But the way they did it! The—the energy and fierceness of it; and the wonderful time of their feet! I tell you, it worked me up to something I'd never felt before. I could have shrieked with excitement! And the crowd felt it too, though they see it every Christmas. You could feel the breathlessness—everybody on edge and—and *tight* with excitement! At the end they just yelled, and I'm afraid I yelled too! Oh, I *am* glad to have seen it! I didn't know men's dancing could be like that. They went over the swords, sometimes over one and sometimes over two; and under arches of swords; and they did a rolling kind of procession, in twos, over and under one another, rather like the second figure of "Grimstock," or the changes of the Ribbon Dance. And they clashed the swords together; and then they fixed them somehow, all in a second almost, into a kind of star and held them up, all the eight in one man's hand; and they never fell to bits—they were quite firmly fixed! I'd love to know how they did it!'

'That's the lock,' her father commented. 'I saw it years ago. My grandfather told me there used to be sword-dancing in our village when he was a boy, but it had died out with the passing of the team, and no younger men had been trained to take their places. I expect a great many villages would have to say the same.'

'What a pity! But that's what my guiser-girl said, of course—that there must have been a sword-dance, but our men had forgotten it, and now they could only play about with the swords. She said it was really a part of the mumming play; or the play was a part of it! I'm not sure which. I wish I'd told her about these men! If only somebody could see them, somebody who understands, and write the dance down, so that it shouldn't be lost, Daddy! For some of those men won't be able to dance much longer; they looked like

grandfathers already! Will the dance have to stop when one of them dies? They say they do it every Christmas.'

'We'll hope they've been wise enough to train younger men to make up the team. Otherwise it will be forgotten and will soon die out.'

'It would be an awful pity!' Jen said soberly. 'It's rotten to think of these gorgeous old things being lost! Somebody ought to take on the job of saving them. Is it only in Yorkshire, you see sword-dances, father? Or is it all over England?'

But her father only knew of these dances as done in the villages of his own neighbourhood. Jen sighed. 'Well, I'm glad we live near one! I shall go to see it every Christmas, and I shall ask cook if they're training other men to have them ready. They were all dressed up, like soldiers, you know, mother! Black velvet coats with heaps of silver braid, and white cotton trousers tied on behind—so funny! And big black boots, and gaiters up to their knees, and weird little crimson caps with rosettes at the sides and ribbons down the back. They looked gorgeous!'

'I wonder the caps kept on,' her mother remarked.

'They didn't, all the time. So they had strings fastened to them, and held the ends in their mouths; yes, they did, really! And there was a clown dressed in white, and he ran round outside the dance and made jokes; and they hung the swords round his neck when they were all joined together in the star. Oh, I wish girls could learn sword-dancing!'

'Jen dear! From your description it sounds most unsuitable!' her mother remonstrated.

'Sword dances are very strictly for men only, I imagine,' her father laughed.

'I don't see why. We dance morris, and that's a man's dance. Of course, girls could never do it as those men did; I know that. But then the men have been doing it for hundreds of years; it's been handed down——'

'What, the same men?' her father teased. 'It's about time they did have a rest, in that case! Don't you think they've earned it?'

'I mean their families, their fathers and grandfathers. It's in their blood. I'm not a baby; I could see that! You wouldn't make dancers like that in a year or two. And they must have practised together for months. And then they were men! Girls could never be the same. But I don't see why they couldn't learn the dance and do it in their own way. I'd simply love to do it!'

'This is what comes of dancing jigs with burglars!' her father said solemnly. 'Now she wants to do sword-dances with men! We shall have to keep an eye on her! Your guiser-girl didn't turn up in the barn, I suppose?'

'No; I wish she had. It was jolly to see dancing in a barn again. We had a topping old barn at Wycombe, you know. I wonder if Cicely's ever seen a

sword-dance? The only kind I'd heard of before was the Scotch one, where the swords are on the ground and you dance across them, as in "Bacca-Pipes." I'd never imagined a dance where the swords were in your hands and you were joined together by them!

'After all, it seems a natural place for the swords to be!' her father laughed.

'I believe even Jack would have liked folk-dancing if she'd been given a sword to dance with!'

'Jack! She was the—er—friend you made when you first went to school, wasn't she? Why haven't we heard much about her lately?' her father asked.

'She was my husband,' Jen said with dignity, which her laughing eyes belied. 'We were married for quite two years. But her folks took her to live in London with them, and so the marriage had to come to an end. I was awfully fond of Jack! Maybe I'll see her again some day. We had a family, you know; but only for three months. Then it left, and it had been such a bother that we never had another. We decided that adopted children weren't worth the fag. I'm sure Jacky-boy would have loved to do a sword-dance!'

A few nights later, in the big back kitchen, she gave her first lesson to a dozen small children from the village; and the following night repeated it for a score of youngsters from 'Tin Town.' The two sets would not mix well, she was warned, and there was very little intercourse between the 'Tin Town' people in the valley and the original inhabitants in the gray stone hamlet on the hilltop.

Her own observation soon told her that the children were of very different natures, those from 'Tin Town' being more of the city type, children of mechanics and trained workers, in most cases; while the villagers were thorough-going country children, whose parents were farmers or farm-labourers, small shopkeepers, shepherds, and the like. The two sets mutually disliked and were suspicious of one another, the village looking on 'Tin Town' as interlopers, the more travelled inhabitants of the bungalows cordially despising the dwellers among the fields. So Jen wisely taught them on separate nights, and found great differences in their powers of understanding, but no difference at all in their delight in this new interest. The country dances made an instant appeal to both parties, and their enjoyment was obvious—pathetic, indeed, in its revelation of their need of some such outlet. They had felt it instinctively, but without understanding; had known they were dull, without knowing what to ask for; for the city was too far away to allow of frequent visits to 'pictures' or theatres on the part of the elder children, and there had been no one to exert himself for the sake of the little ones.

New recruits stopped Jen continually as she cycled through the lanes or along the moorland roads, begging to be allowed to join ‘the dancing’; within a week a request came from ‘Tin Town’ for a class for bigger girls, Jen’s present age-limit being twelve. She was very doubtful of this new venture, feeling her want of experience, and would have preferred to make a success of the little ones first; but the girls were so insistent, and so earnest in their promises of good behaviour, and so pathetically eager for ‘something new to do,’ that with her mother’s rather reluctant consent and her father’s eager approval she promised to give them a trial.

‘It’s good for the child,’ her father argued. ‘She’s looking brighter already. She thinks of those classes all day long; I believe she dreams of them all night too. As for the children, it’s invaluable—exactly what they’ve been needing.’

‘Some of those “Tin Town” girls are very rough,’ Mrs Robins said doubtfully. ‘I wouldn’t like Jen to have any difficulty.’

‘Let cook sit in the room, if it would ease your mind. I’m going to watch myself, one of these days. The girls are keen, and that will help. Jen has only to threaten that they shan’t come again, and they’ll do anything she wants. And it’s tremendously good for them.’

When her classes were over, Jen would go flying up to her father’s room, and dropping on the end of his bed, or at his feet as he sat by the fire, would tell her experiences.

‘It’s priceless, Daddy! We nearly hurt ourselves with laughing. The girls are the funniest; the kiddies are so serious over it, and work so hard; and really they aren’t half bad. They’re still at the stage when you run and skip naturally, you see; of course, they’ve no idea of rhythm, and just stare when I tell them to keep time to the music; but I think that will come. They aren’t stiff, and they aren’t afraid to try new things. They took to “Peascods” like ducks to water—though their clapping’s still very weird! But it’s getting better. But the girls—! They’re too gorgeous for words. They’re mostly over fourteen, and one or two are older than I am, and it’s years since they skipped about, and they can’t imagine running and skipping being real dancing steps. They want to do all kinds of fancy movements; I have to be awfully strict! They can’t believe how simple it really is; they’d turn it into something weird and difficult and—and fancy, if I’d let them.’

‘But you don’t let them?’ her father laughed.

‘Goodness, no! Joan’s hair would stand on end, and Cicely would have a fit, if they saw those girls trying to point their toes and hold up their skirts—quite short skirts, you know!—as if they were ballet dancers! Oh, I’m fearfully strict! But I’d no idea our dances were so funny! Does it seem

frightfully funny to you to run forward four steps, holding your partner's hand?'

'I've heard funnier jokes,' her father said gravely.

'Those girls giggled no end when I made them try. As for running back four steps, that was simply too funny for words. They all went at different speeds, and banged into one another, and roared with laughing till I nearly fell into the gramophone, and was almost too sore to go on. I don't know when I've laughed so much. They simply can't run in small neat steps; either they fly all over the place or they stand still and giggle. I had no idea running was so difficult; I don't remember finding it so hard! I simply took Joan's hand, that first day on the cloister garth, and we ran forward and back, and that was all there was about it. But it's an absolute mystery to these girls! As for skipping—well, the first week I sent them home to practise, and to get the little ones to show them how to do it. This week I made them do "Brighton Camp," and led it myself—without any music, unfortunately. But they could skip by the time they were done with it; they were nearly dead, too, between tiredness and laughing. They won't be able to move for stiffness to-morrow. You see, they work so frightfully hard!—far harder than they need. They skip like horses, pulling their knees right up, for one thing. They don't seem able to do it easily.'

'Did all last week's girls turn up?' her mother asked.

'Rather! They wouldn't miss for anything. And six more came, and they say still more want to. I had eighteen to-night.'

'You mustn't take too many, my dear.'

'Oh, it's easier with a lot! They all laugh at one another! But sometimes I could throw the records at them,' and Jen grew grave. 'A joke's all very well, and apparently country dancing's very funny when you've never done it before. I didn't know it was, but it seems to be! I don't mind them laughing; classes must be jolly! But sometimes they giggle in a silly way that makes me want to shake them all. Why do they do it, mother? We never used to! They can't forget about themselves; they're thinking all the time how funny they must look. They *do* look funny, but I dare say we did when we began, but we never used to think about it. We just enjoyed it. I remember my first dance-evening,' she said thoughtfully, nursing her knees and gazing into the fire. 'It was in the big hall in Joy's house, during the dip. time, when the whole school went to the Abbey for the summer term—just after Joan had found the abbey treasures, the church plate, and the books and manuscripts, but before we'd discovered the hermit's church, and the well, and the jewels. We had a practice dance, everybody in gym tunics, no dressing-up, and Joan took me all down the line and up again in "The Mary and Dorothy," and I danced "Hey, Boys" and "Rufty" and "Bonnetts" and

“Galopede” and “We Won’t Go Home Till Morning”! I dare say my steps were frightful and I looked awfully funny; but I don’t remember ever thinking about it. I enjoyed every minute of it. If I’d been one of these girls I’d have been giggling at myself all the evening. Why are they like that, mother?’

‘You were younger, only thirteen. They are in the very self-conscious stage,’ her mother suggested.

‘They are, of course. It’s awful! But none of our girls were like that?’

‘Don’t you think that may be because they had got out of it before your day, and you unconsciously adopted the attitude of all the rest, and were as natural about it as they were?’ her father remarked. ‘You had the help of all the others, who had been at it for some time; you copied them, without thinking about it.’

Jen nodded gravely. ‘I see. They made the—the proper feeling, of enjoying it and forgetting oneself, and I just dropped into it. Yes, I think that’s right. I wonder if they were giggly when they started? That would depend on Cicely, I suppose; she set them all dancing, and it would depend whether she was natural about it or not. But she would be, of course; she’s never anything else. Seems to me we all owe a jolly lot to her; not only the definite dances, but the—the jolly easy feeling——’

‘The natural atmosphere,’ her father suggested.

‘Yes, she gave us that. Then—then I suppose I’—she paused suddenly and flushed. ‘I say, it’s rather cheek of me, Daddy!’

‘You have to play Cicely for these “Tin Town” girls. You have to create their atmosphere. There’s no doubt of that, Jen; they’ll take their cue from you.’

‘It’s rather a big thing!’ Jen contemplated the fire again. ‘I thought it was just going to be a case of jolly evenings to cheer us all up. But seems to me there’s more in it than that. Seems to me it may make them quite different kind of girls. I say, don’t you think perhaps it *is* rather cheek of me?’

‘If you don’t want to go on with it, the sooner you stop the better,’ suggested the practical mother.

Jen’s father eyed her gravely. ‘*Do* you want to go on with it, Jen?’

Jen, staring into the fire, was seeing visions. ‘Oh, I do!’ she cried softly. ‘It might help them not to be so silly—to get outside themselves—to think bigger things altogether! Don’t you think it might help them, really?’

‘Of course I do. There’s education in it, in the sense of development; and character; and art. Give them all those, with your music and beautiful movements, and give them a common interest that will hold them together and take them outside their everyday lives; and you won’t have done such a little thing, my dear.’

‘It rather frightens me, though!’ and Jen turned anxious eyes on him. ‘I’m only a kid! Perhaps I oughtn’t to try. I hadn’t thought folk-dancing was such a big thing. If I give it to them wrongly, then I may do harm. Perhaps I’d better not go on.’

‘You’re worrying the child, father!’ Mrs Robins said indignantly.

‘I don’t think so. I should forget all about this now, Jen; or nearly forget it. Let it lie at the back of your mind; it will help you to keep on the right lines; but don’t let it worry you. You won’t give the girls anything wrong; you love it too much—just as, I’ve no doubt, your Cicely did. You must teach them as she taught you, that’s all. But it won’t hurt your work for you to have a high ideal of it. Don’t feel you’re doing a little thing!’

Jen nodded soberly. ‘I see what you mean. But I must enjoy it, Daddy, or the girls won’t.’

‘Of course not. Everything depends on you. They’ll copy you without knowing it. If you’re going to teach them to be natural and unselfconscious, you must be absolutely so yourself. If they are to enjoy the music and the dancing, they must see that you enjoy them most of all.’

After a long thoughtful silence, Jen summed up the situation as she saw it. ‘Yes! All that about it doing them real good is interesting and rather wonderful, and I’m glad to have thought about it. But it seems to me what I’ve got to *do* is just to have as good a time as I can, and make them enjoy the classes; and see if I can make them love it all as I do.’

‘Exactly! You won’t go wrong along those lines. And the very first night I think it would be safe I’m coming along to watch.’

‘Oh, not yet!’ Jen pleaded laughing. ‘They’d simply die! At Wycombe we used rather to like having people to watch, because we felt they were enjoying it so. But these girls haven’t nearly got to that stage yet! They’d hurt themselves with giggling! But some day, perhaps in the summer, or next winter, when they’ve learnt to be sensible, I’m going to have an open evening and invite their friends—and you two, of course!—and each class will do two or three dances. It would be good for them; don’t you think so?’

‘Better have the hall in “Tin Town,” and give a real show,’ her father laughed.

‘We’ll see!’ Jen’s eyes sparkled. ‘Perhaps we could have it when Joan comes here in the summer! That would be topping!’ and she forgot possible responsibilities in the glorious prospect.

Her father saw it with relief, for he feared lest he had said too much. ‘What dances did you do to-night?’ he asked.

‘Besides “Brighton Camp”!’ and Jen laughed again at the memory of that exciting episode. ‘Oh, “Peascods,” of course; and they all sat on the floor—they thought even that was rather funny! Everything’s funny to them!’

—and I told them they'd been worshipping the sacred tree on the village green; and their eyes were the size of saucers. Then we did the first figure of "The Black Nag," for practice in slipping step; and the couples all banged into one another, and they simply shrieked with laughing. As for turning single on the spot, that was too funny for words! And I tried "Butterfly" and taught them to swing and change; and if you'd seen the muddles with the arches! They tried to behead one another, and nearly hurt themselves with laughing. And women get into the men's ring in "Peascods," and men get left out, and then try to fight their way in when it's too late. Oh, it's a priceless time! But I do enjoy it. And so do they!'



## CHAPTER VI

### WAKING UP THE VILLAGE

‘Eh, Miss Jen!’ said an old woman in the village one spring day. ‘It be a reet canny sight to see ye flyin’ down t’ ro-oad, in all t’ pretty colours!’

Jen mounted her cycle and rode off laughing. But the words stayed in her mind, and, thinking the matter over seriously, she realised that her vivid jumpers and jerseys must indeed be unusual spots of colour in that gray neighbourhood. The whole village, perched high on a windy ridge with bleak moors all round, was gray and cold; the houses and garden walls were of rough gray stone; there was not a red brick house to be seen. As yet not even crocuses were showing in the gardens; the trees were still bare, and the moors brown and lifeless. She looked at her emerald jumper and cap, her yellow sports’ coat, her pink jersey and her blue one; she loved all colours and, fair, with her hair in two long yellow plaits, she could wear them all; but she admitted that no one else hereabouts wore such vivid things.

‘I must jolly well show up miles away! Even the “Tin Town” girls don’t rise to jumpers like mine! But they’re always looking at mine; I believe they’d like to wear them if they had them. Why shouldn’t they? We made our own at school! I never saw such a gray, chilly set of houses in my life, and it seems to have got into the people somehow! I’ll—I’ll bring some colour into that village, or know the reason why!’ Jen vowed, with solemn resolution, and at her next classes she proposed to the girls that they should knit their own jumpers, in the prettiest colours they could find. The village girls had been apathetic about knitting, but they had, indeed, been eyeing Jen’s greens and blues and pinks and yellows with longing eyes; the Wycombe school, of course, had been knitting like mad for years, and Jen, like the others, had jumpers in every colour she fancied.

Her suggestion was adopted with enthusiasm, and her help demanded on every side. Her mother consented to buy the wool, on the understanding that the girls paid a few pennies a week till they had covered the cost. ‘It wouldn’t be good for them to get it all for nothing,’ Mrs Robins said. ‘If you give them help and advice, and let them pay gradually, that will be far better for them, and they’ll value the garments more.’

So in the intervals of dances, Jen was surrounded by an eager crowd, intent on stitches, borders, and intakes; and she looked forward laughingly but eagerly to the summer, when the lanes would be full of girls in every

colour of the rainbow; but, thanks to her guidance, colours that would be beautiful and not crude.

‘We’ll wake up this old village in time, between our dancing and our jumpers!’ her father mocked.

‘We mean to!’ Jen assented. ‘Some day I’m going to give them singing too, but I don’t want to take on too much all at once, and I don’t know just the right kind of songs. I want some that will fit the dances, and I don’t know where to get them. We had rather stupid songs at school; I won’t give those to the girls! The first girl to wear her jumper will burst with pride, you know. I’m making one too, and we’re all having a race.’

‘You! You’ve got a dozen already!’

‘Oh no! Only four. I’m making a lovely amethyst one, with a darker collar; I’ve always wanted one. But I’m going slowly; I wouldn’t like mine to be the first done.’

‘And do you leave the boys out of all the fun? Can’t they join in the dancing too?’

‘I asked them, when the girls had been at it for a fortnight,’ Jen’s face clouded. ‘I thought it would be jolly to have boy partners; and it would have been good for the girls too. Teach ’em not to be too silly I But the boys call it “girls’ stooff,” and won’t have anything to do with us. Of course, what they’d love would be to learn a sword-dance. Every single one of them would come for that! But I can’t teach them, and I don’t know anybody who could. Cook’s men live too far away.’

‘They wouldn’t teach it outside their own village, anyway, I expect,’ her father said thoughtfully.

‘I wonder about morris?’ Jen’s eyes brightened. ‘Perhaps they’d come for that! I was thinking of trying it with the girls, but if I could get hold of the boys through morris, it would be far better if the girls didn’t try it, of course. It was always a man’s dance long ago! I believe I’ll try—with sticks, you know. That “Blue-Eyed Stranger” girl who came with the mummers said I ought to see men dance morris. I say, Daddy! I’m going to have one more try for the boys! If they like it, they may come into the country dancing with the girls later on.’

‘Your girls will want to do morris too,’ her father warned her.

‘Well, they can’t; not at first, anyway. The boys won’t believe it’s a man’s dance if the girls do it too.’

Morris sticks were easily made, and one day Jen’s cycle stood at the gate of the boys’ school when they all came out at mid-day, while she, with her arms full of sticks, invited any who cared to come up to the house that evening and learn how to use them. The boys had one use, at least, about which they never hesitated, and were all prepared to hit one another over the

head, or to use the sticks as swords or clubs. But several had seen the dance between Jen and the guiser-girl, with its hopping step, its tapping, and its swift glancing-up-and-down strokes of the flashing white sticks. Several boys turned up for the first lesson, enjoyed it, and went home to tell their friends and to ransack the shops of all the nearer villages for bells to wear below their knees, in imitation of Jen's. The bells were a great attraction; the girls wore no bells for their dancing! The class doubled in size within a fortnight, and Jen had to refuse to take any more unless they formed a second class and came at a different time. 'Rigs' and 'Bean-Setting' captured them at once, and Jen foresaw that 'Shepherd's Hey' would soon be necessary, in spite of its more difficult track movements. She introduced them to handkerchief dances, and was surprised herself by the vigour they put into 'Blue-Eyed Stranger' and 'Trunkles.' 'Capers' won their hearts, though they found the side-step difficult; Jen, watching their efforts with some misgivings, remembered often her 'guiser's' criticism, and wondered apprehensively if there might have been some foundation for it, after all.

Then, one great night, the boys asked if they might stay to watch the girls for a time, and were allowed to do so, on promise of very good behaviour. Jen, with deliberate mischief in her eyes, lined the girls up for 'Brighton Camp,' and saw envy and eagerness dawn in the watching faces as the procession skipped gaily down the room and up again, the top couple swung down the 'aisle,' and all swung round and round in their places.

'That be jolly fine!' she heard one say.

'Soom foon tha-at!' another agreed. 'Joost champion, it be!'

'Would you like to join in?' she asked innocently, and held out her hands to one. 'Come in with me; join on at the end! I'll keep you right!'

The first bold pioneer enjoyed his turn so much that he called to his friends to 'Coom on in, you chaps!' and two by two the boys joined the line, the girls laughing but with no time to make remarks.

Jen took her partner from top to bottom in fine style; this left two boys as leaders, and they 'ramped all over the place,' as she said afterwards, but enjoyed themselves hugely, while at sight of them going down the middle together the girls were nearly helpless with laughter.

Presently Jen called a halt. 'I'll give you something new; something nobody knows. But sit down a minute and get your breath. Now the boys must all dance on one side and the girls on the other; it looks awfully silly to see two boys together. Divide yourselves up; take partners, I mean; but don't waste time about it. Just take anybody. We'll do "Galopede"; then you boys can watch while we do some set dances. If you think you'd like to join in any of them, you must come next week and learn the movements in earnest.'

‘Galopede,’ with its running lines, won all their hearts, and by the time the boys had watched ‘Mage’ and ‘Peascods’ they began to think they would like to come regularly. ‘We Won’t Go Home Till Morning’ and ‘Pop Goes the Weasel,’ taught to the whole crowd, completed their conquest, and Jen, dismissing them at last, went up, weary but laughing and very happy, to tell her father that the morris had proved a successful bait, and that the boys had voted country dancing ‘not half bad, after all.’

‘They’ll be knitting jumpers next,’ her father teased.

The problem of music had long since become acute, of course; Jen’s ambitions could not long be kept within the bounds of a few gramophone records, many of whose dances would be far beyond the powers of her classes for many a day. She regretfully put ‘Newcastle’ and ‘Parson’s Farewell’ aside; and there were others she did not know herself. But music for ‘Brighton Camp’ and ‘Galopede’ became imperative and she set all her girls and boys to the solving of the problem. Various bashful budding violinists were produced among the ‘Tin Town’ tribes, and one after another was invited to try what she could do with the music Jen had sent for from town. But they stumbled, and, to Jen’s consternation, were so conscientious that if they played a wrong note they went back to correct it, and so ruined their rhythm and drove Jen nearly crazy, while the class hopped about on one foot and waited ‘till the tune would let them go on,’ or, worse still and much more frequently, disregarded it entirely and went on their way with no reference to the music.

Jen was in despair, when some one reminded her that old Billy Thwaites, the village policeman, could play the concertina. Jen promptly interviewed him, mindful of the man who had played for the sword-dancers in cook’s village, and found she had stumbled on a treasure. Billy loved ‘tunes’ and quite understood the need to ‘go *on*, go straight *on*, whatever happens,’ on which Jen insisted so emphatically. She played the tunes she wanted to him once, Billy at first shy in the unusual surroundings of the big drawing-room and the grand piano, but soon forgetting everything in his delight in the music; he was one of those self-taught natural musicians who could play anything by ear, and, stamping his foot to catch the time, knew instinctively what Jen meant by rhythm. Thereafter Jen was happy, the girls and boys could have any dance they wanted in the big empty kitchen, and Billy spent more jolly evenings and laughed longer and more heartily than he had done for years, and, moreover, was distinctly useful in controlling the boys when their feelings became too much for them at times. It was not every one, as Jen said, who had a tame policeman to play for her classes! He was never satisfied and never tired, and as he was not dancing himself, he was always

urging them on, even during the intervals Jen thought necessary for rest and discussion of jumpers.

Her father slipped in to watch one evening, unnoticed for some time by the boys, who were learning the hand-clapping of the ‘Shepherd’s Hey’ jig with great gusto and much laughter at first. Billy, perched on a wide windowsill, jeered at their efforts at the cross-back-step, but Jen knew the difficulty and was more patient. She stood on a chair encouraging and explaining—‘Across! Never mind the “apart” bit; that will happen of itself. Cross your feet closely, and let them go out again, like scissors. Like this!’ and she jumped from her chair to show what she meant.

Her father watched with interest and amusement and some surprise the air of authority with which she controlled the boys, and still more the manner with which she presently greeted and directed the big girls from ‘Tin Town,’ when they arrived, eager for their turn, inclined to be noisy and giggly still, but all instantly yielding to a word from her. They crowded round her to show the progress in their knitting, while the boys played about with the morris sticks, threatening Billy and sparring with one another. Then Jen, mindful of the audience she had discovered and smiled to, mounted her chair again and called for ‘Galopede.’ Billy struck up the tune, the boys caught hands and the girls did the same, the long lines ran up to meet, fell back, crossed over, turned their partners, and the top couple swung to the bottom, while all the rest clapped in time to the music.

‘That’s first rate!’ and Mr Robins came out of his corner. ‘I congratulate you all! You’re doing splendidly. Let me see something else, won’t you?’

Jen, with laughing eyes, called for ‘Brighton Camp,’ but shook her head when he begged her to join in with him. ‘You’d have heart failure, Daddy. It’s hardly worth it. Now I’m going to teach them something new. “Haste to the Wedding,” please, Billy; you know, this one!’ and she hummed the first few bars. From her chair she gave swift clear directions; then came down to be ‘first man’ and show them what she meant. ‘Now try that! Don’t be silly, Violet. There’s nothing to laugh about. Just nod to Jack and turn away quickly; you haven’t time for more. Can’t you feel the music driving you on? Some of you don’t seem to feel the—the push the music gives you; the swing of it. Don’t curtsey, Maud; there’s far too little time; just nod. Now both hands to the man and turn gently, running. Lift the girls’ hands, as I told you, boys! Don’t grab hold of them so roughly. Now try again!’

‘You don’t wear your gym things for dancing, then?’ her father asked, as they went upstairs when the class was over. ‘You did at school, didn’t you?’

‘Yes, always, for practising. I’d have liked to,’ Jen said soberly. ‘I love a tunic; it’s so comfy. But I thought about it a lot, and decided I’d better not, especially with those big girls. You see, I look about eleven! Nobody would

believe I'm over sixteen. Some of them are as old as I am, so I couldn't afford to look an infant. I want to look important, you know! So I decided it was my duty to wear a jumper and a longer skirt.'

'I've no doubt you're right. Here's a letter for you,' and her father paused by the big table in the hall. He took his own letters and went on to describe to his wife the scene in the back kitchen—the dancing laughing boys and girls, the jolly-faced policeman with the accordion on the window-sill, and Jen standing on her chair, in gray skirt and emerald jumper, a long yellow plait hanging over one shoulder, the other flung back, her face watchful as she corrected mistakes, missing nothing, pulled up a rowdy girl, scolded a boy who was always late in his movements, explained points which had been misunderstood, then sprang down to stand in the midst and show how setting or siding ought to be done, or to explain what somebody was doing wrongly. She made fun of the mistakes, caricaturing the awkward movements till even the victim had to laugh and all the rest shouted, though many looked self-conscious and guilty and wondered why she had not fallen upon them instead; but she did it so gently and tactfully that nobody's feelings were hurt.

'I wonder they don't mind when you jeer at them!' her father had said to her, during an interval.

'Oh, but I'm careful!' Jen had answered swiftly. 'I know which of them I mustn't laugh at. Most of them don't care a scrap. But there are one or two I wouldn't laugh at for *pounds*! They'd never come again!'

'I can quite believe it. But how do you know which they are?'

'I don't know how. By looking at them, Daddy. I just know! I'd hate to hurt their feelings, and I know which have feelings and which haven't. I can't tell you how, but I do know.'

Her father was repeating this remark to his wife, with an appreciative chuckle, when Jen came flying into the room, letter in hand, her face radiant.

'Mother! Father! The most *topping* idea! It's from Cicely! Oh, you must let me go! Just listen!'

And sitting together round the fire, they read the President's letter.

## CHAPTER VII

### A NEW KIND OF SCHOOL

‘Jenny-Wren!—The most gorgeous plan for next August! You simply must come. Joan and Joy are going, and I’m just counting the days. And we’d like you to make the fourth.

‘I’ll tell you all about it. I’ve found out heaps of things we ought to have known years ago. I made friends with a jolly girl on the boat coming home from Ceylon, and before very long I found out that she was as keen on folk-dancing as if she’d been brought up in the Hamlet Club. We talked a lot about it, and I found that she knew heaps that I didn’t; don’t tell the Wycombe girls! She knows morris dances that we’ve never dreamt of; some with great thick sticks two feet long; she showed me the tapping with walking-sticks, and I was simply fascinated. She seemed to know everything, all the dances that we have the music for in our books. I’ve an awful fear creeping over me that we may be wrong in little points here and there; you can’t be sure when you’ve learnt from a book, you know! And she talked about a wonderful thing called Running Set, that was found in America, but is really Old English; it goes on for hours, figures and figures of it. And she knows sword-dances’—Jen stopped in her reading to look up at her parents with a gasp of excitement—‘wonderful things with long wooden swords, and steel swords, and bending swords she calls “rappers”; all with old village names, after the places they came from.’

‘Perhaps she knows ours!’ Jen cried excitedly. ‘I never dreamt any one was interested in them! And *I’m* going to learn them!—if you’ll let me go! Oh, Daddy! Mother! I must!’

‘There’s a society in London,’ Cicely’s letter went on. ‘And they teach the dances all the year round, and have parties for their members. Last week I stayed a night in London with my friend, and she took me to a Country Dance Party as a visitor. Fifty or sixty people, Jen, all grown-up, in evening dress, dancing “Haste to the Wedding” and “Old Mole” and “Mage” and “Mary and Dorothy” and “Newcastle,” just as we used to do at school and in the barn, and ending up with a glorious “Sellenger’s Round.” I felt as if I must be dreaming it; I’d never imagined grown people, London people, cared for our dances like that. Of course, they think they’re *their* dances, and we’re just outsiders playing at it! I suppose that’s so, really. Well, I’m going to be a member and go up to town for parties, and get somebody to put me up for the night, or I’ll know the reason why! But best of all, kid, they have

schools for folk-dancing in the holidays, and people go from all over the country. We can't go to the Easter one now; they've been all booked up for weeks. But I'm going in August, for all four weeks, and I want you to come too. It's at Cheltenham; they say it's relaxing, but very pretty country, and the air's all right up on the hills. My friend can't go; she's getting married in July, unfortunately. I can't think why people do; it interrupts everything so dreadfully! But I'm going, and Joan and Joy, and you! We'll ask to be in classes together, and we'll get rooms and live together, and it will be just exactly like being back at school, except that the classes will all be for dancing. There are lectures, too, all about the history and folk-lore of the dances; I'm afraid I didn't know there was any! And demonstrations, when the people who teach show you how the dances look when they're done perfectly; there were some people dancing at that party, and—well, it was different from anything *we* do, that's all! I guess they must have been the teacher-people; I was just hungry to see them do some more. They didn't do any morris, of course; only country dances. And they have folk-singing every morning, and a party once a week, at night; and exams, when you can get certificates for dancing. Think of that! I'd rather like to go in for it. Hundreds of people go, mostly teachers or students from college; you must make heaps of friends and meet all kinds of jolly interesting people. And we'd learn sword-dances, and the weird running thing. Now you'll come, won't you? Think what topping fun it will be! I don't know how I'm going to exist till August!

'I haven't any news, except about the school! Oh, yes, though; there is one most important item! The Hamlet Club's a grandmother! Its first baby has arrived! Fortunately it's a girl. Mirry's the genius, of course; as she was our first Queen it's highly suitable! The girls are delighted, and I'm to be its godmother. Mirry doesn't like me calling it "It"; but there's so very little of it so far! When it gets a little bigger, I may remember it's a she. Anyway, Mirry seems quite well pleased with it. Fancy Mirry with a baby! Funny to think of, isn't it?

'Well, good-bye till August! Write at once to say you're coming, and I'll get everything fixed up. I don't know how I'm going to wait four months!'

'I don't know either!' Jen cried softly. 'Oh, mother, I may go, mayn't I? With Cicely and Joan! Think of it!'

'I vote we let you go,' her father said promptly. 'After all you've done for the children here, you deserve a bit of fun for yourself.'

'Oh, I've loved doing it! I've had as good a time as they have. But I do feel I want to learn more, and to know if I'm teaching them properly. I want to be criticised, and be in a class myself; it would be gorgeous fun! And I could teach the boys sword-dances next winter! Oh, mother dear!'



‘But if it’s a relaxing place, isn’t it rather silly to go there for your holidays?’ her mother demurred. ‘You’ll feel it dreadfully after our strong air here.’

‘Nine hundred feet up, and nothing between us and the moors! Yes, I shall be as floppy as I always was at Wycombe for the first few days of the term. But considering where I live all the rest of the year, I don’t think a few weeks in a warm place will do me much harm, mother, and Cicely says it’s all right on the hills. The moors will soon put me right again when I come home.’

‘We’d better carry out that plan you were proposing, and all go to Scarborough for July,’ said her father. ‘That will brace you up for a month’s hard work in the balmy south!’

Jen’s face was radiant, for she knew he meant her to go. Even a letter which came from Joan a few days later, telling that the promised visit could not take place at present, as her mother had been ill and would need her for some time, could not damp her spirits. For Mrs Shirley was sure to be better long before August, and then they would all meet at Cheltenham, and Joan could pay her visit in September.

‘This must have been what my guiser-girl was talking about!’ she broke out one time, after sitting dreaming of the happy time before her.

‘The burglar? You haven’t forgotten her, then?’

‘Daddy, she *wasn’t* a burglar! No, I often think of what she said about my side-step, and wonder if it was true. I shall find out at this school, I suppose. She said I ought to go to school in August, and she mentioned Cheltenham. Perhaps I’ll find out about all the other queer things she said—the Tom and the Betty, and all about the sword-dancers, and all that. Perhaps that’s where she had learned it all!’

‘Perhaps you’ll meet her there?’

Jen turned with startled eyes. ‘Perhaps I shall! She’d evidently been. I say, how simply thrilling!’

‘Jen, I will *not* have you making friends with burglars!’

‘She wasn’t! Oh, Daddy, how you tease! But she’s another reason for looking forward to August—my “Blue-Eyed Stranger”!’ Jen said fervently. ‘Besides, I want some dancing! It will be quite a change to get doing some myself! I don’t get much, you know, stuck up there on a chair watching the classes. I join in now and then, but mostly I have to keep an eye on them. I’d just love to dance again as I used to do at school, with nothing on my mind, and nobody’s mistakes or bad style to look out for! It will be priceless fun to be in a class and be taught, after trying my hand at teaching! I’m going to count the days, as we used to do at school!’

## CHAPTER VIII

### A ROOM WITH SEVEN BEDS IN IT

‘But what made you think of asking *me*?’ Jen, brown from a month of East Coast sea air and radiantly happy, sat at a little table in the station restaurant and looked eagerly at Cicely. Her train had arrived just before the one from London; it was only ten minutes since she had thrown herself rapturously into Joan’s arms as she and Joy and Cicely stepped on to the platform.

Cicely had promptly taken charge of the luggage of the whole party and sent it off by a porter to their address; and then, in the high-handed manner characteristic of ‘The President,’ had led them all to the café for coffee and cakes and a chat, though all had had lunch on the train an hour before.

‘Joan wanted you, my dear kid,’ Joy said airily. ‘You were her one and only idea. “Send for Jenny-Wren from the wilds of Yorkshire,” said she. “She’d like to see us again.” Seemed quite sure of *that*. So the President sent, and you came, and it’s time for the curtain to go up for the next act.’

‘Or the bell to ring for school to begin!’ Joan laughed. ‘Don’t you remember the old bell at Wycombe?’

‘And us coming in late from lunch in the dairy, and tearing across the playground like lunatics. Don’t I just!’ Joy said solemnly. ‘I have indigestion whenever I think of it.’

‘I knew you’d be keener on it than most, Jenny-Wren,’ Joan laughed. ‘I suggested you for exactly and precisely the same reason that I once asked you to join in my moonlight dance in the Abbey. Do you remember?’

‘*Do I?* The first time I saw “Newcastle”! The night we had supper at two in the morning, on cushions in the cloisters, and you told Cicely about Lady Jehane and her jewels! And the next day we went and found them!—you and I!’

‘Children!’ said the President peremptorily. ‘This will *not* do! I’ve no doubt we shall do heaps of “Do you remember” before we’re done, but we needn’t begin it before we’ve been together half-an-hour. The present is quite thrilling enough! Do you realise that it is two o’clock; that before supper we shall know all, or nearly all, about it—what the school’s going to be like; who our teacher is and what kind of a person she is; a jolly lot will depend on that!—what the college is like and where it is; what kind of people we’ve got to put up with in our class; and what dances we are going to do! I hope we get some new ones. And before all that we’ve got to find

our house and see our rooms and our landlady and unpack and get into tunics; I'm told they wear them all the time, so we may as well do the proper thing. So come on, all of you, and get to business!

'It's a little school house, you know, Jen,' Joan explained, 'kept by two Miss Wilsons; they go away for August, but they said the caretaker, Mrs Hunt, might take people for the Vacation School. I expect the house will be rather bare; we shall feel we're at boarding-school, that's all! I wonder if she'll have taken any other school people besides us!'

'What do they call us? Students!' said Joy, and solemnly chanted a sentence from the school programme which had caused her intense delight. '“Women students are requested to wear long coats over their gymnasium costume in the streets!” As if we'd go skipping about all legs! I think it's topping!'

'I want to see the house, so come along,' said Cicely. 'I asked for two double rooms, one with an extra single bed in it, if possible; if not, we'll have to take a single room and toss up for it, but it would be jollier to be together. Nobody will want to be odd man out.'

'But there aren't five of us!' Jen remonstrated.

Cicely gave her a quick look. 'Yes, I've asked a friend. It's all right, Jen; you won't mind her. She had friends to travel with, so she'll be there before us.'

'She'll have had her pick of the beds,' said Joy. 'I don't want to be the odd one! But I'm not going to sleep with Joan; that would be just like home. I think I'll have you, President.'

'We'll decide when we see the rooms. Don't look so upset, Jenny-Wren. You won't mind my friend, honestly you won't.'

Jen's face had fallen. 'I thought it was to be just us Hamlet lot. Don't you think it would have been heaps jollier, Joan?' she whispered, as Cicely laughed and turned to pay the bill. 'Any old outsider will spoil everything!'

'It was Cicely's idea. And you know she always does boss and get her own way. You've got to humour the President. But I don't think you'll mind, really, Jenny-Wren.'

'Wherever are we getting to?' Cicely exclaimed, as they left the main streets, turned out of a by-road by a big gateway, and found a green lawn surrounded by railings, with two splendid trees, a carriage drive sweeping round in a half-circle, and a row of white houses, shut off from the traffic of the town.

'*Most* quiet and retired!' Joy drawled. 'When my old bike comes I shall tootle up and down the drive! Some swank!'

'Oh, are you going to have the motor-bike?' Jen's eyes glowed in anticipation of possible rides.

‘Rather! She’s coming along by herself, though; preferred to travel alone! Ought to get here on Monday.’

‘Here’s our house,’ and Cicely led the way to a little gate, where a strip of lawn lay before the windows of a white house.

Two girls were sitting here in deck chairs, and the four glanced at them as they passed, with the same thought. Were these also ‘women students’? They were only schoolgirls, however, of about Jen’s age; one, with a long fair plait and frank blue eyes, returned the look of the new-comers with keen interest; the other wore big spectacles and had a heavy plait of bright brown hair.

But none of the ‘Hamlet lot’ looked twice at these strange girls. For in the doorway stood a slim figure in short blue tunic and green girdle, with black bobbed hair; and at sight of her Jen shot forward with a shriek of delight, while the other three laughed in sympathy.

‘Jack! Jacky-boy! Are *you* Cicely’s friend? She *might* have told me! Oh, how simply tophole! How—how awfully kind! How ripping!’

‘Wife of my heart!’ gasped Jack, strangling in Jen’s embrace.

‘You’ve not grown much, hubby,’ Jen said severely. ‘I’m still about two feet taller than you. I don’t like looking down on my husband!’

‘Then why don’t you stop and let me catch up? You keep going on and on!’ Jack complained.

‘I still remember the day the Wren hurled herself on Jacky-boy at the gate of the Hall, with squeals of joy,’ Cicely laughed. ‘Now, Jenny-Wren, aren’t you sorry for all the things you’ve been thinking of me all the way from the station?’

‘Cicely, you’d better come in and see Mrs Hunt,’ Jack faltered. ‘There’s some bother about our rooms. We were waiting for you to come and settle it.’

‘Bother about rooms? What does she mean? She hasn’t gone and let them to some one else, has she? Come and help me tackle her, Joan!’ and Cicely strode into the house, indignant and businesslike.

‘What’s the trouble, Jacqueline?’ Joy inquired.

‘She wants our rooms for somebody else, and she wants us to share with some other girls who are coming to the school. But they haven’t arrived yet.’

‘What utter rot!’ Joy cried wrathfully. ‘She promised us rooms; she’ll have to stick to it!’

‘Cicely will see to it;’ Jen had absolute confidence in the President. ‘Jacky-boy, tell me why you’re here? *You* aren’t a folk-dancer! Are you going in for it at last?’

‘I’m here to spend the holidays with you,’ Jack explained. ‘But I’m going to classes. I always liked your dancing, but I couldn’t give up cricket

for it at school. But now I'm going to have a shot at it. I won't be able to be in your class, though. I don't know the first thing, and you four know such heaps.'

'No, you're a beginner! But we're all beginners in sword-dancing. Perhaps we'll be together there. You'll love it!—Oh, President, what's the matter?'

'Matter enough,' Cicely's face was full of wrath. 'Come in, all of you, and talk this over,' and they followed her anxiously into a big dining-room. 'Mrs Hunt has the rooms we wanted,' Cicely explained, 'two with double beds and one single room. But she's been asked to take two more students; not those girls outside. They live here and have their own room; one is a niece of the Miss Wilsons who own the house, and the other is her chum. They're going to classes, and Mrs Hunt suggests that we should all have meals together in this big room. I don't mind that; it will be jolly to talk things over. But I am upset about the bedrooms. She hasn't another room for these other two who are coming, except a great big dormitory at the top of the house, where the boarders sleep in term. And she's very anxious to have some friends of her own to stay; her mother and sisters have written to ask if she can put them up next week; and she wants our rooms for them. The town's awfully full, with hundreds of students, and she can't get beds for her own folks anywhere else. Neither could we, I suppose, if we refused what she offers us here. She wants us to sleep in the big dorm.——'

'All together? What a joke!' cried Jen. 'It will be more like school than ever!'

'Some sport! There won't need to be any odd man out!' Joy chuckled.

'Oh, well, if you all like the idea, it's all right!' Cicely's face cleared. 'I was afraid you'd feel bad, and I didn't know what to do, for she seems practically to have promised her own folks they may come. I suppose we could insist on having the rooms she'd promised us, but it would upset her plans and she might be nasty for the whole month.'

'Oh, don't spoil the family party! It might have been awkward splitting ourselves up,' Joy said lightly. 'You couldn't part the Wren and Jacky-boy, you know! Let's all be together and have done with it! We shan't quarrel!'

'Won't we talk all night!' Jen chuckled.

'But we've got to take in these other two, and we haven't seen them yet,' Joan reminded her. 'The room has seven beds in it, and in the present overflowing state of the town she doesn't want to waste two.'

'Coo! Seven in one room!' moaned Joy. 'I hope it's a decent size!'

'Oh, it is, and very airy. We went up to see it at once. It's quite all right, and the beds are all single ones. It's used for the boarders, you know. There are big windows, and you can see the hills from them. I think it may be

fresher than the downstairs rooms,' Joan explained. 'It's only the thought of having two strangers in with the lot of us that's upsetting.'

'Yes, but if there are five of us and only two of them!' Jen began, her eyes dancing.

'True for you, Jenny-Wren!' Cicely laughed. 'I guess we'll be able to manage them!'

'Seems to me it's worse for them,' Jack ventured.

'Come and pick your beds, all of you! Right at the top, you said, President?' and Joy made a dash for the stairs.

'I'm sorry for Mrs Hunt, if this is going to happen every time we all go upstairs! She'll soon wish we were on the ground floor!' Joan laughed, as Jen and Jack raced noisily in pursuit of Joy.

'Yes, this old house is in for a giddy month!' Cicely agreed. 'I hope it and Mrs Hunt will stand the racket! I wonder if the other two will play up, or if they'll be stiff and stand-offish! If they're anything like Joy—like all those three, in fact I—we shall have lively times.'

'Joy's prepared to go on as if she were fifteen again. The very thought of going back to school and wearing her gym tunic all day has quite gone to her head. She swears she'll put her hair down, and no one will know she's twenty. Look in your bed before you get into it, President, or you may find yourself sitting on a hairbrush!'

'Twenty! You and I will have to be the elderly maiden aunts. Not one of them's over eleven! Come on and sit on their heads! Just hear the row!' and they raced upstairs, none too quietly themselves, to the big attic, where a free fight seemed to be in progress already.

'Children, what *are* you doing?' Cicely tried to speak sternly, but collapsed at sight of Jack and Jen assaulting Joy with armfuls of pillows. They had her down on a little bed in one corner, and were apparently trying to smother her, while she struggled wildly, half blinded by a mane of ruddy-bronze hair which had come down in the tussle.

'This is her bed, and she's got to stick to it!' Jack panted, planting a pillow on Joy's chest and sitting on it. 'She's chosen three already; she keeps changing and flinging our things about.'

'Do you silly infants know that it's three o'clock, and I've ordered tea for half-past?' Cicely said severely. 'Remember we've got to find the college; we haven't the first notion where it is. Buck up and get into your tunic, Jen; Joy, you'd better see to your hair! You can all unpack properly at night.'

'Those girls downstairs will tell us the way,' Jen remarked, releasing the victim. 'If they live here they must know.'

‘That’s so. Isn’t it queer how often Jenny-Wren puts me right?’ Cicely laughed, beginning to change hastily. ‘Those girls will be quite useful. We’ll ask them at tea.’

Jen went to the window and stood gazing at the smooth green hills. ‘Get out my gymmy, Jack, there’s a good chap. I’m going to have this bed, as far away from Joy as I can get; you take the next one! We’ll have one of the strangers in between, to protect us. Joan, I do like this! Aren’t those hills beautiful? Can we go some time?’

‘We thought we’d have a picnic there to-morrow afternoon.’ Joan and Cicely had taken possession of beds on the other side of the room. ‘I think we ought to be up there on Sundays, if we can. I’m afraid the town’s going to be very hot.’

‘Oh, it’s deadly stuffy!’ said Jen. ‘I don’t know how I’m going to dance! I’m dying of heat already.’

‘But look where you come from!’ Cicely retorted. ‘If you will live on a ridge all over heather, nine hundred feet up, you’re bound to feel it when you come down to ordinary levels.’

‘If Jen will go to Scarborough, and bathe, and burn herself as black as a gipsy, she’s bound to get stared at when she goes among ordinary pale-faces,’ Joy remarked, brushing out her ruddy mane.

‘Looks awfully funny with yellow hair, Jenny-Wren!’

Jen consulted the glass. ‘Yes, I *am* black!’ she acknowledged. ‘But you’re rather brown yourself. I guess you’ve been motor-biking with no hat on.’

‘All over the place! She’s known for miles round as “That Wild Girl from the Hall,”’ Joan laughed.

Joy’s pillow hurtled across the room, but hit Jack instead and was promptly returned. ‘And Joan’s known as “The Pretty One from the Abbey!”’ Joy mocked.

‘Oh, as to *that*, there isn’t a scrap to choose between you! There never was!’ Jen laughed. ‘I say, won’t it be jolly for two strange girls coming in among all of *us*?’

‘Jolly? I thought we were going to crush them?’ Cicely inquired.

‘Perhaps they won’t let themselves be crushed! If they’re as crazy as Joy, what a giddy lot we shall be!’

Cicely sat on her bed and contemplated her knees, showing below her short tunic. ‘It’s the influence of her legs. She’s not used to seeing quite so much of them. She always was a bit weak in the head, and the sight of her gym stockings has thrown her off her balance. She’s gone back ten years. Even I feel a touch of it coming on, and I’m two years farther off from school than she is. Are we going to run about the house like this, by the

way? It's rather a problem! We can't possibly fag all the way up to change after meals. But the rest of the household will think us lunatics.'

'They won't be far wrong, so far as some of us are concerned,' Joan laughed. 'I'm going to slip my coat on; then I shan't feel quite so undressed.'

Joy, too, was sitting on her bed looking at her legs. 'I'm glad I'm not bandy,' she said suddenly.

'I say!' Cicely disdained to laugh, though Jack was giggling. 'They'll be able to see we all belong together; tunics, blouses, green girdles, all alike! And then on top of that there's Joan and Joy the image of one another and obviously twins; which they're not. Until you look closely at them, and then they're as different as they can be. But at first glance they are alike. We'll be taken for sisters. I'm the elderly chaperone'—the rest jeered—'and Jen's the baby. Don't let's dance together. Let's find other partners, and see if anybody notices we belong together.'

'I do hope they won't be too awfully grown-up,' Jen said doubtfully, replaiting her long hair. '“Women” sounds so frightfully old. I don't feel like a woman.'

'You don't look it either. In that tunic you don't look a day over eleven, except for the length of you,' Joy said cruelly. 'It takes years off each one of us. President, you don't look half as imposing as usual.'

Cicely laughed and slipped a coat over her tunic and long legs. 'Come and look for tea! It does feel funny, doesn't it? But awfully jolly!'

'Tophole!' Jen said sincerely.

'I feel rather as if I were going to a fancy-dress party,' Joan laughed.

'I intend to adopt this costume for biking,' Joy said solemnly. 'In future I shall fly round Wycombe and Oxford and Aylesbury in a tunic. Can't think why I never did it before!'

'You grown-ups look awfully nice, all the same. You needn't worry,' Jack remarked. 'I don't know why you want to bother with coats in the house,' and she and Jen skipped down in advance of the others, quite at home in their abbreviated costumes.

'We're shy!' Cicely laughed. 'Give us an hour to get used to it! We haven't gone about like this for years; centuries, it seems. It's different for infants like you!'

'You'll feel worse when you get to the college and there are stacks of people there!'

'Oh, no, for they'll all be the same. We shall feel better,' Cicely prophesied.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE GIRLS FROM SWITZERLAND

The two schoolgirls came in from the garden to join them at tea, and the fair-haired girl of sixteen introduced herself without a trace of shyness as Anastasia Kingston, and her friend as Karen Wilson.

‘We’re both half foreigners, which accounts for our names,’ she explained frankly. ‘My mother’s Russian; Karen’s came from Holland. We’ve been to school together in Switzerland for a year, but at present we’re staying with Karen’s aunts so that we can go to the Folk-Dance School. We’ve been wanting a chance to learn the dances. Do you know a frightful lot about them? For we’re absolute beginners. I learned a few when I was at school in England, but that was years ago; and Karen doesn’t know anything.’

‘We know a little of the music;’ there was a glimmer of amusement and anticipation behind Karen’s big glasses. ‘It’s going to be quite thrilling when the tunes begin to come alive.’

‘To come alive?’ Joy looked at her curiously as they sat down to tea.

‘When we learn the movements. Don’t you think it will feel as if the tunes we know very well were coming to life? I’m looking forward to it more than I can say; I can hardly sit still, and as for tea, it really doesn’t seem to matter,’ Karen laughed. ‘There’s music we’ve known for months; Tazy whistled the tunes to me; we’ve never seen the books. I’m going to go crazy when I learn some of those dances, or see them demonstrated.’

‘Yes, but music always works you up!’ Tazy retorted. ‘Are you frightfully brilliant dancers?’ she asked of Cicely, while Joy eyed Karen curiously. Apart from motor-biking, music was the serious passion of her life; there was nothing in Karen’s outward appearance that was attractive, but Joy began to wonder if she might not perhaps prove a kindred spirit.

‘We’ve done a good deal of dancing,’ Cicely explained. ‘We’ve been at it for years, though we’ve never been to one of these schools before. Of course, we know heaps of dances; they’ve put us all together in Grade V, both for morris and country. All but Jacqueline Wilmot; she’s a beginner too.’

‘Oh, could we go together?’ Jack pleaded. ‘I don’t know the first thing about it, and I haven’t a soul to go with.’

She was obviously shy and rather nervous. Tazy Kingston said promptly, ‘Of course! We’ll see you through. But how is it you haven’t done any, when

all the rest have?’

‘Because I went in for cricket at school. We had to choose. You couldn’t be in the Eleven if you went in for dancing, because you hadn’t time for both.’

‘Oh, but what a—what a ghastly predicament!’ Tazy’s eyes twinkled. ‘I could never have given up cricket!’

‘Tell her about your famous first innings at St Mary’s, Taisez-vous,’ Karen suggested, and turned to Joan, who sat beside her. ‘Have you seen the college yet? It’s beautiful. It’s a tremendous privilege to have classes in a place like that.’

‘Oh? I didn’t know,’ Joan’s face lit up, for after her years as keeper of the ruined Abbey of Grace-Dieu, beautiful buildings were very dear to her heart. ‘Will you show us the way? We’ve only been here an hour.’

‘I’ve often stayed here with my aunts. It’s my only home in England,’ Karen explained.

At their end of the table Tazy and Jack were deep in cricket talk, Jen listening eagerly. Cicely’s eyes scanned the stranger girls with interest. Tazy’s face was frank and eager; she was a good talker, and evidently made friends easily. Karen was much quieter, but her eyes were busy behind the shielding glasses, apparently taking note of every detail. Cicely felt that in a day or two this girl would know them all through and through, and yet she did not dislike her for it; her eyes, though questioning, were friendly and interested. These girls did not wear the regulation blue gym suits, but had changed from their afternoon dresses to blue tunic frocks, short and neat and both alike, with white cuffs and smooth white collars—obviously a school uniform.

‘I say, President, are you going in for the exam at the end of the week?’ Joy demanded. ‘We know every old dance on their list, except one sword-dance; I should think we could swot that up in a week! Couldn’t we all go in together and keep up one another’s courage?’

‘I’m not scared of their exam,’ Cicely laughed. ‘But I don’t know yet about the sword-dance. I haven’t a notion what kind of a thing it is. I’ll tell you at lunch on Monday, when we’ve had one lesson in it. If we can manage that, I think we could do the rest. Then we might work up for the Advanced by the end of the month.’

‘But for that you need Running Set, whatever that is,’ Joan remarked. ‘I doubt if you’ll manage it, President.’

‘Why do they call you that?’ Karen Wilson asked.

Cicely laughed, and broke into a description of the dancing days of the Hamlet Club, the barn, Joan’s abbey, and the crowning of the May Queens, and begged these new friends not to be overwhelmed by the honour of

having tea with three ex-Queens and one Maid of Honour. 'And now let's get along and see our college!' she said, when Karen had listened eagerly to her story.

'But my card says some school or other,' Jack remonstrated.

Tazy Kingston looked at the card. 'Yes, we're there too. I expect there isn't room for us all at the college. We'll go together,' and Jack's face cleared. 'It's a long way, though. We'll take the car as far as the college, with these others; and then we'll walk on.'

'When Belinda comes, I'll run you all along, if you can tuck yourselves in,' Joy promised.

'Belinda?' Tazy queried, in stunned surprise.

'My old bike and side-car. That's her name. Oh, don't ask me why! I haven't a notion. She's due to arrive on Monday.'

'I'll sit on behind,' Tazy laughed, 'and these two can go in the car. I hope—er—Belinda will behave herself and not break down half-way.'

'And still our extra couple haven't turned up!' Cicely exclaimed, as they set out, shoes in hand, the younger girls hatless. By Monday Cicely, Joan, and Karen had discarded hats also, finding that nine-tenths of their fellow-students went bareheaded through the streets. 'Do you know anything about these other girls?' she asked of Karen. 'I suppose they're friends or sisters?'

'I don't think so. Mrs Hunt says one is "a very young lady"; I don't know just what that means! But the very young lady's sister wrote making very particular inquiries about the house. I don't think the other one has anything to do with her.'

'Coo!' said Joy. 'Two singles in with our lot! I'm sorry for them. If they'd been together, they might have backed one another up.'

'I'm afraid they'll feel rather crushed at first,' Joan laughed. 'We'll have to be awfully nice, especially to the little one, and make them feel at home.'

'They're going to miss their first class. I wouldn't miss it for any money!' Cicely said exuberantly. 'Aren't you all fearfully thrilled? Think what a lot we'll know about everything in less than an hour!'

'President, I didn't know you were such a baby!' Joan laughed, as they waited for the tram. 'You're as excited as Joy, I do believe!'

'My dear Abbey-Girl'—Joan laughed out at this hark-back to their first meeting—'anything to do with folk-dancing stirs me all up! You ought to know that by this time! Besides, this is going to be a NEW EXPERIENCE!' Cicely spoke in solemn capitals. 'I'm simply dying to know what we're going to learn, or if it's all going to be old stuff, and who's going to teach us, and how she's going to do it. Think of being in a class again! It's too priceless for words!'

‘Oh!’ said Joan, in a hushed tone, as they jumped off the tram in a crowd of other hatless girls, many wearing only mackintoshes over their tunics and displaying stockings and knees with an absolute lack of self-consciousness. ‘Is this the college? And we’re going to dance in it? But what a glorious building! Why do they allow it? It hardly seems right!’

‘You needn’t talk, my child! What about the cloister garth? That was a funny place to dance, if you like!’

‘I learnt my morris step on the cloister garth; to say nothing of “Hey, Boys” and “Rufty Tufty!”’ Jen laughed. ‘It is tophole, though, isn’t it, Joan?’

The great gray college, the reddening creeper and yellow roses, the double rows of wide perpendicular windows, the great doorway, the tower and little turrets, the beautiful chapel at the side, the wide gravel drive up which students, men and girls, were crowding on cycles or on foot, reduced Joan to a state of bewildered rapture. ‘Classes in there will feel like dancing in the refectory at home!’ she said. ‘It’s the same style, of course; Tudor. See the wide square windows! I always wanted to dance in the refectory, but never quite dared. Oh, I love this place!’ as they looked for the first time round the great hall, with its cleared floor, honour tablets on the walls, canopied head master’s seat, and the platform with a big grand piano.

Joan looked about her in an incredulous dream. She had expected classrooms, not a beautiful hall with open vaulted roof and stained-glass windows.

Cicely pinched her gently. ‘Wake up, Abbey-Girl! You’ll be in here every day for a month. We’re to learn our sword-dance in this very hall. And there’s our room for country dancing—Room C. Come and ask where we leave our coats and change our shoes.’

Joan followed and changed, still in a dazed happy dream. Jen, with sympathetic understanding which never failed her, whispered, ‘I’ve looked into our room, Joan, and it’s just like the refectory! You’ll love it. Aren’t we lucky? Poor old Jack, and Tazy and Karen, having to go to some old ordinary school in an old ordinary street! We are in luck! Come and see the refectory! Such a lovely roof and windows!’

The big schoolroom was not unlike the great beautiful hall at Grace-Dieu, which Joan had so often described to visitors. The windows were in Perpendicular style; the open roof had great black beams; there was a distinctly ecclesiastical atmosphere, in spite of the floor cleared for dancing, the piano, and the books of country dance music. The students beginning to assemble, girls in gym dress and men in flannels, looked oddly out of place, and so did the desks piled on the platform and the forms against the walls.

In their interest in their surroundings, the Hamlet friends had forgotten to be conscious of their unusual costume, partly, no doubt, because nobody else seemed aware that it was unusual. The girls standing talking and laughing with the men apparently wore gym tunics all their lives. Cicely's eyes widened at sight of several men, evidently members of the class; she had hardly expected men to go in for country dancing. But it was only after she was in bed that night that she remembered, and laughed in the darkness, how very long Joan's legs had looked, and no doubt her own had been as bad. At the moment the thought never occurred to her; all her attention was for their fellow-students, as she began dimly to realise how very very interesting these next few weeks were going to be, with this unusual sensation of being one of a crowd, and a very big, enthusiastic crowd. What were all these girls? Teachers? Students from colleges? They were all grown-up, in spite of their short skirts; Jen was the only girl in the room whose hair still hung in plaits, and she was realising the fact with a shock. Would it be possible to make friends with some of these girls, and hear what each one did at home?—for Cicely had no doubt they all 'did' things; she could see it in the keen purposeful faces of many. Teachers, probably, most of them, she thought, and used to being in positions of authority. How would they like being taught for a change?

'They'll feel it as funny as I'm going to do! I hope our teacher-person is up to her job. It's not like bossing a lot of kids,' she said to herself. 'And men too! I wonder if she's here yet? Any of them might be going to teach, by the look of them. She's got her work cut out for her. I hope she's not soft, with this crowd. There must be nearly thirty of us! Joan, did you *ever* know such a joke in your life? I wouldn't have missed this for a thousand pounds!'

Joan woke from her joyful absorption in these most unexpected surroundings, and laughed. 'It's simply gorgeous! I'm just awfully glad we came. Oh, President, I want to dance! I want to dance the joyfullest thing I know! I think I'll do a morris jig by way of expressing my feelings.'

'Do!' Cicely said encouragingly. 'You'll create "some" sensation! Oh, cheers! Is this our lady boss?'

Some one had come quickly in, and, jumping lightly on a form, surveyed her class. 'Make up sets of eight. I want to see "Newcastle,"' she said.

'And jolly well do what you're told, all of you!' Cicely murmured, her face alight with amusement and anticipation. 'Good old "Newcastle!" We're all right there, anyway!'

## CHAPTER X 'SHE-WHO-MUST-BE-OBEYED'

She was big and fair and jolly, with a very emphatic air of authority, and eyes which missed nothing. Those were Cicely's first impressions; they did not change, but others were added to them, even before the first hour's class was over. From the first moment she never doubted this 'teacher-person's' power to control her class, however big or grown-up or mixed; from the first dance she marvelled at her gift of seeing every detail and missing nothing.

There was an extremely personal reason for this last, however. As they honoured their partners on the last note, the authority on the form delivered judgment with no uncertain voice. 'Yes! Well, that's very bad, you know. You were all wrong over there; and you were all lost too. As for this set'—her eyes were on Cicely and Joan, who, in spite of their resolve, had danced together when it came to the point, facing Joy and Jen—'You got your places all right, but you made your lines frightfully badly. You were all wrong in the second figure too; you four, the side couples. Turn your backs on one another and *lead* to your places, left hands; don't fall back. Go to your positions for the arming; now turn *to* the person whose hand you're going to take. Never turn your back on her; it's wrong, and very ugly; and anyway, it's frightfully rude. You four in this set were wrong, every one of you. Be careful this time. Now ready!'

'She's spotted us, in the first two minutes!' Cicely groaned, amused and dismayed. 'And we *are* wrong! In "Newcastle!" This is awful!'

'But it's a much jollier movement!' Joan argued.

'Oh, it's a great improvement on our scramble round! Why didn't we see it for ourselves? But isn't she "some" boss! I'm going to call her Madam! Wonder if she's any better pleased this time?'

'That's better! Now do the whole dance right through. Be careful of that leading back, you four.'

'Yes, ma'am!' Cicely murmured abjectly, as they caught hands and ran to the centre. 'I feel about ten,' she said to Joan, as they armed together. 'Do take care of me in those lines! I shall die if I make a mess of it after being told! I say, she's got one eye on us all the time! I wonder what's wrong with us?'

'Everything, I expect,' Joan laughed, as she bobbed her honour and passed on.

‘Madam’ watched the sets critically. Suddenly she sprang from her form and went flying across the room to a group in one corner. ‘You’re still all wrong here! This is your place; you should be here’—and she hustled them into their proper positions. ‘Now go back to the arming, everybody. And listen to me! Don’t talk when I’m teaching you; *don’t talk!*’ She sprang up on the nearest chair. ‘You’re so busy telling one another what’s wrong that you won’t listen to me. Your first lines are made up and down the room; first man will be at the end of that line, first woman opposite him. Second man will be, or should be, in the middle of the other line, opposite his own position, second woman at his side. Third man will be at the end——’

‘Oh, goodness! Stop her, somebody! I’m getting all tied up!’ groaned Cicely, in an amused but agonised whisper. ‘I know where everybody ought to be, including myself, but I never heard it all recited at full speed like that before! She’s like a gramophone! But isn’t she sure of it, and no mistake!’

‘When she went for those places like an express train, I wanted to hold my head on,’ Joan laughed afterwards. ‘It took my breath away; I just whirled round and round. But it was awfully clever!’

‘That’s better! That was quite good. See if you can do it like that on Monday. Now I want to see “Hey, Boys,”’ and Madam returned to her place on the form.

‘If she wants to see “Hey, Boys,” she will, I’m certain sure of that!’ Cicely remarked. ‘Be my man in this, Joy? Jen likes to do it with Joan.’

‘Well, let’s get farther away,’ Joy suggested. ‘We needn’t stand right under her nose. I feel a premonition that there’s going to be something awfully frightfully wrong with the way we do it.’

‘After being pulled up for “Newcastle,” anything may happen,’ Cicely observed. ‘But I don’t believe it’s any good running away. She’ll just come flying after us, or yell at us across the room.’

‘Don’t go away, you four,’ a voice called them suddenly. ‘You’ve plenty of room. Stay where you are; I want to watch you.’

The eyes of the four met, apprehensive though full of amusement. ‘Caught out!’ murmured Jen.

‘Coo! Isn’t she a bully!’ Joy said indignantly.

‘“She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed!” Do as you’re told, my children! We may as well know the worst,’ and Cicely resignedly returned to her place. ‘But “Don’t talk while I’m teaching you,” any of you three! I won’t be scolded for behaving like a baby. Besides, it’s rude,’ and they waited attentively for the music to begin.

Joan, her face full of amusement, was watching the ‘teacher-person’ appreciatively. Something in ‘Madam’s’ movement and bearing, as she made that flying leap from the form and ran across the room, had reminded

her irresistibly of the big gray Persian cat, who lived with the caretaker of the Abbey, and could be met any day wandering among the ruins. Joan had always held that Timmy was the most beautiful thing in the way of movement she had ever seen; he could not put himself into an awkward position; every line was perfect, every curve graceful; every movement, whether he walked or jumped or ran or rolled or washed himself or stretched in the sun, was a delight to watch. Suddenly she found the same quality in Madam, in her perfect poise and balance as she ran or stood or jumped on and off her form; what it must be to see her dance Joan could only imagine, and hoped the chance would be given them some day. Beauty of any kind moved her strongly. At home there had been the beauty of ancient buildings, of wonderful colour. Then had come a new joy in the folk music to which the Hamlet Club had introduced her; but of all the dances should have meant in the way of the beauty of free natural movement she had hardly caught a glimpse till now she began dimly to feel it; her eyes followed Madam, when presently she came down from her perch to demonstrate a movement, with hungry eager delight.

But ‘She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed’ was as unconscious of being watched as Timmy. She kept one eye on the Hamlet four and one on the rest of the room, with the result that Jen grew nervous and lost her head, and ran round wildly in the last figure after any one who came near her, and had to be hauled into place by Joan; and the dance ended with the four in a state of collapse, helpless with laughter.

The culprit apologised abjectly to the rest, and Cicely addressed their instructress, who was coming towards them. ‘She does know it, really. She only got in a muddle. She’s known it for years.’

‘I’m awfully sorry,’ Jen said humbly again.

‘I know. I saw what happened. She knows it all right,’ Madam agreed, and unhappy Jen recovered on the spot. ‘But you’re all wrong, all four of you, you know.’

‘What, again?’ Cicely groaned.

‘Not in “Hey, Boys,” surely!’ Joy said indignantly.

Madam’s eyes gleamed. ‘Yes, even in “Hey, Boys.” I don’t know who’s been teaching you, but your style’s *dreadful*! I may as well tell you that at once. I’ve been watching you——’

‘Don’t we know it!’ Cicely groaned. ‘That’s why Jen went wrong!’

‘What’s wrong with us?’ Joy demanded incredulously.

‘Your “gipsy” is wrong, to begin with. You turned out; this is the movement. Gipsy with me!’ she said to Joan, who would far rather have watched her, but obeyed meekly. ‘Now do you see? Do that, all four of you.’



No, *no!*' and she caught Joy by the shoulders and turned her about. 'That way!'

'Oh!' said Cicely. 'Oh, I see!' Her face grew blank. 'I say, we have been making fools of ourselves!'

Madam offered no opinion as to that, but, bidding the rest of the class sit down, delivered more swift destructive criticism. 'Then you stood still in the second figure; you must never do that; no one stops running for one moment in this dance. You must fill in the time. Men do it this way; women, balance before you cross. Do you see that?'

Cicely's eyes met hers honestly. 'Your way is far jollier than ours.'

'Your way simply ruins the whole thing,' Madam said ruthlessly. 'In the last figure, you *must* keep straight arms, and you *must* have them ready. Now do the whole dance, and remember those points. The rest can join in, if they like, but it wasn't at all bad, except for this set.'

She watched keenly as the four very meekly went through the dance. But though they were extremely obedient and quite obviously trying to satisfy her, there was a twinkle in Cicely's eyes and a suppressed grin in Joy's, while Jen was scarlet with the effort to restrain her feelings. And Joan saw that Madam was quite aware of their amusement; like Cicely, she had already a high respect for their teacher's power of observation.

When the dance was finished, Madam said approvingly, 'Yes, that was a different thing altogether. I wish you could have seen yourselves the first time. That was quite good. Now have a rest, and then I want "Boatman."'

'We don't know that,' Cicely remarked; and then, with laughing eyes, 'Perhaps you'll be glad to hear it! We may not be so bad in dances we don't know!'

'I shouldn't wonder,' Madam retorted, and turned to a group of girls sitting on the floor. 'Your arms were wrong too; keep them straight. Your siding is very bad; you must be careful; it's this! You ended by turning your back on your partner; you must turn in, like this!'

'She knows what every single person in the room did!' Cicely marvelled, as they dropped on the floor to rest. 'Has she eyes all round her head?'

'I never saw anything like the way she runs—except Timmy!' Joan murmured, watching the demonstration of siding with fascinated eyes. 'I could watch her all day!'

'But think of those awful mistakes we've been making!' Jen wailed. 'Don't you feel *sick*? I do!'

'I say, President!' Joy leaned forward across Jen. 'Did you say you felt ten? I feel *two*!'

‘I feel like a squashed beetle. I’m utterly crushed. Every scrap of self-confidence I ever had is oozing out of my plimsolls,’ Cicely said mournfully. ‘I wish I’d gone to classes years ago! Did I say I meant to take an exam next week? Goodness me, what an ignorant idiot I was! In a year, perhaps! When I get up my courage, I’m going to confess we’ve been learning from the books.’

‘I believe she knows,’ Joan laughed, watching Madam as she went round the room, telling each girl and man where she or he had been wrong. ‘She knows everything. I think she’s wonderful. She never misses a thing!’

‘Oh, what a glorious tune!’ Jen cried softly, when she heard ‘The Boatman’ for the first time. ‘And what a topping dance!’ she added, when they had learned it.

Cicely and Joan were watching Madam, but could not tell from her face whether criticism or commendation would be their lot. But presently when she thought another interval for rest was necessary, she turned to Cicely, who was approaching her, intent on confession. ‘I’d rather have you in dances you haven’t done,’ she said, with a twinkle in her eyes which kindled an instant response in the President’s. ‘You’re easy to teach; you pay attention, and you don’t talk; and you grasp things quickly.’

‘I’m glad there’s something can be said for us,’ Cicely said ruefully.

‘Oh, there’s a good deal! Sometimes you’re all quite good. But you’ve got into dreadfully bad ways, or been very badly taught, and you’re all alike. You all have the same faults.’

‘Of course. I taught all the rest,’ Cicely said gloomily. ‘And we’ve been so pleased with ourselves for years and years. You can’t think what a shock this afternoon has been.’

Madam laughed. ‘I’m sorry. I thought you looked a bit——’

‘Crushed!’ Cicely groaned. ‘Flattened out. I wish we’d come years ago.’

‘I don’t think you looked crushed at all. I was going to say tremendously amused. I thought you must be having the funniest afternoon you’d had for some time, by the way you looked at one another. As for the way you looked at me——!’ and Madam laughed again.

Cicely laughed too. ‘Well, it is funny! We’ve been dancing for years, and teaching all the rest, and they think we know everything and are just *It!* And in the first five minutes you pull us up on a dozen points, and in things like “Newcastle” and “Hey, Boys!”’

‘Which you think you’ve known for years. I’m very sorry, but look at the things you’ve been doing!’

‘Oh, every single thing you tell us is an improvement! But all the same, it’s awfully funny. I thought Jen would have hysterics from suppressed giggling when you stood over us and made us do “Hey, Boys” all by

ourselves. They'll simply die at home when we tell them. I shall call the girls together and they'll have the time of their lives when they hear how Joan and I were sat on in the first afternoon's class.'

She-Who-Must-Be-Obedyed laughed. 'You'll confess, then?'

'Oh, rather! I'll get the club right on all those points before I've been home a fortnight, and I've no doubt there will be a few more points still to come.' Her eyes danced.

'I've no doubt there will. Is it a dancing club?' Madam asked with interest. 'And you're the leader?'

'The President. I started them dancing six years ago, and taught them all they know; most of it wrong, apparently! At Wycombe, you know; we dance in a huge old barn on a farm, by lantern-light, with a friend to fiddle for us.'

'But how perfectly gorgeous!' Madam's appreciation was as frank and eager as a schoolgirl's. 'How often do you meet? Do you have folk-singing too? I wish you'd invite me some evening! I often go to Oxford, and I pass through Wycombe.'

'Would you come?' Cicely's face lit up. 'We'd simply love it! But not till I've had a whack at their style! Just now their dancing's ghastly; I can see that already. It would make you ill. But I'll get them right; it will be some shock to them, though! But first of all, can you get us right? Or are we too hopeless?'

'I wanted to speak to you about that,' Madam said seriously. 'In knowledge of the dances you are quite up to this grade, but in style you are *not*. I've either got to put you down, or keep on at you till I get you right. I can't possibly pass mistakes such as you are making. You've been learning dances from the books, I suppose?'

'We have,' Cicely assented gloomily. 'But I did do some at school; before I was fifteen, though, and that's some time ago. Oh, please keep on at us as much as ever you like! That's what we've come for. Besides, we enjoy it; I do! It's the funniest thing that has happened to me for years. Pull me up for every old thing you can; I really want to get the dances right, and if we've been messing them up I'm sorry. But I'm afraid we'll be an awful nuisance to you. Do you mind keeping us?'

'Not if you'll remember the things I tell you; don't let me have to tell you over and over again! But you won't; I saw that in those new dances. And don't talk when I'm talking; that really does make me lose my temper!'

'It's the limit,' Cicely agreed. 'Oh, we won't; you can trust us there. The way some of them go on is awful! I do think they might listen.'

'They can't help it. They're teachers,' Madam said philosophically. 'It's in their blood to tell everybody what's wrong and try to put the class right.'

I'm used to it; but I wish they'd leave it to me! Well, if you'll work hard you may stop; but I shall pull you up all the time, you know.'

'We want you to! Besides, I'll take it out of the club when I get home!'

'I'd like to hear more about the club some other time. Tell me your names, by the way. You are—?' and she opened the register.

'Cicely Hobart.'

'And the twins with the pretty red hair?'

'Joan and Joy Shirley; but they're only cousins,' Cicely laughed.

'Really? I was sure they were twins. How dare they have the same initial? How am I to know them apart?'

'You may not see Joy very regularly after Monday,' Cicely remarked. 'You can mark the rest of us present for the whole week; we won't miss a class unless we break our legs. But nobody can chain Joy down, and after Monday she'll have Belinda.'

'And will—er—Belinda keep her away from classes? Which is Joy?' and Madam looked intently at the two Shirleys, talking eagerly with Jen. 'The thoughtful one, or the wild one?'

'You've hit them off!' Cicely laughed. 'The wild one; the quiet one is Joan. Belinda is Joy's motor-bike, and the thing she loves best in the world, after her piano.'

'Oh! And the little tall one? Whose sister is she?'

'Nobody's. Just a school friend. You've hit her off too,' Cicely said approvingly.

'Oh! But she couldn't have been at school with you, surely?'

'We older ones never really left, because of the club,' and Cicely gave a swift explanation of the Hamlet Club, which had kept the former girls in such close touch with the school.

'How very jolly!' Madam commented. 'I must certainly see your barn. By the way, have you done any morris?'

Cicely eyed her apprehensively. 'Heaps of morris!' she said solemnly. 'And if it's on a par with our country dancing I'm sorry for you, that's all.'

'Oh, are you coming to me for morris too?' Madam's eyes gleamed in anticipation of Monday morning.

'We're to come to this room. Won't you be here?'

'Oh, I shall be here! Very well! We'll see on Monday!' Her lips twitched.

Cicely sighed resignedly. 'I can see you know what will happen. Well, if we're as bad as all that, do please get us right, if you can! We really do love the dances, you know; I hate to think we've been murdering them.'

'I'll do my best,' Madam nodded. 'Now make up a longways set, everybody. I want "Christchurch Bells."'

‘Oh, good! That’s new,’ Cicely said joyfully, and led Jen out to be her woman. ‘She calls you the little tall one, Jenny-Wren.’

‘I’m the baby of the class!’ Jen sighed. ‘I wish they weren’t all so frightfully grown-up!’

‘We’re going to get it hot and strong on Monday, when it comes to morris!’ Cicely prophesied.

## CHAPTER XI

### A VERY YOUNG LADY

‘I wonder how my husband has got on! And what her teacher’s like!’ Jen commented, as they climbed the stairs to the room with seven beds in it, considerably more slowly than they had done the first time.

‘They can’t be home yet, by the silence. Jacky-boy and that Kingston girl would be babbling if they were here. Coo! Aren’t I tired?’ groaned Joy. ‘Doesn’t she make you work? I’m going to collapse on my bed, unless I can find a hot bath to roll into—Hallo!’

‘Oh, somebody else has come!’ Jen’s voice dropped politely. ‘I’d forgotten the other two. Oh, glory! She’s more of a kid than I am! Tophole!’

Cicely and Joan, even more tired, were toiling up the stairs after them. Joy turned, and announced in a loud whisper, ‘The Very Young Lady has arrived! And she’s just an infant, President. We’ll easily keep *her* in order!’

Cicely pushed past her. ‘You might go in and speak to the poor kid, then. Where is she?’

The big dormitory was empty, except for one of the beds not yet allotted to any one. On this, dressed in a very short blue skirt and a white jumper, sat a girl—a child, they thought at first—with bobbed yellow curls and a round childish face. Her hands were clasped about her ankles and her chin was resting on her knees, as she surveyed the four of them, tunics, legs and all, and waited for them to speak first. Her round-eyed stare was disconcerting, and for a moment they paused, taken by surprise, for she certainly looked two years younger than any one they had seen at the college.

Then, as Joy and Cicely loosened their coats, and Joan and Jen slipped theirs off, the critical blue eyes began to twinkle. ‘I say! Does everybody go about in gymmies all the time? Through the streets? What topping fun! I was told they did, but I didn’t believe it. *Oh!* You look so funny in a tunic and a hat!’

Joan gravely removed her hat; Cicely’s had come off in the hall downstairs. ‘I can quite believe it. Are you going to the school too?’

‘How old are you? What’s your name? And why are you here all alone, a kid like you?’ Cicely stood over her and tried to put matters on a satisfactory footing, for this Very Young Lady evidently needed no one to be kind to her or put her at her ease.

She sighed. ‘Isn’t it just like school? You’re one of the seniors, I suppose, and I’m a new girl. Are you all frightful swanks at this dancing?’

For I don't know the first thing, but of course I've got to learn.'

'Why?' asked Jen, sitting on her bed to take off her shoes. Her long yellow plaits fell forward across her shoulders, and their new companion asked anxiously, 'Are there any others not grown-up besides you and me? Or shall I feel awfully out of it?'

'There are some,' Jen reassured her. 'There are three in this house, to begin with. Why have you got to learn? Don't you want to?'

'I don't know yet. I've never tried. Is it fun? Do you all know all about it? Have you got heaps of certificates and things, like the one in the corner over there?'

'Where? What? Who?' All four turned to look, and realised suddenly that a suitcase and a trunk had appeared in the corner opposite to Cicely's bed.

'She's gone out to do some shopping. She was here when I came. She's a frightful nut; knows everything about it. Are you frightful nuts at it too?'

The eyes of the four Hamlets met. Then Cicely said grimly, 'If you really want to know, we rather thought we were. But we've discovered we're not. I'm two feet smaller than I was at tea-time, and I expect to shrink still more on Monday; and the rest all feel the same.'

'Golly! You must have taken up a lot of room before you began to shrink! Who shrivelled you up?' The blue eyes danced.

'She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed,' Cicely said solemnly. 'We've discovered that our dances are all wrong, our style's all wrong, our movements are all wrong, our rhythm—no, she let us off there. It was the others got dropped on for their rhythm. I say! Tell us about this other girl! How do you know she's so good? Did she *tell* you?'

'I asked her why she'd got that jolly silver star on her tunic; there, hanging up. She was taking the pins out of the plaits. She said it meant membership of the Society. I asked if any one who joined could have one, and she said yes, a bronze one; but you could only have silver if you'd got your Advanced Certificate. That's the highest thing you can get, isn't it?'

'Coo! Advanced!' moaned Joy, and went over to examine the neat blue tunic and silver lock critically. 'Won't she look down on *us*!'

Cicely sat down heavily on her bed. 'That's the limit! An Advanced Certificate person living with us! She'll be as crushing as Madam! I shan't have a shred of confidence left!'

'She might be awfully useful, though,' Jen spoke eagerly. 'We'll make her coach us at night! We'll have private classes when we're going to bed! There's plenty of room!'

'Not a bad idea!' Cicely laughed. 'But that will depend on the Advanced Certificate. If she's a good sort, she'll be exactly what we need. But if she's

such a frightful swank we'll have to ask her very humbly. And we were going to sit on her! Just our luck to get somebody who knows more than we do, isn't it, Abbey-Girl?"

'It's going to be frightfully good for our characters!' Joan laughed, beginning to unbutton her tunic. 'We ought to go home with beautifully meek and humble dispositions, improved in every way!'

'Some of us need it!' the President groaned, sitting on her bed and contemplating her legs sadly. 'I suppose I'm one. I've always bossed folks. Apparently here I'm going to be bossed by everybody. But isn't it *fun*! I could have died this afternoon, you know! And *she* knew too! I say, Wild Cat, I told her about you and Belinda!'

'Do you all have nicknames?' the Very Young Lady asked plaintively. 'I've heard "President," and "Abbey-Girl," and "Wild-Cat," and "Jenny-Wren." Don't you have real names?'

'Well, what about yours?' Joy retorted. 'At least you've heard some kind of an old name for each of us. Haven't you any at all?'

'You never answered my questions,' Cicely addressed the critical child severely. 'What's your name? Where do you come from? Why are you here alone? And why have you got to learn folk-dancing?'

'Because I'm going to be a gym mistress, and teach drill and games, and I'll need dancing too. My sister's a maths. mistress, and I go to whatever old school she happens to be teaching in. But last Christmas she took it into her head to get engaged, to one of the masters; it was a boys' school. And quite suddenly—'

'A boys' school! But she couldn't teach in a boys' school!' Cicely objected, while Joan and Joy, still in their tunics, came and stood together to listen.

Jen dropped on the end of the bed. '*You* couldn't go to a boys' school!' she argued.

'*Couldn't* I! I had a topping time there for a year. But Dorothy decided to get married in July, and none of the uncles or aunts could take me for August. Dorothy said it would be a good plan for me to come to this dancing school and get started—on my career, you know! My two girl friends have gone to America for a visit, to see the father of one of them, and I couldn't quite go home with any of the boys, though lots of them would have loved to have me. So I thought it might be rather a joke to come here. You don't have to go to all the classes if you get fed up, do you? They can't make you go! But I really do expect to like it, once I get started, if I make friends with people.'

'I don't think you'll do that,' Joy said, looking down at her mockingly. 'You're so frightfully shy and retiring—like me. You'll find it hard to make



friends. I always do!’

‘Yes, I am shy,’ the Very Young Lady sighed. ‘It’s been a trouble to me all my life.’

‘How long exactly has this terrible shyness troubled you? I mean, how old are you?’ Cicely demanded.

‘And what’s your name?’ Jen added.

‘I’m sixteen, and——’

‘Not really? Honest? You don’t look a day more than thirteen.’

‘None of you look more than fourteen, except for your hair!’ their new friend retorted. ‘If you weren’t so frightfully tall you’d just look like a set of kids.’

‘Your name?’ Cicely demanded, in a businesslike tone.

‘Tormentil Grant.’

‘Torment? What?’

‘Tormentil. They call me Tormy,’ hastily and defiantly.

‘Oh! And how often are you called Torment?’

Tormy’s eyes fell. ‘I have been,’ she admitted.

‘And is it—er—justified?’

Tormy’s look flashed defiance at her. ‘I’ll leave you to find that out. I say! Can you do the funny step they use in some of these dances? I’ve never seen it. If you’d show me what it’s like, I’d feel better on Monday. I’m an awful outsider at present.’

Cicely rose. ‘I’ll be Madam! Make up the four corners of a set, you three! Now do “Trunkles” for her; then she’ll get some idea of morris.’

‘I hope she will,’ Jen said doubtfully. ‘I’m not too sure of our step now. After this afternoon I’m beginning to think there may have been something in what my guiser-girl said about my side-step. I expect Madam will have fits when she sees it.’

‘Still, it will give this Torment-child an idea of morris!’ Cicely urged. ‘Get handkerchiefs, all of you! Hum the tune for us, “Traveller’s Joy!”’

Joy obliged, and the four solemnly danced ‘Trunkles’ in the middle of the floor. Tormy watched with keen close interest. But in the middle of ‘Capers,’ as Joan and Joy were crossing, she said suddenly, ‘Somebody’s coming. Is it the Very Advanced Person, or the other one? There’s one more in this room, isn’t there? Mrs Hunt said there were five of you.’

‘The other one’s my husband, Jacky-boy. We got married at school, years ago,’ Jen explained, rather breathlessly, and the dance came to an abrupt end as they all stared at the person in the doorway, who was not Jacky-boy.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

She was slight and dark, with neat figure and small features, and a businesslike air increased by the eyeglasses through which she surveyed them. ‘Those “Capers” were good,’ she said, no doubt or hesitation in her voice. ‘But what about the people underneath?’

Cicely collapsed on her bed. ‘I forgot there might be somebody downstairs! I’m used to dancing in a barn. My aunt! We’ll be turned out for creating a nuisance!’

‘“Capers,” of all the things to do in a top attic!’ Jen giggled. ‘And not one of us thought of it!’

‘I wonder if we’ve brought the ceiling down?’ Joy suggested gloomily.

‘It’s all the Torment’s fault,’ Joan observed. ‘She asked us to. I say, hadn’t we better be getting changed? Dinner was to be at seven, and we’re all still in our tunics.’

The Advanced Certificate surveyed them through her pince-nez. ‘I shouldn’t bother. Whom are you going to dress up for? One another? Or me? Aren’t we going to have meals together? Well, if you’re comfortable—and who isn’t in a tunic?—why do you want to change?’

‘Oh!’ said Joan, rather taken aback. ‘But we couldn’t go down like this!’

‘I shall, next week. I live in my tunic at these times. Why not? Don’t change for my benefit, please!’

The four looked at one another. ‘It would save heaps of time and trouble!’ Cicely said longingly. ‘And I *am* so tired!’

‘Of course, we *ought* to make ourselves decent!’ Joan murmured, as a final concession to propriety.

‘I’m not going to change unless I’ve really got to,’ Joy cried exuberantly. ‘Cheers! Thanks awfully! What a mercy!’

‘I ought to set a good example and keep you all up to the mark,’ Cicely said weakly. ‘But I’d simply love to do nothing but lie on my bed till dinner’s ready!’

‘Oh, I think you might do your hair!’ Joan laughed, and loosened her bronze-red mane and shook it out.

‘Now you do look about eleven!’ chuckled Tormy from her bed. ‘But what a topping colour! Are you twins, you two?’

Joan laughed and began to brush vigorously. ‘Yours is all coming down, anyway, President.’

‘That’s due to my agitation in “Argeers,”’ the President threw herself flat on her bed and lay watching the Advanced Certificate, who was depositing parcels on her bed and taking off her hat. ‘Fancy, “Argeers” on your first afternoon! They do make you work! Do they keep on at this rate? We’ve only been in the town since two o’clock, but already we’ve done “Newcastle,” “Hey, Boys,” “Boatman,” and “Christchurch Bells”; and as if that wasn’t enough, she turned on “Argeers” in the last five minutes! She’s a terror for work!’

‘Who is it? Whom have you got?’ the stranger asked with interest. ‘I hope those weren’t all new to you, or you will be in a dithered state.’

‘Dithered! That’s a good word! It just describes my mental condition at the moment! Jenny-Wren was dithered in “Hey, Boys!”’ Joy chuckled, brushing out her hair too, while Tormy looked from her to Joan with appreciative eyes.

‘No, only two were new. But “Argeers” is tough, even when you know it,’ Cicely groaned. ‘And she was down on us every single time. We were all wrong, everywhere. We’re as crushed a quartet as there is in Cheltenham.’

The Advanced Certificate turned and looked down at her with amused eyes. ‘Is this your first school?’

‘Yes, but you bet it won’t be our last. When’s the next?’

A laugh rang out. ‘Christmas, in London. Are you fascinated already?’

‘I wouldn’t miss a second of it for all the world,’ Cicely assured her solemnly. ‘And that’s in spite of the squashing, the heavy squashing, that’s been very gently administered to me this same afternoon.’

‘And who did it? Who’s taking you for country dancing?’

‘She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed. Madam. I don’t know her name. But those will do. She’s the biggest boss I ever met. But knows her job—goodness me! She made some of those chattering idiots sit up. “*Don’t* talk when I’m teaching you!” I’d have sunk through the floor if I’d had to be spoken to like that.’

‘Some of them are awful. What’s she like?’

‘Big—fair—brown hair—jolly—understands people awfully well—knows just whom it’s safe to yell at, and whom she can make fun of, and which are the ones who simply couldn’t stand it. I was watching her,’ Cicely said seriously, lying on her back and staring at the ceiling, ‘and I was struck with the way she let some people off altogether and was awfully gentle with others, and yet went for some, like me, all the time, because she knew I didn’t mind a scrap.’

‘But she knew the others would mind,’ Joan agreed. ‘She seemed to know by instinct.’

‘Well, you have to!’ Jen expostulated. ‘I have to, with my kiddies at home! I’d hurt their feelings dreadfully if I didn’t be awfully careful!’

‘She never misses a thing, either,’ Cicely, started on the subject of ‘Madam,’ could not stop. ‘She’s got eyes all round her head. She can join in a dance, and do it nearly all with her back to you, and at the end she’ll whirl round and say, “You gave the wrong hand!” I just gasped.’

‘Oh, but that comes with practice! You could say the same of most of the Staff. They’re all jolly good teachers,’ the Advanced Certificate lady was unpacking her trunk and tidying her drawers with a quick businesslike air. ‘She’s good, though. You’re lucky.’

‘The Staff! Is that what you call them? And you know which one I mean?’

‘Oh, yes, I know! A lot of your description would apply to most of them, of course. But I think I know. You’ve struck lucky, if it’s your first time.’

‘We know it. I’ll do any mortal thing she wants, though she spends all her time telling me where I’m wrong.’

Their new friend laughed. ‘Well, that’s what she’s there for.’

‘She does it nicely, though. I couldn’t stand it from everybody. But I don’t mind a thing she says, because of the way she says it.’

‘I was rather surprised at your meekness, I must say,’ Joy remarked, as she rolled up her hair. ‘It’s centuries since anybody sat on you like that, President. I thought you’d explode.’

‘Only with disgust at the mistakes we’ve been making. It is years since I was bullied like that!’ Cicely agreed ruefully. ‘But I enjoyed it, that’s the funny thing!’

‘If she sees you’re keen, you’ll be all right,’ the Advanced Lady said gravely. ‘That’s the one thing they all want, I believe; people who are keen and who love the dances for their own sake.’

‘Oh, but doesn’t everybody? Why do they come here if they don’t? What do they want in a school like this?’

‘Certificates. I’ve been to—well, several—schools now,’ the Advanced one said grimly. ‘And there are two kinds of students who come; those who come from love of the dances and the “folk” atmosphere; and those who want to learn and get certificates, just so that they can get better posts as teachers.’ Tormy Grant from her bed glared at her, but she went on placidly. ‘There are students *and* students! I’ve had experience enough to know which get on best. Although I’ve taken my certificates and although I do teach, I began folk-dancing because I loved it and found something in it I’d never found anywhere else; and I’m getting more out of it, and finding more in it, every day.’

Cicely was supporting herself on her elbow, gazing at her eagerly. 'Go on!' she pleaded. 'I never heard any one talk like that about it, as if it were a real big thing! We've been dancing for years; very badly, apparently, but still we have enjoyed it! But we do it just for the fun of it, and because we're all so fearfully keen.'

The Advanced Certificate gave her an interested look. 'That's all right. You're the best kind. You may find it's a bigger thing than you've known, though.'

'Won't you tell us more? What has it meant to you?'

'Oh, I'm not going to give a lecture!' she laughed. 'You'll find out for yourselves before you've been here long. I can't say how much each of you will find, of course; but I'm not going to give you my ideas.'

Cicely lay back with a satisfied sigh of anticipation. 'Life's far more interesting than I thought!' she announced. 'I only hope this month won't go too quickly! Things will be awfully flat at home after this.'

'Baby!' Joan laughed. 'When you get home you've got your work cut out for you with the club!'

'That's so! We're going to have some dizzy times in that old barn. I'm going to make them all sit up! Well, I guess I'd better get a move on,' and Cicely sat up and shook the remaining pins out of her hair till it fell on her shoulders in a curly brown mane. 'I say! Shall we ever get a chance of seeing Madam dance? I'll sit out the whole party, if need be, to watch her. She did bits of things for us to-day, and it was just enough to make us pine for more. Joan's been raving all the way home about the way she runs.'

'Like my beautiful Timmy; my Persian cat, you know,' Joan added. 'I thought he was the most beautiful moving thing in the world until to-day. I didn't know a human being could be like that. I wanted to stroke her head and say, "Pretty pussy, then!" But I thought I'd better not.'

'It's just as well you didn't,' the Advanced Certificate said grimly. 'She might have misunderstood you. Oh, you'll see her demonstrate on Monday morning.'

'Shall we? You're sure she will?'

'Oh, positive certain!' the firm lips twitched. 'They won't demonstrate without *her*!'

'I say, we're rather in luck to have her!' Jen had been listening with interest.

'Have you never seen folk-dancing?'

'Only by our own girls at home. Why?'

'I'll be curious to know what you think of it when you've seen the real thing, that's all. You shall tell me on Monday.'

'I'm jolly well looking forward to Monday!' Cicely sighed.

‘I hope your luck will hold. Then perhaps you’ll see your Madam do Bampton—morriss, you know. “Bobbing Joe,” for instance. Or a Bampton jig; you’ll really see her then. I love to see the women do Bampton.’

‘Won’t she wear a tunic?’ Jen demanded. ‘She said we needn’t when it was only country dancing. But surely we ought to for morriss? We want to see her in one.’

‘Didn’t the Staff turn out in tunics this afternoon? Oh well, they will on Monday! Don’t worry! They won’t do morriss and swords in skirts.’

‘And jumpers!’ Cicely added. ‘It was quite a nice jumper, and suited her, but all the same we thought she’d wear a gymmy.’

‘Wait till Monday!’ the Advanced Certificate laughed.

‘I suppose I’ve got to, but it’s fearfully difficult! I say, tell me one thing! Does she sing? But I’m sure she does. With that speaking voice she couldn’t help it.’

‘Who? Your Madam? Yes, she sings,’ the Advanced Certificate laughed. ‘Wait till you’ve heard “Aunt Nancy” and “Cocky Robin”! I go crazy over them both—when she sings them. They seem to suit her, somehow. Oh yes, she sings; she couldn’t help it! It’s in the family.’

‘When will she sing to us? How can we make her?’

‘You could always ask! Ask the Director to ask her! He found the songs for us, so he’ll be quite pleased. But look here! I want some help,’ said the Advanced Certificate. ‘I’ve been buying a frock, and I’m going to alter it after dinner. It’s too long for me, of course. I want some of you to give me advice, and judge if it hangs well, and so on. Will you?’

‘You’ve—been buying—a frock?’ Joan gasped. ‘Why, you’ve only just arrived!’

‘Do you always buy frocks the minute you get to a new place?’ Joy jeered.

‘We thought you were going to help us, with dances and steps,’ Cicely laughed. ‘Oh, Joan will fit you! You can take her advice on anything in the dressmaking line! But do you mean that you dropped your luggage on your bed and dashed out and began buying frocks straight away?’

‘Why not? It’s Saturday night. We’ve no shops at home like those here. I’ve been waiting and saving up for these shops,’ the Advanced Certificate said composedly. ‘I always buy frocks here. How do you like it?’ and she spread out a tussore pinafore dress before their amused eyes.

‘Jolly fine!’ Joy commented. ‘Have they got any more?’

‘Awfully pretty. But it will need some altering to fit you. I’d love to help,’ Joan said warmly.

‘Joan shall help after supper,’ Cicely said, with laughing eyes. ‘And you shall criticise our side-step. Will you? We’ve got an awful premonition that

it's bad, very bad, and that we shall get sat on heavily on Monday. We'd like to spare Madam's feelings all we can. I'd be sorry if she had apoplexy; before we've seen her dance, anyway! I thought she would once or twice, when she shouted at me, "Miss *Hobart!* You're *all wrong!*" and then came flying at me.'

'And we were all too "dithered," as you say, to know why or where we were wrong,' Joan laughed. 'I just stood and gasped at her.'

'Yes, your mouth was wide open, like an infant's,' Joy jeered.

'I'm sure it wasn't! You looked quite desperately lost sometimes. Here comes Jacky-boy at last!'

'How late you are, husband!' Jen said severely, as Jack came wearily in. 'Have you had a good time? What have you been doing? Who's your teacher, and what's she like? Where is your school? The college is glorious!'

'I'm dead!' Jack said briefly, and sat down heavily on her bed. 'Why do we live at the top? Why do people dance in hot towns like this? Oh, the other two have come!' and her eyes swept wearily from the Torment to the Advanced Lady, who was putting her trunk out of sight under her bed. 'We've been learning things called "Brighton Camp" and "Butterfly," and your old "Peascods" and "Rufty," of course,' Jack added. 'I found I knew heaps about them from watching you Hamlets so often. But I am tired! And it is hot!'

'It is!' the Advanced Certificate agreed, as the others laughed. 'And "Brighton Camp" is jolly hard work. Who is teaching you? Tell me what she's like, and see if I can guess.'

'Like a robin,' Jack said promptly. 'Karen says so; she thought of it. Not in all ways, for robins quarrel and are so snappy, and she's as kind as kind, and kinder. She never said a cross thing to anybody; I loved her! But in some ways she is. She's little and neat and round and plump and jolly; dark hair; and awfully friendly and full of fun, makes jokes and laughs; and a *lovely* dancer! The way she runs in and claps in "Peascods" beats the whole Hamlet crowd, President.'

'I know,' Cicely said gloomily. 'We're not exactly as good as we thought we were. We've had several shocks, Jacky-boy! You'll roar when Jen tells you. Have you guessed?' she demanded of the authority across the room.

She nodded, her mouth full of pins, as she turned up a tentative hem on the new frock. 'I know her. You've hit her off, Miss—what do they call you? And by the way, it would be rather convenient to know one another's names. If you don't tell me what to call you I shall go round and look at the labels on your luggage.'

'Gracious, we've never introduced ourselves! Where do you come from? Not our part of the country, I think?' for her accent was strange to them all,

though least strange to Jen.

‘Noa! Aa’m frum up north, by Tyenside. Ma hoam’s in Newcastle,’ the Advanced Lady gravely held up her dress and surveyed it severely through her pince-nez. ‘D’ye think thaat’ll be aall reet noo?’

‘Oh, say some more! Do say some more!’ Joy cried in delight, while Tormy rolled on her bed in joy, and Jen and Jack shouted.

‘I shall call you Miss Newcastle,’ Cicely said promptly. ‘“Newcastle” was our first dance this afternoon. It’s a tremendous compliment, for we all love it extra much; it’s a very special dance with us. And yet we got dropped on for the way we made our lines! It was the first shock we had. I shall certainly call you Miss Newcastle. Now I’ll introduce the crowd, and tonight while you’re dressmaking we’ll explain all our nicknames. I’m far too hungry to do it now; and it’s far too long a story—several stories, in fact! There are two other girls in the house, beginners like Jacky-boy; but they have a room downstairs.’

‘I wonder if it was their heads you were doing “Capers” over!’ Miss Newcastle laughed. ‘All right! Introductions! Ready! “Once to Yourself” and then start!’



## CHAPTER XIII

### MISS NEWCASTLE

Miss Newcastle proved a treasure. She knew everything and everybody, and could tell stories of every one, even of Cicely's 'Madam' or the Honorary Director himself; she could give help on any point, and delivered judgment when appealed to with a swift decisive certainty second only to that which 'She-Who-Must-Be-Obeded' had displayed.

'You're all so frightfully sure of yourselves!' Cicely sighed and laughed.

While Miss Newcastle sewed at lightning speed, and Joan pinned and advised and altered, Cicely and Jen lay on their beds and did their share of the talking. Before long, the Advanced Certificate knew all about the Hamlet Club, its Queens, and its barn; about Joan's Abbey and Joy's grandfather's will, and the minuet which had won his heart and had given Joy the Hall; about Jen's lonely home and her dancing classes for the village children. This interested her greatly, and she asked many questions, and heard all about the sword-dance Jen had seen at Christmas.

'That's what you want for your boys, of course. You'll have them for good and all once you've taught them the "Kirkby." You're doing a good bit of work, Miss Robins; I hope you'll go on with it.'

'Oh, please don't! It makes me feel so silly!' Jen pleaded. 'I'm only Jenny-Wren. Could I ever teach a sword-dance?'

'Easily. You'll know two or three after a month here.'

'They'd simply love it! Oh!' and Jen sat up. 'Will you criticise my side-step? I was told it was bad. That won't bring the ceiling down, will it?'

Miss Newcastle put down her work and watched critically through her eyeglasses. 'Uh'm, it certainly is pretty bad,' she said coolly. 'Quite bad. Aa'll show ye presently. But Aa want to get on wi' me frock while the light lasts.'

'You are funny!' Cicely lay on her back and laughed at her. 'Are you going to wear it to-morrow? Didn't you bring any clothes?'

'Aa may's weel get it dune,' and she lapsed into her native dialect.

'You'd better give us all a lesson before we get into bed,' Joan remarked. 'For we taught Jen, so we must be bad too.'

'Aa'll dee thaat!' and at eleven o'clock, by candlelight, she put away her work and solemnly gave a demonstration of the criticised step. 'That's how it should be. This is what you all do! Noo git up and hev a try, ivvery one o' ye!'

They sprang to obey, Jen in a state of hysterical giggling because they were all so very much undressed; she could not quite forget what the scene must have looked like if there had been any one to see. Tormy Grant rolled on her bed to stifle her shouts of laughter, and vowed she would go to classes in pyjamas; but Miss Newcastle, Cicely, and Joan were desperately in earnest and worked really hard, she to make them understand and they to grasp where their failure had been. It was the first of a series of midnight lessons, and Tormy soon grew used to the sight of unclad figures wandering up and down as they made their way through the "Ilmington Hey" or practised steps and movements.

'You're simply invaluable!' Cicely dropped on her bed at last. 'An absolute treasure! We really are in luck. Between you and Madam we ought to go home beautiful dancers as well as beautiful characters!'

'It's awfully decent of you to take so much trouble!' and Joan crawled into bed and lay flat. 'And I thought I was tired hours ago!'

'Delighted, I'm sure! If I can oblige in any other little way at any time, don't hesitate to ask! Have any of you ever tried toe-dancing? Ballet, you know? That's the thing to make you tired! It's cruel!'

'We've only done this kind. What's it like?' Cicely asked curiously. 'Won't you show us? Do you know everything?'

And then she and Joan lay and laughed till they cried, while Joy and Jen, and Jack and Tormy, under Miss Newcastle's directions, tried to put their toes on the mantelpiece while performing contortions with the rest of their bodies, all in their nightgowns or pyjamas.

'Oh, stop, you lunatics!' Cicely wailed at last. 'I'm sore! Do get into bed, you silly infants! You'll split in half if you go on; and you won't be able to move to-morrow for stiffness. This is priceless! I wouldn't have missed it for a thousand pounds! I say! Couldn't we all arrange to live together in London at Christmas?'

'You will be stiff. You'd better give over. I forgot you were new to it,' and the Advanced Certificate dismissed her class. 'That's enough ballet for one night!'

But though they all followed Joan's example and crawled into bed, it was not to sleep but to lie and talk and question and laugh in the darkness, till Joy sat up suddenly. 'It's midnight, and I'm starving. It must have been that practising. Has any one got any biscuits? Then come on, Jacky-boy and Jenny-Wren, and see what we can find! We'll apologise in the morning.'

Giggling, they took candles and crept downstairs after her, returning presently in triumph with a plate of biscuits and another of small jam tarts. 'Found them in our cupboard, so they must have been meant for us! We three are champion explorers in the dark. It's not the first time, is it, you

two? Help yourself, President! My Lady!’—to the Advanced Certificate ‘Biscuits or tarts, or both?’

‘Is this—er—a usual part of Vacation School life?’ Cicely asked, as she lay eating tarts and filling her bed with crumbs so that it had to be re-made before she could sleep in it. ‘I’ve always wanted to eat tarts at midnight, but I never had the chance before. I was never at boarding-school, unfortunately, and I could have all the tarts I wanted, so it never occurred to me to want them at midnight. Does everybody do this kind of thing here?’

‘Oh well, the first night, you know! We shall sober down and get a bit more tired in a day or two.’

‘A bit more tired! I hope we shan’t!’ Jack groaned. ‘More biscuits, please, Joy!’

‘I suppose sober sensible people like Cicely’s Madam and the rest of the Staff will have gone to bed hours ago, to save up for their classes,’ Joan remarked, arranging her pillows comfortably at her back, her ruddy plaits on her shoulders. ‘Why didn’t you bring some lemonade while you were about it, Joy?’

Miss Newcastle, sitting up in bed with her dark hair hanging all over her shoulders, snorted. ‘Sober! Sensible! They’re far more likely to have had a fancy-dress party or something. When they’ve nothing else to do, they get up a dance, for a little variety! They’ve never had enough. I’ve heard stories of their parties—but that’s gossip and I won’t repeat it,’ she added virtuously.

‘*You* won’t repeat gossip?’ Cicely jeered. ‘What about those stories you told us just now?’

‘Go on! What about their parties? We’d love to hear!’

‘Good-night!’ and Miss Newcastle vanished suddenly under her bedclothes.

Joy and Tormy, with a look at one another, made a rush for her, and Jack and Jen were after them in a moment. ‘Get oop and tell us!’ Joy insisted.

‘Aa’ll *not!*’ she retorted. ‘Maybe Aa’m little, but Aa’m varry determined!’

‘Children, you must *not!*’ and Cicely hurled her weight into the free fight going on opposite. ‘Remember there are other people in the house! Jen, behave yourself! Jack, go back to bed! Joy, don’t be such a goat! As for you, Torment-child, we shall have to sit on you, after all, I think!’

‘Oh, do go to bed, all of you!’ Joan remonstrated, lying flat and exhausted. ‘You don’t know how tired you are! You’ll find out when you lie down. I’m going to sleep. Now mind you don’t wake me!’

Joy subsided with an indignant grunt. Jack crawled into bed and groaned as she stretched out her knees. Jen rolled in with a weary ‘Good-night,

hubby! Glad you're here! Good-night, all!

Tormy chuckled. 'Serves you all right! You won't be able to walk to-morrow! I'm going out to explore!'

'No, you aren't; not to-morrow. You're going to classes, to find out what an infant outsider you are. Don't you know it's Sunday already?' Cicely asked crushingly. 'Here's the last tart for you, baby! Now go to sleep! I'm going to get the crumbs out of my bed, and then the light's going out for the last time.'

'Thanks be!' said Miss Newcastle. 'I've lived with some queer folks at Vacation Schools, but never with quite such a set of lunatics as you Hamlet lot.'

Five separate grunts of scorn answered her, but all had found, as Joan had foretold, just how tired they were, and only Cicely had the energy to retort, 'I was just thinking how well you fitted in!'

The Advanced Certificate chuckled, but said no more. Cicely laboriously removed the crumbs from her bed, put out the light, and lay down, with a heartfelt, 'Goodness! How sore I am!' Even that only drew a snigger from Tormy and Joy, however; the others were past caring how she felt, and silence fell on the seven beds at last.

'I suppose we've got to dress, as it's Sunday!' Jen sounded aggrieved, as she sat up some hours later.

The others lay and looked at her, and yawned, and turned round and groaned. 'What's the hurry?' Joy demanded. 'I'm going to have another nap!'

'You're not going up on the hills with me *undressed*, Jenny-Wren!' Joan laughed. 'Oh, I can't move! I shall stay here till to-morrow's classes begin! But I'll go to those if I need to have a bath-chair to get to the college!'

'But look at the sun! The hills are glorious,' Jen clasped her knees and gazed out of the open window. 'I believe there might be some air up there.'

'Where's that Torment-child?' Cicely sat up suddenly. 'You don't mean she's dressed and gone out without waking us?'

The Advanced Certificate, lying reading in her bed, explained. 'She got up an hour ago and dressed like a mouse. Said she was going to coax some breakfast and sandwiches out of Fanny and go off on her bike for the day.'

'Gracious! That infant! Will she be all right?'

'Of coorse she will! That kyend nivver cums to any harrm.'

'Have you been awake long?' Cicely stretched and lay in happy, lazy comfort.

'Good while,' Miss Newcastle turned a page and read on.

'She hasn't been to sleep,' said Jack suddenly. 'Have you?' she challenged.

‘Well, neither have you,’ Miss Newcastle retorted. ‘I knew some one was awake, but we couldn’t talk because of the rest of you. Sleeping like dogs! I’d have liked to throw pillows at you all.’ She sat up. ‘I’m out for breakfast, and then for the hills! I agree with Miss Jenny-Wren.’

‘But haven’t you slept, really?’

‘Jacky-boy, haven’t you?’ Jen asked severely.

‘I was too tired. I couldn’t lie still long enough to get to sleep. I kept turning round to see if the other side would be any better,’ Jack said pathetically.

‘I never do, the first night,’ Miss Newcastle said placidly. ‘It’s quite too thrilling to waste in sleep! I don’t know how you four could sleep like that; your first school, too! Oh, one night doesn’t hurt! But you’ll have a lot of fresh air to-day and a very hot bath at night, Miss Jack; that will help you. Are you five going to let me go to the hills with you? For I haven’t found out who’s here yet, so I’ve no one to go with.’

The suggestion was received with a shout of approval, which she accepted placidly as her due, bowing graciously to each in turn as she reached for her stockings.

‘In spite of our being lunatics?’ Cicely asked, however.

‘Because of it,’ she assured them solemnly, and flinging on her dressing-gown made a dash for the door. ‘I’m first for the bathroom this morning, anyway!’

They spent all afternoon lying in the sunshine on the golf links, the wind sweeping across the plain and making their faces burn with the freshness of the Welsh mountains and the salt of the Severn mouth, the blue Malvern hills before them and a shining glimpse of the river away to the left, dim hints of Wales far to the right. The town lay at their feet, or, when they moved on a little way, fell out of sight round the corner; the tower of Gloucester Cathedral rose from the plain, other hills and valleys lay behind. Jen was reminded of her heather-clad ridge at home, though the turf of these hills was more like that of the Downs. Cicely said rapturously, ‘It’s like the edge of the Chilterns, when you stand by the Cross and look out over Oxfordshire. Abbey-Girl, your Abbey is just down there among those trees! These hills make all the difference to the place. It’s a beautiful town, and up here it’s glorious!’

‘I wish they’d have their classes up here, right on the very top!’ Joy laughed. ‘Some air, then! But what a climb!’

Karen Wilson and Tazy Kingston had begged leave to come too, and Karen was useful as guide, so they were a big party as they lay watching the groups of other wanderers coming up from the tram terminus, and

wondering how many of the girls and men belonged to ‘our lot,’ as Joy called the students.

‘They all might; they look just like it. I’m sure that set are School people! Perhaps we’ll see some one we know.’

Tazy, healthy and very strong, had slept as soundly as Cicely, Joan, and Jen; sleeplessness was never likely to trouble Joy. But Karen, sensitive and artistic, had lain awake, though there had been no midnight demonstrations in her room, no funny stories or dressmaking by candlelight, and no early morning meal of tarts and biscuits. ‘The music wouldn’t stop,’ she explained, as she sat gazing gravely down at Gloucester. ‘I enjoyed it more than anything I’ve ever known, but I couldn’t possibly sleep after it. I went on enjoying it all night, you see. I found I could dance, though; I was afraid I might not be able to. Some people get giddy, and they say it’s their glasses or their eyes that cause it. I was afraid of mine; I’ve had to do without so many things. But I got on quite all right, and I simply loved it.’

‘Did the music come alive, as you said?’ Joy asked curiously.

‘Some of it,’ Karen laughed. ‘I hadn’t known some of it, but Tazy had whistled “Rufty Tufty” and “The Butterfly,” and I nearly cried with joy when I found myself dancing to them.’

‘I don’t know what will happen when you learn “The Old Mole” or “Paper,”’ Tazy remarked. ‘Now those two have associations for you, if you like! You’ll probably swoon with bliss, and I shall have to hold you up. As for “Greenwood”——!’

‘Oh, shall we learn that? Would it be possible? Or “Lady in the Dark?” I’d love to know the movements of those two!’

The Advanced Certificate remarked, ‘You won’t learn those two in classes, if you’re a beginner. They’re rather advanced dances. But I could teach them to you in the garden some evening. There are plenty of us; you only want four or six. Why are you so keen on those two tunes?’

‘I’ll tell her. You’d better write your letter, Karen. You know somebody’s dying to hear how you got on!’ Tazy suggested.

Karen laughed, and moving a few yards away took out a writing pad and began to scribble. Tazy deliberately moved farther from her to the opposite side of the group, and said, in a low tone which made them draw nearer to listen, ‘She’s writing—oh, she won’t hear us! She won’t think of anything now but telling *him* all about the music yesterday! She’s writing to a boy. They’re better friends than I ever saw any two who didn’t mean to get married some day. Yes, it’s true. They don’t say they’re engaged, for she’s only sixteen; he’s seventeen, but he’s older than that in his ways. I don’t know how much she knows yet; I think she just likes him awfully, but she may have got past that and know what she means by it. There’s no doubt of

him! He knows what he wants! She thinks a lot more than she says, so she may feel as much as he does. But she just talks as if they were good friends. She's stayed a lot with his people, and they like her ever so much, so it's quite all right on both sides. She and Rennie fit awfully well. You see, we were all at school together in Switzerland, we at St Mary's and he at St John's, just across the river. She and I had to live at a pension because the school was full; and he was there too, and several other boys—jolly boys!' she laughed reminiscently. 'And Karen and Rennie got fearfully chummy before the rest of us knew anything about it. She was form-captain, and he helped her when things went wrong and she had a rough time, because the other *capitaine* was a slacker. It was then I found out what tremendous chums they were. And she wrote a fantasy for a Musical Competition, and it was made up round those four folk-dances; I whistled them for her. You haven't heard her fiddle? Oh, it's wonderful; quite unusual, really! She'll play anything you want to dance, if you just sing it to her once. Her fantasy was far and away the best composition, and she got the prize and a tremendous ovation, and his folks came to hear her play. His father is Sir Rennie Brown, the most famous doctor for certain things, in the world, I believe; people just swear by him in Switzerland. And Rennie's going to be just like him. It's awfully jolly for Karen to have had a family like that fall in love with her. Her father's a journalist and always travelling, and her mother died years ago. Her eyes are very weak, so there are heaps of things she can't do. But she'll never need to. She'll marry Rennie Brown when she's nineteen, if not before, and be company for his little mother; and they'll all live together in the loveliest place in Switzerland. I'm awfully glad she's settled in life! She's not the kind to make her own way and have adventures. And I am glad she can do this dancing, for she loves every minute of it and every bit of the music. She's so fearfully artistic and enjoys it so tremendously, that I'm just afraid she won't sleep for the whole month!

'You know,' Cicely said exuberantly, when Joy and Jen had finished exclaiming over Karen's story, and Joan had asked a few interested questions, 'I'm going to enjoy every minute of this school most hugely. It's all simply priceless, from the classes, and the new dances and music, to the midnight adventures I foresee in our big dorm. But I believe the bit that's going to appeal to me most of all—it's saying a good deal, I know, and it's early to speak yet, but I'm getting more and more sure of it—is this meeting with all kinds of people from all sorts of places and hearing all about their lives. It's simply thrilling! People are so different. Who could think your Karen was almost engaged? She looks one of the youngest of us! And the Torment-child, with her talk about living in a boys' school; we must hear

more about that! Then you,' and she turned to the Advanced Certificate. 'I know you do interesting things. Won't you tell us?'

Miss Newcastle said gravely, 'I'm only a plain ordinary school teacher. I look after dozens of small children all day. But at night I teach folk-dancing and songs and drill to all kinds of girls—girls' clubs, Y.W.C.A. girls, unemployed girls, a big gym class on Mondays, and so on. I look forward all day to the evenings, though I enjoy my work and I'm very fond of my kiddies. But I'm keener on the big girls, and they simply live for their classes. They're in offices and shops, or else they're little servant-girls from the country with nowhere to go in the evenings, or typists and cashiers; or girls still at school. I try to give them with—no, through!—their folk-dance work a wider outlook and an uplift which they seem to feel the need of, and a touch of poetry and music and art, and I believe they realise it unconsciously; anyway, they respond most tremendously and they do improve. Those I've had for years are quite different from the new-comers.'

Jen's eyes were alight. 'That's just what's happening in a tiny way with my children, though I couldn't have put it into words. Thank you so much!' she said fervently.

Cicely's face was glowing too. 'I knew you were a specially good sort!' she said warmly. 'And you give up your holidays to coming to a school to learn more! I think that's awfully fine!'

'Oh, I enjoy it!' Miss Newcastle laughed. 'Don't make any mistake about that! I know when I'm well off! I suppose you lot think you know something about a Vacation School,' she said solemnly. 'Well, you don't know a thing about it. You've only begun to touch the fringe of it. Why, you haven't seen the School yet. You've only seen your own class!'

'That's true,' Cicely acknowledged. 'You mean we want to see them all together?'

'You've got to see the morning session, the singing, the demonstration, and the crowd. Oh, I can't tell you; you'll know by this time to-morrow! You've got to see it, and feel it, and be part of it. And that child has got to sleep to-night, or she'll get worn out,' with a severe look at Jack. 'We're all going to bed early, with no toe-dancing at midnight!'



## CHAPTER XIV

### MORNING IN THE SCHOOL

Mrs Hunt's little maid, Fanny, was washing the hall on Monday morning when Miss Newcastle, in the neatest of blue tunics and black legs, and wearing her silver star on her breast, came downstairs with unconscious dignity. With one astonished gasp Fanny fled to the kitchen, and the Advanced Certificate greeted the others, when they followed her into the breakfast-room, with an amused chuckle.

'How many small girls were washing the hall when you came down?'

'Both of them,' Cicely said in surprise. 'Why?'

'Because I gave Fanny such a shock that she went flying to fetch Ethel to see too. I guessed they'd both be there. You should have seen Fanny's face! Her eyes travelled down as far as my knees and then she exploded and just ran to find the other kid. Ethel was out on Saturday, you know; I've no doubt Fanny had been telling her what a comic lot we are! They'll both be hanging about when we go up to fetch our coats. They think we're lunatics.'

'Glad we're causing the inhabitants some amusement,' Joy said airily.

Cicely and Joan were practising side-step, according to the instructions given them on Saturday night, when She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed entered the classroom. Their eyes followed her, Joan's in warm appreciation, Cicely's in rapture, for she wore a smooth blue tunic and looked as happy in it as every one else.

'Coo!' Joy murmured. 'Isn't she a treat? She looked jolly before, but in her gymmy she beats herself into fits!'

'You see so much *more* of her!' Jen remarked truthfully. 'And when she's as topping as that, the more you see the better!'

'You see her movement better,' Joan said enjoyably.

'Yes, I feel like a sack of potatoes or a lump of clay beside *that!*' Cicely groaned.

'Oh, you needn't!—She wants you,' and Joan retreated hurriedly, as Madam came towards Cicely, with a peremptory, 'Miss Hobart!'

'She must have seen that side-step! I said she'd got eyes all round her head!' and Cicely went to meet her gloomily.

'Look here!' Madam spoke in the offhand almost schoolboy manner characteristic of her, which fitted her short skirt admirably, but contrasted strongly with the inimitable beauty of her every movement. 'I don't want you four to think, because I'm always finding fault with you, that you

haven't any good points. You've a great many. I don't think I said much about them on Saturday, but they are there. Your balance and movements are good; any one can see you've done a lot of dancing; you're above the average in many ways. In some points your style's surprisingly good, but you've lots of dreadful faults, you know. I want to get you out of them, and then you'll be quite all right. But you've a lot to build on; your rhythm is always good; you know a great many dances thoroughly, and you're sure of what you do know; you don't make silly mistakes continually, and you do concentrate on your work. I wish I could say the same for more of them! I can see that if I tell you a thing, you'll grasp it and remember it, and that means you'll be easy to teach. And you don't chatter!' and she laughed. 'But, when I've said all that, I must say again, you've got *dreadful* faults! You're murdering some of the dances. That's all. Now make up sets of six, everybody,' and she sprang on to the form and stood surveying them. 'I want to see "Trunkles."'

'How awfully nice of her!' and Cicely swiftly repeated the gist of Madam's words. 'Fancy taking the trouble to buck us up like that! I say, don't be too awful after that! Do play up and make the best show you can!'

It was a harassing and disheartening hour for four who had been quite pleased with their morris dancing up till then. Madam watched them closely, and when her eye caught Cicely's she shook her head with a twinkle that seemed to say, 'You're very nearly hopeless. But not quite!' She made no crushing comment, however, but coming down from her form gave a demonstration of the steps and circles which they watched with hungry, wondering eyes.

'Now do it like that!' said she.

'Like that! I never saw anything like that before!' Cicely informed her swiftly, as she passed their set.

She laughed. 'Have you never seen morris? Well, what could you expect?'

'Not morris like yours. Only our own, and apparently we've been playing at it. Yours is quite another thing,' the President said gloomily.

'Yours has got to be quite another thing too,' was the crushing retort, and from her form Madam demanded the dance again.

But this time she gave them a brief nod. 'Practise that at home. Now have you all done Bampton? I want "Bobbing Joe." Remember, when you "show," your movement is this!' and she came to earth to demonstrate again.

'I thought she was going to do it up there, and break her leg!' Joy murmured in relief.

But Joan and Cicely were watching the beautiful waving arm-movement with delighted eyes. 'I *never* saw anything to beat that! But I could never do

it like that in this world!’ the President groaned.

Madam heard and laughed. ‘Now let me see that. All “show” to your opposites, for practice. B music, please!’ and she watched them with keenly amused eyes.

‘Oh, I dare say it’s awfully funny!’ Cicely informed her, as they rested. ‘But you forget that I’m stunned with horror at the mess we’ve been making of things; and Joan’s dumb with joy at the way *you* do them; and Joy and Jen are ready to burst with amusement because I’ve been teaching the rest all wrong; and how *can* we concentrate on which foot goes behind and which arm comes in front?’

‘Oh, you’ll improve in time!’ Madam said coolly. ‘Now you can be thinking out “Shepherd’s Hey.” We’ll have some Ilmington for a change.’

‘You’re trying to muddle us!’ Joy said indignantly; they were sitting on the floor in a ring at her feet. ‘We do know the hey, though. We did it on Saturday, at midnight, in our——’

‘No, I want to see how much you know,’ and Madam did not wait to hear whether the last word referred to place or costume.

With hundreds of other eager laughing girls, they presently crowded into the big hall for the morning session. As they sat in the closely-packed rows, singing folk-songs under the leadership of the Director, each found enjoyment in her own particular way. Joan’s eyes roved over the beautiful hall, and she felt again the privilege of meeting in such a place. Jen, sitting on the floor with Jack, Tormy, Tazy and Karen, who had come in late but managed to find her, sang with all her might, while resolving to teach these songs to her children as soon as she reached home; they satisfied her artistic sense, and were exactly what she had been unknowingly craving for. The choice for the day fell on ‘As I walked through the Meadows,’ ‘Admiral Benbow,’ ‘Banbury,’ ‘Spanish Ladies,’ ‘Midsummer Fair,’ and ‘The Crystal Spring,’ and each in turn was a delight. Then came chanties—‘Whip Jamboree,’ and the high roof rang with the sailors’ chorus, ‘Oh, Jenny, get your oatcake done!’—and a solo, the very announcement of which was greeted with joyful applause; evidently it was an old favourite. ‘Shanadar’ was followed by ‘Sally Brown,’ which was called for from all quarters of the room; everybody joined happily in the chorus lines—‘I spent my money ‘long o’ Sally Brown’—and there was a ripple of laughter at the last verse—‘Now we’re married and we’re living nice and comf’r’able.’

Jack giggled and nudged Jen; but Joy said exuberantly, ‘What a topping voice he’s got! I wish he’d go on and on!’

‘What wonderful accompanying!’ Karen said wistfully. ‘I could listen for ever! But how weird that last tune was!’

Cicely's eyes went from the soloist to Madam, sitting on the platform with one knee cocked over the other and singing with as much enjoyment as anybody. There was no mistaking the relationship. 'He's her brother. I wonder if he dances too?' she whispered to Joan, as the Director rose to make some announcements.

Cicely, as she had foreseen, had found her greatest interest in the crowd. While she sang, her eyes had been roving over the thronged benches, as for the first time she saw the whole School together and began to sense its atmosphere, of eagerness and excitement, of friendship and good fellowship, of keen artistic joy in beautiful sights and sounds. The majority of the students were girls, though there were many men; the tunics were of every colour and variety, from cream shantung silk to the regulation blue of Chelsea and Reading; there was no monotony, such as she had expected. The men wore coloured blazers over their flannels; many of the girls had brilliant jumpers over their tunics and looked more boy-like than ever, with almost no skirt at all showing—especially those who had bobbed their hair, and there were many of them. Keenly interested in everything and everybody, Cicely wondered again how many of these girls were teachers; how many had come because they had found in this folk-art the widening and uplift of which Miss Newcastle had spoken; and if it would be possible to make friends with many outside their own immediate circle. She saw the Advanced Certificate, sitting with several other 'silver-badge' ladies on the edge of the platform, facing the crowd and swinging her legs happily as she sang, but did not know that Miss Newcastle had been watching her intent face with interest.

'But how on earth are they going to dance to us in this packed place?' jerked Joy, as the Director bade them 'Clear away the chairs for the demonstration,' with a gesture, as if he expected the crowded rows of seats to vanish when he raised his hand.

'Gracious!' gasped Jen. 'It's happening!'

It happened, indeed, and in record time. In a perfectly marvellous way, to the novices, the big hall cleared for dancing as if by magic. Madam's brother came to help, and took control of the proceedings with an accustomed air of authority which told of long practice. The chairs vanished to the sides of the room; a solid row of students sat on the floor in front of the first line of seats; those behind stood up against the wall; others scrambled on to desks or window sills or made for the platform; the raised seats at the end of the hall were packed right up to the stained-glass windows. The Director took his place at the piano again; a dark girl sitting by him shouldered a violin; he called the name of a dance, Madam and five

other girls in tunics came out, sticks in hand, to dance ‘Shepherd’s Hey, Ilmington’; and the morning demonstration began.

Jack sat on the floor, eagerly pointing out her teacher among the demonstrators. ‘Isn’t she just like a jolly round chirpy little robin? There, the second one! You watch her, Jen! She made us do morris step, all standing in a big ring; then she told us to go forward doing it, and said, “You must *travel* on it; like this!”—and, coo! She shot forward like a cricket ball! Tophole! She got across the room in three steps! And she’s awfully kind; she never laughs at you. She goes round watching your feet, and saying, “It’s coming!”—I suppose she means the step! She sees every single person and knows just what they did, just as you say your one does.’

Tazy Kingston and the Torment, with a strong bond between them in their love of cricket and boys, commented admiringly on the perfect figure and erect bearing of a tall fair girl in brown, who was tapping sticks with Madam. ‘I guess she’s a gym mistress. Doesn’t she look it? I shall be like that some day!’ Tormy laughed.

Cicely and Joan were very quiet, and Jenny-Wren, glancing up at Joan’s face from her seat on the floor, reached for and clasped her hand, but did not speak. The hall rang with applause as the dance ended; then their ‘Madam’ came forward, handkerchiefs in hand, to dance a Bampton jig with her sister-in-law; and Joan glanced at Cicely, whose rigid attention had deepened. Neither of them missed a fraction of the beautiful movements; at the end, Cicely relaxed with a sigh. ‘And we’ve had the cheek, the impudence, to think we were doing “Princess Royal!” Joan, don’t you feel a worm?’

‘I’m crushed,’ Joan responded limply. ‘I’m flattened out. I know just how you feel.’

‘Do you? I don’t! I’m all turned up inside. I never saw anything like this before. Don’t speak to me; and don’t let those kids chatter. It’s too—too thrilling for words! It’s working me up awfully, you know.’

Joan glanced at her tense face. ‘I know. We didn’t understand.’

‘The men are going to dance! Oh, tophole!’ Jen chortled joyfully, remembering her ‘guiser’s’ words.

All through the country dances that followed the men’s morris, Cicely was unnaturally quiet, watching intently but without a word for any one. For the men, six very tall hefty fellows, had danced ‘Step Back,’ and again she had had a revelation of what morris should be. During the wild rush to the quad and the scramble for buns and milk and lemonade, which followed the demonstration, she was still unlike herself, unwilling to speak to any one save for a few quick deeply-moved words to Joan. ‘The most wonderful

thing, in its way, I ever saw. I don't know why, but I wanted to cry. I can't talk about it yet. You felt it too, Joan! I'm going to ask her——'

She retreated to a corner with the milk and buns Joy had brought her, and kept away from the excited group where Tazy and Tormy, Jack and Joy, were telling Miss Newcastle what they had thought of the dancing, each one fairly bubbling over with delight and appreciation.

'And we'll have that every morning? And an hour of it on Thursday?' Jack cried eagerly. 'I simply love watching them! Each dance was prettier than the last! "Chelsea Reach" was simply lovely!'

'Did "Greenwood" upset you, Karen?' Tazy laughed. 'Wasn't it jolly of them to do it on our first day?'

'Oh, I enjoyed it! It was as beautiful as I'd imagined it! But quite different!' Karen laughed. 'I'd been seeing girls in white, and no men; not blue tunics and flannels! But of course I saw our pine woods, and Rennie, and the whole school crowd, as soon as the music started. It was so vivid that I could hardly watch the dance.'

As soon as Madam appeared in the classroom Cicely, who had been waiting for her, went towards her. 'Why did your dancing make me want to cry?' she demanded.

'Make you *what*? I'm sure I'm very sorry! I hope it doesn't affect everybody that way!'

'Don't you know what I mean?' Cicely brushed aside her mocking words. 'It was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. I'd never dreamt of anything like it. I couldn't speak; I haven't really got over it yet. Of course, I felt, in a subconscious kind of way, what idiots we've been making of ourselves. But that was a secondary idea, behind the real one. Why did it work me up like that? Things don't very often. I don't know when I've felt so—so queer!'

Madam laughed at this anti-climax. Then, with a glance at her face, she asked gravely, 'Have you felt like it before, about other things? Music? Or poetry?'

'Not those. I asked myself that. I'm not clever enough. I felt rather as if this were music and poetry come to life; as if I were meeting them really for the first time. But I have felt it,' Cicely said slowly. 'I know it sounds very ridiculous, and you'll laugh at me; but I felt the same thing in Switzerland when I first saw Mont Blanc, suddenly, from the Col de Balme. The sight of it took me by the throat and nearly choked me. And once when I came on York Minster unexpectedly I nearly cried. Now why? And why should your dancing make me feel the same?'

But Madam did not laugh. She said gravely, 'Don't you know? Then go home and think it out for yourself. But you've said it all already. I'm not

sorry, after all; I'm glad. But there aren't many to whom it means as much as that, I think.'

'I've loved it for six years,' Cicely said simply. 'But I never really saw it till this morning. I hadn't an idea what it could be. That men's dance!'

'Oh, well! "Step Back" is always glorious, isn't it?'

'I never saw it before. You're used to it, I suppose. I never saw anything like those back steps. But your jig was the best of all. *Thank* you for that! I'm going to dream of it!'

Madam laughed, and changed the subject with characteristic abruptness; Cicely soon found that she would take no compliment for herself, though she could sympathise with praise of her art. 'We're gossiping! This won't do. Make up sets of eight, and let me see "Newcastle." Be careful of your last figure. Then I want to do "Chelsea Reach."'

'After doing it for us like that! I suppose you know we feel *worms*?' Cicely groaned.

'I don't see why——'

'Oh, *don't* you!' the President murmured, as she went to her place in the ring.

## CHAPTER XV

### A SHOCK FOR THE PRESIDENT

‘You’re a little treasure that knows everything; a kind of pocket encyclopædia,’ Cicely flung herself on her bed and looked at the Advanced Certificate, who was sitting by the open window gazing severely through her eyeglasses at a big hole in a stocking drawn over her hand. ‘I want you to tell me something.’

Her abnormal state had worn off with the excitement of her first class in sword-dancing, but she had still been quiet at lunch time, and now that there was an hour to rest she turned to her new-found authority for help.

Miss Newcastle laughed, and looked at her over her glasses. ‘What is it? Are you all tied up in “Flamborough?” Who takes you for swords?’

‘Well, I am, of course. I don’t understand it a bit. To expect any one to take in all that at the end of such a morning is simply cruel. I hadn’t a scrap of brain left by the time we got to swords. But I may get the hang of it tomorrow. We’ve got a little boy to teach us, out in the big hall, and my goodness! She’s smart! She’s just like a boy, awfully neat and slim and quick and dark, and sticks to business every minute—never suggests you might like to rest; and she jolly well knows what she wants—just like all the rest of them!’

‘She yells at you no end, though,’ said Joy, who had suffered.

‘I simply loved it—and her. I’m going to enjoy swords. I love clashing them, and to think that I know how to make the lock already is just too gorgeous for words,’ Jen said exuberantly.

‘But that’s not what I want to ask you,’ Cicely went on. ‘I’m really in earnest, so please be serious, Newcastle!’—they had decided it was time to drop formalities, though nicknames might remain.

Miss Newcastle began to darn her stocking. ‘Well?’

‘Why did Madam’s dancing make me feel as I did when I first saw Mont Blanc or York Minster?’

The Advanced Certificate laid down her work and stared at her. Joy crowed derisively, ‘Did you tell her so? I saw you having a heart-to-heart talk with her! Well, she is big, of course, but——’

‘Don’t be an ass!’ Cicely said irritably.

‘Shut up, Joy!’ Joan said briefly, and Joy knew it was serious and subsided, but listened with interest.

‘What do you mean?’ Miss Newcastle demanded.



Cicely described the state of feeling into which the demonstration had thrown her. ‘Joan felt it too. I asked Madam, and she told me to go home and think it out for myself.’

‘And have you done it?’ Miss Newcastle was slowly drawing her needle through the stocking. ‘I understand, of course. I used to feel it myself, and I still do to a certain extent. There are certain times, and dances, that still thrill me so that I snap if I’m spoken to, and want to clout any one who chatters over the head. “Step Back” often does it; and so does “Step Stately” and the Adderbury morris; you haven’t seen those yet. As for the Running Set, I want to get up and yell when they do that! And yet I’ve been watching it for years—not Running Set, of course, but the others. Don’t you know why it is?’

‘I just hoped no one would speak to me. I couldn’t have answered,’ Cicely said simply. ‘Is it—she hesitated—‘is it what I said to her, that you really are seeing music and poetry come to life?’

‘That puts it rather well. It is that, of course. As for Mont Blanc, I haven’t seen it, but I know York. I know what you mean. The Minster is poetry made visible, isn’t it?—a beautiful thought interpreted in stone instead of in words. Weren’t you seeing the same thing in the form of movement this morning? Wasn’t it’—she hesitated in her turn, then went on gravely—‘that on each of these occasions you came suddenly face to face with beauty unexpectedly—beauty that you could see? Some people find it in music and some in books. Perhaps you’re like me—rather simple-minded, I’m afraid!—and want it made visible. You realised it in movement to-day, through a thing you loved already; it’s not surprising you felt it move you deeply.’

‘Move me deeply! I just crumpled up! I was more tired after those fifteen minutes of watching than after the whole hour of morris! I just went all limp. And I’m simply dying for to-morrow morning!’

‘An hour of it all at once on Thursday will be too much for you,’ Miss Newcastle laughed.

‘They’ll have to see me safely home afterwards. Thank you!’ Cicely said impressively. ‘Didn’t I say you were a treasure?’

Madam’s eyes met Cicely’s in a questioning challenge at the afternoon class. Cicely said gravely, ‘I understand now. I didn’t quite get it for myself; I’m not clever enough. But we’ve got a little walking dictionary living in our house, and she explained to me what I’d been feeling. I won’t say it to you, for it would be embarrassing, and you always shy when I try to say nice things. Oh, yes, you do!’ as Madam laughed. ‘But I feel it all the same and all the time. Thank you for what you showed me this morning!’

‘I’m glad you came to the school, since it means so much to you,’ Madam said seriously. ‘Why on earth didn’t you come years ago?’

‘Oh, why? I’m asking myself all the time! To think of the years we’ve missed! We’d never heard of it; that’s why!’

‘Why won’t you wear your gymmies in the afternoon?’ Jen ventured to interrupt the ‘heart-to-heart’ talk.

‘Because the Director doesn’t wish it,’ Madam said solemnly.

‘And does he always have to get his own way?’ Joan laughed.

‘Yes, we heard him this morning,’ Joy joined in. ‘He said we could go home and change and have our bath! We thought it was topping of him to take such an interest in our baths!’

‘But a weird order to do things in!’ Cicely added. ‘Does he always have his bath last?’

‘Cicely calls him The Prophet, because he’s gone all over the country finding out these dances and songs, and now he’s passing them on to us,’ Jen remarked. ‘It’s exactly what I wanted somebody to do with our sword-dance at home; but I didn’t know there *was* a Prophet! We’re awfully much obliged to him, really, you know.’

Madam nodded. Joy said teasingly, ‘The President has names for you all. You know the Prophet’s little secretary-lady? She calls her “the little foot-page,” out of that ballad we sang this morning. She looks just like it when she sits at his feet, in her tunic, and flies off if he wants anything, almost before he’s asked for it; I mean the little dark one, that’s almost related to you, but not quite! We’re sure she dances without touching the ground, especially when she’s setting! *Isn’t* she light?’

Madam laughed out. ‘What a description! It’s very clear! There’s no doubt whom you mean!’

‘Cicely says your brother ought to be called Joshua,’ Joy went on. ‘Not because he’s the least like Joshua! She owns he isn’t. But because he’s the Prophet’s helper and right-hand man, and carries out his orders. The Prophet thinks of things, and Joshua sees they’re done.’

Madam laughed. ‘I’ll tell Joshua! And what is her name for *me*?’

But Joy quailed under the President’s terrible look, and fled. ‘I’m sure we ought to start! Aren’t we wasting too much time?’

And Madam, thinking the nickname might possibly express some of those compliments which she had not allowed Cicely to speak, did not press for an answer which might have been embarrassing.

‘Where is the other Miss Shirley; the one who tries to tease?’ she asked next afternoon. ‘Oh, has Belinda arrived?’

‘Belinda came last night,’ Joan explained, ‘and Joy’s away to Stratford, or Wales, or Cornwall, or the North Pole. I’m afraid she won’t come much

in the afternoons now; she won't miss mornings because of the demonstration and the singing, and because she's so keen on the sword class; but she'll go off after lunch for the rest of the day.'

'It spoils your set. I was going to do "Parson," for four. You'd better find some lonely person and take her in.'

'I think they've all got partners,' Cicely looked round anxiously. 'Shall we have to sit out? Joy is a bounder!'

Madam, from her form, was counting. 'Twenty-seven! What a hopeless number! No, you mustn't all sit out. I'll come in and make up your set.'

'*Will* you? We shall be hideously nervous, though!'

'But we'll simply love it, if you will,' Joan added swiftly, in case she should think Cicely had meant it.

Madam laughed, and took Jen for a partner, to her embarrassment but unbounded delight. 'Thank you awfully!' Jen said warmly. 'I'm so glad Belinda's come! I was invited to go in the side-car; we all were; but we wouldn't. But we didn't know it would mean getting a dance with you!'

'We want you to sing to us some day,' Cicely had been waiting for her opportunity and getting up her courage. 'We're sure you do sing; why should your brother do all the work? We've been told about something called "Aunt Nancy" and something else called "Cock Robin," and that nobody can sing them but you.'

'"*Cocky* Robin"! Madam remonstrated. 'Oh, other people do sing them sometimes! Who's responsible for that statement?'

'Well, when will you? We're dying to hear them!'

'Possibly in the last week, if I'm asked,' Madam said solemnly. 'All kinds of things happen in the last week. Didn't you know? Nothing matters then, and we just enjoy ourselves.'

'Something to look forward to! But it won't make up for having to go home! We'll all feel most horribly flat after this.'

At night they told Miss Newcastle of their new experience.

'She danced just with us three!' Jen said proudly.

'But she was watching the whole room, as usual. She wasn't thinking about us,' Cicely remarked.

'*Wasn't* she? What about the third figure?' Joan hinted, and the rest laughed.

'You want her for a partner in Running Set,' the Advanced Certificate said grimly. 'You don't get the full benefit in country dancing. She's as strong as a man. I had her once, and I just went off my feet. Of course, I'm not very big, but she just whirled me round as if I'd been a child. I was stiff in my arms and shoulders for two days, and she thought it was funny when I told her!'

‘Tophole!’ chuckled Jen. ‘But what is Running Set?’—They were lying in deck chairs in the garden.

‘It’s the wildest thing out. You run madly on and on, as long as your breath holds out. There are endless figures, long ones too; it’s nothing to go on without a break for three-quarters of an hour.’

‘Goodness! Really? I say, will they do it for us one day?’

‘I shouldn’t wonder, some of it, you know. The figures are all called after animals, or children’s games; the Wild Goose Chase, Chase the Squirrel, Shoot the Owl, Box the Gnat, Wind Up the Ball Yarn; then there’s Going Down Town, and the Waltz Swing—gorgeous!’ and Miss Newcastle chanted solemnly—“*Swing* your partner! *Swing* your contrary! Take your partner home!” Oh, you’ve not really lived till you’ve met the Running Set! The Prophet found it in the Appalachian Mountains for us, you know, but it’s as English as the rest of our dances. That’s where he found “Cocky Robin” and “Aunt Nancy” too.’

‘It sounds exciting!’ Jen said hungrily. ‘But what did Madam mean about the last week?’

‘Oh, we have all kinds of extras! Nobody likes the thought of going home, so they pile on all the fun they can. I’ve seen the whole of the Staff and all the advanced classes playing baby games on the last morning; skipping round in “Sally go round the sun,” or flopping down dead in “Roman Soldiers,” as if they were all about six.’

‘We won’t miss that!’ Jen laughed, and went to tell Joy and Jack about their dance with Madam, as Belinda came snorting up the drive.

Jack had gone in the side-car, and it was only the first of many such rides for her. That morning she had rolled out of bed and remained sitting disconsolately on the floor, saying in alarm that she could not straighten her legs. The others were all stiff, too, but managed to hobble about for the first few minutes, and soon found the stiffness wearing off; and even Jack managed to walk after a time, though with difficulty.

‘Why is it?’ she asked, indignant and rather frightened.

‘It’s the morris,’ Miss Newcastle explained. ‘Where do you feel it worst? Up the front of your legs? That’s all right! That’s morris. But don’t do too much to-day.—That child is hardly strong enough for it,’ she said privately to Cicely. ‘Is she here for the month? Then don’t let her do too much at first. She ought to get into it gradually. It won’t hurt the rest of you; you’re all strong, and used to it. But I’d advise Miss Jack to cut some of her classes this week.’

So Cicely warmly seconded Joy’s invitation so far as Jack was concerned, and she was tucked into the side-car and sent off for the afternoon, with orders to bring the Wild One home safely in time for dinner.

Occasionally Tazy Kingston went too, sitting bareheaded on the carrier, holding Joy by the waist; and Belinda, tootling wildly, with a car full of girls, and another hanging on behind, and Joy in tunic and with flying hair, was a familiar sight in the back streets leading to the more distant schools all through the month. None of the rest would miss a class for any inducement Joy could offer, especially since an odd number might mean a dance with Madam.

But no one went riding on Thursday, when the weekly demonstration took place on the cricket-field; not on the precious pitch, of course, but on a smooth green lawn in one corner, with the beautiful college windows and the tower of the gymnasium as background. In brilliant sunshine, which kept cameras snapping on every side, the Staff danced to the students for an hour, and the scene, with the white flannels and coloured rosettes and ribbons of the men, and the brilliant blue dresses of the girls, was one never to be forgotten. Jen and Joy argued warmly as to whether the rich blue looked best on the black-haired 'little foot-page,' their own brown-haired Madam, or her tall fair morris opposite; but agreed at last that it suited them all equally well. Cicely and Joan, in a happy dream, had thoughts only for the beautiful movements and changing figures of the dances.

Cicely was so utterly overwrought with the excitement of the hour, so strung up and yet worn out, that to go home at once afterwards would have been sensible, but was quite impossible. They crowded on to the first tram that passed the college, and spent a happy evening on the hills, first talking over in detail the dances and dancers they had just been watching, while they had tea in the garden of a little hotel with a wonderful view, then going up on the hills above the Devil's Chimney; and there, under Miss Newcastle's directions and to the music of Karen's fiddle, they danced on the turf when they had found a sufficiently level, sufficiently lonely spot.

'You can admire the beautiful style Madam's creating in our country dancing!' Cicely informed the Advanced Certificate. 'And you can teach us something new! Then you can dance a jig to us! Do what Madam calls "Lumps!" "Plum Pudding," you know; such a name to give a jig! This morning she did it just for our class, in our room; a private demonstration. It was glorious; I love those Bampton things! I hope she knew how we appreciated it!'

'Her brother's jig this afternoon was simply marvellous,' Joan said wistfully. 'It's a wonderful thing to see a man dance like that.'

'Oh well, he's——!' and Miss Newcastle shook her head, as if words could not express it.

'Joan and I once thought we could do "Ladies' Pleasure,"' Cicely said mournfully. 'We never will again!' Then her eyes snapped. 'I say,

Newcastle! Do you ever make up words to the dance tunes?’

‘I’ve tried. It’s very tempting sometimes. Why?’

‘Cicely’s made lots of songs to the dances,’ Joan laughed. ‘Some are good, and some are awful! Our first Queen used to sing them at dance-evenings.’

Cicely, with laughing eyes, was scribbling in a notebook. She handed the words to the Advanced Certificate with a bow. ‘After this, I hope you’ll always think of them when you hear the tune!’

‘Perhaps they’ll spoil the dance for her!’ Joy mocked.

Miss Newcastle read the words. ‘No, I like them. Quite ballad-y! I’ll keep them, thanks!’ and she hummed the air and the words. ‘They do fit very well!’

‘As I walked out alone one day,  
Far over the heathery moorland, oh!  
I met a maid who went my way,  
Far over the heathery moorland, oh!  
“Lady,” I said, “will you walk in my company,  
Over the moorland and down to the sea?”  
She said, “Kind sir, that may not be!  
I’ll travel alone o’er the moorland, oh!”

I said, “Fair maid, pray tell me why!  
It’s lonely and cold on the moorland, oh!”  
But on she went with no reply,  
It’s lonely and cold on the moorland, oh!  
Ladies are difficult beings to satisfy;  
Maidens are often uncertain and shy;  
Once more to win her love I’ll try;  
It’s dreary alone on the moorland, oh!

I said, “Fair maid, be not too cold!  
The moon is so bright on the moorland, oh!”  
I fear she thought me overbold;  
She left me alone on the moorland, oh!  
Still will I seek her though dangers be manifold,  
Though the wide ocean between us has rolled;  
Until my tale of love be told,  
And she shall come home to the moorland, oh!

‘Now dance it to us!’ the President demanded. ‘Isn’t Karen jolly useful with that fiddle?’

Joy, scouring the country, had brought home tales of the beauty of Gloucester and the wonder of Tewkesbury. She had only raced through Tewkesbury, but the glorious Norman tower and the great west window had caught her eye, and she talked of them till Joan longed to see them. ‘You’d better come too, President! They’ll make you want to cry,’ Joy teased.

‘I wouldn’t miss a class for any abbey or cathedral in Britain!’ Cicely said warmly. ‘I can go to see them later on!’

But on Friday afternoon, while those who had sufficient courage faced the examiners, Cicely and Joan, willingly sacrificing meals, packed themselves into Belinda and were carried off to the old-world streets of Tewkesbury, with the black-and-white wood-fronted gabled houses, the alleys ending in green sunlit creepers, the old coaching inns, the tannery by the river, the bridges and meadows, and the beautiful abbey among its ancient trees. Joy led them through the abbey gateway, so that they came unexpectedly on the great west window in all its splendour, and turned mockingly on the President. ‘Now don’t you want to cry? And does it remind you of Madam’s dancing? I can’t say I see the connection myself!’

‘No, you wouldn’t!’ Joan said indignantly, but Cicely, face to face with another revelation of the beautiful, ignored the jeers and stood gazing up in rapt speechless joy.

Reaching home just before the evening party, they found Jen and Jack, Tazy and Karen and Tormy, besieging Miss Newcastle for advice as to what to wear. How did one dress for such occasions? Was Tazy’s white silk frock too ‘swish’?—and she spread it out for inspection. Would Jack’s evening dress be good enough? Would it do if the Torment wore an afternoon skirt and a silk jumper?—she ‘loathed dress-up affairs!’

‘The Director wasn’t as helpful as usual this morning!’ Jen sighed. ‘Did you hear him? Tried to tell us how to dress; said the men might wear anything so long as it had a coat; no flannels, I suppose! And women anything that had a skirt! *Anything!* Think of the picture it suggests! But it doesn’t take you very far!’

‘It does put the stopper on tunics, though!’ Jack said gloomily. ‘I suppose we’ll have to be “swish” for once!’

‘Well, decent, anyway!’ their authority suggested. ‘I wish the party could be out on the lawn! But the rain last night spoiled that idea. Better luck next week, perhaps!’

‘It won’t half be a crush, if everybody tries to dance,’ Jen said apprehensively. ‘I don’t mean to sit out once!’

The party was a ‘crush,’ indeed, and they reached home tired out and hungry enough for a second supper. The household had gone to bed, so Joy

raided the larder and found a big cake and some bread and butter, and they solemnly feasted again by candlelight.

After two such days of dissipation, they were all overtired and not fit for the blow which fell on them on Saturday morning. Cicely, indignant and distressed and deeply disappointed, raged all the way home, and burst in upon the Advanced Certificate with her bad news.

‘Look at that!’ she flung down her card for the new week, for classes all changed on Saturday afternoon. ‘They’ve sent us to some other old school, out of the college, and——’

‘Well, you surely didn’t think you were going to have the coll. for the whole month, and other people never get a turn?’ Miss Newcastle asked mildly. ‘You must be sporting, President. Those who have had the long walk all this week surely ought to have a chance of the college next week?’

‘I suppose so,’ Cicely said unwillingly. ‘But we do hate to leave it! Oh, I don’t mean to be piggish! I hadn’t thought. It’s only fair. But—everything’s going to be hateful next week!’ she pulled off her shoes with an angry jerk.

Miss Newcastle eyed her with amusement. ‘Well, you needn’t go unless you like. Spend the whole week in Belinda! But I should just see what it’s like, if I were you. You might find afterwards you’d missed something. I suppose you won’t have your Madam?’

Cicely let down her hair, by way of expressing her despair, and rumbled the brown curls wildly. ‘It’s mean!’ she wailed. ‘I don’t want to go to anybody else! She says she’s going to take the super-swank people—like you, I suppose!—and she won’t be able to *speak* to any of us! And she asked days ago if we wanted to be moved up, and we all said no, because we didn’t want to go away from her. She knew quite *well* what we meant; I saw it in her eye. Of course we couldn’t say it; she’d have choked us off; but I said, “I know when I’m well off!” and Jen said, “I’ll stop where I am, thank you!” and Joan said, “I’m quite satisfied too!”—and we all thought we were going to stop with her for ever and ever. And she just laughed and looked teasing; and now she’s gone and sent us to some other old person! I shan’t go to a single class! It’s mean!’

Miss Newcastle laughed. ‘Baby!’ Then she said gravely, ‘I’m sorry for you. But all the same, you’re a selfish, thoughtless girl, Cicely Hobart.’

‘Oh?’ the President looked up gloomily. ‘Am I? Thanks! Good of you to tell me! Nobody ever did before! And why?’

‘You don’t think of other people. Why shouldn’t others—I, for example—have a turn of her, if you think so much of her?’

‘Oh, I don’t care a scrap about the rest of you! I want her for myself! Other old people are good enough for you!’



‘And you don’t think of her,’ Miss Newcastle said severely. ‘And yet you say you like her.’

‘*Like* her! Well, that’s one way to put it! There *isn’t* anybody else!’

‘Oh, you don’t know! You’d better try a few more of the Staff before you make such sweeping statements. But you might try to see their point of view. It’s a dreadfully wearing and tiring month; fancy teaching *you* for a month on end! They couldn’t do it if they didn’t have changes. But if they take advanced people one week, and beginners the next, it is just possible to keep on. Can’t you see that?’

Cicely sat mournfully shrouded in her hair, staring at the floor. ‘Yes!’ she said at last. ‘And I am a selfish beast. I never thought of her side of it. I suppose it is tiring, and a change will help. I wouldn’t like to see her get nervy or run-down; she always looks so jolly and well. If she looked ill, I’d feel there was something wrong with the universe. Oh yes, it’s better for her, of course! But I do feel bad! I really don’t think I can stand any one else! Will it matter if I don’t go?’

‘Oh, I should go and see!’ Miss Newcastle said lightly. ‘One afternoon won’t hurt you. You might get some one you’ll like just as well.’

‘That’s *not* possible! No one will ever take her place. Do you think we might perhaps get back to her before the end of the month?’ she asked wistfully.

‘You might. You never know your luck. But you’ve been lucky so far. Of course, you made friends with her the first day.’

‘Yes, she was jolly to us from the first. I don’t know why, for we must have seemed awfully hopeless. Even I can see how much we’ve improved. She says we can take the exam, in a week, or perhaps two.’

‘And shall you?’

‘Oh, I suppose so! It wouldn’t occur to me not to, if she told me to,’ Cicely remarked.

‘Probably when you said you’d confess to your club how wrong you had been in the dances, that appealed to her,’ Miss Newcastle observed. ‘It’s what she’d have done herself. She’s very sporting, you know.’

‘Oh, I know! She always owns up if she makes a mistake; I love her for it! She’ll come right across the room to say, “You were right. It was my mistake. I told you wrong.” It’s not everybody would take the trouble, or would be sporting enough to do it.’ She laughed. ‘Talk about “Confess!” Do you know what happened yesterday? She taught us “Confess”; some of them didn’t know it. And she numbered the men wrong, which put everybody else wrong, of course. Never noticed what she’d done, but put us through the whole dance with the wrong numbers, with the result, of course, that we were all going off towards the wrong walls and so on. It felt weird, all turned

upside down; I thought there was something funny somewhere, but you know how—well, convincing and definite!—she is. Kind of “If I say a thing, it’s so” manner; it never occurred to me to doubt her; I just thought I must have been wrong in my ideas of the dance before. We got to the last figure, and then it dawned on her what she’d done.’

Miss Newcastle laughed. ‘Well? What happened?’

‘Oh, she yelled to the piano to stop, and then said “Do you *know* what I’ve done?” and we began to laugh, and she roared and we roared, and everybody laughed; and then we started again. But we had an awful job getting right after that; we were all tied up in the wrong places, and so was she. It took some time before we got straight.’

‘I can imagine it. I wonder what, or whom, she was thinking of!’

‘Well, we said that, of course!’ Cicely laughed. ‘But she had to own up that time! I’d have had to, if it had been the club!’

‘I’ve no doubt she felt you were a kindred spirit, and so you got on with her at once. But you may like the new one just as much, you know.’

‘I couldn’t possibly,’ and Cicely relapsed into gloom again as she unbuttoned her tunic and dressed for the afternoon. ‘But I’m not an absolute lunatic. I’ll give the new person a chance. But she’ll have jolly hard work to fill Madam’s place! I’m going to be desperately lonely for her. The bottom’s just dropped out of everything!’

## CHAPTER XVI

### ALL ABOUT THE PIXIE

Cicely and Joan stood in the doorway and looked at Miss Newcastle, who, tired but happy after an hour with Madam in the college gymnasium, had reached home first and was resting by the open dormitory window.

She looked up, expectant of interest, and perhaps amusement. The impressions of these strangers to the school, their comments on things and people, Cicely's devotion to Madam and Joan's delight in her, and Joan's joy in the complete collapse of the President at Madam's feet, were causing the Advanced Certificate keen enjoyment. In their appreciation she was renewing her almost forgotten early days; she looked forward with amused anticipation to their comments on every new experience. And she knew very well these were by no means at an end yet.

At sight of Cicely's face and Joan's laughing eyes, her face lit up and she laid down the petticoat she was mending. 'Aa put me fut throo 't in "Haste to the Wedding" last night! Cum in an' tell me aall about it! Now, Cicely Hobart!' with a sudden lapse from dialect. 'What does that face mean?'

Cicely laughed. She dropped her shoes in a corner, and threw herself on her bed, and lay gazing at Miss Newcastle with dancing eyes. 'Guess!' she said.

'You've got somebody you like better than your Madam?'

'No! There's only one of her, and I missed her "something fearful." I'll never like anybody as well, in that particular way. She was the first, and I've given her something nobody else can have, for I haven't got it to give now. But I've discovered there are other people; you were right—as usual! And I can like them, after all, though in quite a different way.'

'You're getting on,' Miss Newcastle commented. 'I've something to say on that point of liking your first teacher; but it will keep. Tell me about this afternoon. Are you glad you went?'

'Glad! Newcastle, we've got the most priceless little thing to teach us!'

'Oh?' Miss Newcastle's lips twitched. '“Thing” isn't very polite, is it?'

'Well, she is! She's a gem. I love every inch of her, and we're going to have a gorgeously funny week, whether we learn much or not.'

'Oh, I think you'll learn a little! Tell me what she's like!'

'It isn't saying much to say you love every inch of her, if you mean only the inches you can see,' Joan laughed, taking the pins out of her hair and

shaking it loose. ‘There isn’t very much of her, is there? But I’ve an idea there’s a lot more than you can see.’

‘Newcastle, she’s so high!’ the President measured two feet from the floor.

‘Cicely!’

‘Well, she’s tiny, but very very neat; I’m dying to see her in a tunic! She’s a lovely dancer, too. Fair hair—glasses—bright quick blue eyes—every bit as bossy as Madam, though she’s such a dot; but in quite a different way. I could have died; at the contrast, you know. I simply didn’t dare to look at Jen; I knew she’d explode. And Joan was on the grin half the time. The rest of the time she was too busy.’

‘I was only doing what I was told,’ Joan observed, shrouded in her bronze-red mane.

‘You were. But you seemed to enjoy doing it. She was told off to look after a man; such a nice young man!’ Cicely teased. ‘Our Tiny Teacher had a man in tow, Newcastle; well, she had several, and she was looking after them like a mother. She turned one of them over to Joan, and told her to “look after Captain Raymond for me, will you?” as he isn’t really up to our grade, and she was afraid he’d get lost. So as Joy’s off to Tintern, we took him into our set and were good to him.’

‘Have you guessed who she is, Newcastle?’ Joan cut short the story ruthlessly.

‘Yes, and I just want to cry, because you’ve got her and I haven’t!’ Miss Newcastle spoke with concentrated energy, jabbing her work viciously with her needle. ‘I’m green, yellow, blue, and dandy-gray-russet with envy, so there!’

‘Oh! But you’ve got Madam!’

‘Yes, but the Pixie was *my* first teacher, and I ll-u-u-ve her!’

‘The Pixie!’ Cicely sat up. ‘How perfect! That *is* her name, of course! I said on the way home she was a changeling, not a real person! The Pixie! Thanks!’

The Advanced Certificate laughed. No one was ever called by her proper name in the big dormitory. ‘Tell me all about it!’ she said.

Cicely clasped her knees and launched forth into her story. ‘We took the tram to the dear old coll., and then, feeling very sad and lonely, and very sorry for ourselves, turned our backs on it and went off to Naunton Park. We found the school all right; in fact, there was a crowd round the gates. The man hadn’t brought the keys, and we had to wait there for twenty minutes in blazing sun, to the delight of the neighbourhood. There were stacks of small children looking at us as if we were wild animals let loose. We asked if there were any others for Room I, and which door we should go to, and presently

met several of our crowd from last week. Then this little Pixie came bustling up; she'd got on the prettiest little silk tunic-jumper, in lovely colours——'

'Makes 'em all herself!' Miss Newcastle nodded. 'I know!'

'And she *may* be over four feet, but when she's talking to men who are quite six feet tall she looks just a dot, and they have to bend double to get down to her. She came running round, saying, "Which are my little lot? Who else is here? Oh, here's Keenie"—that's our little boy from the sword class!—"Quite a family party! *Isn't* that nice!" And they were all buzzing round her; I think she'd just arrived to-day. She got us sorted out at last; only about sixteen of us; it's a little room; and bunched us all together by one gate. I felt rather like a stray lamb that had been rounded up by the sheep-dog! Then she called our names, and told us straight she wouldn't remember us all, so she should just call us "you," and we were to remind her who we were. Then she went through the list of dances, and asked what we'd been doing, and who our last teacher had been, making comments all the time. "Oh, she thinks she knows that, does she?" when we mentioned some dance; Madam, you know! I thought Jen would have hysterics, for Madam does manage to give you the impression she knows everything, whether she really does or not! "No, we won't do that; I don't know it! No, I always muddle "Greenwood"! "Chelsea Reach"—yes, I'm very good at that! "Mr Isaac's Maggot"—you've not done that? Oh, that's far too good to miss! Keenie, *do* you remember "Mr Isaac" in Cologne?"—and "Keenie" grinned and said she did. I don't know why in Cologne, though.'

Miss Newcastle's eyes snapped. 'I'll tell you presently. Go on!'

'Well, she said it was a pity to waste time, so she lined us up, in sixes, out in the road, and put us through "Upon a Summer's Day," to the delight of all the small children, and the still greater delight of the other classes. We had no music, but we went through it like lambs, and she ran round and kept everybody straight, and kept one eye on the big men, and their eyes followed her—well, you should have seen! Then she turned Captain Raymond over to Joan, and she told him what to do, and which hand to give, and which way to turn, and was awfully kind to him, and he was frightfully shy and hardly said a word. Perhaps he'll thaw in a day or two, when he finds Joan's quite harmless! We got inside at last, and got to work in earnest; but never will I forget the "Summer's Day" out in the street, and the Pixie running round us like a sheep-dog!'

'And you found her a change from Madam?' Miss Newcastle laughed.

'I could have sat down and laughed till I was sore. I love Madam, and I don't mind what she says to me or how she says it. But sometimes she really was fierce, and I could understand people being scared of her. Some of them are! I'll demonstrate the difference for you!' and the President sprang on to a

chair. ‘This is Madam, at the end of a dance, when she’s really worked up! “I *won’t* have it! You *dreadful* people! Not *one* of you *ever* listens to a *word* I say! I don’t know how people can be so stupid! You haven’t *danced* for me *once* yet all this week! Go right back to the beginning and do the whole dance over again; and do think what you’re doing! You simply don’t use your brains at all! You have the most complicated sort of minds! If there is a difficult or awkward way to do a thing, you invariably choose it! Now try to show me a *dance*, for once!” Isn’t that just like her, Joan?’

Joan, sitting on her bed, laughed. ‘It’s exaggerated, but it’s the correct style! I don’t think we got it quite all at once, like that, but I recognise every bit of it.’

‘Of course you do. I longed to say something soothing now and then. Now, Newcastle, this is the Pixie, at the end of a very bad performance of “Chelsea Reach.” We knew it was bad! She stands on a chair, too, of course \_\_\_\_\_’

‘I’ve seen her sit on the piano,’ Miss Newcastle observed, ‘and entertain the Director and a crowd of men as if she was on a throne. Well? How did she turn you down?’

‘She didn’t. We’d been very very bad, and all she did was to be encouraging and kind of coaxing. “Yes! Well, that wasn’t very beautiful, was it? We haven’t quite got the feeling of the rhythm yet. Suppose we have it once again, for luck?” *For luck!* I didn’t dare to look at Jen or Joan. Madam would have been tearing her hair; you know how bad rhythm touches her up! *For luck!* We did everything once more “for luck.” And she calls the neutrals in a longways set the “dud couple.” You should have seen Joan’s face when she was told she and her captain were the dud couple! And she tries to make you learn through the music; tells you to listen to the tune, and then makes patterns with her hands and says, “Follow the curve of the music! Don’t you hear it? Got it?” She always ends up with “Got it?”’

‘I liked the idea of the “curve of the music,”’ Joan remarked. ‘It was a change after Madam’s “pattern on the floor.”’

‘I always see the patterns of the figures. Now, Newcastle, tell us some more about her! Even in one hour I wanted to take her up and hug her. I could do it easily.’

‘You didn’t want to hug Madam?’ Miss Newcastle asked grimly.

‘She keeps you in your place. It’s an absolutely different feeling. When we did “Glory of the West” this morning, and she stood on the platform and told us to finish by “running up and bowing to *me!*” it seemed quite the proper thing to do. I agreed with one of the men—*her* man, you know!’—the rest laughed. ‘He went down on one knee and put his hand on his heart in a beautiful stagey manner; and I wanted to clap. She does know how to

pretend she's a princess when she cares to put it on! But I just wanted to pick this Pixie up in my arms and hug her. Somehow I felt she was very extra special from the first minute. Tell me something to justify that feeling, if you can!

'She's great!' Miss Newcastle said solemnly. 'Don't I know it? But you're quick to see and feel people, President. You must be very sensitive to people's personalities.'

'I'm always interested in people. Perhaps one learns to appreciate them more. You mean that this Pixie is really an interesting person, and that I felt it by instinct? You see how I sit at your feet, for guidance and advice, and come to you for the solution of all my problems!' and Cicely dropped on the floor at Miss Newcastle's feet, below the open window.

Miss Newcastle sat gazing out at the great swaying sunlit trees which shut off the town with a green curtain. 'You respond to people very quickly. You're certainly right this time! Do you know that your Pixie was in France and Germany for three years, during the war and after the armistice; that's what the reference to Cologne meant. Several of our lot were there, and she was the boss. She went out,' the Advanced Certificate said slowly, 'when most people said it was no use and thought it a crazy idea, to capture the men in the Rest Camps and Convalescent Depots for folk-dancing. They had nothing to do, and used to get fed up. She took some morris sticks and a bundle of rappers; and she did the trick. You haven't heard about it?'

'Dancing? The soldiers? That *little* thing?' Cicely cried incredulously, and Joan, amazed and interested, came to sit above her on her bed, gazing eagerly at Miss Newcastle.

'Yes. "The Butterfly," and "Galopede," and "We Won't Go Home Till Morning," and "Newcastle"; the men loved them all. And she had longwords too, and taught them "Flamborough" and "Kirkby," and even a little morris—"Rigs," you know. She was never long in one place, and the camps were always changing, the men being sent up the line and so on; so she couldn't often do steady work with any one set. It must have been awfully worrying and disappointing. Just now and then she was able to work up a few till they were good enough to give a show, and then she'd find some girls for partners—W.A.A.C.'s and Y.W. girls, and so on—and she'd sit up all night making demonstration frocks for them, and they'd have a hall or a Y.M. hut and give a show. And then crowds more would come and beg for classes. She had girls out from home to help her, and they had classes going all over the country behind the lines. She organised the whole thing, and raced about in motor-cars, or "lorry-hopped," as she says, when she couldn't get a car or train, or went in the water-cart, or anything that was going; and interviewed people, and kept an eye on all the classes and started

new ones—my goodness! The brain for organising she’s got! Time after time her plans were upset, by the men being moved, and so on; but she never gave in. A month of it would have killed me; but she did it for years without a rest, and turned up smiling at the end. She must have been a joy to thousands—literally thousands—of men, in that awful time. She came in contact with so many, and you can tell, even now, how they worshipped her. You spoke about how well she got on with the men at your class. Think what she must have been out there, running round all those camps, scattering that cheery friendly—well, I call it “folk” atmosphere, that she has so strongly! Friends with everybody; won’t turn anybody down. You’ll find she invariably sees the nicest side of people and shuts her eyes to the rest. Those men in France simply loved her; she brought the atmosphere of home and England to the Aussies, who didn’t know a soul in this country, when she talked to hundreds of them about English villages and Maypoles, and then taught them “The Butterfly” out on the turf of the cliffs by moonlight. That’s only one story. I could go on for hours. I once read something she wrote about it, you see. She tackled the raw, rather wild boys who were sent out to Cologne after the armistice, boys who hardly knew enough to salute to the National Anthem, and gave them country dances to keep them happy in their off-times. Stop me, somebody! I could go on all night about that Pixie in France!’

‘We want you to!’ Cicely cried. ‘You shall; after we’re all in bed! You know we never go to sleep till one o’clock on Sunday mornings! To-night, instead of toe-dancing, you shall tell us stories of her and the men!’

‘She says,’ Miss Newcastle bubbled with laughter, ‘she *loves* men and understands them and can do anything with them; but thank heaven she hasn’t got to marry any of them! Yes, she said it! I once discussed marriage with her, and she agreed, rather doubtfully, that it was the most complete life for a woman. “Yes. Yes, I suppose it is. But thank heaven it hasn’t happened to me!” If people go and get married, she says “Bless them!” but she’s quite clear how she feels about it for herself!’

‘She’s awfully tactful,’ Joan laughed. ‘A frightful thing happened this afternoon! We were attempting “Hunsdon House,” and you know the Director’s feeling for “Hunsdon House!” We were *not* doing it well; and suddenly he walked in! We nearly died with horror at the thought of him watching us. But she knew! She told him we were just beginning it, and then she said it would be *such* a treat to us if he would just play it for us! The pianist jumped up, only too delighted, I’m sure, after what he said about “Hunsdon House” in his lecture on accompanying the other day; and he sat down and played it perfectly for us. But the point was that he’d got his back to us! We could have hugged her! Then he went off, quite happy, and we felt



we'd escaped, so we were quite happy; and of course she was! She fairly radiates happiness!

Miss Newcastle laughed. 'The Prophet likes the Pixie! They're pals! And those men who knew her in France will never forget her; she still hears from some of them, I believe. A General was once so much impressed with "Kirkby" that he asked if she couldn't teach it to him; and she said—and Miss Newcastle's laughter bubbled up again—"Of *course* she could! But he'd have to find five other Generals to learn it with him!" I say it was very cheeky; she thinks it was so tactful!'

'To think of her being willing to teach us! Sixteen of us, in a poky little schoolroom!' Cicely exclaimed. 'After doing all that big work with all those crowds of men, and Generals, and things! I say, we are in luck again!'

'You are lucky, to know her so well, Newcastle,' Joan remarked.

'She was my first teacher. She gave me folk-dancing, and gave it to me in a way I'll never forget, a way that made all the difference. I've a theory,' Miss Newcastle said slowly, 'that you never quite lose your feeling for the person who taught you first; that is, if you really have found something big, something real and live; if it's a real live art to you. It's like the opening of a door, and nobody can ever quite take the place of the one who opened the door for you. The Pixie did it for me, and I'll be grateful all my life; and for the way she did it. For there are ways and ways; some people wouldn't have moved me a scrap.'

'Well, Madam was the one for me,' Cicely observed. 'So don't say I'm an idiot any more. You're the same yourself about the Pixie. That's what I meant when I said no one could ever take Madam's place, and I'd given her something no one else could have. She showed me the beauty of our dancing, and though I may like all the rest of the Staff, and though I love your Pixie already, after one hour of her, nothing can undo *that!* Madam's got the pull over 'em all.'

'I never said you were an idiot, nor thought it. I understood; I'd been there myself! But I would have done, if you'd been silly enough not to go this afternoon. I heard a whisper this morning that my Pixie was coming, and some one said she was going to teach at Naunton Park. I hoped you'd have the luck to fall into her hands. If you'd refused to go, I think I'd have dragged you there!'

'Oh, my aunt! Just think what we'd have missed if we'd refused to go!' Cicely said fervently. 'I tell you, she's simply priceless!'

Miss Newcastle was in a story-telling mood that night, as often happened. While they all lay listening and laughing, she sat up in bed and by the light of one candle retailed gossip and stories from other years and other schools.

‘Have you heard about the little girl who was found in tears at the end of “Haste to the Wedding?” It’s one of the Pixie’s stories. When the music stopped, this kid was found to be weeping. The teacher asked what was up, and she sobbed that she “hadn’t had a chance to go down the *aisle!*” Extremely appropriate, wasn’t it?’

‘The Pixie made that up. She’s quite capable of it, I’m sure,’ Cicely remarked.

‘She is; but she didn’t. It really happened. Then there was the man who’d had one lesson in morris, and when he turned up the next time, said he wasn’t going on with it, as he “couldn’t stand the *semaphore business.*” You’ll appreciate that, Jacky-boy!’ as Jack, who was still in trouble with her arm and leg movements, began to giggle. ‘He’d been in the Army, of course; but it just expresses it, doesn’t it? Then there was the man—this one comes from your Madam, I believe! She was teaching soldiers in France, too; oh yes, she was there as well! There was one chap she thought might be troublesome, a great big fellow, and sulky and dour; she’d fixed on him as the likeliest to be difficult, but he was all right through the class. At the end, he stepped out and evidently wanted to say something. She thought it was coming now, but didn’t let on she was worried; just asked him what he wanted. They’d been doing country dances, you know. And he said solemnly, “Miss! In the next Christmas pantomime *I’m going to be the fairy!*” She says she collapsed, and everybody collapsed, and he was never any trouble at all. I believe the Pixie had the same remark made to her; she took a class out in the woods, in Germany; taught the men “Shepherd’s Hey, Ilmington,” all among the trees. And they said they’d feel more like fairies than ever.’

‘Good hefty fairies!’ Jen murmured. ‘Go on, Newcastle! Don’t stop, there’s a darling!’

‘Oh, well, I’ve heard of a teacher at a school who told his class to “Go round the lower end of the top couple.” Goodness only knows what he was getting at; but the story is that the class obeyed him joyfully—on its hands and knees. Wish I’d been there to see! They say he also told them to “Change right shoulders with their partners”—which is hardly the usual way of putting it. Oh, there are heaps and heaps of stories!’

‘But tell us *all* about the Pixie in France! You promised to!’ Cicely urged.

And Miss Newcastle clasped her hands round her knees and plunged into a story that took more than one evening to tell.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A PIXIE IN A GYM SUIT

The Pixie was a law unto herself to a very considerable extent, even as to what and where she would teach. By Monday afternoon she had bidden her men haul the piano to the doorway, and was conducting her class out in the playground, to their great delight, as the classroom had been small and 'squares for eight' had had to be done in relays. She conducted proceedings perched on a low wall only a few inches wide, and kept her pupils on tenterhooks lest in her excitement she should slip off and break her neck.

They were all waiting for her on Monday morning when she came bustling in, caught up a morris stick whose purpose soon became apparent, and planted a chair in the middle of the room. From this vantage-point she took command and set them all to work.

'Get in sets of six, will you? Then I can see just how many you are. Now we're going to do Ilmington. You've been doing a lot of Bampton, haven't you? Yes, well, we'll have some Ilmington for a change; it will be good for you. I'm very good at Ilmington, and I love it. See? Now Bampton I muddle, so we'll leave that. Just walk your track movements, and we'll see if you know them. You're all right, Captain Raymond? Is Miss Shirley looking after you nicely? Gracious! Are there two of you?' at sight of Joy, grinning behind Joan's back. 'Gracious! This is awful! Which is the one I gave you to, Captain Raymond? Do you know them apart? It's too bad! It oughtn't to be allowed! Oh, you're the one we had before, are you? And you're going to take care of him for me?' as Joan, as red in the face with suppressed amusement as Joy and Cicely, put up her hand. 'That's right! That's nice, isn't it? You two be middle couple! It's a very easy position. You watch her!' to the shy fair boy, who had made up his mind on Saturday that Joan was well worth watching, apart from her usefulness as guide in these unknown dances, but found her even prettier this morning in her tunic. 'She'll tell you what to do. You like looking after him, don't you? Yes, of course you do! That's nice! Now listen to me, all of you!' and she hammered with her stick on the chair.

'Oh, stop her, somebody!' Cicely groaned. 'Joan will die in another minute! And that poor boy!'

'You all know your hey, don't you? We'll walk it once for luck. I'll come into your set,' to Joy, who was without an opposite. 'But you oughtn't to be so like your sister, you know. Gracious! It's awful! Couldn't you wear a

green tunic, or something? Now first couples face down. You pass right, pass left, and bulge to the right at the end. Got it, everybody? Middles face up; pass right, bulge left, pass right; just like the merrythought of a chicken, isn't it?' and the bright eyes twinkled with amusement as Cicely collapsed at this description. 'Well, isn't it?'

'Of *course* it is! But it's brilliant! I'd never thought of it. You could never forget after that!' Cicely gasped.

'End couples face down; bulge to your right, then pass left and right. You do know it, don't you? Then let's walk that. I'll be Number Six; oh, here's another man! Good!' and she sprang on to her chair again. 'You go in there, with the other Miss Shirley. Is he a friend of yours?' as Captain Raymond greeted the newcomer with a laugh and a nod. 'Well, isn't that nice! Quite a family party! Now let's walk our hey! Ready!'

They had all been eyeing her joyfully, from the moment she came running across the room; she was so utterly neat and dainty in a little black tight tunic and cream blouse, but tinier and slighter than ever. Quick and neat in every movement, too, she hopped on and off her chair like a long-legged robin; but when she spoke her voice rang out in surprising volume for so tiny a body.

'You mustn't mind me yelling at you as if I were a drill-sergeant,' she told them during the morning. 'I'm used to men, and they think more of you if you shout at them. If you speak to them nicely they take no notice; but they sit up if you shout.'

But as they walked the tricky hey, Joan and Joy had forgotten to take care of the 'opposites' thus thrust upon them, and all the six in that particular 'side' had forgotten the Pixie, fascinating as she was.

Captain Raymond was watching Joan, as directed; and he was wondering how their little teacher could possibly consider these two girls so much alike. They were obviously twins, and they had the same colouring, the same big brown eyes and glorious bronze hair; but in expression there was no comparing them; not for one instant had he mistaken Joy for Joan.

The new man, his friend, was thinking many thoughts and congratulating himself on the good fortune which in the first moment had given him his heart's desire more fully than he could have dared to hope.

Joan, instead of 'looking after Captain Raymond', and Joy, instead of helping the stranger to keep his hey parallel with hers, were watching their first couple with surprise and dismay, eager only for a chance to question them. For it was an understood thing that none of them had any secrets from the rest; but both Cicely and Jen had started—jumped, in fact—when Captain Raymond's friend came in and took his place by Joy; and both were going through the hey with an indescribable look on their faces. Jen's eyes

were wide and startled, and she stared at the stranger, forgot to 'bulge' at the end of the line, gave the wrong shoulder, and looked so utterly bewildered that Cicely, waking up suddenly, called her sharply to order. 'Do think what you're doing, Jen! She'll think you don't know it. What's the matter with you, child?'

She sounded, and looked, irritable, and that was not usual with the President at present. She had her fiery times and fits of temper, but she had been so completely happy in the school that she had been unusually placid and easy-going for the last fortnight. The rest looked at her in surprise; her lips were tight and her eyes stormy, and she would not look at any of them. It was only for a moment; then, realising their startled eyes on her, she relaxed suddenly, laughed, and became more herself. But her eyes held a secret, whose explanation was obvious to her friends. She knew this man who had been thrust into their set, and she was not pleased to see him. Whether she would deign to explain, they could not tell; if she would not, they would certainly have to remain unsatisfied. All that was plain enough. But what was the matter with Jenny-Wren? What part could she have in the matter? Cicely's past, with her many trips to Ceylon with her father, her holidays on the Continent, and the hosts of friends she must have made in hotels and on board ship, held possibilities, of course; but where did Jen come in? She had left school to go and bury herself in the wilds of Yorkshire; but she too knew the mysterious sixth man of their 'side'; that was evident. Well, they could make Jenny-Wren explain, anyway!

But while they puzzled and questioned, and Cicely frowned and Jen looked bewildered, they were forgetting the Pixie, and no one was allowed to do that for long. She bade them dance their hey to the music, and watched with a dissatisfied air as they obeyed. At the end she exploded, with a force equal to Madam's, though in a style all her own.

'Well, but you might be a set of little chickens dancing, you know. Yes, you might!' as several laughed. 'You take absolutely no notice of one another. Can't you dance with your opposites? Look at them! Look hard at them! Now keep your heys parallel, all of you! Do it again!'—they soon grew used to her emphatic little '*Do it again!*'

Captain Raymond looked appreciatively at his 'opposite.' Joan's lips twitched; she knew very well what hers looked like, but she knew too that she had not been troubling to dance with him. How could she, when her first movement was to pass right shoulders with Cicely, and the President's face was full of secrets?

Joy looked curiously at her 'opposite,' whose sudden appearance had thrown them all into this state of ferment. He was a tall broad fellow in flannels, and striking-looking, with black hair and keen blue eyes, which

dwelt so continually on Cicely, leading the other hey, that the wobbly nature of his own was fully accounted for.

‘Now do it again, and for goodness’ sake think what you’re doing!’ their mentor commanded.

Presently she instructed them in the stick-tapping, which was new to several, and the class fell to practising in couples.

‘Jenny-Wren, you look weird! What’s the matter with you?’ Cicely demanded, as she tapped and presented her stick to Jen.

‘You look cross,’ Jen retorted. ‘What’s up, President?’

‘Look how beautifully Joan’s teaching her captain!’ Cicely teased, pausing to rest, for the movement was familiar to them. ‘She’s being awfully gentle and patient with him! He’ll get it in a moment; he’s improving. If only he wouldn’t look at Joan, he’d get on better still!’

Joy was teaching the stranger, and keeping him so busy and demanding such close attention to sticks, that he could no longer look at anybody but her. So Jen and Cicely, each with her own thoughts, stood and gazed at him; then Jen turned and looked curiously at Cicely, who, in spite of herself, was breaking into a laugh at his failure to get the right and left, back and forward stroke.

The clatter of the sticks filled the schoolroom. The Pixie, after instructing some novices, tried to make herself heard but failed completely. Even when she hammered on the floor no one took any notice. With determination in her eye, she strode to a bookcase and thumped on it fiercely till the President feared she would be sued for damage to Council property, and everybody looked up in alarm to see what was happening. Jumping on a small table, she yelled ‘SILENCE!’ in a voice which any sergeant might have envied. Then as they stared at her, in astonishment that one so tiny could produce such a mighty roar, the fierceness died out of her face and a twinkle lit her eyes, and they knew themselves forgiven.

‘I have to break it to you,’ she said impressively, ‘that there are foot movements with that tapping,’ and those who knew the dance began to laugh. ‘You do this!’ and to their dismay she began to demonstrate the step up on the table.

‘She’ll break her neck!’ murmured the black-haired stranger.

‘But it’s lovely to see her do it up there!’ Joy responded. ‘Isn’t she simply priceless?’

‘She’s a joy for ever,’ Joan exclaimed, while Cicely made a note of this for Miss Newcastle at night; the sight of the neat little figure in the smooth black tunic doing a beautiful morris step up on the table was one not to be forgotten.

‘Now try that!’ the Pixie commanded, and came to earth and went round criticising the feet. ‘Oh, you’re all right!’ to the four Hamlets. ‘You know it. You can teach those two men for me,’ and she passed on to others less experienced.

The black-haired blue-eyed stranger man went straight to Cicely. ‘Won’t you give me a lesson, Miss Hobart?’

‘Oh, Joy’s quite able to teach you,’ Cicely retorted, a teasing laugh in her eyes. Then she said ceremoniously, ‘Miss Shirley—Miss Joy Shirley—Mr Everett. We met on the way home from Ceylon last April.’

Joan bowed politely. Joy ‘honoured her opposite’ with a country dance bob. Jen thrust her elbow into the President’s back, as a protest at being forgotten, and Cicely added hastily, ‘And Miss Robins! Sorry, Jenny-Wren!’

Miss Robins’s eyes met Mr Everett’s in a direct challenge. ‘I think I’ve met your sister!’ said she.

His face showed sudden recognition. ‘Why, it’s the little girl that danced at Christmas! Of course! Avice told you to come here, didn’t she?’

‘Yes, but I want to know’—began Jen argumentatively.

But the Pixie’s voice cut short her words and Cicely’s surprised question, as from her perch on the table again she bade them show her the step. Raymond and Everett, who had not attempted it, and the girls who should have been teaching them, looked at one another guiltily and fell hastily into their places. And somehow Jen found herself no longer Number Two and Cicely’s ‘opposite’ but Number Six, while the newest comer faced the President and held up his stick for her to tap.

Jen’s eyes met Joy’s. ‘Isn’t this awful?’ she whispered, as they jumped and swung their sticks. ‘Are Joan and Cicely going to think about those men all the time? Look at the way he bagged my place, so that he could dance with her!’

‘Knows what he wants and means to get it, anyway!’ Joy responded. ‘When did you meet him, Jenny-Wren?’

‘Tell you later. I can’t just yet.’

There were no pauses for rest and conversation under the Pixie’s rule. This was the first class of the day and the only one for morris, and she would not waste a moment. She kept them hard at ‘Shepherd’s Hey’ for some time; then changed to ‘The Old Woman Tossed Up,’ bidding them, ‘Get your wavies!’

‘Wavies!’ giggled Jen, as she ran for her handkerchiefs. ‘What a gorgeous thing to call them! She’s just tophole!’

‘She’s got the quaintest expressions,’ Joan was saying to Captain Raymond, who had produced two big green handkerchiefs. ‘I think she’s priceless!’

‘She’s just herself, and there’s only one of her,’ he said quietly. ‘She taught my uncle’s men in France, and he’s told me what they thought of her!’

‘Oh?’ Joan turned to him quickly. ‘I’d like to hear about it!’

‘I’d like to tell you—when we get a chance!’ and he laughed, as a stentorian voice from the little table called them to their places.

‘Mustn’t keep the Pixie waiting!’ Cicely informed her new ‘opposite,’ who wanted to talk. ‘I want to know what you’re doing here, but I simply daren’t listen just now. Not that I’m afraid of her; I love her. But I’m afraid she may damage herself if she has to shout at us often like that.’

Captain Raymond heard and turned to her with a laugh. ‘She won’t. My uncle says she’s terrific with the men!’

‘I’d give a thousand pounds to have heard that!’ Cicely responded fervently. ‘Lucky beggar, your uncle!’

And then, in their anxiety to satisfy ‘the priceless Pixie,’ as they all came to call her, and in the girls’ amusement at the men’s struggles with side-step, and the men’s grim determination to learn it, they forgot everything else for the time.

‘We’ll have to hurry to get back to the college for singing,’ Joan said, as the Pixie dismissed them at last, and they made a rush for the various dressing-rooms.

Raymond paused. ‘Everett and I have our bikes and side-cars. If any of you would care to use them, we’d be glad to take you along.’

‘He’s getting on,’ Joy said approvingly, ‘He’s actually spoken twice without being asked a direct question.’

‘On Saturday I thought every word had to be dragged out of him separately,’ Jen laughed. ‘Belinda won’t have such a crowd to take home!’

‘No, I guess Belinda will be a lot too slow for Joan and the President now! You’ll rattle about in her; she’s used to two or three. Perhaps the Pixie would like a ride.’

‘Oh, ask her! Do ask her! There’s heaps of room!’

‘What’s that? A ride?’ and the little one whirled round on them joyfully. ‘*Rather!* What have you got? I’ll ride in anything that will save my legs.’

‘Oh, you won’t have to lorry-hop!’ Jen laughed. ‘Joy has quite a good old side-car, and she doesn’t often break down!’

Cicely, changing her shoes hurriedly and slipping on her coat, said grimly, ‘It’s all very well to keep men in their proper places. It may not be wise to encourage them! But if *anybody* offered me a lift in *anything* through all those back streets I’d take it!’

‘Why did you look so mad when you saw him first, President?’ Joan demanded in an undertone.



‘Did I? I was awfully surprised.’

‘You looked wild. What’s wrong with him? He seems quite nice.’

‘Tell you later—perhaps. You can go in his car, if you like, and I’ll look after the shy boy for you.’

‘I don’t think that would be very polite,’ Joan said primly. ‘I hardly think it’s what he meant.’ Her eyes danced with mischief. ‘I say! Joy and Jen have forsaken us and eloped with the Pixie!’

‘They’ve kidnapped her. She’s evidently going to patronise Belinda. So we shall have to go with the men,’ Cicely said resignedly. ‘I won’t walk if I can jolly well help it!’

‘You know you meant to go with them all the time!’ Joan retorted.

‘Oh, well, they may as well be useful, you know!’

The Pixie pushed her way through the crowd, with Joy and Jen in tow, eager to be introduced to Belinda. She paused in the playground to address a friend from another classroom, however, asking how her class had been behaving.

‘They’ve been rather naughty!’ was the response.

‘Oh, I’ve got mine *thoroughly cowed!* You should hear me curse them!’ cooed the Pixie happily, and passed on chuckling, while Jen collapsed in helpless giggling.

‘*Isn’t* this nice?’ There was blissful satisfaction in the Pixie’s voice, as Joy tucked her and Jen into the car, with approving comments on the small amount of space she required.

‘*Isn’t* this a bit of luck? I say! Will you bring me back again after buns and milk?’

Joy promised laughingly. ‘I’ll take you both ways every morning,’ and the Pixie sighed in happy content.

## CHAPTER XVIII 'ALMOST A BURGLAR'

In the circumstances, and with the party so divided, questions and explanations had to be postponed. It was as impossible for Joy to question Jen, or for Joy and Jen to discuss Cicely's behaviour, in the presence of the Pixie, as it was for Cicely and Joan to speak of private matters from their respective side-cars. Conversation had to be general on all sides; and the singing and demonstration offered no better opportunities. Every one knew better than to trouble Cicely, or even to speak to her, during the morning demonstration.

When they entered the college, the Pixie discarded her hat and coat and ran about in her little black tunic, speaking to everybody. Seeing her in the midst of a crowd of men, looking tinier than ever but talking volubly and earnestly, Joy and Jen retreated to 'private boxes' on the sloping lids of the desks, where they looked over the heads of the students on the forms, and Cicely and Joan and the two men joined them there.

'It's very unfortunate that a morris side always has to be six!' Joy whispered. 'Most inconsiderate of them! For as there are four of us, those two men will stick to us for the whole week. I see that plainly!'

'Still, it's rather jolly to have our side made up! Oh, here she comes!' as the Pixie hustled her way through the crowd, followed by several men, and found a seat in the second row.

'She won't see anything there,' and Joy bent and spoke down the Pixie's neck. 'Wouldn't you like to come up into the gallery?'

The tiny one turned joyfully, and allowed herself to be hauled up on to the desks. 'That's what comes of being a little teacher!' she chuckled.

'No, it's what comes of being a *nice* little teacher!' Joy informed her gravely.

The Pixie's eyes were following the Director as he made his way to the piano. 'Don't you love to watch him at these schools? He looks so *happy*! As if he were enjoying himself as much as anybody. And I love the way he goes round the rooms, just to see that we're all happy too!'

'You're fairly happy yourself,' Joy laughed.

'Oh, I'm enjoying myself! It's such a change to be in the middle of things again, after all that queer time abroad. But I do think he goes about looking like a happy uncle or grandfather.'

'Coo! Four hundred grandchildren!' Joy laughed.

As Madam came out to lead the women's morris side in 'Laudnum Bunches,' Cicely's eyes fixed on her and never left her till the dance was over. Then she relaxed with a sigh, and looked down at the Pixie, whose quick eyes had not missed a movement. A glance passed between them; but Madam came forward to dance 'Old Molly Oxford,' and the President straightway forgot the Pixie and all the rest of the world.

'I think that's wonderful!' she whispered at the end.

The Pixie looked up at her in eager response. 'Isn't it beautiful? You feel it too?'

'Oh, I love it—and her! She was the first to make me understand.'

'She's an artist all through,' the Pixie said quietly; and Cicely loved her more than ever.

That morning was Cicely's first experience of the Adderbury dances, for the men danced 'Lads a Bunchun,' and the tapping with the long willow wands overhead roused Joy and Jen to wild excitement, and Joan and Cicely to the highest pitch of delight, though in their case that meant that they were very quiet. In the quad, afterwards, over their buns and milk, which they had graciously allowed Raymond and Everett to forage for and bring to them, they told the Pixie something of their feeling for the dancing and the revelation it had been to them, and she listened in sympathetic interest and found them kindred spirits. 'I remember when I began. I'd never been so happy in my life. I think I'd never enjoyed myself before! Now I try to pass on something of what I feel to other people.'

Madam strolled past while they were talking, and nodded to Cicely and Joan. 'How do you get on with her?' she asked later, when the Pixie had darted off to speak to Miss Newcastle in a corner, and they were shaking one another joyfully by the hand.

'She's great!' Cicely said warmly, and Madam nodded hearty agreement.

'Shall we see you dance?' Jen demanded of the Pixie, as they gathered in their room for country dancing.

The little one's eyes were on Joan and Raymond, and Cicely and Everett, all talking eagerly together. She laughed in sympathy, and turned to Joy and Jen.

'They've made friends. Isn't that awfully nice? But it leaves you two out in the cold. We'll have to look after one another. Shall I give you a man to look after, too?' to Joy, with mischievous eyes.

'No, thanks!' Joy said promptly. 'I've got no use for them. I didn't think those two had either.'

'Oh, they'll enjoy being friends! It won't hurt them. Raymond's a good fellow, you know; I know all about him. I knew his uncle quite well out in France. That's another good story, how he got his Military Cross. He always

says he got it by mistake, just a bit of luck. I'll tell you all about it some day. No, I don't demonstrate; I'm so little, you see. I'd look so funny in a side, now wouldn't I? My morris is good, you know; it's *very good!*' She spoke emphatically, with calm certainty, but in an absolutely impersonal way, as of an art outside herself. 'But it's different from any one else's! I couldn't go into a side. I've danced so much with men, you see. Oh, wasn't that men's dance *beautiful?* I love those Adderbury dances! Now let's get started! We're wasting all our time. Make up a longways set, and we'll do "Mr Isaac's Maggot,"' and she began 'doing the sheep-dog business,' as Jen called it, as she hustled them into their lines.

'Now don't talk!' Joan admonished the President. 'Or you'll make her yell at us as she did in morris.'

The Pixie heard, and looked up at her with merry deprecating eyes. 'Does it sound *very awful?*' she asked, in mock anxiety.

'We simply love it,' Cicely assured her. 'We were just afraid you'd burst something.'

'Oh, I do! I burst all my buttons off,' was the serious response. 'I shout "*Don't cast off!*" and then I know what's happened. I spend all my spare time putting them on again.'

But the day of reckoning for Cicely and Jen could not be put off for ever. No questions were asked during lunch, partly because Tazy, Karen, and the Torment were present, but chiefly because all but the Advanced Certificate were too weary with their first experience of the 'Kirkby' sword dance to have energy enough to tackle difficult problems. Even under the Pixie's guidance, the threading of 'Kirkby' had proved bewildering to novices, and from the President down to Tormy they were all in a distracted state which much amused Miss Newcastle.

'Wait till you get to "Over Two Swords!"' said she. 'The Pixie leaves it out and takes it last. You'll be fairly dithered then!'

'But anything neater than that little thing hopping over the sword in Single Over, you never saw!' Cicely said warmly.

'Oh, I loved her most when she showed us how to "be a procession" in Double Under!' Joan laughed. 'The way she held up her sword and marched through the arch, as straight as a little soldier, was beautiful!'

But when lunch was over, and the usual afternoon's programme was in progress, of taking turns at hot baths and lying talking on the dormitory beds in the intervals, it was time to come to an understanding on several points.

The Torment, with unconscious and quite accidental tact, went off to the swimming-baths; she was never really tired, and thought nothing of cycling or swimming after a morning of dancing. Tazy Kingston had 'bagged the first bath,' and would naturally give Karen second turn; fortunately, the

supply of hot water was unailing. In the dormitory Miss Newcastle sat down by the open window to darn the Torment's stockings, unconscious of the storm brewing among her friends; she loathed darning, but Tormy's hatred of the task was deeper and bitterer even than hers, and she had taken pity on the baby of the party and offered to 'make her decent,' as she said.

The four younger Hamlet girls, still in their tunics, sat on their beds and looked at the President for explanations.

'Oh, bother!' said Cicely, not pretending to misunderstand them. 'What's the matter with you all? Can't you let me alone?' She pulled the pins out of her already loosened hair and shook it loose on her shoulders and lay flat. 'Jenny-Wren, when did you meet Mr Everett? You never told me you knew him!'

'Told you! I like that! How could I? I didn't even know his name! But I *never*'—Jen spoke in righteous indignation—'I *never* expected you to be friends with a burglar, President!'

'*What?*' four separate shouts startled Miss Newcastle, who, realising that something had happened, was darning sedately but listening very hard.

She laid down the stocking now, however. 'Would you like me to—er—retire? You seem to be touching on delicate subjects,' she hinted.

'A burglar?' Cicely sat up, a wild untidy vision of tumbled dark brown curls and wrathful eyes. 'You silly infant, what do you mean?'

Joy crowed delightedly. 'Go it, Jenny-Wren! Hit her again! What else is he? A highway robber, perhaps, or a sheep-stealer? You got one in that time, anyway!'

'Oh, shut up!' Cicely said irritably. 'Jen, what are you talking about? Oh, we don't mind you, Newcastle! You have got some sense!'

'You might just tell me who the—er—gentleman is, in whom the President and Jenny-Wren seem so much interested,' the Advanced Certificate said mildly.

'A new man turned up at classes,' Joan spoke swiftly. 'A friend of Captain Raymond's, and he came in and made up our side. We saw at once that both Jen and Cicely knew him, but we haven't had a chance yet to hear about him. And now Jen goes and says he's a burglar!'

'Well, almost a burglar!' Jen amended. 'He got into our house without having any right to be there, and then he went on and got into another house in the same way, and things *were* taken at the second house that very night. Nothing of ours was stolen,' she said calmly.

'Jen, what utter rot!' Cicely's voice was vibrant with unbelief and indignation.

'Sounds thrilling, anyway!' Joy said excitedly. 'Go on, Jenny-Wren!'

‘Mr Everett’s father owns the coffee plantation next to Daddy’s in Ceylon. We know his family quite well, though I hadn’t met him himself till this spring, because he was abroad—in India, and then in Egypt, I think—with the Air Force,’ Cicely spoke with forced calmness but concentrated energy. ‘It was his sister who told me about the folk-dancing society in London, and took me to see the party; I stayed in their house. And it’s through her we’re all here, for she told me about the school. Now what’s all this rot about burglars?’

‘His sister? But you said she’d got married, and so she couldn’t be here. She’s only about sixteen; oh, it must be another one, of course!—another burglar!’ Jen spoke incoherently.

‘But if you know him so well, why did you look so angry when he turned up, President?’ Joan demanded.

‘I didn’t know I did. I was only surprised. There was a little sister!’ in answer to Jen. ‘Very like him to look at. Do you know her? Is she “Avice” that he spoke of? She was away at school; I only saw her photo.’

‘You looked mad enough to bite him,’ Joy challenged the President. ‘Why did you?’

Joan would not have pressed the matter thus in public, but Joy spoke always without thought. Cicely, brought to book, grew suddenly hot and angry. ‘Mind your own business, Joy Shirley! If you must know, he teases and I’d quarrelled with him. I didn’t expect him to turn up here. He hasn’t any business in our grade, anyway; his step’s ghastly, and his morris is utterly feeble. I don’t know how he got into our class.’

‘I expect he got round the Pixie,’ Miss Newcastle said wisely; she had been listening with interest. ‘She may say she can do anything with men, but she’ll also do anything *for* them! But what about this burgling story? We can’t have you making friends with families of burglars, President!’

‘Well, almost a burglar!’ Jen, having roused the President to her satisfaction, and had her revenge for her lost place in the morris side, thought it time to hedge. ‘They didn’t really do the burgling; we found it was some boys from the village. But just at first everybody thought it was this man and his sister had gone off with the jewellery and things.’

‘What idiots they must be!’ Cicely said scornfully.

‘Oh, I don’t know! When strange people arrive in a village late at night, and nobody knows who they are, and they stop at the inn, and some of them go for walks in the dark, when it’s raining and snowing and blowing, and they get mixed up in a crowd of village people and go into private houses where they haven’t any business to be, and you *hear* them’—Jen’s voice dropped mysteriously, and the excitement of her hearers increased correspondingly—‘you *hear* them say, “It’s not the right house! Shall we

risk it again? I don't want to give it up!" and the man says, "I'll manage it for you!" to the girl; and then they go on and get into the house of friends of yours in the same way—I won't say sneaky way, but quite uninvited and without saying who they were!—and if, after all that, there was a burglary that very night in that very house—I ask you, can you wonder that people talked!' and she paused dramatically.

'Gracious, no! I don't blame them, either!' Joy exclaimed. 'Tell us more about it, Jenny-Wren! I'm fearfully thrilled!'

'But you said it was village boys!' Cicely began explosively.

'Yes, we found that out afterwards. But until we did, everybody thought Mr Everett and his sister had been the burglars,' Jen said calmly. 'Father *always* calls her the burglar-girl!'

'But I don't understand,' Joan interposed, to prevent another outbreak on the part of the indignant President. 'How did they get into the houses, Jen? You don't mean that they broke into them, like burglars, surely? And what did they want?'

'That's what I want to know!' Jen said coolly. 'I tried to ask him this morning, but the Pixie yelled at us and we had to shut up.'

'Did they come in by the scullery window?' Jack asked solemnly. She had been sitting with her chin on her knees and her eyes going from Jen to Cicely in thoughtful excitement.

Joy's eyes danced at sight of Cicely's face. 'Mr Everett's rather big for a scullery window! But perhaps he shoved his little sister in, and she opened the door for him!'

'Oh, she's not so little! She's quite sixteen! Look at me!' Jen stretched out her long legs.

'Oh, you silly kid, can't you get done with it?' the overwrought President exploded again. '*How* did they get into your house?—if they ever did.'

'With the mummers, at Christmas,' Jen said simply, since at last she had been asked a simple question. 'We call them the guisers; his sister, Avice, was the guiser-girl who said my side-step was so bad that she couldn't bear to dance "Jockie" with me.'

'Oh! With the mummers? Do you mean they dressed up?' Cicely looked at her rather blankly.

Jen lay back and laughed. 'No! Oh, no! They weren't taking part! But they joined the crowd following the guisers, and came into our big back kitchen. I wrote all about it to Joan; you were in Ceylon.'

'I remember,' Joan agreed. 'Your Blue-Eyed Stranger girl who danced with you, and said she was a changeling and would vanish with the dawn!'

‘Just that.’ Jen sat up again and addressed the President, who was looking troubled as she sat pleating the hem of her tunic, her face downcast. ‘President, I was only ragging, and I suppose I’m a beast. But I simply couldn’t resist it. After all, he is a nuisance, coming in and upsetting things, and turning me out of my place with you! But of course he isn’t a burglar really. There wasn’t anything so very awful in their following the crowd to see the guisers; any one might be interested in a queer old custom like that! I’m sure if the Prophet had met a crowd going mumming he’d have followed them anywhere!’

‘I’m positive certain he would!’ Miss Newcastle laughed. ‘But I think he’d have apologised and introduced himself afterwards!’

Cicely still sat with bent head, her hair falling wildly across her face and shoulders. Jen went on forcefully, ‘It was only the queer words I heard them say that were worth noticing at all. I never told any one but mother and father. I expect there was some quite sensible explanation, but they went off in the car very early next morning, and we never heard of them again. Do you wonder that I jumped, and made a mess of that old Ilmington Hey, when he walked in suddenly like that? And then to find he was a friend of yours! How could I think about what shoulder to give, especially when it was with him? How could I remember when to “begin to bulge,” as the Pixie says? I was simply stunned!’

‘She really did tell us to “begin to bulge on the second one-two-three-hop!” Isn’t she priceless?’ Joy spoke in a swift parenthesis to Miss Newcastle, who laughed and nodded, but without taking her eyes off the President.

Cicely rose suddenly. ‘We’ll never all get dressed at this rate. I’m going for my bath now. Didn’t you hear Karen knock ages ago? You’ll all have to be quick. That’s all right, Jenny-Wren. You’d better ask him what he meant; you’ve got your chance now. It’s no business of mine; he’s nothing to do with me. Don’t look as if you thought you’d offended *me* by calling him a burglar! Call him any old thing you like. I only wish he hadn’t turned up here. I don’t know why he wants to pretend he’s keen on morris dancing, for goodness knows he’s bad enough at it! Any one can see he doesn’t know the first thing! I never saw such a poor attempt at the step. I should think the Pixie will put him down. She ought to,’ and she dropped her tunic and threw on her dressing-gown and departed to the bathroom.



## CHAPTER XIX

### MISS NEWCASTLE SAVES THE SITUATION

‘I should think the Pixie won’t!’ Joy said decisively, as the door closed on the obviously ruffled President. ‘She says it’s “so awfully nice” they’ve made friends! She won’t part them now, bless her!’

‘The President’s got her knife into him,’ Jack observed. ‘What’s he like, Jen? And what has he done to deserve it?’

‘We don’t know. She looked like thunder when he came in.’

‘I bet he’s proposed to her,’ cried Joy the irresponsible. ‘I do think she might have told us!’

‘If you all tease her’—Joan began doubtfully.

Miss Newcastle folded the Torment’s stockings and rose. ‘Children! I speak with the authority of years and experience!’ Joy cheered derisively, but she went on unheeding. ‘You are faced with a difficult and delicate situation, in which the only possible course is to do nothing, say nothing, see and hear nothing! The President will go her own way, whatever you do. But if you try to interfere, or if you tease her now, you’ll lose her friendship for good and all. You know best whether you can afford to do that or not. I should say most emphatically you can *not*! But it’s for you to say. If you tease her now, she’ll never forgive you. You’ll never be real jolly friends again.’

There was a moment’s solemn silence. Then Jen said, in a thrilled voice, ‘Do you think she *likes* him, Newcastle?’

‘She scowled at him, you said,’ Jack ventured.

‘That’s nothing,’ the Advanced Certificate said airily. ‘It’s rather a good sign than otherwise.’

‘Good! Oh, you mean from his point of view! I should say bad!’ Joy groaned. ‘Look here, Newcastle, we can’t have the President falling in love with any old man! We won’t allow it! She belongs to us!’

‘Well, I’m warning you that she won’t belong to you any longer if you try to butt in now. You can’t help some things happening; you’ve just got to stand aside and let ’em go, and then make the best of them afterwards. But you can try not to make her hate you all!’

‘But do you really think she likes him?’ Jen pleaded excitedly. ‘It’s awfully funny to think of the President—well! Think of the things she’s said about getting married!’

‘Tuts!’ said Miss Newcastle calmly, beginning to do her hair.

‘Then you really think—?’ Joan began, a wistful note in her voice. ‘It would change everything, Newcastle!’

Miss Newcastle gave her a quick look of understanding and sympathy. ‘It might make them better! My dear, I don’t know. It’s too soon to say. She’s interested in him; you could see that by the way Jen’s nonsense touched her up. They’ve met before, you say? Perhaps something happened that she never told you about; she wouldn’t, naturally. I should imagine,’ she said deliberately, and they all drew nearer to listen, in breathless interest, ‘that he liked her, and showed it; that she wasn’t keen, or thought she wasn’t, and that *she* showed it; and that she has managed to avoid him since. She would naturally be annoyed to find him appear suddenly as her morris “opposite!” She’s having a good time, and she doesn’t want to be bothered with serious things. If I’m right, then it remains to be seen if he can make good. There’s no reason she should allow him to bother her; she’s quite capable of taking care of herself! But if he can use his chance, and make her *like* being bothered—!’ she laughed. ‘But, for goodness’ sake, and if you love her and want to keep her for a friend, don’t tease her just now! She’s finding things quite difficult enough. Do nothing, say nothing to hurt her feelings; don’t let her see you take any notice; be unconscious, and take him for granted! They’ve met before; of course they’ll be friends now that they’ve met again. That’s all that matters to any of us just now.’

‘But if we do nothing, and he gets his innings and scores, he’ll go off with our President!’ Joy pointed out in a tone of remonstrance.

Joan sat nursing her knee and staring out at the great swaying trees, saying nothing, a touch of colour in her face, a far-away look in her eyes. Miss Newcastle looked at her anxiously, recognising her as Cicely’s closest friend, as she answered Joy.

‘That’s possible. But she’d still be your chum. If you have a deadly quarrel with her, she won’t. Even marriage—but we’re looking rather far ahead! What would she say to us?—even that would make less of a break between you than if you say or do unforgivable things just now. Surely you can see that?’

‘Yes,’ Joan spoke suddenly. ‘And you are a treasure, Newcastle, as she always says. You’ve saved us from possibly making frightful mistakes. The one thing that matters is to go on being friends. That can last, whatever happens, even if—well, if outside people have to be allowed to come in! The awful thing would be if something happened to our friendship, after all these years. None of us could bear that.’

‘I thought some of you would see it! Do be careful just now, for her sake and your own! It’s one of those times when you must let your friend go if you really want to keep her. By sharing her with other people you’ll keep

her for yourselves. But if you try to keep her only for yourselves just now, you may lose her altogether.'

'Like the Torment and her boys!' Joy commented. 'You know that story we dragged out of her the other night, about her and the boys at that school, and the "other girl," the pretty one who was an heiress? She said something then about sharing your friends if you wanted to keep them. I was sorry for the kid.'

'She didn't seem such a kid as usual, just while she was talking about it. I thought she sounded rather grown-up, and old and wise!' Jack commented.

'It's the same thing with you and your President. But this is a more serious business,' Miss Newcastle said gravely. 'You've just *got* to be careful with Cicely just now!'

'I shan't dare to speak to her!' Jen began apprehensively. 'I wish I hadn't ragged her like that about him being a burglar!'

'If you're nervous and awkward that will be as bad as teasing her!' Miss Newcastle said in alarm.

'Yes!' Joy rose. 'I'm going to carry on as if the wretched man didn't exist. I hate him for it, but I suppose I mustn't say so—to her. I'm going to ignore his existence; that's the line to take, isn't it? I thought so!'

She flung open the door and plunged downstairs to the bathroom, and they heard her hammering on the door. 'President, how long have we got to wait? There are queues all up the stairs, three deep, and Fanny's setting the tea! Have you gone down the pipe with the water? I'm coming in in half a sec., whether you come out or not!'

'It's not playing the game to engage the only bath for the whole afternoon!' Jack added, over her shoulder.

'You rotters!' Cicely appeared indignantly at the door. 'I haven't had five minutes! I should go in both at once, if I were you. Aren't you going out on Belinda, Wild One?'

'No fear; I'm not so shabby. I'm going to class to be a partner for Jenny-Wren. The poor kid can't be left out in the cold,' Joy said significantly.

'She won't be. I'll dance with her, and then we'll be right.'

'Oh, will you!' Joy murmured, as she turned on the water. 'And what will the burglar say to that? Jen, haven't I bagged you for a partner this afternoon?' she called up the stairs.

Jen rose to the occasion, though it was the first she had heard of it. 'Rather! You've got to take care of me in the Pixie's "Shepherd's Holiday." I couldn't do it with anybody else!' and she brushed out her yellow plaits vigorously as the indignant President entered the dormitory.

But though Cicely saw through Joy's hints well enough, she thought it wisest to appear unconscious. She took it for granted that Raymond would

need Joan to 'look after him,' and that Joan would be willing to do it; if Joy intended to do the same for Jen, the President's fate was obvious. And 'Shepherd's Holiday' was a dance for six. Cicely did her hair in silence, and wondered much what had been said while she was downstairs.

As they went down to tea, she slipped her arm through Joan's. 'Come for a tram ride after class, old thing? I want to go out to the hills.'

'I'd love it!' Joan said joyfully. 'Just us two?'

'Yes, I don't want the infants,' as Joy and Jack and Jen came racing down after them, still in the tunics, which they refused to give up even to please the Director, gladly as they accepted his wishes in other ways. From the first they had ignored his suggestions with regard to afternoon costume, though Joan and Cicely always changed to summer frocks before tea. The younger girls admitted that the afternoon classes looked prettier than the more business-like morning ones, but for themselves they put comfort first, and they were not alone. In this one respect Miss Newcastle set a bad example; she too mocked at the Prophet's directions and appeared in her blue tunic even at dinner, and could be seen last thing at night wandering about the front lawn or leaning over the gate still in morning garb, with knees happily innocent of skirts, to the amusement of the dwellers next door. Occasionally the girls danced on the front lawn late at night, to the music of Karen's fiddle, and taught the beginners dances and movements really too advanced for them, to the edification of the neighbours and the delight of Fanny and Ethel, who watched from the windows while Miss Newcastle taught and demonstrated and criticised.

'I've no doubt,' Cicely added grimly, in a low tone to Joan alone, 'that if we whispered "hills" we could get invitations to patronise side-cars! But this isn't a side-car occasion. I want you, and the front seat of a tram, and the hills all to ourselves. Do you mind?'

'I'd much rather have it that way,' Joan said quietly, and wondered if she would be honoured with further confidences.

'Have you seen Mr Everett's sister? Is she here?' Cicely demanded of Jen.

'I haven't seen her yet. I was looking for her all through the Dem. this morning.'

Cicely groaned in disapproval. 'A lot of good you'd get from the Dem. And those glorious dances!'

'Oh, I was watching all right! I can do two things at once easily! I shall ask him this afternoon if she's here.'

'Not yet,' was the answer, when Jen put her question before the Pixie made her appearance. 'She's coming, but she's visiting a school chum on the way.'

‘Then I’ll have to ask *you!*’ Jen had never known shyness. ‘Why did you come into our house like that at Christmas? It wasn’t just to see the mummers! They gave you the chance, that’s all. You came for some reason!’

‘I suppose you know Jen’s been accusing you of being a burglar?’ Cicely’s eyes met his in a half-laughing wholly-defiant challenge. ‘Do you know the whole neighbourhood took you and your sister for burglars?’

‘Heavens, no! Why on earth? It’s the first I’ve heard of it! How absolutely topping!’ he laughed. ‘But why? I say, Jack, come and hear this!’

But Raymond much preferred to tell Joan the story of the Pixie in France, for which she had asked at the first opportunity. So Cicely and Joy and Jen between them enlightened the delighted Everett as to the sensation his brief appearance in the village had caused, and his shout of laughter made even Joan look up, deep in the story as she was.

‘I’m awfully sorry to be so disappointing,’ he assured Jen gravely at last. ‘I’m afraid it’s quite an anti-climax to all that excitement. But we had no felonious intent in entering your house. I admit it was taking a liberty, and we ought to have explained ourselves, but our time was very short, and—Avvie wanted to see the mummers! She was crazy with joy when we met them and she found what we were in for. Seemed to think it was a most extraordinary bit of luck!’

‘But you were after something else!’ Jen insisted. ‘Why wasn’t ours the right house? What was it she didn’t want to give up, and you were going to manage for her?’

‘Oh, you weren’t supposed to hear all that!’ he teased. ‘That’s her business. You’ll have to ask her when she comes. I couldn’t possibly give her away. But—burglars! It’s priceless! She’ll simply howl when she hears!’

‘My uncle’s regiment were in a lonely camp behind the line,’ Raymond was saying, as he sat with Joan on the high teacher’s desk swinging his long legs, while Joan perched sideways. ‘It was after the armistice, and the rest had all gone forward to the Rhine. They felt as if they’d been forgotten by the rest of the world; something went wrong for a time, and they got no letters and no news, and the boys got utterly fed up. So did the officers, and they didn’t know what to do for the men. Suddenly this Pixie, as you call her—I like the name!—appeared in a car from a town some miles away, where the Y.M. had a hut. Some one had told her about them, and she had a few days free and came to see if the men would like classes. Uncle John said he doubted if they’d take to country dancing, as everybody else did, but she was keen to try, and the C.O. didn’t mind. So she went out, speaking to every man she met, inviting them to come round in the evening; they’d found a small hall with a piano. A good bunch of them turned up, and uncle went to see the fun. He said it was great! It was top-hole to see her tackle

them; but it was much more than fun; every one felt they were watching something quite out of the ordinary.'

Joan nodded. 'How did she do it?'

'She'd got rappers, and she let the boys handle them, and talked about them, and they were interested.'

'Rappers! Those are the funny thin swords that bend, with two handles, aren't they? We haven't tried them yet. But when we rave about "Kirkby" or "Flamborough," a friend in our house, who comes from Newcastle, says, "Eh, but you should see the r-r-rappers!" I can't do it!' and Joan tried to imitate the North-country accent. 'She puts a whole queue of r's at the beginning. Did the men like them?'

'Rather! She soon got five to stand up and learn a few movements, while the rest laughed and ragged them, but wanted to have a turn too. And before they had realised it, they were in two lines and doing "Butterfly," and hugely pleased with it and themselves. She ran round and kept them straight, till it seemed certain she'd get trodden on; Tommy's boots are fairly hefty! But she escaped somehow, and she made herself heard above the boots and the piano. Next night there were dozens more of the boys; and when she went down the street she might have been the Queen! Every man of them knew her. She settled down with them for ten days; they'd have liked it to have been ten months! And the boys just fought for the chance of fetching her rations and carrying her water and cleaning her shoes and doing any mortal thing they could think of for her. And she darned their socks and put on their buttons when she wasn't taking classes. She tackled the officers' mess, too, and in half a day she'd made over the whole place. They'd got past caring what it was like, and the place was going to pieces. The men kept it clean enough, of course, but they hadn't an idea beyond that, and it was an absolute barn. They were fed up with its bareness and all that, but they didn't know what to do either. As a matter of fact, they didn't know what was wrong with it; just that they were sick of the whole place. She saw it, but didn't say anything; but while they were taking parade she shut herself in and just did miracles. She switched the whole place round, to begin with, so that it all looked different; got down the old bits of pictures that had been up for months and nobody wanted to see again, and nailed up new fresh ones—I don't know how she reached up to them, but she did it——'

'That little thing?' Joan cried incredulously, as Cicely had once done. 'Oh, but they shouldn't have let her! How could they?'

'They hadn't a notion what she was up to, till they came back and found the whole place like new. She'd put up curtains at the windows—*curtains!* She'd found some stuff and run 'em up the night before. And a new cloth on the table; and a rug she'd scrounged somewhere. She's got a way of getting

things out of people, you know; I guess she'd talked her landlady round. There were *flowers* on the table, and yellow paper shades on the lamps! The old man nearly cried with joy when he saw those lampshades, and begged her to make a pink one for his den! Said the place made him think of Home and Mother! She was tired, but proud and happy, and awfully bucked that they were so pleased. Pleased! They could have worshipped her. They never let the old barn get into that dismal state again; they'd been pulled up, and they never forgot it. And you bet they never forgot the Pixie either! Couldn't think what she'd done to the place at first, for it was clean enough, of course; but just all wrong. But she'd turned everything round, and made it cosy and homelike; they thought of her for months! Here she comes!' and he stood up. 'She was called away in a hurry after ten days, and the boys could have wept; I know they swore. My uncle says he did! But they didn't forget their classes, and later they were moved to the Rhine and found other girls teaching there, and they were able to go ahead. When I heard about it all, I decided if ever I got a chance I'd have a try at it myself. But I was keen to get into one of her classes, of course, so I wrote to her and she worked it for me. And Everett said he'd come too. His folks are all in this dancing business, but he'd never had a chance to try it. So he said he'd come along; he seemed keen to do a little; said he'd heard so much about it for years that he thought it was time he found out what it really was.'

They went to take their places for 'Shepherd's Holiday,' called into line by the Pixie, and Joan wondered, as she waited for the music to begin, if she could not account for Dick Everett's sudden interest in folk-dancing more fully than his friend seemed able to do. For his sister must have told him Cicely was to be at the school.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE PRESIDENT'S CONFESSION

The President and Joan had the hills almost to themselves as they left the tram at the junction and turned into the green lane. Every one else was changing to the hill-climbing car and going on to the golf links and the terminus; Cicely and Joan alone took the green way between trees and hedges, past cottages and farms, to the southern end of the ridge, where the great bare red hillside would presently catch the sunset light and glow like fire.

They climbed by narrow paths to the turf above the cliff, and sat there with the open green downs behind, and Cheltenham and Gloucester at their feet, the green wooded hills of Birdlip and Leckhampton to the left, the blue Malvern range and the fainter Welsh heights away to the right. Cicely's eyes fixed on the silver streak in front which was the Severn; Joan's were on the square gray cathedral tower.

It was Joan who spoke at last. 'Aren't you going to tell me, President? That's what we came for, isn't it?'

Cicely stirred restlessly. 'I suppose so. I want to talk to somebody, and the rest are impossible. I thought perhaps you'd understand.'

'I'll try. I think I'm the most likely to understand,' Joan said quietly.

Cicely turned on her quickly. 'Are you getting to like that nice Raymond boy?'

Joan laughed. Resting her elbow on her knee and her chin in her hand, she gazed down at the white farm in the hollow and said deliberately, 'Not yet. Not here. I don't think it would be the thing. But I don't say I couldn't sometime. I like him; as you say, he's a nice boy, but when you talk much to him you find he's more than that. He's got a lot in him, but he's very shy of letting it come out.'

'You've made the most of your time!' Cicely commented.

'While we're all here, at the school, it's not the time to think of anything but just being friends. I don't feel anything else would be fair—to the school people. We can't have our folks saying—well——'

'That we come to Vacation Schools and go home engaged to strange young men!' the President said grimly. 'I quite agree! It wouldn't be playing the game. But what about afterwards?'

'We'll let afterwards take care of itself,' Joan's eyes laughed at her.



‘But you mustn’t let the poor boy think—unless you mean something——!’

‘You leave me and the poor boy alone!’ Joan retorted. ‘Don’t you worry about us! I’ll play the game; if I mean to be just friends, I’ll make him understand. If I’m sure he wants more, and if I’m sure I do, he’ll know, and I won’t turn him down later on! I won’t go back on my word, and you can give your word without saying anything, sometimes. Now what about you? Are *you* playing the game? What are you going to do with your man, President? There’s no doubt about him; he never takes his eyes off you.’

‘I wish he wouldn’t tease!’ Cicely broke out. ‘I don’t want to be bothered.’

‘You oughtn’t to go on being nice to him, then,’ Joan said sharply. ‘You mustn’t play double; it isn’t like you, President! You’re generally so sure of yourself.’

‘I know. I hate him for it! I don’t know what I want,’ Cicely admitted resentfully. ‘Well, I’d better confess! I brought you here on purpose. You see, it’s different for me; I’d met him before.’

‘Yes?’ Joan asked gently; she was quite awake to the importance of the difference.

‘It was on the way home from Ceylon. I knew his people by name, because their place is next to Daddy’s, but I hadn’t met any of them except the father. They didn’t go out there every year, as I did; I only went to be company for Daddy. They lived in London, and Rose, the elder girl, had never been to Ceylon. But she was to be married this summer, and she wasn’t well, after influenza and other things, so they sent her for the trip, just to be there for a few weeks, with Dick—Mr Everett!—to look after her; he’d just left the Air Force. And we all came home on the same ship. I liked Rose, and we had a common interest in folk-dancing; she’d been keen for years, and said her little sister was a beautiful dancer; he’d been abroad and hadn’t had a chance to go in for it—as you can see by his attempts at it now!’ She laughed, and Joan smiled. ‘We were friends on the voyage, and I—well, I got the idea he’d like to be something more. I’ve always said I couldn’t be bothered with men, but’—she paused, and gazed at Joan expectantly.

Joan justified her trust. ‘You thought it might be different if *he* were the man!’

‘You do understand! I didn’t get further than that. I began to feel it might be possible to put up with some men——’

‘Oh, one’s quite enough!’ Joan laughed. ‘Cicely, I know! Go on! You said you’d quarrelled with him?’

‘I feel bad about that!’ the President said restlessly. ‘I didn’t behave well. I was soft, and I’m not usually weak. I heard some people talking; you wouldn’t think *I* would care what people said, would you? It wasn’t like me. But they were saying what a good thing it would be for both of us—such a good arrangement! It would join up his place and ours, and make a really handsome thing of it; *he* was keen enough, anybody could see that! As for the girl—think of me hearing myself talked of that way!—she’d got sense enough to know what was good for her! There was a lot more, all implying that I’d go and marry him just because it would be such a good thing for both of us! Not exactly for his money; for Daddy’s all right there; though, of course, those idiots didn’t know anything about Broadway End; Grandfather has always said that was to be mine; there’s no one else to have it, anyway. But for the sake of joining up the two places in Ceylon, and because it would be such a good plan for everybody; a kind of business arrangement! It just made me wild. I hated to think of doing anything so ordinary, so—so obvious! I could just hear people saying, “Well, what could you expect?” And for *me*! I’ve never done things because people expected me to!’

She looked hopefully at Joan again, her face flushed with indignation. Joan was looking very grave, however. ‘And you quarrelled with him, though you liked him and knew he liked you, just because of silly gossip you’d overheard? *That* wasn’t like you, President! I’d have thought you’d be stronger. What does it matter what people say? If you and he had the right feeling, wasn’t that everything? Were these silly creatures people you really cared about?’

‘Not a scrap. But everybody else would have said it too. It felt like marrying the man next door!’ Cicely said petulantly.

‘Well, if the next-door man’s nice, and if he happens to be the right one for you, what could be happier?’ Joan said mildly. Then she sat up. ‘Cicely Hobart, I’m surprised at you! You’re a mean girl, and if you care what silly people say, you are soft! And if you’re going to be soft, I’m ashamed of you. I never thought you would. Did you really turn the poor man down just because of that silly talk?’

‘There wasn’t any turning down needed. I just kept out of his way, and went to bed early instead of talking in the dark.’ Joan noted this admission, but made no comment. ‘I didn’t give him any chances. I think perhaps he’d meant to—well——’

‘I’m sure he had!’ Joan said grimly. ‘And was that the end? You didn’t see him again till this morning?’

‘He wrote and asked if he might come to see me,’ Cicely confessed.

‘And you wouldn’t let him? I think you’ve been just mean, Cicely!’

‘Well, he was very easily put off!’ Cicely’s voice had a sudden sore note. ‘If I’d been a man——!’

‘You wouldn’t have taken no. But he must have known he’d meet you here,’ Joan said wisely. ‘His sister would tell him that. He thought he’d wait till he could see you again in an ordinary way, without seeming to tease you or run after you; that’s all. Now what are you going to do?’

‘Nothing. I mean, I don’t know.’ The strong-minded President was in a state of indecision very unusual and uncomfortable to her, and she felt and sounded resentful.

‘You’ve got to decide. You can’t meet him and dance with him day after day without knowing what you’re going to do. I won’t have it,’ Joan suddenly assumed the authority the President had temporarily abdicated. ‘You’ve treated the poor chap badly once; you can’t do it again! Cicely, tell me just one thing!’ and she laid her hand in eager sympathy on her friend’s knee. ‘Did you forget him after telling him not to come to see you? Or have you gone on thinking about him all these months?’

Cicely’s face filled with sudden colour. ‘At first I thought about him,’ she said honestly. ‘Then for a long time I didn’t—much!’ and Joan understood. ‘I thought I’d forgotten. But when he walked in this morning—well, *my* hey went west as well as Jen’s!’

Joan’s hand closed on hers. ‘You do care! Now, Cicely dear, it’s what people will say that has got to “go west.” You’ve got to do the straight thing for him and yourself. You know well enough what it is. You can’t fool about with him any longer. I don’t say you’ve got to get engaged to him at once, but——’

‘He hasn’t asked me yet!’

‘Oh, but he will! If you want him to, just go out in the side-car with him one evening! But I do say you’ve got to stop playing with him. If you’re nice to him now, it’s got to mean that you’ll do something more later on. He’ll hope it means that, and you can’t let him down again. You haven’t been fair to him, but it hasn’t cooled off; you ought to give him credit for that! You know his people and yours will all be pleased; there’s no reason *you* should wait, if you want to go ahead!’ and Cicely knew she was thinking of herself and Raymond. ‘Now let’s go home! It’s getting dark. We can go on talking on the tram, but I will *not* miss the last car and have to walk home; not for several Mr Everetts!’

‘Oh, one’s quite enough!’ Cicely quoted, rising with a half laugh. ‘Don’t give me away to the infants, there’s a dear! They are very young sometimes! And I feel rather old to-night!’

‘Joy’s one month younger than I am!’ Joan said solemnly.

‘A month! Three years! I don’t care what your birth certificates say. She hasn’t even begun to grow up yet!’

‘I *never* thought,’ said Cicely suddenly, as they boarded the last tram, ‘that the next time I saw him I’d be in gym things! I say, Joan, tell me straight! Do I look decent in a tunic?’

Joan smothered a laugh. ‘Yes, not half bad! Oh, don’t worry! He didn’t seem to mind! I rather thought he liked it! Cicely, *do I?*’

‘You! Your nice boy’s eyes went after you as ours did after Madam, the first time we saw her in hers.’

‘I realised suddenly how funny it felt,’ Joan remarked.

The ‘infants’ met them in the front garden with a storm of reproach because they had ‘sneaked away and cut the lecture.’ The Director was always interesting, but to-day he had held them all fascinated while he talked of the origin and folk-lore of the sword-dance play. Jen, fairly overflowing with excitement and joy, knew *all* about it now, as she said; why a sword-dance was a necessary part of the mumming play; why one man must be killed and brought to life again; why the Clown was so important; what the lock meant; why old Billy Thwaites had told her the play was done every year ‘for luck.’

‘He really did say it, just as the Prophet says they always do! And cook knew there ought to be a sword-dance, though she hadn’t the faintest notion why. He told us about the Tom and Betty, too, and all the weird things Mr Everett’s sister spoke about. *Now* I know as much as she does! Oh, I am glad we came! And I do love the Prophet for telling us all about it! How you two miserable slackers could go and miss a word of one of his lectures I don’t know!’

‘We wanted some fresh air, Jenny-Wren,’ Joan said mildly.

Everett and Raymond had already scored heavily with their side-cars, which were at the disposal of the tired girls after every class. While the Pixie sat on Jen’s knee in Belinda, the other two careered wildly from school to college in a few minutes, instead of walking more than a mile. Such help was not to be despised; occasionally they allowed themselves to be taken all the way home, and the three bicycles came tooting up the drive and unloaded at the gate.

‘I don’t quite like those side-cars!’ Miss Newcastle remarked one day, when the girls had dismissed the men and Joy was stabling Belinda. ‘One’s all very well, but when there are three of them rushing about, seems to me something might happen! I hope they’re careful at corners. I don’t want to hear some day that you’re all lying in a heap somewhere!’

‘Oh, don’t worry, Aunty!’ Jen mocked. ‘We’re all right! Joy’s not likely to tip me out; and you don’t think either of those men would crash with Joan

or Cicely on board, do you?’ she added, in an undertone.

Dick Everett scored again when presently he produced a camera, and allowed the President to annex it for her own use, for the time being. She refused to do more than borrow it, having one of her own at home which she had never dreamt of needing. But she had felt the want of it, and joyfully accepted the loan, and spent many happy moments in the quad during the morning interval, snapping Madam, the Pixie, the Prophet, ‘Joshua,’ and others, all busy with buns and milk. She took a holiday one hot morning, and lay on the asphalt of the playground in her tunic, snapping the sword-dance class, while the Pixie conducted proceedings from her low wall or kept a watchful eye on ‘Kirkby.’ And at the afternoon demonstration, Cicely snapped the dancers as quickly as she could change her films, and was rewarded with a series of interesting photos, though she admitted she had not had the full good of the demonstration.

‘It felt rather like sacrilege! But I did want some dancing photos! And I’ve got them!’ she said joyfully.

‘Thanks to Mr Everett!’ Joy hinted.

‘Oh, he has his uses!’ Cicely said airily, and Joan laughed, her mind at ease about the President now.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE GUISER-GIRL EXPLAINS

‘You never know *whom* or *what* you may meet next in a longways dance!’ gasped Jen, at the party the following night. For as she turned to give right and left hands to the ‘man’ below her, in ‘Jamaica,’ she faced a laughing, black-haired, blue-eyed schoolgirl of sixteen.

‘Even burglars!’ mocked Avvie Everett, as they parted.

They met again presently in the second figure, when Jen was working up the line, and as they turned one another ‘once-and-a-half,’ the guiser-girl said swiftly, ‘Meet me afterwards and I’ll tell you all about it!’

‘Right-o!’ Jen panted, and was swung away from Avvie by her partner.

To her joy, she was dancing with the Pixie, and they had gone all down the line and up again before the music stopped. The country dance class had discovered that their little teacher had no objection to dancing with students, so there had been a rush for her, and she had promised to ‘reserve herself for this class!’ Jen had proudly claimed her for ‘Jamaica’; Joy had ‘bagged her for “Newcastle,”’ and Jen begged the Advanced Certificate to come and be the eighth, since Joan and Cicely were provided with partners.

‘Quite a family party! *Isn’t* that nice?’ said the Pixie happily, and enjoyed the ‘family set’ as much as anybody.

That was half-way through the evening, however, when the novelty was beginning to wear off. At first, only the fact that they could do ‘Mary and Dorothy’ and ‘Hey, Boys’ by instinct—‘Standing on their heads backwards,’ as Joy said—kept Joan and Cicely from getting utterly lost in their delight in this new experience. For the grass was dry, the night was warm and still, and the party was held out on the lawn in the corner by the big tree. The girls felt dimly that it was going to be ‘extra special,’ as they looked round at the laughing, talking throng; then the music started, and all the brightly-coloured figures began to interweave in regular rhythm; and the President literally stood still in her place to gaze, forgetting everything.

Joy gave her an indignant poke. ‘Going to cry?’ she mocked. ‘You needn’t spoil the dance for the rest of us, anyway! If you want to dream, get out of the way, President! If you want to dance—hands-four, quickly!’

Cicely woke with a start, and laughed, and caught her hand. ‘I never saw anything like it!’ she said, and felt it again and again, as after each interval the whole moving crowd suddenly resolved itself into rings or squares or

lines of rhythmic movement. 'You can see it here! We were so squashed together inside!'

There was plenty of room for everybody, and even with hundreds of dancers no one was cramped, a great relief after the 'crush' of the week before. For 'Peascods,' the big rings seemed to reach as far as one could see in the gathering dusk, and the effect, when all the circles began to swing at the same moment, was wonderfully beautiful. For the closing dance, which of course was 'Sellenger's Round,' the whole party, of several hundred, were massed in great rings, one inside the other, all revolving in alternate directions, the loved Prophet in the centre, smiling even more happily than usual. Cicely could not resist the temptation to dance it with Dick Everett, nor Joan with Raymond, but they were inclined to agree with the Pixie, as, original always, she retreated to a chair to watch, murmuring, 'I never can dance this! It's *too* beautiful!'

'Wait till all the arms go up in the second figure! It's like a wave,' said Madam's brother, as he skilfully and tactfully arranged the rings, bidding them go alternately 'clock' and 'counterclock.'

'I know. It's too beautiful,' she said again, and stood enthralled as the coloured crowd below her broke into movement.

'I'll never forget that!' and Cicely broke away with Everett after the first time. 'They'll do it again, you know! Let's look on!' and they joined the Pixie.

'It's a wonderful sight,' he agreed, as all the arms swung up to the centre.

'It's worth coming for—just that! I'm glad to have seen it out of doors, even once.'

Jen had found Avice in an interval, and they had had a few eager excited words together.

'Dick told me!' Avice laughed. 'I nearly hurt myself! Did you *really* think we were burglars? Did we look like it?'

'I didn't! I always said you weren't. But father wanted to know why you were prowling about our village on a dark snowy night. And I'd heard you say——'

'Yes, you weren't meant to hear that!'

'You should have waited till you got outside before saying it, then!' Jen retorted.

'Tell me!' demanded Avice, with mocking eyes. 'Was I right about your side-step? Did you get pulled up for it when you came here?'

'Rather! But that was only one thing. The first day we thought every single thing we did was wrong. I know what you meant about the sword-

dance now. I didn't even know what a sword-dance was when I saw you! We were outsiders, as you said; but we aren't any longer!

'Who's this girl Dick's running round in his car? Is she one of the Hobarts father and Rose know?'

'Yes, she's one of them—Cicely Hobart. She's our President, and simply tophole! There isn't a man made that's good enough for her!' Jen said stoutly.

'I thought there wasn't a girl anywhere I'd care for Dick to look at!' Avice said grudgingly. 'She's pretty, of course, and she seems jolly good fun and all that; but it's awful cheek of her to go off with Dick! They seem fairly well pleased with one another! And themselves!'

'They get on all right now. They didn't at first, but they seem to have got used to one another, and the rest of us just have to put up with it,' Jen said philosophically. 'Won't you tell me what you meant that night?'

Avice laughed. 'There's the music for "Three Meet!" My "man" will be looking for me. I'd got a school friend, a real chum, that I cared about awfully,' she said swiftly, 'and just at the end of the term we'd had a frightful scrap. Never mind what about! It was chiefly my fault; I've got a beast of a temper. I wanted to say I was sorry and get things squared before the new term began; I wrote, but she didn't answer. Then I heard from her sister that Nora was staying with an old aunt and uncle in Yorkshire, at a house called Lowmoor; and after Christmas Dick and I went motoring with friends, and when we stopped that night in your village, I asked questions and found we were quite near the house Nora was stopping at. So I persuaded Dick to come out and see if we could find it, and I thought perhaps I'd have courage enough to ask for Nora and see if we couldn't settle things. I wasn't scared of Mrs Carr, but I did feel bad for fear Nora would refuse to see me; she hadn't answered my letter, you see, and I knew I'd been in the wrong. I'd have felt so awfully snubbed. Then we met the mummers, and I was wild with joy; any one would be, who understood what a ripping chance it was to see the real thing, done by real village people! But I was awfully disappointed in your sword-dance! Well, it seemed to me a far better way to get into the house with the crowd than to go to the front door and ask for Nora! I thought if I could get hold of her suddenly I'd say I was sorry before she could say she wouldn't listen, and she wouldn't be able to squash me; you'll understand that! I was told by a man in the crowd that there was a girl in your house, so of course I thought it must be Nora; then I saw you sitting on the dresser, and knew we'd come to the wrong place. Then after that priceless mumming and that awful attempt at a dance, you up and did morris, and just took my breath away! I'd *never* expected to see "Jockie" danced to a gramophone in the wilds of Yorkshire!'



Jen laughed. 'I know now I did it very badly!'

'Some of it. But it was morris. I was kind of stunned, especially when you tried to do "Princess Royal." I wondered what you were, for I knew I'd never seen you at any of our schools.'

'I suppose it was very awful?'

'It was, rather,' Avice agreed. 'I couldn't resist the temptation to show you how it ought to be done and see if you'd feel any difference.'

'I did, of course, in that "Blue-Eyed Stranger." I felt it at once, though I didn't understand. But you didn't try to show off! You could well enough have done jigs I didn't know. You only helped me out.'

Avice laughed. 'We don't show off, any of us! Well, we went on to Lowmoor with the crowd, but had no better luck there, though we knew it was the right house. Nora was ill in bed; had taken cold on the journey and been in bed ever since; so I had to wait till she came back to school, after all.'

'I heard about the girl who came to Lowmoor at Christmas,' Jen agreed, 'but I never thought of connecting her with you! She was ill all the time, and had to go away home at last, before she could get really well, so I never saw her. Of course, Mrs Carr would have asked me down if she'd been well enough. They thought Yorkshire in January must be too cold for her, so they sent her back to London as soon as she could travel safely. Did you make friends next term?'

'Oh, yes! I told her what a desperate effort I'd made to reach her in the hols, and she wished she'd seen the mummers. She'll shriek when she hears you thought I was a burglar! I'm sorry to be such an anti-climax, as Dick says. I'm afraid he's going to call me "the anti-climax"; seems to think it's such a come-down, when I might have been a burglar!'

'We always call you the guiser-girl, because you came with the mummers. Here's my husband; I'm dancing this with her. Thanks so much for telling me! It's an awful relief!'

'Quite a weight off your mind, I'm sure!' Avice laughed, as Jen turned to Jacky-boy. 'I'll see you later; often, I guess!'

'Yes, I've got a *real* sword-dance to tell you about! A gorgeously beautiful one!' Jen called after her.

## CHAPTER XXII

### 'TAKE YOUR PARTNER HOME!'

'You've enlarged your set!' said Madam. It had not taken her eyes long to discover that the four had become six, and that the two men were more than mere dancing partners. She knew the signs, and did not need to be told that Joy and Jen would have to dance together.

'Yes, I can't go out in Belinda any more, because that would leave Jenny-Wren stranded!' Joy said, in an aggrieved tone. Then her eyes danced. 'But we all went heaps of times last week! We "cut" afternoon classes, and Joan went all over the place in Jack Raymond's side-car, and Cicely went off with Mr Everett; and Jenny-Wren and I dragged Jacky-boy—she's Jen's chum and husband!—from the paths of virtue, and we three went in Belinda. We felt we'd earned a holiday. Joan and Cicely have some private joke about "going in side-cars"; they won't explain, but they look at one another and laugh if any one says, "Are you going out in a side-car to-day?" Sometimes they go all four together, but the last day or two they've gone different ways.'

'They used to go together, but they didn't always come home together!' remarked the observant Jen.

'True for you, Jenny-Wren! Cicely and Mr Everett are old family friends,' Joy added primly, for Madam's benefit.

'Oh, I see!' Madam wondered privately if this had made much difference. 'And the other boy?'

'Oh, he's a chum of the Pixie's! He's all right! We wondered, Jen and I, how long it would take you to see that Joan and the President had each developed a man! We had a bet on; I said you'd see it in one afternoon.'

'And I said in five minutes!' Jen sighed. 'I was nearest! We wish they hadn't, but we've had to put up with it!'

'I hear you've been neglecting your classes!' Madam said severely to Cicely, after watching the two couples with sympathetic understanding through a dance for six and a longways set.

Cicely's face had grown radiant at sight of her the moment she entered the classroom, but she had not made straight for her as she would have done three weeks ago. Now, however, she said joyfully, 'It's tophole to come back to you! We hardly dared to hope for such luck. We didn't know it would be you; we just came this afternoon to see! If it had been any one else we'd have slacked next week too, but I won't miss a minute if you're to be here.'

We've been having adventures with all kinds of people, and some we've liked and some we've just put up with! The week with the Pixie was great; we had her for everything, and we never missed a class. But last week we had samples of people; they were interesting, and awfully good teachers, and all that; we haven't come across one that isn't a good teacher! Some of them are brilliant, and I've a tremendous respect for them. But all the same I could quite bear to miss a class now and then. It feels like coming home to get back to you.'

'You found the side-cars too fascinating, evidently!'

'We thought we ought to see something of the country, while we were here!' Cicely said demurely, but with dancing eyes. 'And a month of this kind of life is too strenuous. We took things more easily last week, so that we wouldn't all be dead before the school closed. Now we're rested and bucked up to begin again. I don't know how you keep on!'

'I'm going to work you hard this week! You haven't done any Running Set? Then you don't know what you're in for! Make up sets of eight, everybody, and we'll learn the Introduction.'

'Oh, we know! And we're dying to try it!' Cicely said eagerly. 'We saw you do it the other morning; we haven't missed a minute of a single demonstration, you know! I'd never seen, or felt, anything like the excitement of that morning; you could feel it all through the room. Jen says she felt the same when she saw the sword-dance men last Christmas. I wanted to yell; we were all thrilled to the very limit! And I thought you were all going off your heads too. Will you really teach it to us?'

'Oh, you can't do Running Set at top speed and keep quite sober!' Madam laughed.

'How do you like it?' she asked on Monday morning. She was lying stretched on the lids of the desks in her tunic, her head on her arm, looking so like a lazy sprawling cat in the unconscious beauty of her attitude that Joan, looking down at her, had hard work again not to stroke her and say 'Pretty pussy!' 'I *am* getting tired!' Madam added. 'I'm ready for a holiday. I shall bathe and lie out on the sand-hills for a month. Well?'

'Running Set's just "It!" ' Cicely said warmly. 'If you're going to do that every day, I won't miss a minute for any money!'

'Or any man?' Madam teased, sitting up suddenly. 'I've got to take strong measures, since you've learnt how to be slack! Running Set is the strongest I know. Get in your sets, and we'll do a new figure. You remember "Shoot the Owl?" If you do it well, you shall have "Chase the Squirrel." '

'We want that Wild Goose thing, where you go hunting the men,' Joy begged. 'I'm Jen's man; I want to chase those two!' nodding at Raymond and Everett.

‘I want the one where you wind up into a ball, and then you shout “Swing!” and it all flies apart!’ Jen pleaded.

Madam laughed. ‘We’ll see how you get on with your “Do-si-do” and Promenades first.’

She sat on the wide window sill, her hands clasped round her knees, and called for silence. ‘*I’m* going to be the Caller to-day! Somebody else can do it to-morrow, if they like; but to-day I’m going to count for you all, so you must listen!’ and they laughed, recognising a familiar note.

Above the music Madam’s voice rang out—‘*Grand, Promenade! Swing your partner! Swing your contrary! One, two, three, four, five, six—turn! One, two, three, four, five, six! Swing your partner! Swing your contrary! Take your partner home!*’—it was almost a chant.

But that was only after much practice. At first she came flying across the room to one set after another, as the ‘Do-si-do’ got wilder and wilder, and more and more out of position; or buried her face in the skirt of her tunic and groaned, at sight of the hopeless muddle they made of the Grand Promenade. Those who knew her laughed; those who did not, looked alarmed, dreading the storm about to break on them, or wondering if she had collapsed in tears.

She looked up when she had recovered. ‘*I never* saw such hopeless people in *all my life!* Go back to the beginning, and *listen* to my counting! You *must* turn on six, or you’ll *never* get there. And don’t stay too long with your contraries. Do the Grand Prom. again, and be ready for that turn . . . Yes. Now go back to the beginning and do the Introduction right through. Be careful with your “Do-si-do.” Men, I want to see you avoiding one another more. Arch your backs as you pass. It’s this!’ and she descended from the window sill and bade Raymond stand aside. ‘Do the “Do-si” with me!’ to Cicely, Joan, and Everett.

That morning had held a new joy and a great treat for them, for instead of ‘the chanty-man’s’ solos during the morning session, Madam had stood beside the Director and sung several of the songs he had found in the Kentucky mountains and brought back to their native land. Her voice was, according to the President, ‘exactly what it ought to be for folk-songs and baby nursery rhymes,’ every note true, every word clear, and so natural and simple that even the occasional use of a quaint old expression was easy to follow. She had sung ‘Aunt Nancy’ and the curious Appalachian version of ‘Cocky Robin,’ and then the Bird Song, and ‘Soldier, soldier, won’t you marry me?’ and the President had told her exuberantly afterwards,—

‘I love you when you’re dancing, but I’m not sure that I don’t love you more still when you’re singing!’

‘I say! You’re easily satisfied!’ Madam mocked her teasingly.

‘You know, I think you’re a downright sport!’ Cicely said to her at the end of the class one morning. ‘In the fourth week of a school like this, when you must be getting nervy and tired, you might very well take only easy work. Instead of that you go and tackle a ghastly thing like Running Set; ghastly to teach, I mean. It’s ripping to do, and we’re enjoying it awfully. But it must be the limit to teach; I think you’re just sporting! And with people like us!’

‘Oh, you’re not as bad as some! I want to dance too,’ Madam assured her. ‘I’d like to join in. But I can’t till you know it—not to enjoy it! I’ve got to keep an eye on everybody. But I love Running Set.’

‘Oh, it’s glorious to do! Perhaps we’ll be good enough by the end of the week. I wonder—I’m planning an awfully jolly evening in our barn at home, somewhere about Christmas!’ Cicely said eagerly. ‘If we fixed a day that would suit you, would you come? And would you, *would* you dance Running Set with us? I’d like the girls to see it. I’m not going to teach it to them yet; I’m going to get them right in the ordinary dances first, and give them some swords.’ Madam nodded. ‘But if you’d come in and make up a set, we could let them see what it’s like, and they could try it later on. We shan’t forget it, and our fiddler can play anything. I’ll get the music. But would you dance with us?’

‘I’d love it, of course. But that wouldn’t make eight? There are only four of you’—Madam paused suddenly.

‘Oh, I’m going to ask the Pixie! I think she’ll come; she said she would. And Jen’s coming from Yorkshire, to stay with Joan and Joy at the Hall. I’d love to put you up!’

‘But that only makes six!’ Madam eyed her severely. ‘What about your fourth couple?’

‘Seems to me it makes eight!’ said Cicely placidly.

‘Are you hinting that those two men will be there?’ Madam demanded, with sudden understanding.

‘No, I’m assuming it! We’ll have to get it over sooner or later!’

‘Oh! You’re going to introduce them to your club? Of *course* I’ll come! I say, congratulations!’ Madam’s eyes snapped.

‘Well, you know I always do every mortal thing you tell me to, and you’re telling me all the time to “Take my partner home!”’ Cicely retorted. ‘Don’t give us away to the infants just yet, though! I say! I’ve a pressing engagement with “Haxby” in the gym! See you this afternoon! Thanks awfully for that Running Set!’ and she fled.

## CHAPTER XXIII WHEN IT HAPPENED

‘Don’t be late home!’ said Miss Newcastle. ‘Remember you’ve all promised me dances to-night, for the last time!’

‘Oh, we won’t miss the last party of the school!’ Joan laughed.

‘Fancy going home to-morrow!’ Joy groaned. ‘Won’t it feel weird and quiet, after this month?’

‘Yes, but we’ve got our work cut out for us, to use all the new things we’ve learnt! I’m going to give my boys “Kirkby” and “Flamborough,” before I’m much older, or know the reason why; just as soon as ever we can get swords!’ Jen vowed. ‘And I shouldn’t wonder if we tried “Haxby” and “Sleights” too, though it seems rather cheek. I don’t pretend to know them properly yet.’

Then the two ‘gentlemen-side-cars,’ as Joy called them, came hooting up the drive to join Belinda, and the whole party tucked themselves in and whirled gaily away, except Miss Newcastle. She had been invited to go too, but knew better than to consent to share a seat with Joan or Cicely, and Belinda was already crowded enough with Jack and Jenny-Wren. The Advanced Certificate did not like the thought of a place on the carrier for herself or any one else, and preferred to stay at home.

She was sitting in the front garden some hours later, putting finishing touches to her dress for the evening, and wondering if the wanderers would be home in time to change before dinner, when her name was called from the gate, in a tone which made her heart stand still. ‘*Newcastle!*’

As she turned and sprang up, Tormy slid from her cycle at the gate and fell in a heap on the grass at her feet. ‘There’s been a smash-up—the bikes. One of them’s hurt or killed. Will you go?’ and then she broke down and sobbed, gasping for breath.

Miss Newcastle, white and shaking, raised her in her arms. ‘You’ve ridden too fast, child. Try to tell me more! Where am I to go? And who is hurt? Oh, Tormy, *which?*’

Tormy clung to her, panting brokenly. ‘I don’t know! The hardest thing I ever did—to come for you, and not go to see! The hospital; Jack said they’d take her there, but they wanted you.’

Jack! Then Jack was all right! ‘But didn’t she tell you who was hurt, Tormy dear? Where did you meet her?’

‘I was cycling home by the Shurdington Road,’ Tormy panted, leaning heavily on her and shaking from head to foot. ‘I caught up with Jack; she was running, and nearly dead. She was coming for you, and she’d run miles already. She called out to me that they’d crashed, and they were taking her to the hospital, and they wanted you; then she went giddy and rolled over on the bank, and a woman from a cottage said she’d see to her and I’d better go on and tell her friends. And it was the *worst* thing I ever had to do, to come on and find you and not know who—which—’ she broke down and sobbed brokenly.

Miss Newcastle laid her gently in the deck chair. ‘You’re a plucky kid, and very sporting,’ she said warmly. Then she ran upstairs, flung a coat over her tunic, and raced down again; took possession of Tormy’s cycle, and made off at full speed for the hospital.

But as she went, her mind was a whirl of frightened agonised thought. *Who* was hurt?—perhaps killed? Tormy did not know how serious the accident had been.

Joan? Not Joan, groaned Miss Newcastle! Not Joan, in whose eyes that new happiness had dawned. Everybody loved Joan; the thought of losing her was too hard to face.

Not Cicely!—with her radiant joy in life and her delight in beauty; with a new undreamt-of future just opening before her.

Not Joy! No, not Joy, cried Miss Newcastle’s heart. For though she hardly loved Joy as she did the elder girls, she knew that Joy had never really lived yet, in one sense. She was still a child, still unawakened, untouched by the deeper things of life. Joy had enjoyed every moment of her twenty years; even the troubles of her schooldays had left her serious side untouched. If she had to go now, she would have missed everything but enjoyment. Suppose she were injured, and had to lie for all her life; Joy the wanderer, ‘Traveller’s Joy,’ the ‘Wild Cat Who Walked By His Wild Lone,’ as Cicely teasingly called her! No, not Joy! If it must be one, the elder girls had at least tasted life; they had taken beauty to their hearts, and they would never forget. Even if this month were the end for either of them, their friends would feel that they had known the best; and in these last two weeks they had both tasted the deepest joy of all, or Miss Newcastle was greatly mistaken. It would seem horribly cruel if Cicely or Joan had to suffer, if either were so badly injured that she could never move, never walk or dance, again. But Miss Newcastle knew that if they lived, neither of them would ever forget what these weeks had held for them. But Joy! Joy was still just a baby! Not *Joy!*

Her thoughts had only travelled so far when she reached the hospital gate, and saw Joy coming to meet her. Miss Newcastle’s heart gave a bound

of relief, and then a sharp stab of fear. It was not Joy. But then who?

Joy came to meet her, with a look on her face the like of which her friend had never seen. She was as white as if the accident had been hers, as drawn and broken, and her eyes were wild and frightened. Suddenly Miss Newcastle knew that it was for Joy she was needed, though Joy was unhurt.

‘It was my fault,’ Joy greeted her without any explanations. ‘I was talking, and not looking. And now——’

With the first chance to speak came relief to her pent-up feeling. She began to shake all over, and then to cry brokenly. Once more Miss Newcastle knew her own fears and questions must be put aside in answer to another’s need.

She held Joy tightly in her arms. ‘Dear, don’t cry like that! You mustn’t lose your head. It would only make more trouble for everybody. Joy, don’t be so unkind!’—an instinctive word, but a very wise one, for it took Joy out of herself. ‘Who is hurt? Tormy couldn’t tell me. Oh, Joy, tell me who it is?’

Joy clung to her, shaking and overwrought. ‘Jen. She was in the side-car. Jack was on the carrier, and she was thrown clear and only got a bump. But Jen fell on her head, and the wheel went over her. I did it; I was laughing and not looking, and I caught Dick’s wheel and we went over. If Jen dies, it will kill me too.’

Jen! *Little Jenny-Wren*, in spite of her height! Miss Newcastle’s thoughts had not reached her. ‘Tell me how bad it is, Joy!’ she pleaded, knowing it would be better for the girl to talk. ‘She isn’t dead?’

‘Not yet. They don’t know. They’re all with her. I thought she was dead,’ Joy shuddered. ‘She looked like it; she lay so still. But when they lifted her, she moaned; I’ll never forget! It was my fault. I can’t bear it, Newcastle!’

She broke away to wander restlessly up and down, her face ghastly in its distress. Miss Newcastle took her arm and drew her gently down on a garden seat again, and Joy submitted without protest, and looked at her with dazed eyes.

‘Where are they all?’ Miss Newcastle kept her talking. ‘Cicely and Joan? And the rest?’

‘Dick and Jack have gone to telegraph to her mother. The girls are in there. They wouldn’t have me,’ Joy’s face quivered. ‘Cicely said—she said \_\_\_\_\_,’

‘She didn’t mean it!’ Miss Newcastle said swiftly. It needed no great knowledge of the President to guess that bitter hasty words had escaped her in the first shock of the accident.

‘Oh, but it was true. I did it. I—I wish it had been me!’ Joy wailed. ‘Why should Jenny-Wren be hurt? It was my fault!’



‘Here’s Joan!’ and Miss Newcastle sprang up and ran to her, as Joan came to the door.

Joy’s tragic eyes swept her cousin’s face. Then she turned and hid her face against her arm, on the end of the seat.

Joan came to them quickly, her face filling with relief. ‘Newcastle dear! Oh, I’m so glad you’re here! Will you take care of Joy for me? I came to look for her. She mustn’t go on like this; but I can’t stay with her. Cicely wants me; she feels responsible for Jen, as she brought her here, and she’s just ready to go all to pieces. I must stay with her. But I knew what Joy would be like. Can you help her, Newcastle? It was an accident. She mustn’t break her heart like this.’

She ran to Joy, and sat down by her, putting her arms round her. ‘Dear, you couldn’t help it. Don’t cry like that! It hurts us all, Joy!’

‘Oh, but I could!’ poor Joy gasped and shook. ‘I was talking and laughing, and not looking. It needn’t have happened. Joan, is she dead?’

Miss Newcastle’s eyes were asking the same question.

Joan said gravely, ‘No. But they won’t say yet. There’s concussion, of course, and they think they’ll have to operate,’ her voice broke. ‘And the wheel crushed her leg and side. They don’t know if that will come right; they don’t know how bad it is yet. Joy, she isn’t suffering; she doesn’t know. We’ve only got to wait. I’ll come and tell you as soon as there’s anything to tell. But I can’t leave Cicely alone. Be good to her, Newcastle! We’ll all be grateful to you for ever.’

She went indoors again, and Miss Newcastle took her place as comforter. But it was a terrible hour for them both. If Jenny-Wren died—if her brain were injured and she never knew them again, never heard Joy say she was sorry, but lay there always unconscious and only half alive—if, more terrible still, she woke to find herself helpless, unable to walk again, all her dancing days and all her dreams for her village children at an end! Joy whispered something of this, and Miss Newcastle agreed; then dissented quickly.

‘No, Joy! It wouldn’t be more terrible; not for Jen. She’d still have something within her, something she could never lose. It would be very hard to have to live on memories, to look back all her life; but better that than never to have known such joy as Jen has had. Beautiful things have become part of her; she’ll never lose that happiness while she can think at all. Better by far to live in the enjoyment of the past than to lie knowing nothing! And Jen would find other ways of happiness, if all she has had were taken from her;—as she did when she had to leave school and lose you all and all the joy of your school and club life. She made her own happiness, because she had it within her, and she will do it again, if it comes to that. How? I can’t

tell you. But she'd do it, because she's Jenny-Wren. Her greatest happiness is in beautiful things and in friendship, and so long as consciousness lasts those will last too. Yes, even if she can never walk or dance again, you must pray they'll be able to save her mind.'

'But it's so cruel!' Joy shuddered again. 'And I did it! If she gets better, she'll know!'

'Now are you thinking more of Jen or Joy?' Miss Newcastle demanded.

Joy's head dropped on her arm. 'I always have thought first of myself,' she whispered. 'They've been so good to me, Joan and Aunty. They've always put me first. And I've let them. I've taken everything, just like a baby. Oh, if there was only something I could do for Jen!'

Miss Newcastle thought hard, her arms tightly round the unstrung girl. 'Was Belinda smashed?' she asked suddenly.

Joy looked up in amazement. 'No, she just turned over. She's all right. Dick brought her home. But why do you want her? I can't ever look at her again!'

Miss Newcastle had foreseen that. 'I want to send a telegram,' she said deliberately. 'I want you to take me to the post office, and Belinda would be the quickest way. Will you run me round?'

Joy stared at her open-eyed. 'You'd trust me? After—after—? Why, I thought no one would ever go out with me again! And you don't much like side-cars at any time! Yet you're asking me to take you out—to-day?'

'I want to send that telegram,' Miss Newcastle said gravely, 'and it's the quickest way. It's not a time for any of us to think of ourselves, is it?'

Joy gave her a quick look. 'But you could 'phone it from the hospital?'

'That would trouble them. No, I want to send it myself, and I want you to take me. We must tell them of this round at the college, too, but I think we'll wait till we know more, and until to-night's party is over. It would spoil it for them all, and that wouldn't help Jen. I'm sure she wouldn't want the party spoiled on her account. Can we go at once?'

'You aren't frightened?' Joy asked bitterly, as she rose.

'Frightened? What of?' Miss Newcastle rose briskly.

Joy said nothing, but her lips pinched tightly. Her perceptions were not quick, and she only dimly understood the reasons that lay behind the sudden request. Miss Newcastle's resolve that she should not lose her nerve and be afraid to drive again, and that she must not feel no one would trust herself with her, went too deeply into matters for a child like Joy. But she felt dimly a sense of relief in doing something useful for somebody; and she was acutely grateful to Miss Newcastle for this evidence of confidence. It was only afterwards she realised she might have been too shaken and nervous to drive again, and was thankful for the peremptory demand which had forced

her to it before she had had time to think. Joan understood as soon as she heard of it, however, and her gratitude to their friend was heartfelt.

Joy was shaking still as she pushed Belinda to the gate, and Miss Newcastle saw it with some misgiving, and resolved to cancel the ride if matters did not improve. A second accident would help no one. But Joy's hands steadied instinctively as she gripped the handles; she was not troubled with nerves, though sorely shaken by the recent shock. She drove with pathetic care through the town, stopped for a moment at home, to allow Miss Newcastle to tell Tormy all she knew, and then carried her to the post office, where the Advanced Certificate telegraphed briefly that she would be unable to return to her school work on Monday, as expected. For a day or two, at least, she must stand by her friends in their trouble.

Then at her suggestion they raced away up the Shurdington Road to find poor overtired Jack and bring her home. And so back to the hospital for hours of weary waiting, broken only by a run in Belinda round to the college when the dance would be over, to tell the Pixie and Madam and other friends of the accident, so that they should not wonder at the disappearance of the whole party from classes on the last morning.

'We'll send round the latest news,' Miss Newcastle promised. 'She has stood the operation well, so as yet it is good news. We'll tell you more in the morning.'

## CHAPTER XXIV WHEN JOY GREW UP

The morning's news was good, so far as it went. Jen had stood the shock of the operation well, and had fallen into a long sleep which made for health. There was a constant stream of visitors at the hospital; every friend the girls had made, and there were many of them, had to call for the latest news on her way to the train. Madam and the Pixie came together, before going round to take their final classes, to ask if they could do anything to help; and came again as soon as classes were over. Both would have stayed the week-end willingly, if there had been anything they could do; but when they heard Jen's mother had been sent for, they only left messages of sympathy, and charged Miss Newcastle to send them news as soon as anything definite was known.

As the students of the Vacation School scattered to their homes all over the country during the afternoon, Jen woke to consciousness, and the anxiety of her friends was eased on one point; she knew them, and had smiled at Cicely, and even whispered a word to Joan. In that direction all would be well; as to the crushed limb and bruised side, the doctors would not say for a few days.

She woke also, of course, to pain; and Joy was heartbroken, and suffered with her all the time. Jen was plucky and made no complaint, but she liked to hold Joan's hand all that day, until her mother came; and the rest knew what that meant. They could not all be with her, and the old love and homage she had given to Joan from the day of Joan's Coronation as May Queen came to the fore now. Jen wanted Joan, and Joan would not leave her till her mother came; and even then was with her much of the time.

The rest, unable to help Jen, helped Joan instead, by being very good to Joy. She needed all their care and help, all their efforts to keep her thoughts from the shadow overhanging them all, in those days of suspense when no one could say if Jen would ever be really strong again. She would be able to walk, said the doctors before very long, but possibly only limping or leaning on a stick. Whether they could cure her so completely that no ill results of the accident would be left, they could not say for some time.

Every one went burdened by the thought of Jenny-Wren on crutches or with a limp; every one but herself, for she never knew of the fear till long afterwards. But Joy's distress was the deepest, and she learned more in those days of anxiety and doubt than all her happy easy years had taught her. It

was while Jen lay suffering that Joy grew up; she was never quite so careless or thoughtless again. The accident would have affected her far less deeply if the injury had been her own; she suffered and learned through Jen the greatest and deepest lessons of her life. Nothing Miss Newcastle, or Joan in her free moments, could say to comfort her could alter the fact which Joy would never forget, that this need not have happened, that it was her want of care which had brought Jen to this. The knowledge had its result on her whole life.

Miss Newcastle was a mighty help to them all in those first few days, but especially to Joy. For Joan could not be with her much, and just at first the President, in her acute fear for Jen and with her sense of responsibility for the younger girls, was hard on Joy and would hardly speak to her, fearing lest she should say too much. Joy accepted an occasional harsh word, and the continual grim silence, with pathetic meekness and showed no resentment, but she found no comfort in Jack or Tormy; Karen and Tazy had gone, and Joan was always at the hospital. Those were very silent nights in the big dormitory. Joy turned to Miss Newcastle in despair, and found help in her strength.

Joan saw how matters stood, and as soon as the arrival of Mrs Robins set her free at times, she devoted herself to Joy in a way that sent Jack Raymond into the depths of despair, as he wondered if after all he had been mistaken in what he had allowed himself to hope. Everett had no doubts as to Cicely, however; the signal stood at 'all clear' between them, whether she had much time for him at the moment or not. He ventured a word on his friend's behalf, and she gave swift, decisive advice.

'Tell him not to worry. That's all right! But he mustn't expect anything from Joan just now. She's thinking about him all right, but anything to do with herself has to wait at present. Tell him to go away, and come to see her when she gets home again and we know Jen's all right. I'll let you know. But nothing's any use just now.'

The doctor's final verdict was given next day, and in much relief the party scattered to its various duties. Jen would be well again in time; she would walk as well as ever, and even dance, but not for a long while. She would need patience, but there was no injury which some months of rest would not put right.

So Miss Newcastle went off to her neglected school duties, Raymond and Everett were ordered back to town by Cicely, and escorted her, Jack, and Joy; and only Joan stayed on with Mrs Robins until Jen could venture on the long journey home; and then, at the patient's urgent request, went with her for the long-promised visit to Yorkshire.

‘My children were going to dance to you,’ Jen laughed. ‘But you’ll have to do without that. They aren’t good enough without a few lessons! I’d feel as bad as Cicely would have felt if Madam had gone to the barn before the President had had her whack at the club’s bad style!’

A great pleasure of those convalescent days at Cheltenham was a brief visit from the Pixie on one of her flights about the country, still on her own particular job of planting the seeds of a new comradeship and a friendlier atmosphere through the medium of folk-dancing, though now she visited English villages instead of rest-camps in France. While ‘doing the west country’ for a time she paid a flying visit to see how the patient was progressing; and was hailed with joyous greeting by Joan and Jen alike.

‘Did the school go off its head on the last morning? I am so sorry I missed it, and made all the rest miss it too!’ Jen sighed regretfully. ‘Newcastle said they always went a little bit mad. We wanted to see you and Madam playing “Mulberry Bush” and “Ring o’ Roses.”’

‘More likely to be “Looby Light,” or “Nuts in May,” or “Old Roger,”’ said the Pixie. ‘No, we didn’t go off our heads this time. We kept quite sober; rather sad, in fact.’

Jen looked at her quickly. ‘About *me*? Did I spoil the last morning? Oh, I am sorry! But how nice of you all to care so much!’ she said warmly.

‘Well, we couldn’t forget you, Jenny-Wren!’ said the Pixie.

Madam, on her way home from her much-needed seaside holiday, came off her direct route to look them up also, and to add her congratulations when she found Jen sitting up in the garden.

As they sat talking, and thanking her for the kindness of this visit, Joan’s eyes fastened on a ring she wore, which had certainly never been there in school days. She looked her eager questions, but did not voice them; but Jen saw it presently, and burst out excitedly, ‘Who? What? When? Oh, won’t you tell us, *please*?’

So Madam, laughing, admitted what only confirmed the guesses they had made a month before; and Jen sighed with satisfaction.

‘May I write and tell the President? She’ll be so awfully pleased and thrilled! It’s not a secret? But it can’t be if you’re going about in that lovely ring! How tophole! And no *wonder* you were a sport and understood about Cicely and Joan! The President always said you were!’

‘Jenny-Wren!’ Joan remonstrated.

‘Oh, you needn’t go red! You know we all knew, silly!’

‘You know you’re going to marry him, so why not say so?’ Madam remarked, with the directness characteristic of her. ‘Has the President announced her engagement yet?’

Joan shook her head. ‘She’s waiting.’

‘She’s waiting for Joan,’ said Jen. ‘She says they’ll get it over together, like having measles. The girls will be so awfully excited, you see. They’ll think it’s so funny for the President to be engaged. I never thought she would!’

‘I didn’t know you knew anything about it, Jenny-Wren,’ Madam said severely. ‘I was particularly asked not to give her away to the infants. I suppose that includes you?’

‘Oh, but I know everything *now!*’ Jen assured her calmly. ‘Joan’s told me heaps of things to amuse me while I’ve been in bed. Besides, d’you think we didn’t know, Joy and Jack and I?’ she added scornfully. ‘We weren’t born yesterday!’

Madam laughed. ‘But is the President sure Joy and Jack won’t give her away to the club? I wonder she feels safe. I should imagine “the other Miss Shirley,” as I used to call her, was quite capable of doing it just to tease.’

‘She would have done, once. But she won’t now,’ Joan said quietly. ‘And Jack’s in London, and has been told she mustn’t say anything. She wouldn’t, anyway. Joy was the only one who might have given Cicely away, and she won’t—now.’

Madam nodded, with quick, characteristic understanding. ‘Was she very much cut up? But she would be, poor child! She’ll never want to drive that thing again.’

‘I’m going to ask her to take me out in it, the first time I see her. I love Belinda. I always did,’ Jen said nonchalantly.

‘Jenny-Wren, you’re downright sporting!’ Madam said warmly, as she rose to say good-bye.

## CHAPTER XXV

### A DANCE-EVENING IN THE BARN

‘I thought you and the Pixie were to be the guests of honour to-night!’ Cicely greeted Madam gaily at the door of Darley’s Barn. ‘But we’ve some one *much* more important here to meet you!’

The lanterns were lit and swinging from the high roof. Margia Lane was tuning her violin and playing over to herself the haunting music of the Running Set, her bow barely touching the strings; and Madam laughed in enjoyable anticipation as the strains of ‘Morpeth Lassies,’ ‘Gooseberry Blossoms,’ ‘Grama-chree,’ and ‘The Banks of Allan,’ met her on the threshold. The barn was filling with girls in light-coloured dancing-frocks, school girls, old girls, and even married girls.

The Christmas School in London was over, with its performance of the Nativity Play and the Folk Play from Ampleforth. Madam and the Pixie had been met at Wycombe Station by the big carriage from Broadway End, and it had carried them through dark climbing lanes to Darley’s Farm and the hospitable open door of the barn, where lights and folk-music, girls and laughter made them forget the lonely way they had come. Miss Newcastle had been warmly urged to come too, if she were coming south for the school, but she had regretfully decided that London was too far away, and that she must wait till spring or summer before seeing her friends again.

Cicely’s invitation to Madam, fixing the date, had added, ‘Please, if you can, bring a partner for our Running Set! Or we shall be done out of it, and I shall be so disappointed! For we shan’t have Jen, and there will only be seven of us. So do bring somebody! I don’t think you’ll find it difficult. We can put up as many as you like; we’ve oceans of room. But I do want that dance, and the girls are crazy to see it.’

So Madam, with amusement in her eyes, gravely introduced a very newly-acquired husband, whose Running Set was ‘really quite good,’ as she said; and the President’s face lit up with delighted welcome. ‘I hoped you’d come,’ she told him warmly. ‘I’d heard, and I did hope she’d take the hint!’ Madam laughed. ‘But I can never remember to call her by her new name! You don’t want introducing, do you? You remember Mr Everett and Mr Raymond?’

‘And may we congratulate you officially at last? My good wishes are six months old, you’ll remember. Does the club know all about it now?’ Madam was hastily changing into dancing shoes and putting off her coat.



‘The club is making frantic guesses, and trying to divide two men between three girls who went to Cheltenham,’ Cicely said solemnly. ‘They know there’s something up, and they think they know what the something is; but they aren’t quite sure how to pair us off. There’s Joan introducing Dick and Jack as if they both belonged to her; and a few minutes ago I saw Joy with the two of them in tow. It’s really very dithering for the girls! They’re just bursting with curiosity. But it won’t hurt them. There’s some one I want you to speak to!’ and she led them into the barn. ‘They’ll all be more worried than ever when a third man appears! Now! This is the guest of honour!—the one we’re most pleased to see here!’

Taller than ever, after her six months’ illness, but looking very well, with bobbed yellow curls in place of the long plaits she had always worn, Jen came to meet them eagerly, with warm welcome for Madam and the Pixie, and a swift look of delighted understanding at the third member of the party. For Jack had attended folk-dance classes in London during the term, and had written before Christmas in much excitement to tell how ‘Madam had gone and got married all of a sudden; and wasn’t it *just* like her?’

‘Oh, I’m very well!’ she laughed. ‘And enjoying myself ever so much. It’s tophole to see everybody again! Mother wouldn’t spare me for Christmas, but I came yesterday, to stay with Joan and Joy at the Hall. I’ve stayed with them before, you know. Yes, I’m quite all right, really. I can walk miles—two or three, anyway. And I’ve been teaching my kiddies again.’

‘But we aren’t going to let her dance much to-night,’ Cicely explained. ‘She may do things like “Rufty Tufty” and “Mary and Dorothy,” if she likes; or “Summer’s Day,” for the sake of one summer day at Naunton Park!’—her eyes met the Pixie’s and they all laughed. ‘But she will *not* do Running Set! That’s why there were only seven of us.’

‘And I want to do it most of all,’ Jen mourned. ‘The President’s a frightful bully!’

‘No, I wouldn’t advise Running Set. Nor “Haste to the Wedding,”’ Madam laughed. ‘You’re surely going to begin with that, in the very particular circumstances?’

‘I rather thought we ought to,’ the President acknowledged. ‘But you’ll have to be first couple. You have had a wedding! We haven’t—yet!’

She called to Margia, who gave the tune, and the girls hastily began to choose their partners, not for a moment seeing the significance of the dance. Cicely, sudden colour in her face, nodded to Dick Everett, who was coming towards her; then turned to the platform, where several of the former Queens of the club were sitting. Mirry, the White Queen, had brought her baby girl to her first meeting of the Hamlet Club; and Marguerite was there, just come

from France with a French husband. Jen was sitting down with them to watch, when Mirry's baby was thrust into her astonished arms, and Mirry and Marguerite went hand in hand to join in the fun.

'In honour of the great occasion, President!' and Mirry bobbed a curtsey. 'Jenny-Wren must mind my family! I'm going back a few years!'

'I hope the family won't yell all the time,' Joan laughed, as Jack Raymond led her to their place as third couple, below the President and Dick.

'Oh, it's a well-trained family, and very fond of music!' Miriam assured her.

Her little sister, Queen Barbara, the choice of the girls on the previous May Day, went up to the Pixie with dignity and no shyness, and asked to be allowed to be her 'man,' since the other two strangers had obviously paired off together. Babs' manners were good, and she knew that the visitors must be looked after by the Queen. They took their places as the music struck up; and then the eyes of all the club members were busy, indeed, for the couples were sorted out at last. With Margia's violin leading them on, they could not stop to question or comment; there was no choice but to dance, with that music and that tune, but they could, and did, look their hardest, as Joan and Madam, and, a moment later, the President were led down the middle by their partners. There was no possible mistake now, and Cicely, waiting at the top for her turn, laughed at sight of Edna Gilks's face, and was prepared for a demonstration of some kind at the first opportunity.

As they honoured their partners at the end, Edna and Miriam with the same idea called a word to Margia, and Marguerite ran to pass on to her the word Miriam had whispered as they swung together. Margia struck up 'Sellenger's Round,' and the girls, with quick understanding, caught hands in a big ring that filled the whole barn, leaving the two couples in the centre.

'Oh, you mean things!' Joan cried, laughing and dismayed.

Cicely caught Madam by the hand and drew the third couple into the ring. 'You're just about as new as we are! Come and keep us company! Help us through this ordeal!' as the dance went gaily round. 'What do we do? Turn single on the spot, counter-clockwise? I'm not the Prophet! I'm not used to being a maypole or a sacred tree!'

'I should dance too. There are six of us,' Madam said promptly. 'It would be far less embarrassing.'

'Topping! You're the one for ideas!' and Cicely caught Dick's hand. 'Join in, children!' to Joan and Raymond; and they made a little ring inside the big one and ran to the centre, throwing up their arms in the second figure, to the disappointment of the younger members, who had hoped to see the President look embarrassed at last.

For once the Pixie joined in 'Sellenger's Round,' in spite of her love for looking on. But as the second time began, she slipped away and sent Joy, who was sitting out with Jen, to take her place.

'Go in instead of me, won't you? Yes, please do. I'd far rather look on. And you must dance in your sister's honour; well, cousin, then! But I still believe she's really your sister. Gracious! You did give me a shock that day! Doesn't he ever mix you up?'

'Doesn't seem to!' Joy laughed, and caught the little Queen's hand and made the ring complete again.

The Pixie sat watching beside Jen and the baby, her eyes intent on the moving coloured throng. 'Aren't they all happy? I do like to see people enjoying themselves! I love to watch this, don't you?'

'I'd rather dance, if they'd let me. I could, too, but Cicely's so frightfully careful of me. You know, Joy says she's going to be my partner all the evening, and sit out everything that I can't dance, so that I won't feel left out. Isn't it topping of her? She declares she won't dance in the Running Set, but of course she'll have to, or she'll spoil it for everybody. I've been out in Belinda already! Joy didn't want to take me, but I begged and teased until she did. But she just crawled! It wasn't any fun at all! Oh, there's the end! Now they'll be mobbed! I hope Mirry will come for this baby of hers! I'm sure it's going to yell.'

The third couple extricated themselves dexterously from the excited crowd all clamouring to congratulate the President and Joan, and stood laughing and watching on the platform.

'This is a very great event,' Margia Lane laughed. 'The President has been so very independent, and has bossed the club and everybody for so many years, that the girls will find it hard to believe she has really given in to anybody. I understand her explanation is to be that she had never been bullied or bossed till she went to Cheltenham, but that she enjoyed the experience so much that she decided to make it permanent. I've always thought she had things too much her own way; I've known her since she was fifteen. Everybody looks up to her, from her grandparents downwards. But from what I've seen of Mr Everett, I don't think she'll be able to sit on him too thoroughly.'

'She won't want to. They're very happy, both sets of them. Can't we make them give us a dance for four?' Madam suggested. 'We old married people will look on. Play "Lady in the Dark." I taught them that myself.'

In keen delight and excitement, the Hamlet Club fell back to watch the dance for four, and Cicely and Joan, with faces full of suppressed amusement, took care of their partners and opposites and saw them safely through, for the men had forgotten it.

‘I suppose you saw through that?’ the President challenged Madam afterwards. ‘Yes, you would, of course. There’s no hope of cheating you.’

‘Not when you do it so obviously as all that,’ Madam retorted. ‘What are you going to do now?’

‘My sword teams are going to show the rest “Kirkby” and “Flamborough,” and you’re going to criticise and tell me where they’re wrong,’ Cicely said promptly. ‘After that you two are coming in, and we’re going to have “Jenny Pluck Pears,” and the men are going to put us three in the middle, and then we’re going to put them in. The girls don’t know it, so they’ll simply love it.’

‘I’m sure they will. All right! I’m ready!’ Madam agreed.

She watched with interest and appreciation the country and morris dances that followed. Cicely, sitting at her feet, asked anxiously, ‘Is it too bad? I’ve had a frightful time with them!’

‘No, it’s quite good. You’ve done wonders if their style was what yours was when I saw you first.’

Cicely laughed ruefully. ‘I know. I know now what we were like. I wonder you weren’t ill. We’re awfully grateful for the way you pulled us round. I suppose you know the girls’ name for you? They’re simply delighted to see you here, though they aren’t showing it much because they’re so much excited about us! But they’ve been looking forward tremendously to your visit.’

‘And what is it they call me?’ Madam demanded.

‘Oh, you’re known as “The One Who Bossed the President!”’

Madam laughed. ‘It seems to have made an impression on you! I must have been very crushing. I’m sorry!’

‘Oh, you needn’t be! I’d never enjoyed anything so much in my life! But it was a new experience!’

‘Did you have a good time at Chelsea?’

‘We had a very interesting time!’ Cicely said sedately. ‘We couldn’t be completely happy when we never had you at all. We only saw you in the distance.’

‘Silly!’ said Madam promptly.

‘All right! Just as you like!’ the President agreed placidly. ‘But it’s so, all the same. There’s something not quite right with a class unless you’re the boss. But I enjoyed it all; I’m not saying I didn’t. It was tremendously interesting, and I like getting to know new people. But none of them quite come up to you. I’m always rather lonely if you’re not there.’

Madam ignored this. ‘Whom did you have?’

‘Oh, we were in luck! For country and Running Set we had the Prophet’s “Little Page.”’ Madam laughed out at the name. ‘I simply loved watching

her; I'm more than ever sure she dances without touching the ground! I got some ideas from her too; and she gave us some new dances. Her Running Set's perfect; but then of course it would be. For morris and sword we had the Dear Little Robin, as Jacky-boy always calls her; and I just loved her. She's a sport, and topping fun; and just about as quick at seeing things as you are. It takes my breath away to hear her go round after a morris telling every single person what she did wrong; she never misses a thing; you can't dodge her! And I shall always connect "Sleights" and "Haxby" with her. Oh, I was awfully interested and enjoyed it all, except that I hardly ever saw you.'

'Baby!'

'All right!' Cicely agreed equably again. 'I can be happy with the Dear Little Robin any day, and I love to see her demonstrate. But all the same, she isn't you.'

'Are you coming to Cheltenham?'

'Rather! Do you think we'd miss it? Oh, we're all coming, married or not.'

'Oh, are you going to——? When is it to be?'

'Dick wants me to go out to Ceylon for a flying visit, and I can't very well go with him unless we get married first. I usually go with father every winter, but this year I didn't, and Dick seems to think it would be better if I went with him. It's very difficult when so many people want you!' Cicely sighed. 'The grandparents hate to have me away from Broadway End, and Daddy wants me in Ceylon, and now there's Dick!'

'Who after all has the first claim. You'll have to take the others in turn, and put up with him all the time. You'll soon get used to it,' Madam assured her.

'Oh, I am! But I never thought I should.'

'It's wonderful what you can do when you try,' Madam assured her solemnly. 'And when you want to!'

'I'm finding that out. Oh, I'm quite enjoying it!'

The Pixie and Jen were watching them from across the barn. 'My husband isn't here,' Jen sighed sentimentally. 'Jacky-boy, you know. She isn't really a member of the club, but they asked her, for my sake. Cicely thinks of everything! But her folks had a party to-night and she couldn't be spared. That's why I have to be a lonely widow. Oh, there's something the girls would love so much! Do you think Madam would dance a jig for them?'

'If you ask her. I'm quite sure she won't offer it,' the Pixie remarked. 'But I think she'd do it at once if she were asked.'

'And would you do it with her?' Jen urged.

But the Pixie was equally definite on that point. She did not approve of women dancing morris jigs before an audience, though she knew others did not share her opinion; to her, morris was a man's dance, and though she would teach it she would not dance in public. And with Madam. Her sense of fitness would have made her refuse, in any case. 'We'd look too funny. No, she'll do it alone,' she said.

Madam, on being asked, agreed at once. 'If you want me to, of course I will. What would you like? I love your barn, and your girls. I've never danced in a barn before. Choose what you'll have!'

'Oh, well, "Princess Royal"—"Jockie"—"Ladies' Pleasure"—"Molly Oxford"—"None So Pretty!" We want them all. You'll have to choose,' Cicely said gratefully. 'I could never say which I loved most!'

'Neither could I. Which do the girls know, and which have they never seen? They'd better have one of each.'

'You *are* good! They haven't seen "Molly Oxford." It was new to us last August.'

So Madam commandeered big handkerchiefs from her husband and Dick Everett, and stood up to dance; and a thrilled, delighted audience of girls dropped on the hard earth floor to watch the beautiful movements and the wonderfully light capers, and to feel for the first time something of what Joan and Cicely had known that Monday morning in the school. For though the President's dancing when she came home had been quite different from that which they had always known, and they had all seen and felt the change, only Madam could give quite the full revelation of what this dancing ought to be. Her husband stood watching with his peculiarly intent look; the Pixie sat blissfully happy; Cicely was reduced, as usual, to a silence too deep for words—though not for long.

Jen looked round eagerly at the other girls, and saw the wonder and delight in the faces of many, the excitement of the younger members, the appreciation in Marguerite's face, the incredulous enjoyment in Miriam's.

'It *is* something different from ours, after all! I didn't really believe it!' Mirry said softly, while the applause of the delighted girls rang among the rafters of the high open roof, where the lanterns hung.

'Of course, you dear idiot,' Cicely said affectionately. 'Haven't I been trying to tell you that for the last four months? This is the real thing. We're only playing at it. There's years of it behind that!'

'Not quite the real thing,' the Pixie objected. 'For that you must have men. No woman can put quite the same into it that a man can.'

'But I always think it's more beautiful done by a woman. You don't, I know; but I do,' Cicely insisted. 'It depends on the woman, of course; but I'd rather have it done like *that* than by any man, in spite of you. I know I'm

very improper, but I think Madam makes it a more beautiful thing than any man could ever do.'

The Pixie shook her head at her. 'That's heresy! What would the Prophet say? Come and hear what she's saying!' to Madam, who came up, not at all out of breath.

'What's that? I want to see "Jockie," done by the President and Joan. Oh, yes, of course you'll do it! What's the use of me teaching you? I want to see how much you've forgotten. Afterwards I'll do "Princess Royal" for the girls, if you think they'd like it. But I want to see you two first.'

Cicely rose reluctantly. 'I hate to, just after seeing you! I always feel all legs and elbows. But you see how obedient I am! It's become a habit. But if we do, you must criticise, and tell us where we're wrong.'

'Oh, I *shall*!' Madam laughed.

'I know when I'm well off. Since we've got you here, we want your opinion and advice,' Cicely informed her.

'You've improved a lot. That was really not at all bad; quite good, in fact,' Madam said approvingly, when the girls had danced, to the delight of the rest.

Cicely laughed. 'From you that means a lot. That's about the most she ever says,' to Miriam. 'Nothing is ever good enough. She always qualifies it with "quite." You soon learn not to be too pleased with yourself. It's awfully good for one!'

'Oh, I can't have you getting to think too much of yourselves!' and Madam went forward to keep her promise with 'Princess Royal,' and then 'Ladies' Pleasure,' since the delight of the girls was so evident.

'There's one thing I would like,' she said, when she came to sit beside Cicely and the Pixie, confessing herself ready to rest at last.

'Absolutely anything, after what you've done for us! Those dances were too perfect for words. What is there we *can* do?'

'I want to see the minuet which won Joan the Abbey and Joy the Hall. It's not a folk-dance, of course, but I can enjoy others, and for the sake of its associations I'd like to see that dance.' She had long since heard the whole story, of course.

'Yes, we ought to have that. Go and do your duty, you two! And just be thankful you once danced it so beautifully on the cloister garth!'

'In our old morning pinafores!' Joan laughed, and gave her hand to Joy.

'Joan wants you to go over and see her Abbey to-morrow, if you can possibly spare the time,' Cicely said, as the cousins danced. 'So unless you have to hurry back to town, Joy has asked us all to lunch at the Hall. We'll drive you over. The Hall's used to a crowd, isn't it, Jenny-Wren? Do you remember the invasion by the whole school?'

‘Do I remember?’ Jen mocked. ‘But I was *in* all that fun! You’d grown up and left!’

‘I must tell you something!’ and Cicely turned eagerly to Madam. ‘I was watching “Princess Royal” at Cheltenham, at an afternoon demonstration one day, when a dear old lady sitting near me turned to a friend and said, “I love that little run!” The “little run” was the side-step, and the Little Page was doing it! I curled up inside, and longed to tell the dear lady all that lay behind the little run. And I wondered what the Little Page would have said if she’d heard. I suppose she’d have died on the spot. For her side-step isn’t easily beaten.’

‘Does it really look to outsiders just like a little run?’ Madam asked mournfully. ‘What a blow! I do feel crushed!’

‘She was an idiot, though. She said, “Isn’t it *sweet*?” at the end of “Hunt the Squirrel,” led by you. “Sweet!” I could have slain her!’

Madam and the Pixie laughed. ‘I often wish I could hear the comments in the crowd,’ Madam said. ‘We don’t get that side of it. I have heard “Well done, missy!” shouted from the gallery of a theatre, though.’

‘What I’d like,’ said the Pixie thoughtfully, ‘would be the students’ point of view at a school. I’d like to know what they think of us all. Of *me*, for instance!’

‘Some day, when I have time, I’ll write a book and put you in, and tell you just what we think of you, and what a school’s like from our point of view,’ Cicely said solemnly. ‘Now what about a few dances for the girls, and one or two nice quiet ones for Jenny-Wren’—Jen snorted indignantly—‘and then we must have our Running Set, and all go home.’

‘“Take your partner home!”’ Madam quoted.

‘Oh, do you know! The other day we were told—never mind by whom!—to “promenade with our partners to our places!” I nearly groaned! After your beautifully simple, “Take your partner home,” it was an awful shock!’

‘No use wasting words about it. You may as well put it the shortest way!’

After a few more country dances, in which the guests joined with obvious enjoyment, the girls fell back to the walls and benches again, and the three couples stood up, ‘To demonstrate the Running Set,’ as Cicely laughingly said. Joy and the Pixie made the fourth pair, Madam and her husband leading and calling the figures, and counting for the Grand Promenade. Jen watched from the platform, and called the names of the figures to Mirry and Marguerite, and saw and felt the rising tide of excitement among the girls, as she had felt it when she watched the sword-men a year before.



The three men and Joy lifted their right arms, raising their partners' left hands; Margia struck up 'Barrack Hill'; and the ring began to run to the left, with quick little steps.

'Introduction!' said Jen to Miriam. 'Now hands-four and "Do-si-do"! Watch Madam's arms! I always want to dodge. See Joy swing the Pixie round and take her home. This is "Shoot The Owl". . . Now it's "Chase the Squirrel"! Watch the men do fancy steps alone in the middle! Oh, good! Dick's enjoying himself; he's getting steam up. Joy will do a Highland fling, I guess. . . Now Rights and Lefts. See Madam whirl them round! She's like another man in this . . . What will they do now? Aren't the girls just thrilled? Don't you *feel* it? Oh, "Wild Goose Chase"! They'll love this! Now you'll see some fun! Watch Dick and Jack chase one another! Madam's hurting herself over them. But she can laugh and still keep her breath. The President's holding herself in. Isn't it topping fun?'

The barn rang with laughter as Dick Everett, with a long arm outstretched, and five men and women linked together behind him, hunted Madam's husband round the circle, and he fled, dodged behind her, and swung her into the line. 'You nearly go off your feet when you're the tail of the string,' Jen laughed. 'Little steps aren't possible, even for Madam, when she's last. I thought the Pixie would give it up and just let herself be dragged when she was the tail. I don't know how she kept on the ground at all. Oh, I can't sit still! I want to be down there in the fun! . . . What are they going to do now? That's all our lot know,' as the dancers, most of them panting, gathered in a bunch in the middle of the floor. 'Oh, is she going to give them a new figure? *Isn't* she a sport?'

'We'll do "Going Down Town," and then "Wind Up the Ball Yarn,"' Madam was saying. 'That's the best finish. No, you don't know them, but I'll tell you, if you'll listen!' and the rest assumed expressions of proper meekness. She gave swift clear directions. 'You see that? Remember to stay with your contraries this time. Please play us "Footy Agyen the Wa'," and then "Killiecrankie," when we change the figure,' she said to Margia. 'You'll have to look after your man when it comes to unwinding the ball. You're fourth couple,' to the Pixie. 'We'll lead, and the rest of you only have to do as we've done.'

The swinging rhythmic 'Going Down Town,' and the more exciting 'Ball Yarn,' when the eight dancers were wound up into a close circle, arms round their necks as in a sword-dance, and then at the call 'Swing!' fell apart, or 'flew to bits,' as Jen said, to take their partners home, brought the dance to an end, and also roused the excitement of the girls to the highest pitch. As Joy, piloted from behind by the Pixie, unwound the ball successfully from the last wind-up, the audience fairly cheered with delight,

and the President panted to Madam, as their partners took them home for the last time, 'You'll have to give me full directions for that unwinding, for I don't know how Joy did it, and I'm sure she doesn't! But the club will insist on having it, that's certain. Oh, thank you awfully! That makes a glorious finish!'

'Yes, I've enjoyed that. But I'm done!' and even Madam collapsed, breathless and exhausted.

'"Some" dance, President!' and Edna Gilks came up excitedly. 'When can we have a go at it?'

'Joy will have to teach you, I'm afraid. I'm going to be married next week,' said Cicely, flushed and over-excited with the dance.

'Wh—wh—*what?*' gasped Edna, and Mirry and Joan and Jen laughed.

Madam looked up quickly. 'President, this is very sudden?'

'Not so sudden as yours! I am confessing beforehand, anyway! I've got your good example before me,' the President retorted. 'It isn't sudden at all, really. It's been fixed for weeks, but I haven't happened to mention it to anybody except two or three. I knew I'd have to own up to-night; I rather hoped that dance would work me up to it.'

She stepped on to the platform, and faced the crowd of girls bravely, still flushed with the enjoyment of the dance; and Dick Everett, Madam, and the rest sat on the edge of the platform looking up at her.

'Girls of the Hamlet Club!' said the President, breathing quickly with the excitement of what had gone before, but still more with that of the moment. 'We've had the jolliest times together these last six years. I'm glad I started the club; we've all enjoyed it. But now I feel it's time for me to resign. You may not care to have a married President, and I'm going to be married next week—"On a Tuesday morning!"' in a laughing aside for those who knew the song.

'It's not really as sudden as it seems,' she explained, when she could make herself heard above the wild outcry of excitement her tidings caused. 'Dick and I have been engaged since August. Ask Mirry or Joan; they knew! We haven't talked about it, that's all. Oh, of course I've got a ring! But I haven't happened to wear it when I've been with any of you! I did think of getting it all over and only telling you afterwards; it was very tempting! But I decided it wouldn't be quite sporting, when we've been such friends. It would have been mean to cheat you all so completely. But I'm going out to Ceylon for two months; I'll be back for May Day, for sure and certain! So as I'm going with Mr Everett this time, we decided to have a wedding first. If any of you care to come'—the rest was drowned in the shout that went up.

'Joan's going to wait a little longer, so that she can be my bridesmaid,' Cicely explained to Madam. 'But I shouldn't wonder if she was an old

married lady by the next Cheltenham School, too.'

Edna Gilks sprang on to the platform. 'President, we all wish you everything that's good, and we hope you'll be very happy. I must say I think you will! We'll all come on Tuesday, of course. But as for resigning, that's rot; and just silly. We haven't chucked Mirry out because she's got husbands and families and things——'

'Only one, Edna, please!' Miriam protested. 'Only one of each so far!'

'And we can't do without you, married or not. You're sure to be here a lot, or at least at Broadway End, so you can be our President as much as ever. We'll never let you go if we can help it. You *are* the Hamlet Club, and that's all about it. Girls, three cheers for the President, however often she gets married!'

'I say!' Dick Everett remonstrated.

'Once is enough, isn't it?' Madam laughed, and joined with Edna in leading the cheers.

Cicely bobbed a curtsy to the excited club, and stepped down from the platform. 'Thank goodness, that's over! I've confessed, and it's off my mind!' she said. 'Now one more dance for everybody, to finish up! What shall it be? You choose!'

'Oh, "Confess!"' laughed Madam. 'There's nothing else will suit! And then one more turn of "Sellenger's Round!"'

And with that the Hamlet Club's greatest evening came to an end.

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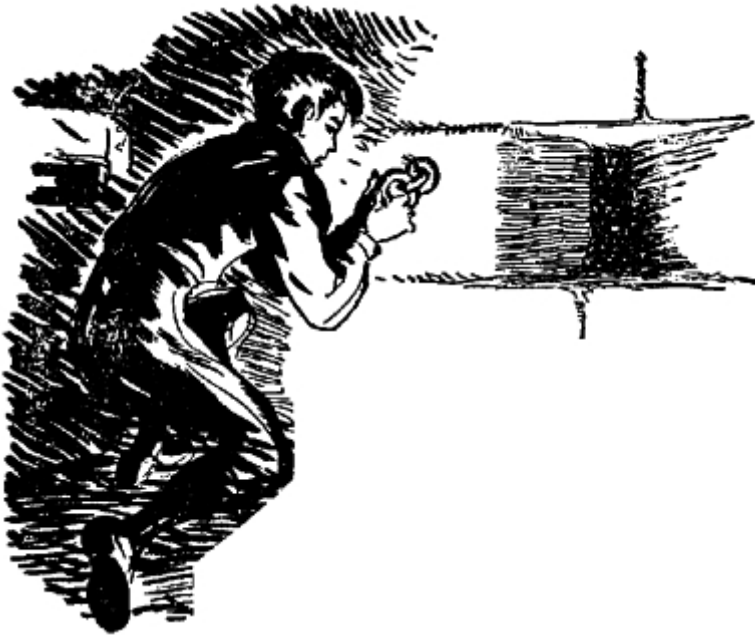
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## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Abbey Girls Go Back to School* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley  
(as Elsie J. Oxenham)]