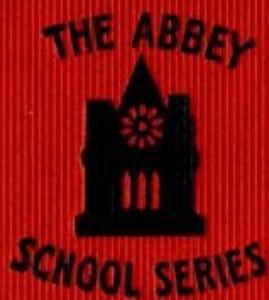


Robins
in the
Abbey

E. J.
Oxenham



COLLINS

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ROBINS IN THE
ABBEY

by
ELSIE J. OXENHAM



COLLINS
LONDON AND GLASGOW

First Printed in this Edition 1958

To
MY COUSINS
AGNES AND MABEL DEAN
WITH LOVE
AND ALL VERY BEST WISHES

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

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CHAPTER ONE

ROBIN ALONE

“Are you travelling quite alone?”

The brown-eyed girl in the brown overcoat and soft hat turned quickly, to see who had spoken in that clear, very sweet voice.

“Yes, but—oh, it’s you! I saw you come on board. You were with—with a party; a lot of children.”

“Yes, the Marchwood twins and the Quellyn babies. I’m Miss Belinda, the twins’ nursery governess.” And the blue eyes laughed back at her. “My name is Belinda Bellanne, but most people call me Lindy.”

“Belinda Bellanne? How fascinating!”

“My sister is Anne Bellanne; we both have old family names. Are you really crossing alone? Then do come along to us sometimes. You looked so forlorn, gazing back at New York as if you’d left all your friends behind!”

The brown girl laughed. “Well, I haven’t. My friends are much farther away than that. My adopted sister came out with me, but she’s staying for some months with very great friends in the West Indies. I want to get home to Mother.”

“The West Indies! That’s a long way off! Oh, well, you must adopt me and the twins till we get to Southampton! I’m sure you’ll like us.”

“I’m sure I should! That’s very kind and generous. But it’s no good, you know. You mustn’t be friends with me.” The brown girl’s face had clouded.

Belinda pushed back the yellow curls which hung round her face, and gazed at the new friend in astonishment.

“But why ever not? Are you a criminal fleeing from justice? Or have you got scarlet fever?”

In spite of herself, the brown girl laughed. “Nothing so dreadful as that. But Lady Quellyn—I saw her come on board; I’ve heard of her, and I knew her by the lovely red hair—she wouldn’t like it. I’m Robin Brent; Robertina, but I’m known as Robin.”

Lindy’s eyes went to the brown hat and coat and caught a gleam of red from a blouse or jumper. “Robin colours! Why on earth should Lady Quellyn object to my being friends with Robin Brent?”

“Then you don’t understand,” Robin said quietly, and turned to look back at New York again. “I inherited the Quellyn family place—Plas Quellyn, in Carnarvonshire—from my godfather, Robert Quellyn. She feels that he ought to have left it to his cousin, Richard, who was her husband’s

father. They had quarrelled, and my godfather, who had been in love with Mother, left the estate to me. Lady Quellyn feels Sir Ivor should have had it, and though she's heard of me, I know she doesn't want to meet me."

"Oh!" Lindy said slowly. "Yes, I see how she feels. But it isn't your fault."

"No. I couldn't help it. But I understand how she feels too. Plas Quellyn is the family home, and Sir Ivor, her husband, is the only Quellyn left; now that she has two little Quellyn boys, she'd like them to have it some day. And here am I, just Robin Brent and no bit of Quellyn in me, owning the whole place. She can't help feeling I've butted in. I knew nothing about it till after my godfather's death, when I was only twelve; I'd never heard of Plas Quellyn. But Lady Quellyn can't forgive me for—well, for being here." She smiled at Lindy.

"But how do you know she feels like that? Has she said so?"

"Not to me; I've never met her. But I was at school with a girl who knew her. I went to Wood End. You don't know Wood End School? I knew Benney Bennett and—oh, several girls who knew; they told me."

Lindy stood gazing back also. "I'm sorry," she said at last. "Poor Lady Joy! We call her Lady Joy, though of course it's not correct."

"I've heard her called Lady Joy. I'm sorry, too. It makes me uncomfortable to know she grudges my house to me. She looks so marvellous! I'd love to know her and have no sore feeling. But there's nothing to be done about it."

"Except for Lady Joy to get over her soreness."

"That, of course. But I can't do anything."

"I'm going to tell her I want to be friends with you during the crossing," Lindy said decisively. "You can't be left all alone, and I don't want you to find somebody else. I want you to come in with us. I shall see what Lady Joy says."

"I'm afraid she'll object," Robin said quietly. "I shall understand, if you don't come back. But I'll wait and see." And she smiled again. "I won't chum up with any one else just at once."

"Give me time to consult her! I was going to say—to convert her, but I hope that won't be needed. I'll go and talk to her right now. If she's willing, I'll bring the twins along to see you." And Lindy nodded and made her way across the crowded deck.

Robin stood by the side, her brown eyes wistful. She had watched the family party come on board: the nurse, carrying a year-old baby; the red-haired twins, ten years old, leading between them their dark little elder step-brother, now nearly two years old; "Miss Belinda" keeping a close eye on the three; and beautiful Lady Quellyn following them all. She knew, from

the newspapers, that Sir Ivor Quellyn was remaining in New York for two weeks longer, to take part in an International Music Conference. He would follow his family shortly, but Lady Quellyn, after fifteen months in the States, which had included a dangerous operation and a long convalescence, had been unwilling to delay her return any longer. Robin had liked the look of the little family and had wished friendship had been possible.

In the stateroom, where settling-in was in progress, Lindy poured out the story of her meeting with the girl who owned Plas Quellyn.

Joy raised her brows. "The heiress? Where's the other one? There were two of them."

"She's stayed behind with friends. I like Robin Brent, and she's lonely. Lady Joy, would you mind?—"

Lindy pleaded.

Joy laughed, rather shortly. "Not desperately, Miss Belinda. Don't expect me to welcome her! That would be rather much to ask. I do grudge that house to her, as she knows very well; it ought to be ours. But do as you like. If the girl's alone, I know your generous soul will want to be good to her; and I wouldn't like you to be any different. You and the twinnies can pal with her during the crossing; but don't bring her to speak to me."

As soon as she could be spared, Lindy called the twins and went with them in search of Robin, looking relieved, but grave.

"It's all right for us, but I'm sorry for Lady Joy. It must be horrid to keep a sore feeling like that," she said to herself.

Robin, still standing alone, heard the same very striking voice say cheerfully, "This is Elizabeth Marchwood, and this is Margaret. Twins, this is Robertina Brent, but she'll let you call her Auntie Robin, I expect."

Robin swung round, and looked down into two pairs of amused brown eyes.

"Robertina! That's a funny name!" said Elizabeth.

"As long as ours," Margaret added. "I like just Robin best. She's not our aunty."

"Then we'll say just Robin. I like it better, too," the owner of the name assured them.

"Does the sea make you ill?" Margaret asked.

"Not unless it's very bad." Robin smiled down at her.

"I like you when you grin," Elizabeth cried.

Robin laughed. "That's a good thing! I'll grin a lot, just for you, shall I?"

It was the beginning of a pleasant ship-board friendship. Joy held aloof and soon made other acquaintances; she was too well known to have any difficulty in finding her circle. But the twins and Lindy were constantly with Robin Brent, and all four enjoyed the companionship and were sorry that it must come to an end in a few days.

An evening concert organised by the passengers brought surprises for Robin, for after Lady Quellyn had played a Beethoven sonata, the twins came forward, Elizabeth carrying a small 'cello and Margaret a violin, and joined their mother in a simple but tuneful and gay little piece, written by her especially for them. For their age they played well, and they were not nervous and acknowledged the delighted applause with little bobbed curtseys which reminded Robin of country-dancing at school. Then came another surprise, for Lindy stood up to sing, and her voice rang out with a clear bird-like quality which was delightful.

"I wondered what your speaking voice meant!" Robin told her at the end of the concert. "I noticed it from the first words you said. But I didn't know you were a singer."

"I'm hoping to be a singer some day," Lindy corrected her. "I want to sing in oratorio, with Maidlin di Ravarati, who is now Mrs. Robertson."

"I've heard her sing, before her marriage. Your voice is like a lark's."

"That's what she said the first time she heard me sing," Lindy laughed. "She's lovely. But she's been too busy to sing in public lately; she's just had two baby girls. We're rushing home to see them."

"More twins!" Robin exclaimed.

"There's another set as well. Her best friend is the Countess of Kentisbury, and she had twin girls just seven weeks ago."

"Oh, I know the Countess! She's been terribly kind to our school, and she often comes to see us. I still think of it as my school, though I left a year ago; I'm twenty now. We were all at the Kentisbury wedding; the school formed the guard of honour for the bride—we knew her as Rosamund Kane. I saw Lady Quellyn at the wedding, and Miss di Ravarati and the twins were bridesmaids, and we saw other friends of theirs as well. I feel I know all their crowd by sight, though I haven't spoken to any of them. I saw in the papers about the Kentisbury twins. How I'd love to see them!"

"Perhaps you will, some day. You can understand we're in a hurry to get home, to see four new babies!"

"I'm not likely to see them, I'm afraid. Quellyn is far away, in a lonely part of North Wales."

"It sounds odd to hear you say 'Quellyn' like that," Lindy observed. "I hadn't realised it was a place as well as a surname."

"Lady Quellyn would think it odd to hear me say it." And a shadow fell on Robin's face.

"Do you live there all the time? It sounds lonely."

"We love the country. Mother and I live there, and Gwyneth, my adopted sister. Father's often abroad; he hasn't given up his business interests, and he travels a great deal. One of my brothers is in Edinburgh, studying medicine;

the younger one's in the Navy and is hardly ever at home. Mother and Gwyn and I have settled at Quellyn, now that we're done with school. We've heaps to do; we're remaking the garden, for one thing. I've been away for three months. I'm rather craving to get back to Mother now. She's going to meet me at Southampton."

"You're jolly lucky to have a mother to meet you! I've only one sister in the world, though she's a particularly nice one."

"You seem to have friends who are just like your own family, though."

"Oh, yes! I'm not lonely," Lindy said happily. "I'm terribly sorry for lonely people. Nan and I might so easily have been two forlorn strays; it was just a chance we fell in with these Abbey people. I'll tell you the story to-night after the twins are in bed."

"Abbey people? Oh, I remember. They live near a ruined Abbey, don't they?" Robin asked with interest.

"Rather! I wish you could see it. It's quite beautiful."

"Benney Bennett told me about it. I'd like to see it," Robin admitted. "But I don't see much chance of it."

"You and your mother could be tourists and pay a shilling to come in and be shown round," Lindy suggested.

"We'll think about it," Robin agreed.

CHAPTER TWO

JOY CONQUERS

The great liner crept towards Southampton Docks.

“Miss Brent? A letter for Miss Brent. Come aboard by the pilot, miss.”

Robin had been standing with Lindy, watching the green shores of Hampshire slip past. She turned with startled eyes, and took the letter with a word of thanks.

“From Mother. Perhaps she isn’t well and can’t meet me. Don’t go away, please, Lindy! I’m afraid—there may be something wrong.”

She tore open the envelope, glanced at the letter, and dropped with a gasping sob on the nearest seat.

“It’s Father. He’s crashed—in a ’plane—at Lisbon. She’s gone to him.”

“Then he wasn’t killed?” Lindy’s arms were round her. “Hold on to that, Robin, and be thankful. So often every one is killed.”

“Not that. But she didn’t know how bad it was,” Robin whispered. “She rushed off, and left this note for me. She’ll cable when she knows. She—she’s flying too. Oh, *Lindy!*”

“Oh, how brave!” Lindy exclaimed. “How marvellous of her, Robin! She might very well have faked it. It’s so much quicker, and she wanted to get to him at once; but just after his accident—oh, she must be splendid!”

“She wouldn’t think of herself; only of him—and me. She was bothered about me. There’s no need; I can look after myself,” Robin said brokenly.

“What will you do? Go straight to your house in Wales?”

“We were going to an hotel in London for the night and taking the early train. It’s an all-day journey to Quellyn. I wonder if I could get a night train? I feel dazed,” Robin’s voice broke. “I can only think of Father; and of Mother—flying to him.”

Lindy looked down at her with troubled eyes. “You can’t go to an hotel alone, and we don’t know anything about night trains. Besides, your Quellyn place is so far away, out in the wilds. Suppose your mother wanted you to come to her? I think you should stay where you could start quickly if you were needed. Haven’t you any friends in this part of the country? What about your old school?”

“Closed for the holidays; sure to be. I don’t know anywhere to go,” Robin said unsteadily.

“Wait for me here. I’ll ask somebody.” And Lindy raced away.

“Lady Joy! Oh, please listen!” And she told her story in breathless haste. “Robin can’t go and bury herself in a lonely castle, when she may be sent for at any minute! You know so many people. Isn’t there anybody who could put her up for a few days? She can’t go to an hotel alone,” she urged.

Joy looked into the troubled deep-blue eyes. “You want to take her home with us, but you don’t like to suggest it because I haven’t been nice to her. Isn’t that so?”

“I feel,” Lindy said vehemently, “that if I hadn’t bagged her almost before we left New York, she might have made other friends, who would look after her now. We’ve kept her with us, and—and we can’t let her down, Lady Joy! We must see her through! I know you don’t want her with us, but isn’t there anybody who would be good to her?”

“No, we couldn’t let her down,” Joy agreed. “I’ll go and speak to her. I like the thought of that plucky mother, forgetting everything and rushing off by ’plane.”

“It’s what you’d do yourself,” Lindy called after her, watching eagerly as Joy went towards Robin.

Joy bent over the broken girl. “My dear—they call you Robin, don’t they?”

Robin looked up and then sprang to her feet. “Lady Quellyn! Oh, how kind! Did Lindy tell you?”

Joy could keep a grudge while she thought only of herself, but it could not last in the face of trouble like this. Her generous side was strong, and it surged up and conquered.

“My dear, don’t fret too much. You’ll come home with Lindy and me; you like Lindy, and you can put up with me, perhaps. There’ll be more news in a day or two, and then you can make your plans.”

“Oh, no!” Robin said shakily. “That’s far too good of you, but I must go home. Mother will wire to Quellyn to say she’s arrived safely and—and to tell me how she found Father.”

“Who is there at home?” Joy asked. “Only servants? Or have you friends living with you?”

“Only the maids. My brothers are both away at sea. The younger is in the Navy, and we don’t often see him. The elder one is studying medicine in Edinburgh, but this is the long Vac., and he loves the sea, so he’s gone as assistant to the doctor on a liner sailing to Australia. He can’t be home for some time. There’s no one else. But our old nurse-housekeeper is kind.”

“It sounds lonely. You’ll eat your heart out, waiting for news, and it may be a day or two before you hear. I can’t let you go home to be alone with servants. No, my dear girl, you must come with us. We’ll fill your mind with new interests and new people, so that you won’t have time to feel lonely.” At

an impatient movement from Robin, at thought of being amused at such a time of suspense, Lady Quellyn added quickly, "I know you want to do nothing but sit and think about your parents, but you mustn't do it; you'll wear yourself out. As for news, I promise that the moment we reach the Hall you shall telephone to Quellyn. You're on the 'phone, I suppose?"

"We had it put in last year. Oh, could I? They'd tell me if there were any news."

"Of course. And they must 'phone you the minute any message comes, day or night. It will be better than going to an hotel. We won't tease you or try to cheer you up," Joy promised. "You shall do just as you like. But if your mother should send for you, you'll be able to go much more quickly from here, and we'll help you to arrange it. It will save you the long journey from Quellyn to London; we can run you to Southampton in a couple of hours."

Robin looked at her, her great brown eyes full of fear, mixed with unbelief. "You really will do all that for me? You'll put up with me, and help me to go, if I'm sent for? I shouldn't know what to do. Oh, you are good! But I thought you hated me!"

Joy coloured. "You must forgive me. I've been horrid and silly about the Quellyn property; a bit childish, I'm afraid! But if you're willing we'll forget all that. You must come with Lindy; you like her. If you could feel you would like to come with me, too, I'd be glad and I'd feel you had forgiven me."

"I'd love to come with you!" Robin cried fervently. "I didn't know anybody could be so kind!"

"Good! Then we'll have your things put with ours, and we'll get ashore as quickly as we can," Joy said briskly. "Now don't fret too much. We'll ring up and ask for news the moment we reach home."

Joy was an experienced traveller. The business of landing, luggage and customs was over in a fraction of the time which would have been needed for a lonely Robin, and almost before the bewildered girl realised it they were standing beside two big cars, and one chauffeur was touching his hat and explaining, while the other coped with porters, trunks and suitcases.

"Glad to see you, Frost! And Henderson, too. Oh, that's splendid! I thought we were going to be crowded," Joy exclaimed.

"Miss Mary said you'd need both cars, my lady, and Lady Marchwood said Henderson must come. She'd have come herself to meet you, but she's gone in the Rover to see Mrs. Raymond. She said she'd be back by the time you arrived."

"Thanks very much. Are they all well?"

"All very well, my lady." Frost's eyes held the glimmer of a smile.

“What are Aunty Maid’s babies like?” Elizabeth seized his hand and gazed up into his face.

“Are they nice little things?” Margaret danced with eagerness. “Are they very, very little?”

Frost’s face relaxed. “I’m told they are small children, but very, very nice,” he said solemnly.

Joy laughed. “I’m sure they’re nice! Now, twinnies, we’re wasting time. The sooner we start the sooner you’ll see Aunty Maid and her babies. Jump in with Nurse and the boys, in Henderson’s car. Lindy and Robin are coming with me. Remember you have to take care of David and show him everything. He doesn’t remember England; he was all wrapped up in a shawl, only two months old, when we took him to New York. You have to show him fields and cows and English trees and flowers. See who can find the most exciting things! Now, girls, jump in!”

“Oughtn’t I to go with the twins? But I’d much rather come with you and Robin,” Lindy said wistfully.

Joy smiled at her. “You know very well that the way to make the twins behave like little angels is to put David in their charge. They won’t give Nurse any trouble. Robin wants you, I’m sure, so come along.”

CHAPTER THREE

JOY TALKS OF FAMILIES

As the car ran smoothly through the country, Joy turned to Robin, who was sitting silently beside her, feeling a little shy and very heavily burdened at the thought of what news might come presently from Quellyn.

“You know about our families, don’t you? Henderson and the second car come from the Manor, next door to my house, the Hall. The Abbey we so often speak of is in the grounds of the Hall, but belongs to my cousin Joan, Mrs. Raymond. Our twins have a crowd of little Marchwood cousins at the Manor—three boys and two girls—and their father and mother are called Sir Kenneth and Lady Marchwood—or, to us, Ken and Jen! Kenneth had a bad motor smash about a year ago and has been very ill, and Jen has been nursing him; she must be fagged out. But he’s all right again now. Jen is a very old friend; we’ve known her since she came to school, when she was thirteen and Joan and I were sixteen.”

“And you were all May Queens at school,” Robin said shyly. “Benedicta Bennett told me.”

“Oh, you know Benneyben? She is a very good friend of ours. Yes, Joan and Jen and I were all Queens, and so were Rosamund and Maidlin, the schoolgirls whom I adopted and who lived at the Hall for years, until they married. You’ve heard about them too, I suppose?”

“I saw them, and you and your twins, and Mrs. Raymond’s boy and girl, at Lady Kentisbury’s wedding. Lady Marchwood and Mrs. Raymond weren’t there.”

“No, Rosemary Marchwood was having her appendix out, and Joan was standing by Jen and Kenneth, who were terribly frightened and anxious. I’d forgotten Wood End School came to the wedding.”

“I know Lady Kentisbury. She’s been so kind; she asked us all to the Castle when the school was partly burnt down. She has a little boy, as well as the new twins, hasn’t she?”

“Son and heir; yes, Geoffrey-Hugh, nearly a year and a half now. You can guess how thrilled we were to hear that first she and then Maidlin had twin girls! Do you wonder we’re in a hurry to get home to see them?”

“I don’t wonder at all.” Robin smiled. “Will they be at the Hall to greet you?”

“Maidlin will be there. Her babies were born at the Hall—her old home. She was so pleased about that! Her husband is Dr. John Robertson, the

musician and teacher of singing, and he has been building a house for his family. It's ready, and they'll go there quite soon now, but they decided to wait till the twins were born. Maid said she felt more at home at the Hall; which was true, of course. We shall drive over to see Rosamund and her twins to-morrow, unless they're at the Hall to meet us, which wouldn't surprise me in the least."

"I think she'll be there," Lindy said. "She'll feel she couldn't bear to let you see Miss Maid's babies and not see hers as well."

"You really must stop calling her Miss Maid, Belinda!" Joy remonstrated. "I'm sure you couldn't bear to say Mrs. Robertson all the time, so you'd better call her Maidlin, as the rest of us do."

"It seems such cheek," Lindy protested.

"Maid won't think so. I'm sure she'd rather have it than Miss Maid. I feel like a grandmother to all these new babies," and Joy smiled at Robin. "I always used to call Rosamund and Maidlin my first twins."

"You'll be the twins' godmother, won't you?" Robin asked.

"The elder one of each family is to be called after me," Joy assented. "I've some godchildren already; Joan's second girl is called Jennifer Joy, and Jen's second is Katharine Joy. Now we have to see what Ros and Maidie have called their daughters! You won't be dazed by such a crowd of us, will you?"

"Is there anybody else I shall meet?" Robin still spoke shyly.

"Only Mary Devine, my secretary and the friend of us all. I expect you know her books. Or are you too old for school stories?"

"Not for Mary Devine's," Robin assured her with energy. "I love them; I have them all. Benney told me about her. I'll love to meet her."

"There's no one else, I think——"

"Oh, Lady Joy!" Lindy cried reproachfully. "Won't Littlejan Fraser be there? The new Queen of the Hamlet Club! We can't forget her!"

"The reigning Queen. I beg her pardon! No, we mustn't forget Queen Marigold," Joy agreed. "I've never seen her, so I didn't realise she would be at the Hall. She's the daughter of a friend we knew when we were all schoolgirls, Robin. Jandy lives in Ceylon now, so she brought her girl home to us, to go to our old school. Last May the dancing club crowned her Queen, and as she chose orange for the colour of her train, and marigolds for her flowers, she's called Queen Marigold. She's just a kiddy; fourteen, isn't she, Lindy? You've seen her."

"Fourteen and a half; she has a Christmas birthday. She's a jolly fine girl," Lindy said.

"But her other name? That was queer," Robin asked.

“Littlejan Fraser. Her real name is Joan, after my cousin Joan, whose elder girl is called Janice, after Littlejan’s mother Janice. When Marigold was born she was so like her mother that her father called her Little Jan, and the name stuck, although she was christened Joan.”

“She tried to make us forget Littlejan and call her Joan-Two or Joan the Second, when she first came home,” Lindy remarked. “But I don’t believe people will ever do it, though they may call her Marigold, now that she’s Queen. But she wasn’t Marigold when I saw her a year ago.”

“Miss Belinda brought the twins to me in New York, when I was ill,” Joy explained. “That’s why she—and the twinnies—know Littlejan, though I don’t.”

Belinda had been watching Robin, and now she laid a hand on Joy’s knee. “Robin’s tired. She had to hear all about us; it will be a tremendous help to her to know who everybody is; but she’s thinking of other things all the time, and she looks nearly dead. I think she should try to go to sleep for a few minutes.”

“Oh, I couldn’t!” Robin said wearily. “It’s good of you, but I can’t stop thinking. I’m sorry! You’ve been marvellously kind, and I’m glad to know about everybody. I’m really looking forward to meeting Miss Devine and Queen Marigold and to seeing the new twins. But—I can’t forget—and till I hear from Quellyn that Mother is safely there, and—and how Father is—I’m afraid I shall be with them in my mind all the time, behind everything else.”

Joy had known suspense and she realised that though friends could help greatly, nobody could banish fear at such a time and that attempts at distraction might become merely wearisome, if persisted in too long.

“Suppose we all rest,” she said. “The drive will take a little time. I want to think about Maidie and Ros and their babies.”

And she sat gazing out at the country, as Robin was doing.

Presently Lindy touched her arm and nodded towards their guest. Robin, exhausted with shock and strain and suspense, was asleep.

Joy nodded, and they sat silent as the car bore them homewards.

At last they were among beechwoods, and Joy said happily, “This is home. Shall we wake her, Lindy?”

Lindy touched Robin’s knee gently. “Robin! Wake up! This is Whiteways; we’re almost home.”

Robin sat up, startled. “Was I asleep? I didn’t think I could. Oh—I remember!”

“In five minutes we shall be at home and you’ll be ’phoning to Quellyn,” Joy said quickly, to comfort her in that moment of remembrance.

Robin looked at her gratefully. “Will you really let me ring up at once? You are kind!”

“Look at our village. There’s the maypole on the green; we’ve danced round it often. This road leads to the Hall.”

“It is pretty! I remember it from the Kentisbury wedding-day.” Robin’s eyes were on the tree-hung lane, as she steadily put her trouble to the back of her mind.

“Here’s the Abbey; the gate-house, you know,” Lindy cried, as a break in the trees showed a grey gabled building in a green meadow, and uneven roofs beyond, inside a high wall. “Look, Lady Joy! The new barn—no, I mean the very old tithe-barn that the twins found for us—is behind those dark trees by the farm.”

Joy looked at the grove of ilex, or evergreen oaks, with interest. “I knew just where it must be, from your description. Strange that we never found it, in all those years! I want to see it, and to dance in it. Now, Robin, here’s my house. And why I should ever have grudged Plas Quellyn to you I can’t imagine, for I could never live anywhere but here! I love every stone of the Hall.”

“And I love every stone of Quellyn.” Robin smiled at her tremulously.

“Then it’s right you should have it. This is the beech avenue.” And Joy’s excitement grew with every second, as they swept up between the double lines of magnificent trees. “And here we are at home!”

“There’s the Kentisbury car, so the Countess has brought the twins to greet you!” Lindy cried.

The great door of the old grey house stood open in welcome. Joy ran up the steps to the terrace, as Mary Devine came out to meet her.

Robin never forgot what happened next. Expecting to be forgotten in the excitement, she was astounded to hear Joy’s first words.

“Mary dear, here’s a girl for you to take care of. Be good to her! Take her straight to the telephone and help her to ring up North Wales. She’s Robin Brent, of Quellyn; she’ll tell you her story. Help her all you can. Now where are Maidie and Ros? In Maid’s old room upstairs? I’ll go to them at once. The family’s just behind, with Henderson, in the other car. Be good to Robin, Mary! She’s in bad trouble.”

“Oh, how wonderful of her!” Robin cried unsteadily.

But Joy was gone, through the entrance-hall and up the great staircase, to find her first twins and her new godchildren.

Puzzled but eager to help, Mary Devine held out her hand. “You must be Robin. How can I be good to you? Tell me about it. The telephone is over here. I’ll help you all I can.”

CHAPTER FOUR

JOY AT HOME

“Let me hold the little Joys!” Joy flung aside her travelling hat and big coat, and sat down and held out her arms. “Oh, girls! It is nice of you!”

Maidlin laid a dark-eyed baby on her arm. “That’s Marjory Joy. She’s my big daughter.”

“Big! Oh, Maidie! What size is the other one? What a tiny pet! And just like you!”

Rosamund brought a yellow-haired twin for Joy’s other arm. “Rosabel Joy. We had to be here to greet you.”

Joy laughed in delight. “My new godchildren! I *am* proud! Show me the rest of your families! I don’t quite believe Maidie has two, even now.”

Maidlin laid her younger daughter on Joy’s right arm beside Marjory Joy. “This is Dorothy Rose.”

“I like their names! You’re right; she is littler than the first one. Oh, Maidie, aren’t you proud?”

“Very.” Maidlin’s smile glimmered in her black eyes. “But still rather surprised. They didn’t tell me there would be two, until the very last minute. Jock thought I would be frightened. It was a very great surprise to me!”

“I should think so! I was stunned when your cable came. Give me your second too, Ros! I can hold them all if I’m sitting down.”

Rosamund laid a second baby girl on her left arm.

“Rosalin Cicely. Mine are seven weeks old; Maid’s are only three weeks.”

“Girls, you have been clever!” Joy gazed down in rapt delight at the four little heads in her arms, two very dark, two very fair.

“We have,” Rosamund assured her. “They’re all healthy and intelligent, and, as you can see, extremely good-looking, like their mothers.”

Joy laughed. “Wasn’t the President pleased to hear one was to be Cicely?”

“So thrilled that almost on the spot she had a daughter and called her Rose, after me.”

“Ros! What do you mean?” Joy cried.

“The President has a second girl, born last week, and her name is Shirley Rose.”

“Oh, I am glad! She will be pleased!”

“Shirley is quite a usual name for girls now,” Maidlin observed. “But in this case Cicely means it to stand for you and Joan.”

Joy’s eyes widened. “We were Joan and Joy Shirley when she knew us first. How very nice of the President!”

“You can be godmothers, if you like. I’m one, of course,” Rosamund said. “I’m collecting goddaughters fast. Besides Maid’s girl and Cicely’s, there’s Biddy’s Marie-Rose, in France; that’s unofficial, because Marie-Rose is a little Catholic, but I dare say I shall send her a postcard on her birthday.”

“It was nice of Biddy to call her second girl for you, when the first is Madelon, for Maid.”

“Very,” Rosamund agreed. “It means a lot, from Biddy, for it would have been to her interest to call the babe after some rich Verdier relation. I believe the French family wanted her to be Françoise Marie or Marie Simone, after elderly aunts, but Biddy stuck out for Marie-Rose, for the sake of the old days.”

“Yes, it was *very* nice of her,” Joy said. “There’s a lot of good in Biddy.”

“Oh, heaps! As for my little Rose namesakes, there’s going to be quite a crowd of them. Some day I shall have a house-party and ask them all to the Castle. Did you know that Ruth—you remember Ruth? Mary’s and Biddy’s cousin in Paris—Ruth has a second girl, and as the first was Mary Ruth, she called the new one Bridget, for Biddy; and then, wanting a second name, she asked if she might make it Bridget Rose. So that’s another for my bunch of Roses.”

“They all like to say—‘She has the Countess of Kentisbury for her godmother.’ That’s why.” Maidlin gave Joy her quick smile again.

“Then there’s Jandy Mac’s new babe in Ceylon. She’s called Cecily Rose. And there’s Joan, too.” Rosamund ignored the hint in Maidlin’s words.

“Joan? What do you mean?” Joy demanded. “Her girls are Janice Margaret and Jennifer Joy.”

“The next one’s sure to be a girl. Joan had a boy last time and hers always come in turns,” the Countess said calmly. “She’s promised the next girl shall be Jillian Rose—spelt with a J, to match the rest of the family. Why spell it with a G, when you’re going to pronounce it Jill?”

Joy laughed. “I hope Joan will soon have Jillian Rose. It’s very pretty. Girls, I promise here and now that if I ever have another girl she shall be Madeline Rose.”

Maidlin looked up quickly. “Will you have any more, Joy? We didn’t like to ask you, but we’ve been afraid that perhaps that fearful illness, and the big operation——”

“Not at all,” Joy reassured them. “The doctors want me to wait a year or two, to get quite strong, but I can have another child presently, and I’d like a girl, after two little boys.”

“Oh, I’m glad! Perhaps you’ll have twins again,” Maidlin suggested.

“Where is your family?” Rosamund asked. “Don’t say you’ve left the twins and the boys in New York! We know Ivor had to stay for his conference; but where are all your children, Lady Quellyn?”

“I expect the twins are showing David the garden. He doesn’t remember anything about it; the girls have been looking forward to showing him everything.”

“I wonder we haven’t heard Margaret’s shrieks of excitement.”

Joy smiled. “Oh, Margaret couldn’t go on being noisy when she lived with a month-old baby in the house! She toned down very quickly; you’ll find her changed. Here’s somebody!” as the door opened.

“It’s Jenny-Wren,” Rosamund remarked.

“There’s something wrong,” Maidlin said quickly, and took her babies from Joy’s arms.

“What’s up, Jen?” Rosamund rescued her daughters also, and Joy held out her hands to her friend and sister-in-law.

Jen, Lady Marchwood, lived next door, at the Manor. Tall, with short yellow curls, she was the youngest of the original Abbey Girls, and was only two years older than Rosamund. With a big family of three boys and two girls, life had not always been easy, but she had kept her buoyant spirits, and her happy nature showed few signs of the trials through which she had bravely laughed her way. It was rare to see a shadow on her face, but there was one there now, and her friends looked at her in dismay. It must be something serious to cloud Jen’s face on the joyful day of Joy’s homecoming, so eagerly awaited by the whole family circle.

She bent and kissed Joy. “How are you, old thing? Quite fit again? We thought at one time you weren’t going to come back to us.”

“I’m all right, if I don’t overdo things. I’ve heard about the bad time you’ve had all this year, Jenny-Wren, but I thought it was over and Kenneth was well again. What’s the matter?”

Jen avoided the question. “Isn’t it disgusting?” she broke out. “Isn’t it maddening? These girls, I mean. Both of them to go and have twins! And I, who’d love to have two, get only ones! I do think it’s too bad!”

Joy laughed. “We’ve all beaten you, except Joan; she hasn’t had two yet. Are you fearfully jealous?”

“She’s eaten up with envy,” Rosamund observed. “Maid and I have been scolded for weeks. It was bad enough when I had two, but when Maid did it as well Jen nearly burst with rage. But she’s had time to get over it. What’s

wrong, Jen? I want to take my babes home, but I can't leave you looking like that, without knowing the reason. Out with it!"

Jen dropped wearily into a big chair. "I've been to see Joan. I've just come from her."

"Well? Why should that drown you in gloom? Joan's all right, isn't she?"

"Is anything wrong with Joan?" Joy asked sharply. "I'm going to see her to-morrow."

"No, she's all right. I didn't mean to frighten you. Sorry! But I had to tell her first, and ask her if she thought I really must——" Jen paused.

"Joy, you might shake her for us," Rosamund exploded. "Maid and I are too heavily laden with daughters."

"Must go round the world and enjoy myself for a year," Jen said simply.

The other three gazed at her, astounded.

"But why?" Joy and Rosamund cried together.

"Oh, Jen, don't go away!" Maidlin pleaded.

"You don't think I want to do it, do you?" Jen wailed. "It's the doctors. Kenneth *is* all right again, but they want him to go for a long holiday, to build up his strength, before he settles down at home, and they say a voyage would be the best thing."

"You couldn't let him go alone," Joy began.

"It would be good for you too," Rosamund said practically. "You've had a year of nursing and anxiety; you must be run down, whether you feel it or not. It's a good idea; I'm all for it. If you and Kenneth settle down at home, you'll go having more babies before you're fit for it; we know you! You ought to have a holiday. The doctors are right."

"They want me to go with him, and, as Joy says, I couldn't let him go alone, after so nearly losing him," Jen said drearily. "But I don't want a holiday. I—yes, I am tired. I want to stay quietly at home and rest."

"And add to your family! You simply mustn't," Rosamund said firmly.

"Well, I do want another baby," Jen cried defiantly. "Katharine is a year and a half now. I don't like long gaps in families."

"Then your husband shouldn't get nearly killed in car crashes."

"That wasn't my fault! I'd have given my life to save Ken."

Maidlin had been laying her babies in the big cradle which had once held Joy's twin girls. She came to Jen and perched on the arm of her chair, her hand caressingly on Jen's shoulder.

"You went to tell Joan. What did she say?"

"That I must go, and—and pretend I'm enjoying it, for Ken's sake," Jen burst out. "Of course, he knows how I feel; I couldn't begin to try to cheat Ken! But Joan said—how awful it would be for him if I went in tears,

always moaning about not wanting to leave the children and wondering if they were all right at home.”

Rosamund laughed. “Sorry, Jen dear! I do sympathise; I’m not being heartless. But what a picture! Poor Kenneth!”

“Of course you must go, and for Ken’s sake you’ll be jolly and happy about it,” Maidlin said. “The children will be all right. We’ll take care of them for you.”

“Where will you go?” Joy asked. “I can give you introductions to nice people in New York, and in Florida too.”

“Oh, we shall go to Kenya. Ken wants to show me his old shamba, and Nairobi, and the mountains. He can’t ever live in the Tropics again, but a visit will be all right.” Jen’s tone showed no enthusiasm for the Tropics.

“Your honeymoon!” Maidlin exclaimed. “You never had a real one; just a week in London. You always said you’d have it later on.”

“For ten years you’ve been too busy with the family,” Rosamund added. “Oh well, better late than never! Cheer up, Jen! You simply can’t go for a honeymoon looking like that!”

“A honeymoon leaving five children at home!” Jen groaned.

“You could go on to India and Australia, and then home by the States,” Joy, the much-travelled, said thoughtfully. “You’ll like Kenya, Jen, especially if you go up-country.”

“On safari. I’ve heard all about it. I may get keen, once we’ve started,” Jen said gloomily. “At present I feel like a lump of lead.”

“But if it will make all the difference to Kenneth for the rest of his life?” Maidlin suggested. “You’ve fought so hard to save him; this is the last little bit, to finish it all off. You won’t funk now, Jen.”

“Maid, you’re rather a dear!” Jen exclaimed.

“I’ve a husband myself. I’d go round the world twice, for Jock,” Maidlin said simply.

“You must do everything you can for your man, to get him as fit and well as possible,” Rosamund added, sitting on the bed to dress her babies in their tiny coats and shawls for the car-ride to her Castle.

Jen glanced at her. “You’ve done it, for your Geoffrey. You’ve made a new man of him.”

“If you do everything, no matter how much it hurts, you’ll know a feeling of happiness and triumph every time you look at him, for the rest of your life.” Rosamund’s care had nursed an invalid husband back to health, and she spoke from experience.

Jen sighed. “It’s the thought of being cheerful about it that gets me down.”

“Oh, Jen! Don’t be an ass!” Rosamund cried. “You know you’ll be cheerful! Where’s your pluck gone?”

Jen laughed in spite of herself. “I don’t want to go away from you all.”

“We don’t want you to go; you can be sure of that! It will be a horrid year for us,” Maidlin said. “But if it’s best for Kenneth, Jen——!”

“It’s best for Brownie too.” Joy used the old school nickname which was so inappropriate to Jen’s fairness and yellow curls. “I can see she’s tired.”

Rosamund laid down Rosabel and took up Rosalin. “That’s why she’s going on like this. She’s not herself at all. Jen!” She spoke with authority and emphasis. “You must realise that. It’s only because you’re tired that this seems so bad to you. Once you’ve started and the wrench is over, you’ll buck up and enjoy things. Think of seeing Gibraltar and the Mediterranean and Egypt! You could go up the Nile—but you’d miss the Red Sea. You’ll have a wonderful time. Don’t moan over your hard fate any more!”

“Thank you, Ros,” Jen said meekly. “I’m sure you know best.”

“Pig!” Rosamund cried. “I know I’m supposed to be too sure of myself, but this time I’m right. Now what about the family? The boys will be at school, and in the holidays I suppose they’ll go to Joan, with her John. Which of us is to be trusted with the babies? Will you send them to me? We’ve heaps of room, and they’ve been before.”

Jen looked at her gratefully. “No, Ros, dear. You were too good for words when you took Rosemary and Mike that other time, but your hands are full now, with your two boys and those babies. I can’t dump three of mine on you as well.”

“We could manage. I can always get more help.”

Jen shook her head. “Not with new twins to look after.”

“Joan, then? No, I suppose not.”

“Not Joan, just now. She offered, but I wouldn’t think of it. Her hands are full too and will be fuller yet. Jennifer is only two, and Jim just one. No, not Joan.” She looked at Joy. “Either they must stay at the Manor and I must borrow Mary-Dorothy to mother them, or——” and she paused.

“They must come here,” Joy said decisively. “I need Mary, but there’ll be plenty of room for your nurse and the babies. I’m taking Elizabeth and Margaret and the boys back to New York in October.”

“Oh, you are, are you?” Jen exclaimed. “We’ve wondered what you were going to do with them,” and she and Maidlin and Rosamund sat and gazed at Joy.

CHAPTER FIVE

AN ABBEY WELCOME

“But what about school?” Rosamund demanded. “It’s time the twins went to school. They’re ten.”

“I’m sure Lindy has taught them well, but a nursery governess isn’t enough for them now,” Maidlin added.

“No; I’m going to find a good girl who will teach them thoroughly. But she must be English. I won’t have either an American school or governess.”

Jen leaned forward. “Joy! Barbara Honor. She’s just what you want.”

Joy raised her brows. “She certainly is! But could I have her?”

“She has her B.A., and she’s taught in good schools. I believe she’d go to New York, for you, and she’d teach the twins beautifully. And she’s a Hamlet Club Queen, like all of us; that does count for something. You’d like to have the Wild Rose Queen as your governess!”

Joy, the Green Queen of the school’s dancing club, agreed warmly. “I’d love to have Wild Rose! I shall write to her at once.”

Rosamund, the Red Rose Queen, and Maidlin, the Primrose Queen, applauded the idea eagerly. “Brilliant, Brownie!”

Jen, the Beech Brown Queen, bowed graciously. “I have good ideas occasionally. With Marguerite in New York—our Strawberry Queen—you’ll be able to have quite a Hamlet Club reunion.”

“With Lindy to help with the boys——”

“Oh, but I want Lindy!” Maidlin cried. “Joy, I must have Miss Belinda! We’re counting on that. Can’t you do without her now? You’ve had her for a year! Jock and I need her, now that these two babies have come.”

Joy looked at her and laughed. “You surely do! But Lindy has been a great help to me.”

“We’ve always said she must come to The Pallant. Her sister is going to housekeep and cook for us,” Maidlin urged.

“We’ll plan it all out. There’s plenty of time,” Joy promised. “If Lindy goes to you, I shall have to find somebody else.”

“Perhaps I can help you there,” Rosamund suggested. “But about the twins—your twins, Joy! Wouldn’t school be better for them than a governess? They’d learn so much more than lessons at school; finding their level, and standing up for themselves, and team-work!”

“I know all that. We’ve talked it over carefully. But they’re learning more, at home with us, than they’d learn at school; school can wait one year

more. The twins have been too important all their lives,” Joy said gravely. “It couldn’t be helped; they were all I had for seven years. But they did get a big idea of their own importance.”

“That’s why school would be good for them!”

“Presently, Ros. Just now they’re learning to be a family, to be good to the babies and to consider them, and to give in and take only their proper place. Ivor and I feel this year has been so very important for them that we want them to have another. I couldn’t part them from the boys, in any case; it would break their hearts. When we come home for good they can go to school.”

“You’re only staying in New York for the three years of Ivor’s appointment?”

“That’s all. And he won’t go away again to live. Now that we have the boys we shall settle down at home.”

“And bring up your family,” Rosamund agreed.

The shadow fell on Jen’s face again. This was exactly what she was craving to do and what was being denied her.

The other three saw it, and Rosamund was about to speak when Joy exclaimed—“What’s that? I’ve heard it for some minutes,” and she listened as the sound of a sweet contralto bell came through the open window. “Oh, girls! Is it the bell you found in the old barn?”

“That’s Cecilia, the Abbey bell. Joan and Jandy and I found her.” Jen put away her trouble for the moment. “She’s ringing in your honour. The village will know you’ve arrived.”

“Ringing you home. Cecily rings us in and rings us out when we dance in the barn,” Maidlin explained. “Isn’t she nice, Joy?”

“Beautiful; a lovely mellow voice—rather like yours, Maidie! I do feel honoured! I must go and see Cecilia.”

“We’ll have a party for you,” Rosamund promised. “Queen Marigold shall summon the Club to meet you. Did you know Jandy Mac has called her second girl after the bell? Marigold’s new little sister is Cecily Rose.”

“You spoke of her before. I hadn’t heard that Jandy had another daughter. Oh, girls, I forgot! Your babies and Jen’s news put it out of my mind. I’ve brought home a new girl, and she’s in bad trouble. I want everybody to be very good to her.”

“We’re not in the habit of being unkind to people!” Rosamund said, staring at her. “Who is she?”

“And where is she? What have you done with her?” Jen demanded.

“I handed her over to Mary-Dorothy. She wanted to telephone. Mary will take care of her.”

“Of course she will. Mary would take care of anybody,” Maidlin agreed. “But who is your new girl?”

“And where did you find her?” Jen added.

“On the boat; Lindy made friends with her. She’s Robin Brent, of Plas Quellyn.” Joy looked at them bravely, but she flushed.

“The Quellyn girl!” Jen exclaimed. “And you’ve brought her here? I say, old thing, that was jolly decent of you! You haven’t felt exactly loving towards the heiress!”

“But if she were in trouble, Joy would forget all that,” Maidlin remarked.

Joy gave her a grateful look. “Nice of you, Maidie! I did forget.”

“Robin Brent!” Rosamund said. “Ex-head-girl of Wood End! I know her very well; she danced at my wedding, and she came to the Dower House when the school had the fire. I’ve seen Robin dozens of times. Where is she? And what’s the trouble?”

Joy told Robin’s story. “The only thing we could do for her was to help her to telephone to Quellyn, to ask if any news had come from her mother. So I left her with Mary-Dorothy.”

“Poor kid! She’ll have an anxious time. It was nice of you to bring her here, Joy,” Jen said again.

Rosamund was putting on her coat. “I must take the babes home. Nurse is waiting downstairs.” She settled the twins neatly on her left arm. “I’ll see you again soon, ‘Traveller’s Joy.’ It’s lovely to have you home. I’ll have a word with Robin as I go out; she’ll have finished ‘phoning by now.”

“Is that how you carry them?” Jen asked enviously. “Not one on each arm? I suppose you know I’m green with jealousy!”

“While they’re tiny I can manage like this. Soon they’ll need an arm each. I like to have one hand free.” Rosamund went to the door. “Good-bye, Maid! Put Marjory and Dorothy to bed; I’m sure you’re all tired out with excitement!”

Jen sprang to open the door for her and followed her out. “Joy will like a few minutes alone with Maid. Take care of your precious infants! If only I could have two!—but I’d want mine to be boys.”

“I wanted girls. I’m satisfied, and very proud.” Rosamund stood looking down from the gallery into the big hall. “Hi, Robin Brent!” she called softly.

Robin, alone in the hall, looked up. “Lady Kentisbury! Oh, may I see your twins?”

Rosamund shifted Rosalin to her right arm and stood and held out a baby in each hand, as Robin ran up the stairs. “Here you are! Come and look at the world’s most beautiful sight—one of them. The other most beautiful is in Maid’s room; I dare say she’ll let you have a peep. There! What do you think of my bunch of Roses? Lady Rosabel; she came first. Lady Rosalin!”

“What pretty names! And what lovely babies!” Robin cried softly, gazing down in delight at the tiny yellow heads and tightly-closed eyes.

“Blue eyes, of course,” Rosamund told her.

“Oh yes! They’re exactly like you and your little boys.”

“What news?” Rosamund asked.

Robin looked at her bravely. “None. There hasn’t been time. But Mother will cable to Quellyn as soon as she arrives, and they’ll ’phone the message on to me at once.”

“Then you can’t do any more. I’m glad you’re here. Be as jolly as you can while you’re waiting, and don’t think you’re a bother to anybody, because you’re not. It’s the rule of the house to help any one who needs it; it’s our inheritance from the Abbey. Joy’s only doing what the old monks would have done. It was sanctuary, where people came for refuge. If you’re in trouble, that gives you the right to be here. Honestly, that’s how we feel. I should go into the Abbey, if I were you; then you’ll understand. Now I must go. Where’s Jenny-Wren?”

“Here she is, waiting till you had finished your little lecture on the Abbey, of which I endorse every word.” Jen came forward.

“Pig! For the second time to-day—pig!” Rosamund said indignantly.

“Not at all. I’m admiring the way you put it. Come along, Robin! The Countess shall see herself off, as a reward for being rude to me. I’ll take you to peep at Maid’s babies and then I’ll show you the Abbey. I’m not needed at home for an hour.”

Rosamund put Rosalin securely on her left arm again, to leave her right hand free for the stair rail. “Tell Joy I shall come to-morrow to see Elizabeth and Margaret, and David and Richard, and Miss Belinda. I mustn’t wait any longer now; these little ladies must go home.” And she went carefully down the wide shallow steps, to find her car and her nurse and her chauffeur.

CHAPTER SIX

LITTLEJAN TAKES CHARGE

Robin followed Jen Marchwood through the Abbey ruins, entranced by the peace and beauty of the ancient place. Her visit to Maidlin's little dark girls, and her reply to Joy's enquiries, had taken only a few moments, and Jen had led her away for a first glimpse of the Abbey.

"Maid will be tired. She isn't strong yet, and it's been very exciting to show her twins to Joy. We'll leave them to rest. I'd like to be the one to show you the Abbey."

"I don't know you by sight," Robin said shyly. "I saw all the others at Lady Kentisbury's wedding, when we danced on the village green; but your little girl was ill and you couldn't be there."

Jen looked grave. "It was a terrible day for us. Rosemary had a very bad operation. She isn't too strong, even now. I hate the thought of leaving her, though I know she'll have the best of care." And she told of her husband's serious illness and the long holiday insisted on by the doctors.

While she talked, they crossed the lawn and took a shrubbery path, which led to an old gate in a wall. Jen unlocked the gate and stood aside, her attitude saying—"There!"—though she did not speak.

"Oh!" Robin cried. "Oh, *how* beautiful!"

The wide lovely windows of the refectory, facing them, looked down on a tiny garden, with roses, lilies, and pansies, a stone seat and a flagged path. The path led to an arched doorway, and through a dark tunnel came a gleam of sunlit green.

"This is the Abbot's garden. The infirmary for sick folk was over there, but it has gone." Jen's voice was quiet. "This high place is the refectory; the kitchens and penance-chambers are underneath. The passage through the arch is the tresaut, leading to the cloister garth, where the monks were buried; the heart of the Abbey. Come and I'll show you."

Standing in the sunshine on the smooth lawn, Jen pointed to the grey walls which enclosed the little square of green and told what lay behind each. "The refectory again, on the south side. That blank north wall is where the great church used to be; I'll show you pictures of it in the refectory. On the east here's the chapter-house; yes, beautiful windows and doorway; and the parlour, where the monks were allowed to talk; and the stairs leading up to the dormitory. That row of windows above is the dormitory. The monks' day-room is here, where we came in; the entrance, and the way out to the

gate-house, are over there on the west, where the cloisters still remain, just on that one side. There's a lot to see, and there are mysterious places underground; the glorious old church in the crypt, and the tomb of the first Abbot Michael. We called our third boy after him. The eldest is Andrew, for Joy's first husband—my husband's brother; the second is Antony, for Sir Antony Abinger, who restored the Abbey when it was used as farm buildings and made it beautiful again. When he died he left it to Joan, now Mrs. Raymond, and he left the Hall to Joy; he was her grandfather. I'll take you for a quick look round and then leave you to wander by yourself, and tomorrow I'll come again and we'll do it thoroughly, and I'll tell you all the stories and legends. You'll enjoy them more if you've got the feeling of the place first."

Robin realised later how wise this had been and how much more she was able to appreciate Jen's history when the atmosphere of the Abbey had soaked into her mind. She was also told by Maidlin, and by Joy, and by Mary Devine, how fortunate she had been to be introduced to the Abbey by Jen, who loved it as much and knew it as well as did Joan herself.

"Look at this little chap! He thinks the Abbey belongs to him. I always bring something for him," and Jen flung a handful of crumbs to the inquisitive robin who had followed them about the ruins.

"My namesake," Robin said. "I'll remember to bring him a present too."

"He does very well. Mrs. Watson, the caretaker, feeds him, I know."

With a final "Cheer up! Try not to feel too bad!" Jen went off to her family, and Robin wandered about alone, delighting in the beauty of the ruins and feeling the peace of centuries healing her frightened mind. She had been instructed to slip out by the Abbot's garden, if tourists came to be shown round, or, if she could not escape, to hide in the little room which the twins and Miss Belinda had used as a schoolroom, but which had once been a bedroom for Jen and for Mary-Dorothy, and in schoolgirl days for Joy and Joan themselves, and since that time for many other friends. She looked inside and was seized with a great longing.

"I wonder if they'd let me sleep there! Although they're all so kind, and in spite of what Lady Kentisbury said, I feel I'm a stranger here and they're such a family party. The house must be very full; Mrs. Robertson's husband will be back from London before night, she said. I shall feel in the way. Oh, I wonder if they would! But I'd be farther from the telephone." And her face grew grave again.

Filled with the idea, she went back to the house at last, locking the old gate behind her.

"Oh!" She paused on the lawn. "Here's somebody new! How jolly she looks!"

On the terrace stood a slim girl of fourteen, in riding-breeches, with a green pullover, and a vivid orange scarf tucked in at the neck; she was bare-headed and had big dark eyes, and dark brown curls tumbling about her face. She ran down the steps to the lawn and came to meet the stranger, with no trace of shyness—only an eager desire to make her feel at home.

“You must be Robin. I needn’t say Miss Brent, need I? Thanks awfully; it would only have been for half-an-hour. You’d have been sure to turn into Robin before long. Mary-Dorothy told me about you; I’m to bring you in and give you tea. Lady Joy is having hers upstairs with Maidlin and the babies, and Mary has gone to look for Lindy and the twins, who seem to have lost themselves somewhere in the garden. So I’m to look after you; you must be dying for your tea. I’m Joan Fraser, but everybody calls me Littlejan, or Marigold. Shall I tell you why?”

“Please do!” Robin smiled at her. “Either name seems to need some explaining.”

“I’ll tell you when you’ve had some tea. It’s ready,” and Littlejan led her into the big hall, and made her sit in the corner of an old oak settle, where a round table was drawn up and spread for tea.

A maid brought the teapot, and Littlejan sat down to preside, pressing her guest to help herself to hot scones or bread and butter.

“The Hamlet Club chose me for its Queen, last May, and I took orange for the colour of my train and marigolds for my flowers,” she explained, throwing aside the vivid scarf from her neck. “That’s why I’m called Marigold; the Queen usually has a nickname. I’ve been to Kentisbury for my riding practice; my pony, Chestnut, lives in the stables there, and the Countess sends the small car to fetch me for my lesson twice a week during the holidays. There isn’t time once term begins; being Queen, I’m kept jolly busy. Littlejan was my home name; Father’s name for me, because I’m so like Mother, whose name is Janice. Home used to be in the South Sea Islands, but we’ve moved to Ceylon since I came home to school, and I’ve a new little sister, just three weeks old, called Cecily Rose, after the Abbey bell and the Countess. Mother helped to find the bell, a year ago; and the Countess was just terribly good to us when we arrived in this country. Now that’s all about me. I’ve heard about you; you mustn’t worry too much! I expect good news will come quite soon. What did you think of the Abbey?”

“I loved it,” Robin said simply. “I want to stay in it. Would they let me sleep in that little room?”

“Oh, you mustn’t do that!” Littlejan cried, her tone shocked.

“Oh? I’m sorry! But why not? Lady Marchwood said several people had slept there.”

“Oh yes! That would be all right. But you’d be so far away from everybody.”

“From the telephone. Yes, I thought of that,” Robin admitted, her face clouding.

“That wouldn’t matter. The telephone’s in the Abbey; we could pass on the message to you. I don’t mean that.” Littlejan spoke earnestly. “Don’t you see? You might want to speak to somebody; you might feel suddenly bad—lonely or frightened, in the night. Until you’ve had good news, you simply mustn’t go and bury yourself all alone in the Abbey! Presently, when you know your mother’s safe and your father’s going on well, you can sleep in the Abbey; you’ll love it. It’s so peaceful and quiet. But just now you must be near people, so that you can come to somebody if you want company.”

Robin flushed. “How very kind of you to think of that! But I couldn’t bother people, however bad I felt.”

“But they’ll want you to bother them. They’ll expect it,” Littlejan assured her. “I don’t suppose Lindy or I would be much use, as we’re younger than you; though Lindy can be very comforting. She helped me, on my first night here, when my mother had gone off to Scotland in a hurry, and I was lonely and sure she’d have a train smash in the night.”

Robin shivered. “That’s how I feel.”

“Yes, but why should she? Thousands of people fly safely, and after an accident is the safest time, for everybody will be so extra careful. You don’t ever get two crashes at the same place and the same time! But if you felt like that in the night you’d just have to go to somebody, and Mrs. Watson in the Abbey wouldn’t be the slightest use.”

“Oh, but I couldn’t!”

“You could! Not to Lady Joy, perhaps; I don’t know—I haven’t seen her yet. But you could go to Mary-Dorothy!” Littlejan leaned forward and spoke eagerly. “Every one goes to Mary’s room when they’re in a mess or when things go wrong; I’ve done it myself. She always helps. And she seems so surprised and pleased, if you go to her; as if you’d paid her a compliment she didn’t feel she deserved. She’d be so touched and happy if you went and cried in her room and said you were frightened and lonely! She’d give you coffee and biscuits and cheer you up. You can’t go away into the Abbey and lose the chance of being helped by Mary-Dorothy!”

Robin gazed at her, fascinated by her earnest pleading tone. “The school was very sensible when they chose you as Queen.”

Littlejan flushed. “What has my being Queen to do with your going to Mary’s room at night?”

“There is a connection, but I can’t explain it,” Robin told her seriously.

“I don’t see it! But you’ll remember that Mary-Dorothy would want you to go, won’t you?”

“Is Mrs. Robertson’s second twin called after her?”

“Dorothy is for Mary, and Rose is for Lady Kentisbury. The other one is Marjory, for Dr. Robertson’s mother, who died last year; and Joy, of course.”

“Why did you go to Miss Mary at night? Were you bothered about your mother?”

“No, Lindy helped me that time. But she’d gone to America, to take the twins to Lady Joy, who was very ill after a bad operation. I was bothered about something at school.”

“But how could Miss Mary help you about school troubles?”

“She did help. It was about the dancing Club, the Hamlet Club. Mary told me to tell Aunt Joan—Mrs. Raymond; she’s my godmother and I’m called after her, but they couldn’t have two Joans in the family, so they call me Littlejan. I told her all about it and she told me what to do.”

“What was wrong with the Club? What did Mrs. Raymond suggest?”

“She told me to tell the President, Mrs. Everett—but they call her Cicely. I went to tea with her and she gave me some marvellous ideas. She’s just had a baby girl; everybody is so pleased!”

“Thank you for looking after Robin for me, Littlejan Fraser!—I mean, Queen Marigold!” cried a voice from the staircase. “Let me look at you! Oh, you are like your mother! You’re just Jandy Mac over again!”

“Lady Joy!” Joan the Second sprang up, eager and excited, and bobbed a country-dance curtsey. Her voice rang out in delight. “Oh, you’re just like Aunt Joan! And the twins, of course. Everybody told me the twins were the image of you!” and she gazed up at Joy, while Joy looked down at her, both glad to meet at last.

“I’ve heard such heaps about you,” Littlejan told her.

“And I’ve heard so much about you, from Miss Belinda,” Joy assured her. “The reigning Queen! I’m glad to meet you, Marigold.”

Littlejan bobbed again. “I can’t imagine why they chose me, but it’s fun being Queen,” she said.

“I know it’s fun,” Joy agreed. “I’m sure you’re a good Queen,” and she came down the steps to the hall.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ABBEY FRIENDS

“But where is my wandering family?” Joy asked, when she was satisfied that Robin had been well looked after. “Nurse and the babies are having their tea upstairs, but has Miss Belinda taken the twins back to New York?”

“Mary-Dorothy’s looking for them. Perhaps they’ve gone to the barn,” Littlejan suggested.

The telephone rang, and Robin started up, her face full of fear. Joy checked her. “I’ll call you at once, if it’s for you. But it’s far more likely to be for me. I won’t keep you in suspense.”

Littlejan’s hand crept to Robin’s and pressed it. “You mustn’t jump like that every time the ’phone goes; you really mustn’t——”

“It’s for me, Robin,” Joy called.

“Oh, thank you!” Robin relaxed, looking white and tired.

“All Lady Joy’s friends will ring up to ask how she is after the journey,” Littlejan explained. “If you have heart attacks every time, you’ll be very tired before your news comes.”

“I see that,” Robin acknowledged. “I’ll try to be sensible.”

“It was Joan, asking if we’d arrived,” Joy said, when she returned and found the girls talking quietly, Littlejan determined to leave her guest no time for brooding. “It will be the President next, or Miriam. I’m afraid it will be disappointing for you, Robin, but I gave all these dear people such a fright a year ago that they want to hear my voice and make sure I’m really home. . . . And here, at last, are the twins. Miss Belinda, where have you been? Aren’t you dying for tea? Ring for fresh cups, please, Littlejan. Twins, you may have tea with us, for once. Now tell me what you’ve been doing.”

“Went to see Tunnel,” Margaret said gloomily. “But he’s dead.”

“He had dis-something, and though Mr. Edwards sat up at night with him, he couldn’t save him,” Elizabeth explained. “But he’ll give us another puppy later on, when we come home to live.”

“Tunnel?” Joy sounded dazed. She had not realised the importance of Tunnel to the twins.

“The bloodhound puppy at the farm,” Lindy explained. “I couldn’t satisfy them; they had to go to see him. Mr. Edwards is very sorry, but Tunnel died of distemper three months ago, and Bess hasn’t any pups at present.”

“If he gives you another, it might be something smaller than a bloodhound, Elizabeth,” Joy remarked. “And I can’t have a dog called Tunnel, Margaret. I’ve told you so before.”

“No other dog could be called Tunnel,” Margaret said definitely. “This one had to be Tunnel, because Bess found us in the tunnel.”

“If she hadn’t, we might still be there,” Elizabeth pointed out.

“I think somebody would have found you! Tell Robin the story of your tunnel, while you have your tea.”

Lindy and Littlejan had fallen into one another’s arms. “Miss Belinda, how lovely to have you home again! Don’t go back to America!” Joan the Second cried.

“Littlejan! Congrats on being Queen! I was so frightfully bucked when I heard!” Lindy exclaimed.

“I can’t imagine why they did it.”

“And a unanimous vote! Mary told me.”

“All but one.” Littlejan grinned at her. “I wanted Alison, the head girl.”

“Oh well, you couldn’t vote for yourself! You don’t count. When will you dress up in your robes and let us see you?”

“I don’t know; perhaps not till next May-day. There’s to be a party in the barn for Lady Joy soon, but I want to dance. I’m not going to spoil it by wearing a long dress and a train!”

“We want to see the Folk Play too,” Joy said, from across the tea-table. “Do you make a good Fool? Do you know the Mummers’ Play, Robin? You ought to see it, while you’re here. Are you a dancer?”

Robin smiled at her shyly. “Lady Kentisbury taught us a good deal, before her marriage, when she kept the school tuck-shop. Then our gardening mistress kept us up to the mark; she danced beautifully. But I haven’t done any since I left, a year ago.”

“You must tell us your favourite dances, and we’ll put them on our programme,” Joy said thoughtlessly.

“If I want to dance.” Robin spoke quietly. “It’s very kind of you, but I may not be here. I might have to go to Mother.”

“I’m sorry. For a moment I forgot,” Joy confessed.

“It will be thrilling for you, Joy,” and Mary Devine changed the subject quickly. “The Club has learnt so many new dances, thanks to Littlejan. You may find you don’t know half the programme.”

“I’ll enjoy seeing the new ones,” Joy assured them.

Maidlin’s husband, Jock Robertson, arrived from town in time for dinner, and his eyes twinkled with amusement at finding himself the only man in the party. He insisted that Maidlin must come down to keep him

company, or, as he said, to hold his hand, and complained loudly that Ivor Quellyn should have come home with his wife and family.

“I shall ring up the Manor to-morrow and ask Kenneth Marchwood to come to dinner every evening,” he declared. “And in a few days Maid and I and the girls will go to The Pallant and leave you to yourselves.”

“How you love to say ‘the girls’!” Joy mocked. “Considering the size of your daughters you might call them babies. You’re fairly radiating conceit, Jock Robertson.”

He laughed. “They are rather nice! I’ve three little Maids instead of one; I feel very rich. Here’s the skylark! What has Ivor Quellyn done for you, Belinda Bellanne? Remember your voice is in my charge.”

“You shall hear her sing presently,” Joy promised. “Ivor’s delighted with her progress and prophesies great things for her.”

Robin was very quiet, among all the greetings and laughter. Maidlin, quiet also, smiled at her now and then, with understanding sympathy, and Lindy and Littlejan tried to keep her interested, so that she could not brood. She begged to be allowed to go to bed early, and Joy agreed that it would be wise for every one.

“We’re all tired with the excitement of homecoming. Lindy will take you to your room. It’s a little one, but the house is full to overflowing.” Lady Quellyn smiled at her. “It’s called Jen’s room; the one she used to have when she came to stay.”

“It’s more than kind of you to find a corner for me,” Robin said earnestly. “I can see now how lonely I’d have been at Quellyn. I’m realising it more all the time.”

“Oh, you couldn’t be alone with your maids at a time like this! It would have been dreadful for you,” Joy said warmly.

Lindy pointed out the various bedrooms, as they reached the gallery. “Lady Joy’s room is here; the twins are in there and I’m next to them. You’ve been in Mrs. Robertson’s room. Nurse and the babies are away at that end. Littlejan has the room next to me.”

“And these two are Mary-Dorothy’s rooms,” the Marigold Queen said, deep meaning in her voice. “You won’t forget, will you, Robin?”

“I won’t forget,” Robin said gratefully.

She lay in the dark, trying to rest, stilling her anxious thoughts by dwelling on each of these new friends in turn. Maidlin, happy with her babies and her Jock, with her new home waiting for her—Lady Quellyn, beautiful and stately, with her big twins and her baby boys—Littlejan, with the vivid personality and deep understanding which had so evidently captured her schoolmates and made her election as Queen inevitable—Lindy, overwhelmingly friendly and sympathetic, with her wonderful voice

and obviously the life of a public singer before her—Jen Marchwood, about to tear up her roots and go wandering to fresh continents for her husband's sake—Mary-Dorothy Devine? Mary had been as quiet during dinner as Robin herself, and Robin felt she did not know her yet.

But it was all no use. Suddenly there flashed into her mind the picture she was holding at bay—the 'plane falling in flames—her mother. . . .

She sprang out of bed and ran barefoot from the room, down the quiet corridor, to tap on Mary's door.

It opened swiftly, as if she had been expected. Mary, in a blue dressing-gown, drew her in.

“I hoped you would come,” she whispered. “Was it very bad? Oh, you poor dear—bare feet? As bad as that? Wait one moment,” and she lit the gas fire. “Put on my slippers and wrap the eiderdown round you. That's better, isn't it? I'll get you something hot to drink, and then you shall tell me.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

MARY HELPS

"I'm an awful idiot." Robin looked up in apology. "I'm so sorry to disturb you. Nobody can do anything, I know, but I couldn't bear it all alone, and Littlejan said you wouldn't mind."

"Littlejan knows." Mary smiled down at her as she crouched by the fire, and then fetched a pan and milk and biscuits. "I wasn't asleep. I was sure you'd want someone, and I hoped you'd come to me. I can't do much, but it helps just to speak to somebody, doesn't it?"

"Oh, it does! Thank you for not minding!" Robin said fervently. "I couldn't sleep, and I kept seeing things——"

"Things that aren't at all likely to happen?"

"That's true. But I couldn't stop them, Miss Devine."

Mary paused, pan in hand. "There's no coffee for a girl who calls me 'Miss' at midnight."

"Is it really midnight? Oh, I do apologise!" Robin cried.

"Call me Mary-Dorothy and I'll forgive you."

"May I? I didn't quite like to. But I've known you for so long, after all."

"Oh?" Mary smiled up at her this time, as she knelt on the hearth. "And how did that happen?"

"Benney Bennett lent me your books at school. I'd had some of them before I met her, too."

"Oh, Benedicta! She spent some months with us, after her accident in the Abbey, when she saved the twins; they might have been killed, if they had fallen from the dormitory in the dark. Benney fell instead and was badly hurt. We're all very fond of Benedicta. Will you tell me about the nightmares that were torturing you, or would you rather forget them?"

"It was the aeroplane," Robin almost whispered. "If Mother had gone the usual way I shouldn't worry quite so much."

"But think what a long journey for her! All those hours in the train and all sorts of changes; or a voyage through the Bay of Biscay! And your mother tormented by anxiety all the time! You couldn't wish that for her!"

"No," Robin admitted. "But—oh, thank you! You are kind!" She took the cup of coffee and a biscuit from Mary.

"Try to forget that aeroplane," Mary advised. "They'll be very careful, so soon after the other accident. At any moment you may have a message from your mother; keep that in your mind—it's a happier thought. And—"

Robin! If you lose your father, remember that at least for him all will be well.”

“I do believe that,” Robin said unsteadily. “But—if only it hadn’t happened! He was quite well. It’s not like after a long illness, when you can say, ‘It’s a happy release.’ Father was all right and jolly, and he’s not much over fifty. Why should his life end like this?”

“It hasn’t ended yet; he may recover. But—Robin!” Mary, still kneeling on the hearthrug, laid her arm across her guest’s knee. “May I say something, without seeming to preach, which I’ve no right to do?”

“Oh, please do! Talk sense to me! I know it will help.”

“I’m afraid it won’t, much. But as long as we—that is, people in general—take risks, for the sake of speed and pleasure and business, accidents will happen. I don’t mean your father especially; but all this flying—it’s wonderful, and it’s valuable, but we have to pay the price. It’s a new thing, still in its infancy, and sometimes matters will go wrong. When it happens to touch us personally we feel it’s cruel and unnecessary. But it’s no use blaming any one; and certainly we mustn’t blame God. It’s part of the price we have to pay for a new and useful way of travel. Think of your brave mother reaching your father in a few hours and being saved all that weary journey! You have to be brave, too, and accept what has happened, without feeling somebody, somewhere, has been cruel.”

Robin sat gazing at the fire, forgetting her coffee. “Thank you!” she said at last. “I’m sure you’re right. I will try.”

“Drink up your coffee,” Mary said practically. “Do you like my room? You must see my green study, where I work. Joy and Jen made this home for me when I came to live here, eleven years ago.”

Robin followed her round the brown and gold bedroom and the green study next door, exclaiming softly over the shining pottery on the shelves, and Mary saw with relief that her eyes were less frightened and that she was not so tense. There was hope that she would sleep, after all.

The telephone bell shrilled through the silent house. Mary caught Robin’s hand, and they ran down together. “For you—from Quellyn.” Mary handed the receiver to Robin.

Robin was trembling, but she steadied suddenly and listened to the message. “Thank you,” she said quietly. “Good night!” And she laid down the receiver with a tired sigh.

“Mother’s safe. She’ll send an address in a day or two. The cable says Father is badly hurt, but they hope he’ll recover.”

“My dear, that’s splendid! Really good news. You couldn’t hope for more as soon as this. Come up to my room again for a few moments, and then you’ll go to bed and sleep.”

“Won’t the bell have wakened everybody?” Robin looked disturbed. “I’m terribly sorry!”

“We talked it over and decided I should be the one to answer any call that came. The ’phone is just below my room, and I always hear it,” Mary explained. “The grown-ups all promised faithfully not to get up unless I came to them, and I said I wouldn’t go if it were good news. They won’t let the bell disturb them, but I’m not so sure about the half-and-halves.” And she smiled at Robin. “I mean Lindy and Littlejan. Yes, I thought so!”

They had reached the gallery, and two adjoining doors were opening softly. “What news?” whispered Littlejan. “Is it all right?”

“Tell us, Robin!” Lindy begged.

“Mother’s landed safely. Father’s very bad, but she hopes he’ll recover,” Robin said bravely. “Now do go back to bed! It’s lovely of you to care, but you ought to be asleep.”

“I was waiting for the bell. I was sure you’d hear to-night,” Lindy explained.

“I say, Robin, what a whacking fat plait you’ve got!” Littlejan commented.

Mary drew Robin to her door again. “Go to bed, Marigold!” she said sternly, and they heard the Queen chuckle as she withdrew into her room.

“Warm yourself by the fire, and I’ll give you fresh coffee,” Mary said. “You’ve had a heavy strain on you and you’ll feel it presently. Don’t try to wake in the morning, Robin. Sleep as long as you can. It will do you good. There’s somebody else wanting to hear the news, in spite of that promise! I’ll see who it is.”

She came back presently, and found Robin gazing wearily into the fire. “It was Joy, and Maidie’s nurse. Maid had heard the bell and she wanted to know the latest news, and Joy says she was restless, like Lindy, waiting for the ’phone to ring. They’ve gone back to bed and everybody’s going to sleep, including you, I hope.”

Robin’s eyes had filled with gratitude. “How lovely of them to care!” she cried, deeply touched. “They’ve only known me for a few days—Mrs. Robertson only for a few hours!—and yet they really want to know about Mother!”

“They wouldn’t have come out of bed to ask unless they really wanted to know,” Mary agreed, and went with her to her room, to see her safely into bed.

CHAPTER NINE

JEN SHOWS THE ABBEY

The Countess rang up next morning, to suggest that if Joy was going to lunch with Joan, taking the nurse and all her children, so that Joan might see the babies and how much the twins had grown, she should come on to early tea at Kentisbury, as the two homes were not far apart.

“I want to see all your little crowd, and so does Geoffrey, and your twins will like to see my twins. I don’t want mine to have that drive again to-day. So do come to us, and bring Robin with you. Has she had any news yet?”

Joy told of the midnight message. “She’s hoping for another cable, to give her an address, so that she can tell her mother where she is. I’ll give her your invitation.”

“Bring Marigold, too. And Lindy must come, to take the twins off your hands.”

Joy called her household together and passed on the various messages.

Lindy’s face lit up. “I love the Castle! What a jolly day we’ll have!”

Robin flushed. “How very kind of the Countess! But please ask her to excuse me. I’ll wait quietly here.”

“A message could be ’phoned on to you,” Joy began.

“But we might be in the car. No, please! I’d rather not. I have seen the Countess and the babies, and I saw the Castle long ago. I want to write to Mother, so that I can post the moment I have an address. And Lady Marchwood is going to take me round the Abbey and tell me all about it.”

“That’s reasonable,” Joy agreed. “Rosamund will understand. And you don’t know Joan yet, do you?”

Littlejan had heard the invitation with a smothered whoop of delight, but now she spoke quickly. “It’s nice of the Countess, but we can’t all go. I was there yesterday; I’ll stay at home.”

Robin looked up. “That’s because of me. Please, Marigold! Don’t stay for me. I’ve heaps to do, and I’m not feeling as bad as I did yesterday. It’s kind of you, but there’s no need.”

“We can’t all leave you! You’re our visitor,” Littlejan protested.

“Robin will feel more at home, if you stop treating her as a visitor.” Mary came to the rescue. “Think of her as one of us, and leave her with me, Marigold. She won’t be lonely.”

“Not with you,” Robin said gratefully.

“I’d like to go,” Littlejan admitted.

“You must go. You’ll have a crowded car, but you won’t mind that.”

“I’ll sit on Lindy’s lap,” Littlejan declared, a grin of relief on her face.

“You won’t! Miss Belinda may hold a twin, but not a hefty Queen like you,” Joy assured her. “You can hold the other twin, if you will.”

When the laden car had driven away, Robin sat down to her letter, telling her mother how great the shock had been and how frightened she had felt in the night. Then she told eagerly of the invitation and from whom it had come.

“Lady Quellyn, Mother! Isn’t it marvellous? I know you’ll be as glad as I am. She doesn’t grudge Quellyn to me any more, and she has been so kind! They’re all kind, and such interesting and jolly people; but it means more from her, for she didn’t like me a scrap so long as I was only a name—the girl who had taken Quellyn away from the family! She hasn’t left out one thing that could help, and she even came to hear the news at midnight, though she’d been in bed for some time; she really must have cared. If it wasn’t for you and Father, I’d be completely happy here. Perhaps some day, when all this horror is over and you’re home and Father’s well again, I could come and stay here and really enjoy it.”

In the hospital in Lisbon, Mrs. Brent read the last sentence and looked at her husband with fear in her heart. “Poor Robin! I hope these kind friends will keep her for a time, for he can’t possibly be moved just now, and she’d be terribly lonely at home, without even Gwyneth for company.” And she wrote a long letter, telling what she could, and saying how glad she was to know the breach with the Quellyn family was healed.

Robin finished her letter and put it aside to wait for the address. She was wondering whether she would go to Mary and ask for a useful job to do, or if Maidlin would perhaps allow her to help with the babies, when she saw Jen Marchwood crossing the lawn to the Abbey gate.

Robin ran down and followed her. “Oh, Lady Marchwood! May I come with you?”

Jen turned. “I thought perhaps you’d be in the Abbey. I was coming to look for you.”

“I’ve been writing to Mother. An address may come at any moment, and I want to post at once, to tell her where I am and how kind every one has been.”

“Good! Mary told me that you’d had one message. I was so glad to hear she had arrived safely,” Jen said heartily. “Then let’s do the Abbey properly. I love showing it to the right sort of people!”

Robin coloured. “Am I the right sort? I’m glad.”

“I’m sure you are. My mind wants distracting too,” Jen told her. “Kenneth—my husband, you know—has gone to town to arrange about

tickets and passports for our trip.”

Robin gave her a quick look. “I’m sorry you have to go, when you hate it so. It’s such a marvellous chance to go with him and have a real honeymoon again, and you’ll see such beautiful places and things; it’s a pity you aren’t looking forward to it. It spoils it for you.”

Jen laughed ruefully. “I suppose I’m an ass, but I don’t want to go so far from home. But I’m going to pretend I’m keen. Kenneth has friends in Kenya, and he’s really pleased to be going to see them again. I mustn’t spoil it for him. We know the children will be all right; it’s only that I don’t like leaving them.”

“May I come and see them?”

“Come to tea this afternoon. Joy and her crowd won’t be back till seven. Rosemary is six, and Mike is three, and Katharine is a year and a half. The two big boys are in Yorkshire, at my old home on the moors, but they’ll be home before we start.”

For two hours they wandered in the Abbey, and Jen told legends of old days, and stories of recent years. She showed the treasures in the refectory—jewels and parchments, ancient dishes and the old pictures of the great church which had vanished, and told how they had been found. She led Robin down to the beautiful crypt and through the tunnels to see the grave of Ambrose, to whom they owed so many of the discoveries; and then showed her the most recent finds, the Abbey bell and the old tithe-barn, and explained how they had remained hidden and unsuspected for so long.

“It’s a most beautiful old place,” Robin said, in deep content. “And you tell it all marvellously!”

“I know it fairly well,” Jen acknowledged. “I’ve loved it since I was thirteen.”

“I’d like to sleep in that little room,” Robin suggested wistfully. “And the house is so full. I’d be out of the way in there.”

“I’m quite sure you aren’t in the way in the least! If you feel you are, come right along to the Manor and demand a bed. But you could have a night or two in the Abbey, and you’d enjoy it. Consult Joy and Mary-Dorothy; they’ll arrange it for you. There’ll be plenty of room in the house when Maid and Jock, and their twins, and the nurse, and Miss Belinda, all go off to The Pallant, as they mean to do in a few days now. But then, of course, my brood and their Nanny must come here.” Jen’s face clouded again at thought of the approaching parting.

“When must you go?”

“As soon as we can be ready. The sooner we start the sooner we’ll be able to come home.” Then Jen pulled herself up with an indignant laugh. “I am a rotten coward! I *want* to go, for Kenneth’s sake; he couldn’t bear it

without me. I'd do anything for Ken. You can't understand how one feels about a husband, yet. Or can you? I was married and had a boy by the time I was about your age."

"Honestly? I'm only twenty. You must have started early!"

"I married at twenty. My parents had died, and I wanted my own home."

"Oh! Yes, I see." Robin's tone had a suddenly tense note. "No, I'm afraid I don't know anything about husbands."

Jen glanced at her and blamed herself for a thoughtless speech. "My dear, I'm sorry. I've brought back the shadow to your face. To please me, banish it and look happy again. Then I'll feel you've forgiven me."

"Oh, you mustn't feel like that," Robin cried. "I'm silly, but I'm so frightened about Father! Mother can say so little in a cable!"

"Yes, they're dreadfully tantalising. It looks to me as if Mary-Dorothy has something for you!" Jen exclaimed as they reached the lawn and saw Mary looking for them on the terrace.

Robin raced across the grass and up the steps. "Mary?"

Mary handed her a slip of paper. "From Quellyn. I wrote it down and made them spell the address."

"Oh, thank you! I wanted an address," Robin said unsteadily. She glanced at the message and her lips quivered as she turned to Jen. "It's an address that will find Mother. About Father she just says, 'Condition unchanged.' I'm afraid—he's rather bad."

Jen put her arm round her. "She doesn't say so. But I feel as you do that she may mean that. You must be brave, Robin. In a day or two there will be a letter, and that will tell you much more. This is your time for using all your courage."

"You're using yours," Robin said brokenly. "I'll try to be like you."

"Then I must try harder still, to be worth your copying. I won't let you down. We'll try together."

"That will help a lot," Robin said gratefully. But her voice was dreary and not hopeful.

"Mary wants you to go in for lunch with her and Maidlin, and then I'll be expecting you at the Manor," Jen reminded her, and left her with Mary and went back to her home and her children.

CHAPTER TEN

HAMLET CLUB QUEENS

A few days later a conclave was held at the Hall. Rosamund drove over to hear Joy's plans; Maidlin sat nursing her babies; Lindy waited in a corner with Robin and Littlejan; Jen seized a few moments from her packing and came to make her comments; Mary-Dorothy was quietly ready in the background, to make suggestions if these were needed.

"We'd like to go to The Pallant on Monday, Joy." Maidlin's colour rose. This would be a great adventure; she was looking forward eagerly now to settling in her new home. "That will give you much more room. But I want Miss Belinda. You'll let me have her, won't you?"

"What about it, Belinda Bellanne?" Joy asked. "I meant you to come back to New York with me, but Maidie insists on having you."

Lindy flushed. "I loved New York, and you know how keen I am on the twins and the boys—and you, of course! But I've always felt I was only waiting till Maidlin needed me." She used the name easily now, and a smile passed between her and Maidlin. "And Nan will be at The Pallant," Lindy added. "We've been separated for a year."

"Yes, I see that. I'm sorry, but I suppose I must give you up," Joy said regretfully. "Then I must have somebody else. Barbara Honor is willing to come as the twins' governess, and I'm more than grateful to Jen for suggesting the Wild Rose Queen. It will be delightful to have her. But Nurse must have an assistant, who will take her place presently; she wants to go back to her own people soon. I won't have an American girl."

"I agree with you," Jen said. "You must think of the children's accent. But Miss Belinda couldn't take Nurse's place; she's going to sing."

"This is where I can help," Rosamund began. "I've had to get in touch with good people in town, because I need so much help now. Joy, do you remember Stripes—the Striped Queen?"

Joy looked at her in surprise. "The dumpy little person who was so good-natured, always helping somebody? The Queen before Barbara Honor?"

"Queen Beatrice; Queen Bee. She's been trained as a children's nurse. I believe you could get her."

"That would be marvellous! She and Wild Rose would be charmed! They're friends already," Joy cried.

“I’ll tell you where to write to. This is what happened.” And Rosamund explained: “At Marigold’s crowning last May I wasn’t dancing, and I had a talk with Bee. You remember Nesta, the Silver Queen, who came before Stripes—good old Honesty?”

Littlejan whispered hurriedly to Robin. “I saw them all the day I was crowned. Nesta was the second Queen after Aunty Joan, and she wore a dazzling silver train; the President had a golden one. Nesta’s had purple borders, because she was the Honesty Queen and honesty flowers are purple. On the edges there were silver honesty pennies—the seeds, you know; and she carried a bunch of them as her flowers. She was called Honesty, or Silver.”

“Of course I remember Honesty!” Joy exclaimed. “She was a jolly Queen.”

“She and Bee were in my crowd,” Jen said. “Honesty danced with me when I knew simply nothing at all; a good sort, old Silver-Nesta! Tell Joy about her, Ros; it’s your yarn.”

“She married, but she lost her husband, and she had no family. She was very keen on children, and she had to do something, so she decided to spend her life looking after other people’s kiddies. She had a thorough training, and she’s been in good posts ever since. She persuaded Bee to go to the college which had trained her, and Bee loved it; she was always good at doing things for people. She told others of our girls about the training, and when I got in touch with Bee lately, to ask her to recommend a youngster who had just finished her training, to work under my good Nanny and get experience, she found me Hyacinth.”

“Hyacinth?” Joy knit her brows. “I’ve missed several coronations. Wasn’t Hyacinth rather a recent Queen?”

“How did she dress herself as Hyacinth?” Robin whispered to Littlejan.

“What they call pastel shades: soft pink and blue, in bands round a white centre, with one strip of dark blue and one of red: the colours of garden hyacinths. Here and there she had white hyacinths painted on the coloured bands.”

“It sounds pretty.”

“Oh, it was—and very dainty. Not in the least like Queen Bee’s stripes of red and yellow and green! But Stripey wanted something gaudy, to make people look at her train and not at her, because she says she’s such a funny little dump of a Queen. Hyacinth looked rather a dear, I thought; but she left school before I went there.”

“She was crowned four years ago; the eighteenth Queen. She’s coming to help me with my little crowd; a very nice girl. I know she’ll do well,” Rosamund said.

“She’d jump at the chance of a job in Kentisbury Castle,” Joy observed.

“She’ll get her experience all right, with our four. Nanny’s one of the best, but she’s strict, and Agatha knows her job too. They’ll lick Hyacinth into shape, and when Agatha marries Hyacinth will be ready to take her place. And here’s the last bit of Hamlet Club news; only fixed up this morning. Tell them, Maid!”

Maidlin’s eyes were glowing. “Honesty herself is coming to me, as soon as she can leave the job she’s in. Ros wrote and asked her, and she says she can’t resist it. Rosamund told me this afternoon. Nurse can only stay with us for a few weeks, as she has to go to another case. I was dreading losing her, but I’ll feel perfectly safe with Honesty.”

“Oh, that’s nice!” Joy cried. “And when May-day comes you can bring your Nurse-Queens and park the babies in a corner and all be in the procession together! If I’m at home, Striped and Wild Rose and Green Queens will join in. Then every one’s fixed up with helpers; the Hamlet Club has come to the rescue! Now, Jen, you’re the only one left. You must send Nurse, with Rosemary and Michael and Katharine, to us here as soon as you like.”

“Only when I have to leave them. It’s kind of you, ‘Traveller’s Joy’, and I’m terrifically much obliged.”

Jen sat up and took her share in the discussion. “It will be all right so long as you’re at home, but I’m not easy in my mind about after that. Mary-Dorothy, won’t it be too much for you? We have to think of you. It’s not as if Belinda Bellanne would be here. What about your writing? We mustn’t spoil your books.”

“But why should it spoil my books, to have your Nurse and babies here, Jenny-Wren?”

“It must make more fuss in the house, and there’s all Joy’s work, and I suppose Jansy Raymond will come for the term. It makes a crowd for you to mother.”

“Jansy won’t be any trouble. I’ll see to that,” Littlejan said promptly.

“You see?” Mary smiled. “I’m equipped with a Hamlet Club helper too. I shall have a crowned Queen—a responsible person—to rely on.”

“Oh!” Littlejan grew scarlet. “Oh, Mary-Dorothy! How lovely of you! I will try to help!”

“A crowned Queen! The reigning Queen, in fact! What a nice way to put it, Mary!” Jen exclaimed. “Marigold, I apologise! I’d forgotten you’d be here. You can do anything with Jansy, I know. She’s beginning to grow up; she’ll be twelve at Christmas. She might be difficult, but not with you here.”

“She’ll be all right. She’s going to be moved into the Third; she’s a brainy kid. It will take her all her time to keep up with her new form,”

Littlejan said. "I say, might I say something, as so many Queens are here?" She looked at Joy.

"Oh, please do!" Joy said quickly. "What's the matter?"

"I want Jansy to be Queen some day. It would please Aunty Joan so much."

"We'd all like Jansy to be Queen," Rosamund agreed. "But she's too young, Marigold."

"Don't try to push her with the Club," Jen warned her. "That would be fatal. They'd vote her down at once."

"I might be able to make them want her, though! I hope next year's Queen will be Jean, my maid, and I believe she'll be chosen. But after that we could have Jansy; she'd be thirteen and a half when she was crowned. Is that too young? Mirry was only twelve."

"And the Club went to pieces, till you stepped in and pulled it together," Rosamund pointed out.

"Jansy would have Marigold and Jean behind her," Maidlin observed. "Poor Mirry hadn't anybody. Hyacinth and Lilac had left, and Heather had gone slack and didn't care. Jansy would be all right."

"She wouldn't let us boss her, and we shouldn't try," Littlejan remarked. "But if Jean and I were still there the girls would know we wouldn't let things go wrong."

"The Club will be safe so long as you're in the school," Rosamund assented. "You're right, Marigold. Jansy could do it with you to back her up."

"Then she ought to be Jean's maid, next May," Littlejan said firmly. "It's not enough to be Aunty Joan's maid. I'll see that Jean asks her. So long as Jansy is her mother's maid the Club will think of her as they do of the twins: just one of the Abbey kids."

"Marigold, how right you are!" Jen cried. "I shall tell Joan. I know she feels Jansy has stuck to her long enough. She can easily find a babe in the Club to carry her train."

"I wonder what colour Jansy would choose? With her hair she'd have to be careful," Maidlin said.

Littlejan grinned. "We talked about it when she had chicken-pox last Christmas. We talked about everything under the sun! I never thought I'd be Queen; I was too new to the school; but I thought very likely Jan would be, one day, when she was much older, and I asked what she'd choose. She'd have very dark blue—the colour of the Countess's sapphires; rather like Aunty Joan's violet, but really blue. Nobody's had deep blue yet."

"Oh, that would be safe! And lovely, with her colouring!" Joy exclaimed.

“The only flower we could think of was lobelia.” Littlejan’s grin deepened. “I told her she’d be called Lob. That’s the colour she wants, but lobelia wouldn’t make a good bouquet.”

“She could have cornflowers,” Rosamund suggested. “They’re almost the same colour. And a lobelia crown. Good for Jansy!”

“The Cornflower, or Sapphire Queen. Oh, I hope it happens!” Maidlin said.

“What colour will your Jean choose?” Joy asked. “Not pink, I hope, as she may have to crown Jansy and she’d always be next to her in the procession!”

“You haven’t seen Jean,” Littlejan said seriously, “or you wouldn’t ask. Her nickname’s Ginger.”

“Another red-head?”

“Yes, but bright golden-red, not dark like Jansy’s. If she’s chosen she’ll wear rosemary colours, dark green and lavender.”

“Oh, how pretty! And safe, for both her and Jansy,” Joy said.

“Jean says,” Littlejan went on, “that if she’s chosen she’ll be the Rosemary Queen, and it will remind her of Lady Jen’s first little girl; and of the Countess’s family, too, because all her girls have to be roses. She admires Lady Jen and the Countess most frightfully, so she’d be terribly pleased to have a name that reminded her of them.”

“How decent of Ginger Jean! I didn’t know,” Jen commented.

“Jolly nice of her,” Rosamund agreed. “We mustn’t let her down and lose her high opinion. She’ll be a good godmother for Jansy-Lobelia, if that should come off. I shall try to find one little sapphire for Jansy to have made into a brooch, if she sticks to her choice.”

“But in the meantime no one must breathe a word of this to Jansy or the Club,” Mary said quietly.

“Right! It shall be a dead secret,” Rosamund promised. “Poor Robin! This Club gossip must be boring for her!”

“Oh, it’s not! I’m interested,” Robin exclaimed. “I want to see Jansy again. I saw her at your wedding, when we danced on the green.”

“She’s a bigger edition of my twins, with two funny little red pigtails,” Joy said solemnly.

“She’s a jolly fine kid,” Littlejan insisted. “And the girls like her. Her cricket’s good, and she’s a lovely dancer.”

“Jansy and the Club are safe in your hands, Marigold.” Maidlin gathered up her babies. “Miss Belinda, since you’re going to belong to me, come and help Nurse with these two. It will be good practice for you.”

Lindy sprang up. “I’ll love to help! Oh, will you really trust me to carry one upstairs?”

“That’s Dorothy Rose.” Maidlin smiled. “I’ll teach you how to know them apart.”

“And I must get back to Rosabel and Rosalin,” Rosamund said. “Oh, Joy! It was so nice to see all your family at Kentisbury! And how Margaret has improved! She’s quite stopped shouting with excitement, and now that she speaks properly she has your pretty soft voice. Elizabeth has always had it, but I thought Margaret had missed it.”

“I noticed it as soon as she spoke,” Jen said. “She’s immensely improved by New York. I should have thought it would be the other way and she’d shriek more than ever.”

Maidlin had paused at the door. “I remember when Ros and I first came here, Ros told me to notice how pretty Joy’s voice was, and suggested we should try to speak like her.”

Joy laughed. She had been listening to the comments with an amused smile. “I didn’t know I’d been a model for you, Maidie!”

“Oh, you were, in lots of ways!” Rosamund assured her. “We copied you whenever we could.”

“Even to having your daughters in couples!” Jen murmured.

“I wonder you’ve turned out so well,” Joy said grimly. “But as for Margaret, she came to New York and found two baby brothers when she’d only expected one, and David was ten months old and Richard was three weeks; they’d taken him home with his nurse, though they’d left me in the hospital. Elizabeth and Margaret were thrilled to the limit; they grasped the idea that babies mustn’t be disturbed, and they crept about like mice and spoke very quietly. If Margaret forgot and raised her voice, Elizabeth or Miss Belinda was down on her in a moment, and she soon learned not to scream. I agree that she used to be noisy, but it was only baby excitement. She’s very highly strung and perhaps still a little nervy after that accident when she fell down the Abbey well. You remember how ill she was when they had measles a year ago! Elizabeth has always been more placid. Margaret won’t shriek at you any more. I’m very glad, I assure you. I quite agree she has improved.”

“Enormously!” Rosamund said. “I couldn’t say anything before her, but I noticed it at once. Well, good-bye, all! It’s been a most useful little meeting. We’ve arranged for everybody very happily.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE OTHER ROBIN

Maidlin, Jock and their family, with the nurse and Lindy, went off to The Pallant, to take possession of their new house and begin making it into a home, with the capable help of Anne Bellanne, who, with her maids, had been there for several days; and the Hall seemed quiet without them.

Lindy's going left the twins needing a guardian, but Littlejan and Robin promptly took charge and kept an eye on them and planned picnics and excursions.

"When you go back to school, I shall beg for Lindy again, for a few weeks, Marigold," Joy said. "We can't expect to keep Robin for ever."

She went to the telephone and rang up The Pallant. "Well, Maidie? How's the new house?"

"Beautiful, Joy! I love every corner of it. Jock has taken such a lot of trouble to make it comfortable. I haven't seen it for two months, and he's made heaps of improvements."

"Good! I'm glad you like it. When am I to see it?"

"When will you come to tea?"

"Quite soon. I want to see The Pallant. Don't do too much at first, Maid."

"Anne Bellanne and Miss Belinda do it all. I'm not allowed to do a thing. But I shall start soon."

"Babies all right after their journey?"

"Quite all right. They love their jolly nursery."

Joy laughed. "I'm glad they're pleased. Here comes Mary-Dorothy with letters, so I'll ring off."

Mary came in with the afternoon's post and handed letters to Joy and Robin.

"From Mother," Robin said joyfully.

"From Ivor." And Joy sat down to read her husband's letter, while Littlejan took the hint and carried off the twins for a ramble in the woods.

Joy gave an exclamation. "Gosh! Gracious, how odd!" And she glanced across at Robin.

Robin was absorbed in her letter and did not hear. She looked up, her eyes troubled. "Mother's delighted to know I'm here, and she thinks it's terribly kind of you, Lady Quellyn. She's so glad you don't—oh, Lady Joy, what's the matter?"

“Nothing very serious. I’ll tell you presently. Your mother’s glad I don’t grudge Quellyn to you any more. Is that it?”

“She knew how sorry I was about how you felt.” Robin coloured. “It’s worried me for a long while, but I couldn’t do anything. She’s so glad things are different now.”

“It was my fault,” Joy said. “How is your father?”

Robin’s face grew graver. “Still the same. Mother doesn’t tell me much. She wants to bring him home, but he can’t be moved yet. I’m worried about him. I want to know more.”

“Perhaps she doesn’t know any more herself,” Joy said thoughtfully; and in her mind she added: “Or doesn’t want to tell how bad it is, while the girl’s alone among strangers. She’ll bring him home, if she can; and then, if there’s bad news, she’ll tell Robin herself. It’s what I should do, if it were one of my girls. There’s nothing to do but keep her mind off the trouble. As it happens, I can distract her thoughts thoroughly.”

Aloud she said, “There’s an odd bit of news from my husband. He wrote just before sailing; he’ll be here next week. He tells about his conference, and then he says, ‘A lad walked in one morning and introduced himself as Robin Quellyn, son of old Tom Quellyn, my uncle, who went to sea as a boy and settled in New Zealand.’ Odd, isn’t it?”

“*Robin Quellyn?*” Robin cried, astounded.

Joy glanced at her. “It will be awkward to have two Robins. Ivor’s bringing the cousin home, so we shall see him. I expect his name is Robert, after the painter who left the property to you. Robin is more often used for a boy than for a girl. ‘Auld Robin Gray,’ in the song, you know, and ‘Robin Adair,’ and others.”

“Yes, it is used for boys,” Robin assented, staring at her dazedly. “And—he’s coming here? Didn’t Sir Ivor know him? Did he need to introduce himself?”

“We’ve never seen him. Ivor only knew vaguely that there was an uncle who went abroad. There was some sort of family flare-up, and this boy’s father, Tom, went to sea and never came home and never wrote; and Ivor’s father, Richard Quellyn, never saw Robert, the eldest cousin, again. I don’t know who was in the wrong, but they were evidently a hot-tempered family. My husband isn’t exactly placid at times,” Joy owned. “I shall keep a close watch on the boys. David has quite a big temper for nearly two years old!”

“My godfather was quiet and gentle,” Robin said. “Mother always says so. But there may have been something he couldn’t forgive; I don’t know about that. Does Sir Ivor say any more about the cousin?” Her eyes were deeply troubled.

“At least I’ve given her something fresh to worry about!” Joy thought. “She’s wondering whether this boy will grudge the property to her, as I did. Probably he’ll feel it should never have gone out of the family—and I quite agree. But we can’t do anything about it. It’s going to make this Robin uncomfortable again, I’m afraid, but I had to tell her.”

“I can’t tell you much more,” she said aloud. “Ivor says, ‘This boy—he’s about twenty-five—has music in him—really Welsh! Sings well and plays the ’cello not too badly. More important, he’s tried his hand at composition; he needs help, but his ideas are good and original. He brought me a series of short pieces, which he calls ‘South Sea Suite.’ I tried them over and liked them, and I showed them round a bit at the conference, and several folk seemed struck by them. Young Robin is worth some help and guidance. You’ll be interested in his attempts, and you’ll like him.’ We shall have to turn him into Rob or Robert! We can’t have two Robins at the Abbey!”

Robin looked at her. “I’d better go home. Please, I’d like to go. You’ll have a full house again; the nurse and children from the Manor will be here. I ought to go.”

“Didn’t your mother want you to stay with us till she comes back? I thought she didn’t like the idea of your being alone at Quellyn?”

“Yes, but only if it was quite easy for you, and I feel it won’t be easy,” Robin pleaded. “It’s not only the extra bedroom! This Mr. Quellyn—you can’t expect me to call him Rob or Robin, if he’s older than I am!—he won’t like me, any more than you did at first. Does Sir Ivor know I’m here?”

“He knows now; he’ll have had my letter. He didn’t know when he wrote this. My dear, it mustn’t make any difference. We’ll explain to the boy and tell him all about you; he’ll understand. He wants to see England, and especially Wales, Ivor says. He hasn’t been to this country before.”

“He’d like to see Quellyn. When he sees it he’ll hate me more than ever,” Robin said unhappily. “That doesn’t matter; he doesn’t know me. But it will make him feel bad; he’d better not come to Quellyn.”

“He’s more likely to be thinking about music, and London, than about a house in the country. Ivor evidently thinks he has a career before him. Don’t worry, Robin, and don’t run away,” Joy urged. “Give the boy a chance! Think how bad he would feel if he heard you had fled because he was coming!”

“I shouldn’t think he’d care. Does Sir Ivor hate me too?”

“Nobody hates you, silly girl!” Joy scolded. “Ivor has known about you and his Uncle Robert’s will for years. He doesn’t want to live out in the wilds, among the mountains! His job keeps him in London, or travelling to concerts all over Europe. Quellyn would be no use to him. I don’t say he wouldn’t like to own it for the sake of our boys, for this house must go to

my twins some day; that's understood. Ivor must buy a country place for the boys, that's all. He has far too much to think about, to have time for brooding over an estate. Don't be upset on his account!"

"I love every stone of Quellyn," Robin said vehemently, "but I do wish it had come to me without causing injustice to other people! I didn't know for years that my godfather had any relations; it was a shock when I heard about Sir Ivor and you. I've never felt quite happy since I knew."

"I'm sorry, but that's quite unnecessary," Joy told her.

"From the first, Quellyn was spoiled for me because of Gwyneth fach," Robin went on. "Then, when we'd settled everything, I heard there were other Quellyn relations, who ought to have had the property, and I felt bad again."

"Gwyneth? Is she the other girl? I knew there were two of you. What did you call her?"

"Gwyneth fach—little Gwyneth, or Gwyneth dear. She stayed in the West Indies with her great friend, Gwyneth fawr—big Gwyneth—who is married now and has a little boy. My godfather adopted Gwyn and Quellyn was her home. I still believe he meant to leave it to her, but he'd made his will, leaving everything to me, and he never altered it."

"Hard on Gwyneth!" Joy commented. "She'd feel you'd turned her out."

"She did, of course. It took us a long while to make friends. As soon as I'm of age we're going to divide the estate. I'm to keep Plas Quellyn, but Gwyn is to have Moranedd; that's the little house close to the sea, at Porthdinlleyn. We both love Moranedd, and Gwyn's terribly happy to feel it's going to be hers."

Joy raised her brows. "You'll hand over part of the property to her? Will the lawyers agree?"

"They can't stop me, once I'm of age. We both feel it will be fair. My godfather never meant to leave Gwyn without a home; he couldn't possibly have done it. But it made me feel horrible until we fixed things up; Gwyn hated me so fiercely at first. We've been pals, just like sisters, for years now."

"Decent of you to share with her!" Joy remarked. "Not everybody would do it."

Robin coloured. "I don't see what else I could do. But I can't divide Quellyn again!"

"No, you can't share with Ivor or this new Robin boy. Don't worry, my dear! If you could, they wouldn't hear of it. You mustn't run away on their account. Unless your parents are coming home, you must stay with us."

"Then could I—oh, please!—could I go to the Abbey when they come, and sleep in that little room? I've wanted to live there ever since I saw it. I'd

be so much happier,” Robin pleaded.

“My old bedroom!” Joy laughed. “I didn’t know you were craving for it! Oh, yes, we could let you do that, if you’d really like it. Would you be so much more comfortable out of the house?”

“Yes, I’m afraid I should,” Robin said frankly. “But only because other things are so difficult. I love your house, and you couldn’t have been kinder.”

“I shall tell Ivor and Robin Quellyn that you’ve run away from them.”

“Oh, please!—Oh, what’s happened?” Robin cried. “It’s Littlejan, in a frightful hurry!”

Joy started up, as Littlejan came racing wildly across the lawn. “What’s the matter? Where are the twins? Is anybody hurt?”

“No! No, it’s all right,” Littlejan panted. “Just a moment—let me get my breath—they’re quite safe! But—oh, Lady Joy! Up there in the woods! The rain has loosened the ground and a great chunk of the cliff has fallen down, and there’s been something hidden behind it, and—and we think it’s Michael!”

“Michael?” Joy and Robin stared at her blankly.

“The other bell from the Abbey. Cecily and Michael. Don’t you know what’s written on Cecilia?—

“‘Cecily and Michael we
Serve ye Lorde righte merrile.’”

“We guessed there must be another bell, but nobody knew where to look for it. Couldn’t you come and see, and—and tell Lady Jen? She’d want to help to find Michael.”

Joy, looking startled, went to the telephone. “Just exactly what did you find?”

“A big round thing, iron or rusty brass; metal, anyway. It’s been buried under the cliff; it’s bigger than Cecily. There are some squiggles on it that might be letters. Margaret’s sure she can make out an M, but Elizabeth says it may be just scratches. We met Susan and Sally from the farm, and they’ve gone to fetch their father. Mr. Edwards will dig it out for us.”

“I’ll ring up the Manor. Jen must certainly not be left out of this!” Joy said firmly.

Littlejan gave Robin a grin of wild excitement. “Isn’t it a gorgeous thrill? And we weren’t looking for anything!”

“Michael?” One of Jen’s old shrieks of excitement, quite worthy of Margaret, came over the wire. “Oh, wait for me! I must be in on this! Good old Michael at last! I do hope he—she!—isn’t cracked!”

“I think it’s extremely likely!” Joy retorted, as she put down the receiver.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MICHAEL COMES HOME

“Don’t tell me the twins have found something without killing anybody, for I simply won’t believe it!” Jen exclaimed, as with Joy, Robin and Littlejan she hurried to the ancient steps which led up into the woods.

“Littlejan was there,” Joy began.

“Oh, well, that accounts for it! But did you really leave them alone with their find, Marigold? They’ll be climbing all over it and breaking their necks.”

“They’re too wildly thrilled,” Littlejan grinned. “Elizabeth’s stroking Michael, to make herself believe he’s real, and Margaret’s trying to clean off the dirt to see if it’s an M she thinks she’s seen or if it’s only scratches.”

“Couldn’t we run?” Jen urged. “I raced through the park like a lunatic.”

“We believe you,” Joy responded. “Isn’t it a pity Joan can’t be here?”

“Joan the Second must represent her. Where is your find, Marigold?” Jen demanded.

“We turned off here and went along the hill,” Littlejan began.

“Towards the old door into the monks’ passage, coming up from the Abbey!” And Jen set off along the woodland path that met the moss-grown steps half-way up the hill.

Robin followed at her heels, her double burden forgotten, greatly intrigued to be part of what she realised must be a real Abbey adventure. She had heard how the bell, Cecilia, had been found just a year before, and knew everybody had believed a second bell to be hidden somewhere close at hand.

Joy was not far behind. When she reached the clearing in the woods, where a great piece of chalky cliff had fallen, Jen and Robin were bending over the rounded shoulder of the mass of rusty metal uncovered by the landslide. The farmer, John Edwards, with two men and his two little girls, was hurrying up the hill. The twins were dancing with excitement and delight.

“Is it the other bell? Oh, do tell us! Mr. Edwards, dig it out quickly!” Elizabeth begged.

“Mother, there’s an M on it; lots of M’s!” Margaret cried.

“It is, Mother; she’s not making it up. I saw two M’s, and there might be another,” Elizabeth asserted.

“Two or three M’s? One would be enough for Michael!” Joy began.

“There’s more than one Michael,” Jen called. “Come and look, Joy! It’s the bell all right. We’ll see about these Michaels when she’s cleaned up. You’ll do that for us, won’t you, Mr. Edwards?”

“Aye, sure. We’ll get her out and clean her up, and then you’ll read her, and we’ll hang her beside t’other one and play tunes. Now you, Sally and Susan, out the way there!”

“Look, Joy—Robin! There’s one M—quite plain, and here’s another, lower down. And I think this is a third,” Jen said eagerly. “She’s had an inscription of some kind, like Cecily’s.”

A few moments’ digging was enough to expose the form of the bell, larger than Cecilia, round and shapely.

“Her’ll need some rubbing up, but so be as her baint cracked her’ll be a’ right,” said one of the men.

“Oh, I hope she isn’t cracked!” Robin whispered. “How disappointed they’d be!”

Littlejan touched Jen’s arm. “How soon can we ring up Aunty Joan?”

“And Rosamund, and Maidlin. How thrilled they’ll all be! In five minutes, Marigold. Let’s see her clear of the chalk. Perhaps we’ll be able to read more of the wording,” Jen suggested.

The big bell was dug out quickly, and the men were sent off to bring ropes and a hay-cart. Mr. Edwards scraped and rubbed and polished at the lettering, and presently called Jen and Joy to look.

*Michael am I
Michael made me
Humble
For ~~Great~~ Abbot Michael
I will praise
The Lord Always*

“Michael was the first Abbot,” Littlejan explained hurriedly to Robin. “He’s stuck up on the gate-house, and he’s buried in the old church.”

“I know. I’ve seen his lovely tomb——”

“Joy! Littlejan! Robin! Don’t you see?” Jen almost whispered. “It was ‘Great Abbot Michael,’ but ‘Great’ is crossed out and ‘Humble’ is put above it. They couldn’t alter it once the word was cut.”

“I wonder who made the mistake?” Joy frowned. “Very careless of somebody!”

“It wasn’t a mistake. Don’t you see what happened? The monk who cut the letters adored the Abbot, so he called him Great—against orders, no doubt. The Abbot saw the inscription and was horrified; *he* wasn’t great! He had Humble put in above, and I expect the monk did penance. Oh, I think that’s a lovely story for our second bell!”

“You may be right,” Joy laughed. “It sounds likely enough. But it is your story; you don’t know.”

“I’m right, though. No one would make a mistake in an inscription that couldn’t be altered.”

“I don’t think an Abbot would call himself great, if he were really a holy man,” Littlejan added.

“Not in those days. Michael belongs to the early times, when the monks were still holy and humble and simple. Later on they may have become proud and rich, perhaps, but not in Michael’s time. No really fine Abbot would call himself great; humble is much more likely,” Jen said firmly. “I’m sure my story is true. I wonder what the penance was!”

“They’d stick him in one of the dark little rooms under the refectory, with a good monk to watch him.” Elizabeth had been listening with enthralled interest.

Margaret was tracing out the letters with her finger. “I saw them first. I said there were lots of M’s. Something more down here, but I can’t make it out.”

“I saw some marks, but I thought they were just scratches.” Jen came to look. “It can’t be any more of the inscription; that’s finished. Whatever it is, it’s very small.”

“If you brought Uncle Ken’s big glass . . .” Margaret began.

“The magnifying glass. We might be able to make out if there’s anything more,” Jen agreed. “As soon as Mr. Edwards has cleaned Michael, we’ll have another look at her. There may be more words on the other side.”

“And so there is, but what they says I cannot tell,” said the farmer. “There’s more written on her back. I’ll ring you up, my lady.”

“Please do!” Jen exclaimed. “Now let’s go and ’phone to everybody! We’ve plenty to tell, for one time. Can you remember the words, Twins?”

“Yes, Aunty Jen. It’s easy,” Elizabeth said. “And we won’t forget great-humble.”

“I know it. I’ll remember great-humble, too,” Margaret added. “I like the story about the Abbot.”

“I wonder what sort of voice Michael will have?” Littlejan began.

“Deeper than Cecilia’s. He’s a larger bell,” Joy said.

“She,” Jen corrected her. “As Mr. Edwards told us last year: ‘Bells is shes.’ Didn’t you notice that he always said ‘her’? I am so glad we found her

before I have to go away! Twins and Littlejan, if I didn't love you before I'd love you now for ever! I shall bring you a special present from Africa. No, I can't tell you what it will be!" as Margaret began to ask and Elizabeth looked expectant. "I've no idea what Kenya can produce in the way of presents. But I'm sure to find something."

"It will be wonderful to be able to ring two bells," Joy said. "They won't make a tune, in spite of Mr. Edwards, but they'll be more exciting than one bell alone."

"We'll work out a code," Jen began, with enthusiasm. "Michael's sure to be several notes lower than Cecily. Let's see! 'Come to dance!' Oh, yes! Two Michaels and one Cecily; we must have a rising note for the call to dance in the barn! 'Welcome home!' Two Cecilys and one Michael, because the low note will be restful and we come home to the Abbey to rest. 'Good-night'—one of each; Cecily and then Michael, I suppose, to put us to sleep. 'Good-bye' might be the other way; Michael and then Cecily; a rising call to sound hopeful, to make people come again. 'Come again soon!' could be two Michaels, one Cecily, and then back to Michael. We'll make a list of calls and their meanings and send it round the clan."

"What an imagination!" Joy laughed.

But Robin's eyes were glowing in delight, and Littlejan and the twins were making wild suggestions.

"A lot of quick Cecilys and then one big Michael could be 'Come and see the Ab-bee!'" Margaret cried.

"And three growly Michaels could be 'Go away!' for people we don't like," Elizabeth added.

"Three Cecilys for 'Come again.' And both the bells clashed together for weddings or new babies," Littlejan said. "Lady Joy, did you know Cecily rang for my little sister, when we heard about her? She's called Cecily, because Mother helped to find Cecilia last year. She's Rose, for the Countess, too."

"We must tell Joan about the two bells clashed together for a new baby," Joy said, laughing.

"When we hate people very badly we could have lots and lots of Michaels." Elizabeth proceeded to develop her idea.

"In fours, saying, 'Go away, pigs!' That would be fun." Margaret tried to help.

"Girls, who are these people you don't like?" Joy asked severely. "I don't want to hear of your hating people very badly."

"Oh, not any one yet! But there might be somebody some time," Elizabeth said easily.

"We might as well be prepared," Margaret explained.

“Be prepared for nice things, not for hating people, then.”

“Oh, but we did that first! We prepared for new babies, didn’t we?” Littlejan said demurely, her eyes full of mischief. “They’re always nice: at least, usually. What could we do for twins? We so often have twins. Perhaps Aunty Joan will have some one day.”

“Clash all the bells twice over,” Elizabeth suggested.

“We’ll need to bust both the bells, if we have any more twins,” Margaret said solemnly.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE BELLS RING FOR JILLIAN

Rosamund and Maidlin, thrilled and overjoyed, declared their intention of coming to inspect Michael next day.

“We want to see the inscription,” Maidlin explained. “You’d hung Cecilia before you told us about her, and she had to come down for us to read her verses.”

“Tell Mr. Edwards to have Michael hung quickly, so that both bells can be rung for Joy’s party next week,” Rosamund suggested. “What does Jenny-Wren say it’s to be? Two Michaels and one Cecily—is that ‘Come to dance’? We’ll remember.”

John Edwards called up the Hall and the Manor next morning. The bell was sound and free from cracks. The inscriptions were clear. He would like Lady Quellyn and Lady Matchwood to come and read them for themselves.

“Plus Robin, Twins and Marigold,” said Jen, and came armed with Kenneth’s large magnifying glass.

Michael stood on the floor of the barn, in which Cecilia, the companion bell, had been found.

“She makes Cecily look quite a little dot,” Elizabeth remarked.

“I’m glad she isn’t any bigger,” Jen said. “She might be too heavy for the refectory wall. But Mr. Edwards thinks it will take the weight all right. Joan told me to ask about that most particularly.”

“Isn’t Aunty Joan coming to see her new bell?” Margaret asked.

“Soon, perhaps,” Joy told her. “Jen, I think Michael will be a tenor, don’t you? Not large enough for a big bass voice.”

“Tenor and contralto will be nice,” Jen agreed. “Now what about this inscription?”

“Where’s your glass, Aunty Jen?” Elizabeth cried.

“We’ll read the verse first; the words are quite clear.” Jen knelt and read out the lines on the back of the bell—

*Ye bells be raysed,
Ye lorde be praysed,
Let brothers join and singe;
And work and praye,
While bells do ringe,
And wide their prayses flinge,
So every daye
We bless our Lorde and Kinge.*

“Oh, that’s nice!” Joy exclaimed.

“‘Work and pray’ was the Cistercian motto. I don’t think ‘King’ means Henry the Eighth—or even Henry the Second, which would be nearer the date,” Jen observed. “‘Our Lord and King.’ No, that’s not Henry.”

The twins and Littlejan were hurriedly memorising the verse, and Robin was copying it in her diary.

“Now, what about Margaret’s mysterious scratches?” Jen moved to the other side of the big bell, and knelt and scanned the faint tiny marks. The rest crowded round, but could read nothing without the glass.

A smothered exclamation broke from Jen. “Joy! Ambrose! It really is! Ambrose again!”

“What does it say? Let us see!” Joy exclaimed.

“You know what it says up there: ‘Michael made me’? Underneath the little verse about praising the Lord always, is just this, in tiny letters: ‘Ambrose saved me.’ ‘Michael made me. Ambrose saved me.’ Oh—nice! Good old Ambrose must have found somebody to help him to bury the bell, and before he left her he scribbled his own message: ‘Ambrose saved me.’ Oh, I am so glad!”

“It would be Ambrose! We owe nearly everything we’ve found to him,” Joy explained to Robin. “You’ve seen his grave, away down under the gatehouse?”

“Lady Jen showed me and told me his story. It’s wonderful that he saved so much for you.”

“Marvellous old chap!” Jen said reverently. “I’d have worn his ring if I’d thought we were going to meet Ambrose to-day, but I didn’t know he came into Michael’s story.”

“Ambrose is in everything. You ought to have guessed, Aunty Jen,” Elizabeth said reproachfully.

Jen laughed. “Michael has no more to tell us. We’ll leave her to Mr. Edwards now; he’ll hang her for us. When he’s ready, we’ll come back and

hear how Michael sounds. We'll ring 'Welcome home' and then 'Good-night,' and then a lot of Cecily's and Michael's, just for fun."

But the first message broadcast by the united bells was a wild clash of joy, and the faces of the listening audience were radiant, for a 'phone call from Joan's husband, Jack Raymond, had brought good news. Joan's third daughter was born, and Jansy and Jennifer had their new little sister, Jillian Rose.

"How nice of Joan!" Jen exclaimed. "Fancy having Jill just at the right moment!"

"Joan will say it was nice of us to find Michael just at the right moment to be rung for Jillian," Joy said, laughing.

"We found Michael; us and Littlejan," Margaret cried.

"Don't ever forget that, please!" Elizabeth said firmly.

"Quite right, Twins. We owe Michael to you and Littlejan," Jen agreed. "We'll remember Michael was your find."

"Even if it was quite an accident," Littlejan grinned. "Is the new baby like Jansy and the rest? Or is she like Jimmy?"

"She's another Abbey red-head." Joy smiled and turned to Robin. "Joan had three red children—Jansy, John and Jennifer; then she had a yellow-haired laddie who took after his father. Now Jillian is red, and Jim remains the only fair one."

"Like you, but your oddity is black," Jen said. "Your young David is as dark as his daddy; then you have Richard, who is as red as the twins."

"Oddity! David's a lovely boy," Joy retorted. "Just look at your own crowd of oddities! You and Kenneth and all three boys are as fair as you can be; and then you go and have, not one, but two, little dark daughters! Yours is a funny crowd, if you like!"

"We have to take what comes to us," Jen said resignedly. "But I'm convinced that Rosemary and Katharine will turn out to be the beauties of the family; they're real Marchwoods and the Marchwoods are all handsome. I'd rather not have any more girls. Two are enough. We've plenty of girls in the clan already! But I would like some more boys; three more, to make up my morris side. I'd love to have two at once!"

"You'll have to take what comes." Joy quoted her words back to her.

Jen laughed. "And they're always very nice, and very welcome! Still, if I have two girls together some day, I shall groan!"

As she walked back towards the Hall with Joy, she asked, "What's wrong with the Robin-heiress?"

"Both Robin and the heiress are feeling under a cloud." And Joy told of Robin's fear for her father and her distress over Ivor's letter. "She's afraid this new Robin is going to grudge her inheritance to her."

Jen raised her brows. "Very likely he will. Two Robins at the Abbey! If you tell anybody you have Robins they'll think you mean me."

"Every one's forgotten you came here as Jen Robins and were immediately nicknamed Jenny-Wren. Shall I let her go and hide in the Abbey?"

"I should. She'll be happier, and it will leave you to yourselves as a family party, except for Marigold and my little crowd."

"When do you start?"

Jen's face clouded. "In a fortnight. The boys come to-morrow, so that John Raymond can go to see his mother and Jillian. When we leave, they'll go back to The Grange for the rest of the holidays, and Nancy will send them off to school and see to their packing. She's done it before, while Ken was ill, and they're very good with her. They have to be; she sees to that! But I shall put Andrew in charge of the other two, and there won't be any trouble. We'll come to your welcome home party and help to ring your bells; and we'll see Ivor and this new Quellyn fellow; and then we shall start. Oh, Joy, I don't want to go!"

"Jen, dear, you will enjoy it once the good-byes are over."

"You're sure?" Jen asked wistfully. "You've had to do it; you ought to know. I feel quite sure I'm going to be miserable the whole time. Not showing it, of course, for Ken's sake, but having a constant struggle to keep bright and jolly."

"I felt fearfully bad when I had to go and leave the twins and all of you. You will like it, Jenny-Wren! You must make up your mind to enjoy yourself."

"Not so easy!" Jen groaned. "Half of me will be left behind at the Manor. But at least I've been at home for the finding of Michael, and I've heard him rung for Joan. And I shall be able to see her and Jillian before I go. I'll dance at your party and see your new Robin, and then—off into exile! I say, Joy! Couldn't the Robins marry? The heiress and the representative of the family—Ivor being fixed up with you already? Miss Robin would change her name to Quellyn, and Mr. Robin would go home to live in the family castle. Convenient for both of them!"

"Considering they haven't met yet, and they probably both resent the existence of the other, you're rather in a hurry," Joy mocked. "It would be ideal, of course, and you aren't the first to think of it. I just managed to keep myself from saying to Robin, 'You'd better marry him, my child.' He may have several girls already."

"Several! Well, perhaps they do that sort of thing in the South Sea Islands! Ask Jandy Mac! Don't put it into the heiress's head; it would make her shy. But if it happened, it would be fun."

“She’s shy enough, as it is. I shan’t suggest it, but I see how suitable it would be. It’s a good thing you’re going away,” Joy said thoughtlessly. “You might not be able to resist saying something.”

The shadow fell on Jen’s face again. “I must go back to my babes. Good luck to you with your Robins!” She went off, alone and downcast.

“Joan wouldn’t have said that. I could kick myself! I’ve let her go home feeling worse instead of being cheered up,” Joy said remorsefully, as she went to telephone to Joan’s home, to tell how the bells had rung for Jillian Rose. “Why can’t I learn to think before I speak?”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

JEN RUNS AWAY

The telephone rang shrilly through the Hall, very early in the morning, on the day of Joy's welcome home party.

Joy, called by the maid, heard Jen's voice, strained and overwrought, a voice she hardly knew.

"Joy! Don't say anything. Let me speak. We're off—now; the car's at the door. Nurse and the children will come to you during the day. Thanks a million times. I just couldn't bear the good-byes, and that party to-night. Ken had a sudden offer of berths a week earlier than we'd arranged; someone had cancelled their booking. He has friends going out on this boat—nice people. I know them, too. Our things were all ready; we only had to lock the cases and strap the trunks. So we exchanged, and we're off to Southampton right now. Forgive me, Joy, and be an angel and tell the others for me. Tell Ros I'm a rotten coward and I'm running away because I couldn't bear the waiting any longer. Joan and Maid will understand. *You can't say anything! It's what you did yourself. You rushed off for your first honeymoon and only said good-bye in letters. It nearly broke Maidie's poor little heart, and Ros and I were mad with you. Give everybody my love, and say I'll be home soon. Be good to my babies and take care of Rosemary, Joy, please!*"

The brave voice had been growing unsteady and now it gave way altogether. The telephone was banged down, as Jen ran out to the car to join her husband.

Joy frantically rang up the Manor to say good-bye. A maid replied: "Sir Kenneth and Lady Marchwood have just started, my lady."

"And that's that!" Joy said forlornly, and stood staring at the unresponsive instrument.

Then she seized it and began a round of calls.

"Oh, good for Jen!" Rosamund said unexpectedly. "I call it jolly sensible. She was dreading the farewells; much wiser to get it all over in a rush. I shall write and tell her so. I suppose you have an address?"

"No, I haven't. I don't know the name of their ship," Joy said, startled. "I'd forgotten that."

"Total disappearance of Brownie!" Rosamund laughed. "Don't worry. They'll want letters. They'll see we know where to write to. Kenneth will ring up before they sail."

“Poor Jen!” was Maidlin’s comment. “Then we shan’t see her to-night. Everybody will be sorry. But it would have been dreadful for her, Joy.”

“All well, Maid?”

“Oh, yes, splendid! Nesta comes to-day. I shall bring her to the party to dance.”

“Bring the twins too. But not to dance!”

“No,” Maidlin said firmly. “They’re too young for country-dancing. And the Club would want to nurse them. They mustn’t be mauled by a crowd.”

“Perhaps you’re right. Maid, when Jen rang up, she reminded me how I went off to Kenya without saying good-bye and said it nearly broke your heart. I’m sorry, Maidie. I apologise.”

Maidlin laughed. “Eleven years ago! Oh, Joy!”

“I am sorry. I see now how brutal it was. But I felt, like Jen, that I couldn’t bear good-byes and a last night at home.”

“It was a horrible shock, but I’ve recovered,” Maidlin assured her happily.

Rosamund rang up during the day. “Joy, this is urgent! If you feel the least bit anxious about Rosemary Marchwood, you must pack her warmly into a car and send her to us. Nurse and Agatha loved her when they had her for some weeks last summer; if she shows any sign of illness they’d like to nurse her. Tell Mary, when you go away. If Rosemary needs nursing, we want to do it. Mary-Dorothy mustn’t have that responsibility and worry.”

“That’s good of you, Ros!” Joy exclaimed. “I’ll be terrified if we have any trouble with Rosemary. Would you really take on the job?”

“I want to take it on, if there’s any need. The same goes for Mike and Katharine, too, but Rosemary is the one likely to give us trouble.”

“I’ll remember, and I’ll tell Mary-Dorothy and Nanny. We’ll see you to-night, Ros?”

“Oh, yes, I want to come! Keep one dance for me. If it’s a new one I’ll pull you through! You’ll be in great demand.”

“I expect so,” Joy said calmly. “Ivor may arrive during the evening, but I can’t miss the party. He and his Robin can feed while they’re waiting for me; or they can come to the barn and look on.”

“The new boy ought to see a party. He’ll be fascinated,” Rosamund said. “Has your Robin gone to the Abbey?”

“She and Mary are there now, arranging her bedroom. Robin wouldn’t be happy here, so I’ve had to let her go.”

“Oh, far better! It’s hard on her. I feel for her very much. I’d ask her here, but I don’t think she’d come just now.”

“She feels, from something in her mother’s last letter, that they may want her to go to them, and I promised, if that happens, to see her through.

She'd have no idea how to set about it. She won't go away from me at present! I've helped her to get a passport, which is the first step."

"Oh, good! You can do that better than any of us; you've had so much experience. I haven't forgotten how you took charge, when I was only a kid and had to go to Mother in Switzerland in a hurry. Most efficient, you were! No, the heiress won't leave you, if you've offered to help. She's lucky to be with you. Make her come and dance in the barn. It will distract her mind and do her good."

Joy had hardly turned from the telephone when the bell rang again.

"Joy, will you come to lunch to-day? You can go home in time for the party," said Maidlin's voice.

"I'd love it! I want to see your house. But won't it be too much for you? We want you in the barn, if only for a little while."

"Not a bit. Jock says I may come for an hour, with Honesty to keep an eye on me and make me sit out, if I'm tired. Between them I can't possibly do too much."

"Poor Maid! You are being bullied," Joy laughed.

"I am, rather. Bring your heiress and Littlejan; they'd like to see The Pallant too."

"Oh! Oh, no, Maid! I've no doubt they would, but I don't want a crowd when you show me your house. I want you to myself."

There was a pause. Then Maidlin answered, "All right, Joy. I see how you feel. But I didn't mean to take you round in a crowd; I want you to myself too. I was going to turn them over to Belinda Bellanne; they're both friends of hers. Never mind; they can come another day."

"I'm a pig!" Joy exclaimed. "I'll bring them. I know they'll love it. The more new things I can give Robin the better."

"That was kind of Joy," Maidlin said, as she turned from the telephone. "I'll tell Lindy what we want her to do."

Robin accepted the invitation with delight, but Littlejan begged to be allowed to stay at home.

"I've a lot to do for the party," she explained.

"I forgot you were the reigning Queen," Joy admitted. "But what is there to do, Marigold?"

"Oh, things!" the Queen said mysteriously.

Joy laughed and did not tease her with questions. She welcomed Jen's nurse and the three small children—Rosemary, who was six, Michael, three years old, and Baby Katharine; and made sure they liked their new quarters. Then she fled from Rosemary's insistent demands for her mother and Michael's questions as to where Daddy had gone, and left Mary to explain as best she could; and with Robin she drove off to see Maidlin's new home.

The Pallant was a spreading white house at the foot of a little hill, with a stretch of gleaming water in front and then a wide view of woods and fields, reaching to the distant blue hills of Sussex, where Rosamund had her home. Behind the house the slope was cut into terraces, one of them a lawn, one given up to fruit trees and bushes, the higher ones aglow with colour almost all the year round. At present they were gay with asters and dahlias and the second crop of roses.

“Oh, how pretty!” Robin cried softly, as Sunrise Hill came into view. “Is that really where Mrs. Robertson has gone to live?”

“It must be. I’ve heard about it from Rosamund. Maid has brightened up the whole country-side with her terraced garden, Ros says; it has been flowering ever since the spring. The masses of aubrietias in all shades, and arabis and daffodils, were wonderful, I believe.”

“It’s a marvellous idea! Like sharing her garden with everybody who passes by.”

Maidlin had been watching, and she came running out from the wide-open door to greet them.

“Welcome to The Pallant! Oh, Joy, how lovely to have you here! I do hope you’ll like it!”

“No doubt of that. I’ve liked it ever since we turned the corner. I recognised your house from Rosamund’s descriptions.”

“Ros loves our house. She often drives past, just to look at our terraces. Aren’t they gorgeous? I didn’t know the asters would be quite so lovely. You must climb to the top and sit in the Pen; the summer-house, you know. There’s a beautiful view.”

“The twinnies told me about your Pen. They wanted to come, but that would have made too big a party. So I reminded them they are hostesses to Rosemary and Mike. Marigold has stayed at home to make preparations for to-night.”

“Marigold is a very conscientious Queen.” Maidlin smiled at Robin. “Then you’ll have Belinda Bellanne all to yourself. Here she is! She’ll show you the garden, while Joy and I go over the house.”

“Do you like our little shack?” Jock Robertson asked, when they met at lunch.

“I don’t know what I like most,” Joy exclaimed. “All your rooms are quite charming, and Anne Bellanne’s kitchen is delightful. The garden is lovely, and the view from the Pen is fascinating. The atmosphere of the whole place is most satisfying.”

“Oh, Joy! How nice of you!” Maidlin cried.

Jock looked at Robin. “I hope you approve too, Miss Heiress?”

Robin coloured, but she had made friends with him during the days at the Hall, and she smiled. "It feels like a lovely home, and it's so sunny."

"I'm glad! You've both said exactly the right things!" Maidlin said joyfully.

"The girls seem to like it," Jock remarked.

"Jock Robertson! Do you mean those tiny scraps of yours in that beautiful nursery?"

Maidlin smiled. "He always calls them 'the girls.' I say they'll be girls some day, but they're only big dolls at present."

"Our little Joy and Rose. The house feels quite crowded," Jock declared. "They're going to be singers; they have the most extensive voices—you should hear them yell! They think they're in the Albert Hall, instead of in a country cottage."

"He wants to call them Joy and Rose, but I say we'll get mixed. Marjory and Dorothy would be much safer," said the mother of the future singers.

"I'm looking forward to training their voices," said their father. "I'm convinced they'll both be contraltos. I'd like one to be soprano, but I expect Maid has passed on her voice to them."

"They'll be lucky girls, if she has," Joy remarked.

"Is Marigold going to spring any surprises on us at the party?" Jock asked. "She looks as if she might; a young lady with ideas."

"I haven't heard of any, but she looked mysterious when she said she must stay at home. You're coming, then? Has Maid taught you to dance?"

"A very little," he said solemnly. "My brain isn't equal to it; I always go wrong unless I dance with her. She has to whisper, 'Siding!' and 'Hey, you silly!' or I'm left gasping. But I'm terrifically good at watching her. I don't see anybody else, if she's dancing. Fairy thistledown; that's what I call her."

"If you can tear yourself away I'll give you a job," Joy told him. "I quite expect Ivor will turn up during the party. Couldn't you look after him, and feed him and all that? I want to dance."

"The party is in your honour; you can't leave us, even for Ivor," Maidlin said. "Jock will have to do without watching me, for once."

"Then Nurse Honesty must keep an eye on you, or you'll do too much," Jock said promptly. "I can't have the girls upset because you've danced yourself into a state of exhaustion. I'll do that for you, Joy! I'll feed Ivor; I've a thousand questions to ask about his conference."

"Good! I'll leave him to you. Maid, we're going home early, so that you can go to bed for an hour."

Maidlin smiled at her. "Nesta will put me to bed, I've no doubt. Nurse doesn't leave us for two days yet, and between them and Jock I'm bullied all the time."

“We must think of the girls,” said Jock.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE HAMLET CLUB DANCES

“Maid’s going to have great fun showing her house and her babies to everybody,” Joy said, as they drove home.

“She’s very happy,” Robin ventured.

“And very proud. It’s lovely to see her with her own place and her own family,” Joy agreed. “We were her first visitors, but Rosamund is to go tomorrow, and then Mary-Dorothy.”

A letter was waiting for Robin and it brought better news. Her father sent his love, and her mother had hopes of bringing him home soon. Immensely cheered, Robin began to look forward to the party in the barn; she had known she must go, but it would have been an effort. Now she felt she could allow herself to enjoy it, with one of her burdens beginning to lift. The other, the arrival of Robin Quellyn with Sir Ivor, had not been referred to again, but she knew he was expected, and she looked to the little room in the Abbey as a real sanctuary, where she could escape from his presence.

She changed into a frock of robin red, which suited her brown colouring, and went from her refuge across the Abbey meadow to the barn.

The twins, in dancing frocks of vivid green, met her at the door, with a third girl, exactly like them, but bigger and much more of a schoolgirl, between them.

“Here’s Jansy. She’s come for the party,” Elizabeth said.

“She came in the car, while you were at Aunty Maid’s,” Margaret added.

“I’ve danced with Jansy before, at the Countess’s wedding.” Robin shook hands and smiled at Jansy. “She hadn’t any pigtails then, but I had a long one. I like your frocks!”

“Littlejan’s got one too——”

“Elizabeth, you ought to call her Queen Marigold at a party!” Jansy protested.

“Where is Marigold? I suppose she has to receive the guests?” Robin asked.

“Not all of them. They’re allowed to crowd in as they like,” Margaret said mysteriously. “Come and see the barn, Robin!”

“Oh, what a pretty sight!” Robin cried, for the big shadowy barn was filled with girls in swinging dance-frocks of every gay colour.

Jansy rushed off to find her class-mates and to tell them about her new little sister. The twins, proud of their knowledge, pointed out the leaders of

the Hamlet Club. “Heaps of the old people have come, because it’s a party for Mother. There’s the first Queen; her little girl was Queen last year—Mirry. The President isn’t here, because her baby girl is only a few weeks old. Oh, listen! There are Cecily and Michael!”

The bells were chiming—“Two Michaels and a Cecily,” as Jen had suggested; two low notes and one high—“Come to dance! Come to dance!”

“Now watch!” and the twins tugged at Robin’s sleeve. “It’s a surprise for Mother. Oh, there’s Aunty Maid and Miss Belinda, and the other one’s Queen Honesty; we’ve seen her at crownings. And here comes Aunty Ros; don’t you like her blue dress?”

To Robin’s amusement, the “Countess” had vanished and Rosamund wore a short blue dancing frock, much like those worn by the girls. Maidlin’s was of vivid gold; Nesta’s of silver-grey; Joy came behind them, wearing green, like the twins.

As she entered, to the chiming of the Abbey bells, the curtains which had been hung across the transepts of the barn to make them into dressing-rooms were drawn back, and Littlejan came out, robed in white, as the Queen, a crown of marigolds on her dark hair, her glowing orange train held by a tall girl in white, whose hair of Scottish golden-red was crowned with a white wreath.

“Oh! A State welcome!” Joy murmured, much amused. “How very nice of Marigold to take so much trouble! But it spoils her own dancing.”

“She’ll change in a moment. We brought her frock over this afternoon and had everything ready,” Mary-Dorothy explained. “It’s been planned for weeks.”

“She’s *very* pretty!” Robin exclaimed. “I hadn’t realised quite how pretty she is.”

Maidlin heard and smiled at her. “She ought to wear white flowers, as the reigning Queen. But we all wanted to see how her marigolds would look, and this isn’t official, so we let her have her own flowers, and they suit her beautifully.”

Littlejan, with no shyness, came out to the cleared floor, and curtsied low. “Lady Joy, the Club is so very glad to have you here again,” she said, simply and clearly. “Welcome home, and welcome to our barn!”

“Marigold, what a lovely greeting!” Joy exclaimed. “I thank you, and every one, very much. But I hope you’ll dance yourself.”

“You bet!” said the Queen. “Jean and I are going to vanish, now, at once. Come and undress us, Mary-Dorothy! You’d better start, everybody. The first dance is ‘The First of April.’ Thank you, music!” and she lifted her long robe and ran back to the dressing-room to discard her crown and change into her short green frock.

“Did you teach her that very fine curtsy, Maid?” Joy asked, as she led Maidlin into the line.

“I did,” Maidlin smiled. “I drilled her in it before she was crowned. She does it beautifully.”

“It reminded me of you. Tell me what to do! I like the tune, but I’ve never heard of the dance before.”

While the next dance, “The Dressed Ship,” was in progress, Littlejan and Ginger Jean came racing out and joined on at the end.

“I couldn’t waste the whole party,” the Queen grinned, as she met Joy and Rosamund coming down the line.

“You were generous to give up one dance. What jolly new ones the Club has learned!”

Littlejan nodded and laughed over her shoulder as she “cast” up to take their place, while Rosamund turned Joy under her arm and they went on down the line.

“‘Way to Norwich’ next. It’s lovely; you’ll like it. I suppose you wouldn’t have it with me?” the Queen asked wistfully of Joy, when the dance was over. “So many people want you to-night.”

“I’ll be proud to have one with the Queen! But you must take care of me. I haven’t an idea what to do,” Joy warned her.

“Pleasures of the Town” and “The Cumberland Square Eight” were followed by “The Alderman’s Hat,” and Joy collapsed in helpless laughter at her own mistakes. “I say, people, I’m awfully sorry, but I’ve never even heard of it before and it *is* extremely rapid! Can we do it again? I’ve grasped it now. And give us something we know soon, Marigold! I’m going to have musical indigestion with all these new tunes. Each one is jollier than the last, but I know they’ll get mixed up in my head at night. Can I have the music, to help me to sort them out?”

“You’d better take it to bed with you,” Rosamund suggested.

“She can’t take the piano to bed with her!” Littlejan protested.

“She doesn’t need a piano. She can read the tunes, especially when she has danced to them,” Rosamund explained.

“We’ll have ‘Nonesuch’ next, for those who know it. I’m one, and I love it,” said the Queen. “And ‘Picking Up Sticks.’”

“And ‘Newcastle,’ *please!*” Joy begged. “The Club may be bored with ‘Newcastle,’ but I haven’t danced it for years.”

At the end of “Newcastle,” Maidlin, dancing with Joy, raised her head and listened. The bells had been silent for some time, but they were ringing again.

“Listen, Joy! Michael and Cecily—but they’re different. What are they saying?”

“What was that code of Jenny-Wren’s? Two Cecily’s and a Michael; what was that to mean?” Joy cried. “And who is ringing the bells?”

“Wasn’t it ‘Welcome Home’?” Maidlin smiled at her. “I expect it’s Jock. He loves playing with Cecily, and he was keen to try Michael too. It must mean that Ivor has arrived.”

“Then all’s well. Jock promised to look after him; I’m going on dancing! Don’t say anything to Robin; she isn’t looking forward to meeting the other Robin. She’s having a good time. We won’t spoil it for her.”

Robin, dancing with Lindy, with Littlejan and Jansy, and with the twins in turn, was enjoying her first experience of the Hamlet Club, and was learning fresh dances all the time. She had no chance to think of problems, and she did not even notice that two new men had joined those already looking on. The Earl of Kentisbury was there and several other husbands and fathers. Jock Robertson came in, with two friends, left them with the rest of the guests, and joined Maidlin in “The Old Mole,” to the delight of the dancing girls.

“Maidie doesn’t look like the mother of two,” Miriam, the White Queen, said to Joy.

Joy smiled. “I had lunch with her to-day. She’s a charming hostess. The new house is delightful, and the twins are darlings. She’ll want you to come to see them. Maidie is very well now, and she’ll be ready for ‘Messiah’ in the Albert Hall at Christmas.”

Miriam repeated her remark to the “mother of two” at the end of the dance, and Maidlin’s deep smile glimmered in her happy eyes.

“You know, I don’t quite believe it yet; I don’t believe they’re real. Now that I’m here again, dancing with you all in the barn, it seems like a dream that there are two babies waiting for me at home. And my lovely house is a dream too.”

“You’ll find it’s a nightmare when the girls are singing for their supper,” said Jock.

“The girls? Does he mean the babies?” Miriam asked, amused.

“He insists on calling them ‘the girls.’ One more dance, Jock, *please!*” and she turned to Rosamund and held out her hand for “Corn Rigs.”

Then Jock carried her off, with Nurse Honesty and Miss Belinda, to rest and attend to the needs of her daughters; the Earl and Countess said good-night for the same reason and slipped away; and the Club, and Robin, danced on.

The younger of the newcomers watched “The Huntsman’s Chorus” with delight. “Must be sport to do. It’s jolly good fun even to watch,” he said.

“Have a go with Joy. She’ll tell you what to do. She knows them all,” said Sir Ivor Quellyn.

“Just what she doesn’t do,” Joy retorted. “The Club has learned shoals of new dances while we’ve been away.”

“There’s a pretty girl—in a red frock—going down the middle now, with one of your kiddies.” The stranger looked at Joy.

“That’s not one of mine. She’s a cousin, though she’s so like me. Your pretty girl is the Quellyn heiress, Robin Brent, your namesake.” Joy gave him a laughing look. “She’s frightened of you. She thinks you’ll be rude to her because she’s taken Plas Quellyn away from the family.”

The new Robin looked with deepened interest at the brown-eyed girl, who was making an arch at the bottom of the set with Jansy Raymond.

“So that’s the heiress! I say, she mustn’t feel like that! The Quellyn place ought to be ours, of course, but it would have come to Ivor, not to me. If Ivor doesn’t grudge it to her, I’ve no need to feel sore about it.”

“You can tell her so to-morrow. Don’t spoil her party! She hasn’t guessed who you are. She’ll run away and hide, if I introduce you.”

“Won’t I see her later? Ivor said she was staying with you.”

“She was, but she has run away from you. She’s going to sleep in the Abbey.”

“That ruined place we came through? Oh, you can’t allow that! I’ll clear out——”

“Don’t be silly,” Joy said calmly. “Robin will be perfectly safe and comfortable, and she’s looking forward to it. I had a bedroom there myself for years; ever so many of us have slept in my little room. Robin’s begged to be allowed to sleep in the Abbey ever since she arrived. I assure you she’ll be all right.”

“But she’s turned out of the house because of me. If any one has to go ——”

“It ought to be you. Quite so! But Robin wanted to go, and we can’t alter things now.”

A ring was forming for the “Circassian Circle.” Robin smiled an invitation to Elizabeth Marchwood, who had been deserted by Margaret in favour of the elder of Jen’s boys, Andrew, while Tony and Jansy’s brother John had Susan and Sally Edwards from the farm as partners.

“Thanks awfully! I didn’t want to be left out,” Elizabeth admitted.

Robin’s third promenade round the set brought her Margaret as a partner, and as they skipped Margaret panted, “Did you see our Daddy? He’s come; and somebody new with him. Looks jolly nice; Mother says he’s a sort of cousin.”

Robin’s eyes went to the audience on the dais. She knew Sir Ivor Quellyn by sight; it was easy to guess who the young man beside him must be, though there was no likeness; the stranger was fair-haired and very

brown. He was watching the dance intently; or was he watching one dancer? To Robin's tense mind it seemed inevitable he should be looking at her—as indeed he was, but not for the reason she suspected. At the end of the dance, which was to close the party, the children would rush to their stepfather. There might be introductions.

Robin's right arm was round Littlejan. Margaret had passed on to the next partner.

"I say, Marigold, I want to get out of this. Can we?"

Littlejan looked at her quickly. "Are you ill? Easily, if we both go. Come on!" And they skipped out of the ring and ran to the dressing-room.

"Tell me, Robin! There'll be a wild mob here in a moment."

"I'm all right, but I want to get away before they come. I'm not ill, Marigold. Please let me go!" Robin was hastily changing her shoes and pulling on her coat.

"I'll come with you——"

"No, please! You must say good-night to the Club. It's only"—she saw that an explanation was necessary; Littlejan was too full of understanding and sympathy to be put off as a young child might have been—"that new man is there with Sir Ivor; the other Quellyn person. I don't want to be introduced to him to-night. I'll vanish into the Abbey and go to bed; Mrs. Watson has supper ready for me. Don't let anybody come after me!" And she caught up her shoes and torch and ran out into the night.

Or at least—her shoe. One red slipper fell from her hand and was left behind.

A grin spread over the Queen's face. She picked up the slipper and went back into the barn, where the crowd was clamouring for "Sellenger's Round."

"What energy!" Joy groaned. "Oh, let them have it! I can't dance anything more. What's that, Marigold?"

Littlejan held out the red dancing shoe. "Cinderella has gone home to the Abbey. She left her slipper behind."

Joy's eyes gleamed. She handed the slipper to Robin Quellyn. "You'd better be the Prince and return it to Cinderella to-morrow, Robin. You'll want to make friends."

He slipped the red shoe into his pocket. "Thanks for the hint, Cousin Joy. I say, I wish you'd call me Rob. It was Mother who called me Robin. She would never believe I'd grown out of it; we used to argue about it. I'd much rather be Rob."

"Good! That will make things easier." Joy said no more about Cinderella, but ordered him to watch the last dance, with its big rings, one inside the other. "The only thing you've missed is Jen Marchwood's piping.

Some day you shall see more dancing and she'll stand up there on that little platform and pipe for us. Dearie me! How we are all missing our Jenny-Wren!"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CINDERELLA

"I must have dropped one of my shoes," Robin said to herself, as she locked the old door which led to the cloisters and prepared for bed. "Oh, well! Littlejan will find it. I expect they have stacks of things left behind after parties. I don't need it to-night; I'm not going out to dance on the garth alone!"

She drew the curtains across the lancet windows, so that the crowd going home to the Hall should not be tempted to call on her. Almost above her head, as it seemed, the bells were chiming, "Good night!"—Cecily and then Michael; and then "Good-bye!"—Michael rising to Cecily.

Robin laughed, drew the bedclothes over her knees and her red gown round her shoulders, and sat eating sandwiches and cake and drinking the cocoa Mrs. Watson had prepared for her.

"It *was* a jolly party! The Hamlet Club does know how to dance! I almost felt I belonged to them—a sort of grandchild of the Club, as Lady Kentisbury was my first teacher. I saw her dancing 'Corn Rigs' with little Mrs. Robertson; that was one she gave us at our first lesson, in the garden at Wood End, when Gail Alwyn played the dulcitone. Gail's married to Benedicta's brother now; she got engaged to him at the Countess's wedding, or just after. I can hear people going home; I'm glad I'm in bed! I can't be introduced to anybody to-night, that's certain!"

There came soft tapping on the door. Robin stiffened. "Go away! I'm in bed!"

"Are you all right, Robin?"

"Oh, Queen Marigold! Yes, thanks. Is anybody with you?"

"No, they've gone to the house. I was bothered about you."

Robin slipped across the floor and unlocked the door, and then sprang back into bed. "Come and see for yourself. Then you'll be satisfied. Have a sandwich?"

Littlejan peeped in. "You do look cosy! I love candle-light. No, thanks, I guess you can eat them all. What a jolly red dressing-gown! And I said it before, but you have got a whacking great fat plait. Isn't it hard to put it up?"

"No—easy. It's much worse if you've a mingy little scrap."

"I don't think I'll ever grow mine. Mother's is short, so I don't see why I should. Do you know what I heard in to-day's letter from Ceylon?"

“Not another little sister?” Robin mocked.

“That would be twins, with a month between them,” Littlejan said solemnly. “No, but Mother hopes to come home in the spring, to bring my brothers to school; they’re to go to the jolly place where Andrew and Tony and John go, which is just like home for kids whose people are abroad. Mother will try to be here for May-day, so that she’ll see me being Queen. I have to abdicate and get my forget-me-nots from Mirry, and I make a speech, if I want to. I expect I shall say a few kind words to the Club! Then I crown the new Queen, and then I go into the background. Mother’ll try to come and watch, and she’ll bring Cecily Rose, so I shall see her at last. Father was here when I was crowned last May, so I’ll have had them both. Aren’t I lucky?”

“*Aren’t I!*” Robin laughed.

“Oh well! Am—I—not—a very lucky girl! Both Aunty Joan and the Countess want Mother to stay with them; the Countess is Cecily’s godmother, you know. You can’t think how I want to see Mother again! Isn’t it lovely to have that to look forward to?”

“Marigold, how very jolly for you!” Robin exclaimed. “I know what it’s like to want my mother.”

Littlejan sat on the edge of the bed. “I ought to go. It’s terrifically late. Yes, but you’ll have yours soon. And then you’ll go away from us. Come back to the Abbey some day! Come for May-day, and meet Mother, and see the coronation, and dance with us again!”

“I’d love it! Would they have me? Perhaps I could sleep here, if there are crowds of visitors.”

“They often have people for May-day. I think they’d want you to be a proper visitor next time. You wouldn’t need to hide from anybody! I like Mr. Rob Quellyn. He lives in New Zealand, but he’s sailed a lot among the Islands, and he met Mother in Samoa. She heard his name was Quellyn, and she asked who he was, and she told him about Lady Joy and Sir Ivor, although she hadn’t seen Lady Joy since she was at school and she’d never met Sir Ivor. But she knew all about them and she knew the twins. She told him he ought to come home and get to know the family. He’s nice, Robin. And we’re to call him Rob, not Robin.”

“I’m glad he’s nice, but he doesn’t matter to me,” Robin retorted. “I hope I shall be going home in a few days. Marigold, I’ve lost a shoe; I must have dropped it in the field or in the barn.”

“I found it. A red one, wasn’t it? Did you see my jolly green ones? It’s all right; it won’t get sopping wet with dew or rain. But I gave it to Lady Joy. I didn’t know I’d be able to steal away to ask if you were all right,” Littlejan said casually. “We’ll bring it back to you.”

“Thanks; I was sure somebody would find it. I don’t want to lose it. Marigold, you really ought to go to bed!”

“I know. But I never can sleep after dancing; not for ages. I think it was a nice party for Lady Joy?”

“A lovely party! Everybody enjoyed it. I’m so glad to have danced in your barn.”

“I know. It makes you into one of us. I felt I belonged, when I’d danced in the barn. And isn’t it marvellous to have Michael? Everybody’s glad we found him—her! Yes, I really am going now. Good-night! I’m glad you’re all right.”

“Couldn’t be better! But not a bit sleepy,” Robin responded.

Littlejan, at the door, laughed back at her. “Go for a walk in the Abbey! What tune’s in your head? It’s the ‘Huntsman’s Chorus’ I can’t get rid of.”

“A jumble of all the lot, and the colours of the frocks, and all the laughing, dancing people. Good-night, Marigold!” Robin said firmly.

Littlejan laughed again and raced off across the garth.

“I could bear to do as the nice kid said, and go for a walk,” Robin mused, as she locked the door. “But I don’t think I will. It’s very dark. I’d be tempted if it were moonlight,” and she blew out her candle and went to bed.

Early next morning Littlejan came running back, with a letter. “If it’s good news, will you come for a picnic with me and Jansy and the twins? We’re going to show Jan where we found Michael. No grown-ups with us, unless you’re one!”

Robin skimmed through her mother’s note. “It’s all right. Father’s going on well. I’d love a picnic, if you aren’t bringing any bogey-men along.”

“It’s mad to call him that! He’s awfully nice. But he’s not coming in the woods with us to-day. Bring some sandwiches and we’ll go right up the Monks’ Path to the top and on to the hills, after we’ve shown Jansy where Michael was buried. There are such hordes of babies at the Hall now,” Littlejan explained. “Three of Lady Jen’s and two of Lady Joy’s, and crowds of nurses. The twins and Jansy seem quite big enough to go out with, when you think how little Rosemary and Mike and David are! We’ll come for you in about an hour, when you’ve had your brekker. I hope Mrs. Watson will give you a good one! No, I didn’t bring your shoe; sorry! But later will do; you aren’t going to dance to-day. It’s quite safe.”

“Scatter those crumbs of cake as you go out,” Robin said. “There’s a friendly robin haunts the garth. He sang me a dear little autumn song before I was out of bed.”

“I know him. I hope he’ll stay all winter.” Littlejan swept the cake-crumbs from the plate into her palm.

“He’s more likely to stay, if we feed him.”

“Two Robins in the Abbey!” Littlejan laughed, as she went out.

Returning from the long day on the hills, for tea in the caretaker’s sitting-room—the caretaker who was so mysteriously Maidlin Robertson’s aunt—Robin promised herself an evening of prowling among the ruins. She came out to the garth just after six, which was closing time for tourists, and stopped in dismay, for a man sat on a camp stool, a block of drawing paper and a board on his knee, a pencil in his hand. He was sitting close to the entrance to her little room, looking across at the arched door and beautiful windows of the chapter-house, and the friendly robin was hopping about hopefully near his feet.

Robin shrank against the wall, in the shadow under the pent-house roof of the cloisters.

“I’ll creep out, to the gate-house or the barn. But I thought it was music he was keen on? Is he an artist too? Lady Joy said he’d written music and Sir Ivor liked it.”

Rob Quellyn seemed intent on his drawing, glancing continually across the garth.

Robin’s interest overcame her shyness. “I’m not scared of him, and I shall have to meet him sometime. I am a coward! I won’t creep out; I won’t creep anywhere!”

She went forward openly, her cheeks flushed. “I saw you at the dance. I know who you are; and you know I’m Robertina Brent. May I see your picture? Oh! Oh, but *how* lovely!”

“Do you like it? Really?” He rose, looking appreciatively at the red cheeks and brown eyes and hair, the red jersey and brown suit and cap. “But you aren’t Robertina; you couldn’t be any more than Robin, dressed like that—just like this friendly little chap.”

Robin ignored this. “But I thought you went in for music? Lady Joy told me about your South Sea pieces, and that Sir Ivor said they were good. Please tell me! How does it happen that you draw so beautifully? Was it a mistake about the music? She said you sang, and played the ’cello, as well as being a composer.”

Rob Quellyn laughed ruefully. “That’s my trouble. I’ve never been able to concentrate on either—music or pictures. I paint a bit, though I’m not using colour to-day. Joy showed me round the Abbey this morning, and I was seized with a wild craving to make pencil drawings of these glorious arches and windows. I couldn’t resist them; the lines are so lovely. I’ll have a go with colour another time; the grey of the old stones and the yellow and red of the lichen are wonderful.”

“The refectory windows!” Robin exclaimed. “Oh, marvellous! You are lucky to be able to do such fine work! And music too?”

“I can’t choose between them, and so I shall never do anything great at either. Ivor’s mad with me because I won’t concentrate on music; he says with his help I could be really worth while, and he wants me to swear never to touch paints or a pencil again. But I can’t do it.”

“Oh, you couldn’t, when you can make lovely little pictures like these! One whole part of you would starve!”

Rob looked at her in real gratitude. “I say, you do understand! That’s what I feel. If I wrote the most marvellous piece of music in the world at the price of never doing another drawing, I’d feel it wasn’t worth it. But all the time I’m working on a picture there’s music in my head, and sooner or later I have to write it down and work on it till it’s something like what I want it to be. And that puts a stop to the pictures for quite a while. Awkward, isn’t it?”

In her sympathy for his difficulty Robin had forgotten her shyness and the question that lay between them. “I think it’s frightfully clever to be good at both. They’re such different things.”

“Oh no! They’re the same; only a different way of making pictures—on paper or in sound.”

“I suppose that’s true, but they seem different to me, for I can’t do either. Have you studied both?”

“Oh, sure!” he grinned. “And each of my colleges told me to concentrate on their subject and give up the other entirely.”

“That didn’t help you much. But you can do both—if you don’t need to —” She paused in confusion.

“To waste my time earning my living. That’s all right; my dad and mother are both gone now, and they left me a good deal. Mother’s father had done well with sheep, and she was his only bit of family.”

“In New Zealand? And the sheep money came to you?”

“That’s so. After she went Dad and I cruised among the Islands for some years, and then he went too. I went on wandering for a while, and in Samoa I came across Mrs. Fraser, only just in time, for she was packing up to go to Ceylon. Nice kid, that girl of hers, who is the dancing Queen! Mrs. Fraser was tickled to death when she heard I was called Quellyn, and she told me she’d been staying at Lady Quellyn’s place in England. That’s what brought me home; I guessed it was time I hitched up with the family. I came by New York, because she told me Ivor and his crowd were there. I found him, but Joy and the children had come home. That’s my yarn; not a long one!”

“Then you can afford to do both the things that are pulling at you. It will be more worth while to make beautiful little pictures and write a few bits of good music than to paint one marvellous masterpiece *or* compose a symphony. Or, not both!”

“That seems to me a really common-sense way to look at it,” he said. “Everybody else wants me to stifle half of myself.”

“I don’t think you could. You’d always be thinking about the half you’d smothered.”

“You are jolly comforting!” he said gratefully. “You’ve got hold of the idea—of what I feel—exactly. I shall now be quite happy in defying Ivor and Joy, and I shall go on drawing until music gets too strong and demands its turn.”

“I’d like to hear your music.”

“Then you must come back to the house.” His eyes met hers and he laughed. “Why did you run away? Am I such an ogre?”

Robin grew scarlet. “I felt—you know how I felt! I can’t give up my house to you, but I feel it ought to be yours.”

“Or Ivor’s. But if Uncle Robert didn’t want us to have it, what more is there to say? His cousins—my dad and Ivor’s—got his back up and that was the end of them. He’d have left Plas Quellyn to the nation rather than let them have it. That’s what my dad used to say. I knew there was an heiress, outside the family, but I didn’t suppose I should ever meet her.” He smiled down into Robin’s troubled face. “Please don’t look so unhappy! Nobody in the whole world wants to take Quellyn away from you. I’d like to see the place, but I know it isn’t possible just now. Joy told me of your trouble. I’m sorry, Miss Robin.”

“Thank you. Mother hopes to bring Father home soon, but I’m afraid we couldn’t have visitors at present. I hope you’ll see Plas Quellyn some day, if you really don’t hate me because it’s mine. You didn’t know my godfather?”

“Old Rob Quellyn? I never had the chance. He was a wanderer too, wasn’t he? He never came our way.”

“When he was young, he came home hoping to marry my mother, but he hadn’t told her, and he found her married. He was more than generous to her and Father when things were difficult for them, and when I was born they called me after him. He was pleased, and though he married later he had no children and his wife died, and he left everything to me.”

“The best thing he could do!” Rob Quellyn said heartily. “He was a painter, wasn’t he? Joy says I’m to go to see his pictures in some gallery.”

“The Quellyn collection,” Robin assented. “We have some lovely ones at home. They’re pictures of Welsh fairy-tales and folk-lore; he put his wife and her sister into most of them. She must have been lovely, and her sister’s very pretty too.”

“Painting is in the family quite as much as music. Both seem to have fallen on me, perhaps to the harm of both, but there it is.”

“I can’t do either,” Robin said again. “I’m not any sort of an artist. I’m not a credit to Quellyn.”

“You can dance. I saw you dance last night.” His eyes, dark like Ivor Quellyn’s, twinkled. “I’ve something here that belongs to you,” and he drew a red shoe from his pocket. “Cinderella, I wonder you weren’t more careful. You must know what happens to beautiful damsels when they drop a slipper and run away from a dance.”

“Oh!” Robin cried, and grew as red as her jersey. “I knew I’d lost it, but I never thought of——”

“Of being Cinderella.” He laughed and handed her the shoe. “Joy told me to be the Prince and bring it back to you.”

Robin’s eyes were dancing, to match his. She sat on his stool and solemnly put on her slipper. “It fits, you see!”

“I never doubted it, from the way you skipped around. What about the rest of the story, Cinderella?”

“Certainly not!” Robin said promptly, putting on her walking shoe again. “I’m not going to marry the Prince, even though it would change my name to Quellyn. The story goes wrong there. Thank you for bringing back my shoe. Good luck to your picture! Good-bye!”

“Unfortunately, though I may be the Prince, you are the Queen—of the Castle that might have been mine,” he said, folding up his stool, as she went towards the cloisters. “The Prince doesn’t marry the Queen, just to get the kingdom. No, I’m afraid the story won’t work out properly this time. But we can be friends, Miss Cinderella-Robin. Won’t you stop hiding from me and come back to the Hall? It makes me feel bad to know you’ve run away from me.”

“But I love being in the Abbey!” Robin retorted, and closed her door on him firmly.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ROBIN LEAVES THE ABBEY

“He’s right,” Robin said to herself, as she watched through her narrow window-slit while the Prince disappeared by way of the tresaunt. “He wouldn’t ask me, even if we both felt like it. We don’t, of course! But he’d know people would say he was doing it to bring the property back into the family. And if I married him—which I’m not going to do, now or ever—I’d know every one would think it was so that my name would be Quellyn. I’d like to be Mrs. Quellyn of Plas Quellyn! It’s a most attractive idea. That’s why, for both reasons, he and I are the last two people in the world who are likely to marry. It’s too obvious; too much to the interest of both of us for either to believe the other one was really in earnest. And people would say such horrible things! Fortunately we don’t want to do it. We’ll both take care that we don’t come to want it, either! As that’s settled, I’ll admit that I like him; he’s very pleasant and he’s definitely clever. He’d better wait a few years and then marry Queen Marigold. Or he may fall in love with Belinda Bellanne. He won’t choose me, that’s certain; and I wouldn’t have him. So we needn’t worry about that. I’m glad to have made friends. I suppose I’ll have to go back to the house presently. But I love my little room!”

She waited till Rob Quellyn had had ample time to reach the house, then pulled on her coat, for the ruins were draughty, and wandered through the Abbey.

“I love prowling about in this dear old place! There’s the robin again; he’ll miss me, if I go away. I must tell Mrs. Watson to go on feeding him.”

She was sitting on one of the window-seats of the dormitory, looking down on the garth, where the robin was searching for his supper, when Littlejan Fraser came out from the tresaunt.

Robin hailed her, as she was going towards the cloisters. “Hi, Littlejan! I’m up here.”

“Where? Oh, I see you! Here’s a note from Lady Joy. I’ll bring it up to you.”

“No, I’ll come down.” And Robin ran carefully down the worn stone steps.

The note proved to be a formal invitation to dinner—“Lady Quellyn requests the pleasure”—and underneath—“To meet Mr. Robert Quellyn.”

Robin flushed and laughed. “He’s told her. I’d better get it over. Marigold!”

Littlejan had wandered away and was making friends with the robin by means of a handful of crumbs. "Shall I take back an answer? Lady Joy says you'd better come soon, so that you can go up to your room and change."

"Please tell her I thank her very much, and I'll come."

"You will stay, won't you?" Littlejan asked anxiously. "I know you like being here, but we want you in the house with us."

"Perhaps. I'll see," Robin said cautiously.

She packed her little case and said good-night to Mrs. Watson, knowing very well that she would not be allowed to return that evening.

No one seemed to be about when she reached the house. She crept upstairs to her room, and found herself expected, for hot water was waiting. She changed into her white dinner frock and was hesitating, with a touch of shyness, when a tap came on her door.

Mary Devine stood outside, a telegram in her hand. "For you. I hope it's good news."

Robin tore it open. "Oh!—Yes, it's good news, thank you, Mary. They're coming home. But I shall have to go at once. Mother says—'Home Saturday night. See you at Quellyn.' She'll want me to be there."

"This is Thursday. Could you be ready to travel to-morrow? We could send your trunk after you," Mary began.

"Oh, I'm sure I could! But could I get the early train from Paddington? It doesn't stop at Oxford, or anywhere near here. Could I speak to Lady Joy?"

Joy was already downstairs. She greeted Robin with a laugh. "We're glad to have you here with us! But is anything the matter, my dear? A telegram?"

Robin explained quickly. "Lady Joy, could I possibly get to Paddington in time? It means a terribly early start, I'm afraid."

Joy was used to planning sudden journeys. Sir Ivor travelled a great deal, and she had often gone with him at a moment's notice.

"That will be easy," she said. "Of course you must go, though we'll be sorry to lose you. But your mother will want you; you must be there to welcome her. If you don't mind an early breakfast we'll send you to town in the car. Train is quicker, but it's more harassing. The car will take you right to Paddington, and someone shall go with you and see you into the train."

"Oh, that's good of you! But there's really no need. Once I'm at Paddington I'm all right."

"I expect someone would like to go, for the drive. I think I won't go myself; a card from Kenneth Marchwood has given us addresses to write to, and I want to send Jen a long letter about the party, and the bells, and how we used her code, and about Maid's new house. But—oh, here's our guest! I

understand you have already met Mr. Quellyn,” Joy said, with laughing formality. “Miss Robertina Brent—Mr. Robert Quellyn.”

“I have met the robin from the Abbey,” Rob began.

“Rob, would you like a day in town?” And Joy told of Robin’s hurried journey. “Suppose you take Littlejan and Jansy, and after you’ve put Robin in her train you could all go off to the Zoo, or the Tower, or Westminster. What do you say, Marigold?”

Littlejan began an Irish jig. “Oh—sport! Oh, Rob, do say you’ll go! But I’m sorry about Robin.”

“You needn’t be sorry. She’s going home to her mother.” Joy smiled at Robin. “We shall all be sorry to lose her, but we knew she’d have to go, and it’s very much better for her than having to go to Lisbon. What about it, Rob?”

“I’m on,” he said heartily. “If the Abbey must lose its robin, we must help her on her way. Once she’s safely off, there’s no saying what we young people will do.”

Littlejan had been waiting anxiously for his answer. “You are a good sort!” she cried. “We’ll have a marvellous time! I must tell Jansy!” and she rushed away.

“I’m sorry your last evening with us should be spoiled, Robin,” Joy said. “But I suppose this will mean packing. We were going to have music after dinner.”

“I’ll need to pack, but perhaps for a little while,” Robin began.

“Rob tells me you’ve seen his drawings. You ought to hear his ’cello, and I want the twins to listen. Elizabeth has made quite a good start on her small ’cello; she’ll be thrilled. Rob!” and Joy turned to him. “I suppose you know you’ve demoralised my family?”

“I didn’t know. I’m very sorry!” and he raised his brows. “How did I do it?”

“The twins were quite content with their music. They were going to work in earnest and become famous, and play in public, so they said. Now they’ve decided they want to make pictures too. If you can do both, why can’t they? Elizabeth has always been keen on colour. I’ve been arguing with them, but they say they’re quite as clever as you, and if you can—and so on.”

He laughed. “It’s early days. We must help Elizabeth to find colour in music. I expect one subject will win in the end. It won’t hurt them to experiment with both. I’m sorry you have to go.” And he looked at Robin, as they went in to dinner.

“If it wouldn’t annoy you too much, I’d like to show you Plas Quellyn,” Robin said, colouring. “When I see how Father is, I’ll write to Lady Joy, and

perhaps she'll tell you. Even if we couldn't have visitors in the house, you could stay at Moranedd."

"Mor——? Do you speak Welsh? I've never learned it."

"I've picked up a good deal in the last eight years," Robin said. "Why did you ask?"

"Because of the way you said that—Mor-something. What is it?"

"Moranedd—the house by the sea. It's a dear little place, right on the shore; the waves wash up to the garden wall. As soon as I'm of age, in a few months, I'm handing it over to my adopted sister, as her share. She ought really to have had it all." And she told of Gwyneth fach and of how Quellyn had been her home.

"You're giving up part of the estate to her?" Sir Ivor looked at her severely. "Surely it ought not to be divided?"

"It's going to be divided," Robin said stoutly, though she reddened under his gaze. "Nobody can stop me, once it's really mine. I could never be happy, if I didn't share with Gwyn."

"Robin, how sporting of you!" Littlejan cried.

Robin looked at Rob Quellyn, anxious, in spite of herself, for his opinion. "I couldn't do anything else. Mother agrees."

"It's generous, and it's fair," he said. "But I don't think many people would do it."

"Or approve of it," Sir Ivor said stormily. "The property ought to be kept intact."

Robin's colour deepened, but she held her ground. "It's the only thing to do. It has been arranged for years. Moranedd and Bryn Ceiriog, a farm near, are to be Gwyneth's."

"I love to hear you say those weird names!" said Littlejan.

"I shall have to learn Welsh. It's so musical," Rob Quellyn declared. "Miss Robin, never mind if Ivor looks thundery; it's nothing to do with him. You stick to your guns."

"And give up part of her land. She ought not to be allowed to do it."

Robin looked straight at Sir Ivor, her eyes shy but brave. "I haven't any choice. The only thing that matters is what my godfather would have wished. Although he didn't make it legal I'm certain he would have wanted Gwyneth to share. He left the place to me, for Mother's sake; but he never meant to leave Gwyneth unprovided for; I'm sure of that. I have to do what he forgot to do, in his will."

Ivor Quellyn gave an angry grunt of disapproval. "He wouldn't have wanted the property divided."

Robin's eyes flashed dangerously. She had plenty of courage and she was roused to indignation.

“After all, your father, and yours”—to Rob, who was watching her in admiration and amusement—“were only his cousins. It’s not as if they’d been brothers. You only feel sore because of the name.”

“Squashed, Ivor!” Joy said. “You should change your name to Quellyn, Robin—legally, I mean! It can be done quite easily.”

Robin’s cheeks had flamed, at thought of other ways in which it could be done. “Thanks, but I don’t want to do it. Shall you go to the Zoo, when you’ve seen me off?” And she turned to Rob.

“Don’t tease the child, Ivor!” Joy said. “She’s as firm as a rock on the point. Perhaps she’s right; she’d never be happy if she didn’t feel she had done the fair thing by the other girl, being Robertina Brent! Let’s plan out a jolly day in town for Rob and the children.”

“Do you allow yourself to be called a child, when you’re a reigning Queen?” Rob asked seriously of Littlejan.

“I don’t, really, but Lady Joy may do it, if she feels like it.”

Joy laughed. “My apologies, Marigold! You looked quite grown-up in that long robe last night.”

“I feel completely grown-up when I’m being the Queen,” Littlejan admitted.

The twins and Jansy were allowed to come down for half-an-hour after dinner, to listen to Rob’s ’cello, which he played well to Joy’s accompaniment. Ivor, still disapproving, went to his study and left them to their music. Then Robin slipped away to begin her packing, the children were sent to bed, and Littlejan was ordered off also, to prepare for an early breakfast.

“Fine girl that,” Rob Quellyn remarked, as he sat with Joy on the terrace in the twilight. “I liked the way she stuck to her point.”

“And stood up to Ivor. She was terrified, but brave,” Joy agreed. “She’s very pretty, too, with her good colouring.”

“Pity she has that property tacked on to her. Some day some chap will find it difficult.”

Joy looked at him quickly. “Plas Quellyn is a lovely place, I believe; quite a castle.”

“That’s why it will be difficult. She’ll need to be careful, too. If he’s the right man he won’t like to ask her; if he’s a wrong ’un she may get into a mess.”

“Robin Brent won’t get into any mess of that sort. She’s remarkably shrewd and clear-headed. What about yourself? It would solve the family problem?”

“I haven’t come hunting for castles. She’d never believe I was in earnest; she’d say I was after Plas Quellyn. Much better not to think about it. But

she's a jolly fine girl; I'll grant you that."

Joy said no more. She left him presently to his pipe and went upstairs to Mary's room.

"Mary-Dorothy! May I come in?"

"Oh, Joy! You know how I love you to come!" Mary drew up a big chair for her to the open window. "Can I help?"

"You were working," Joy apologised, at sight of the proofs spread on the desk. "I am sorry! You aren't getting much time for your own work just now. When does that one come out?"

"Next year. There's no hurry; these people do things very early. But I like to get the proofs off my hands. They can wait," and Mary pushed the slips aside.

"It's about Robin, Mary. I can't help fearing she may have a shock when she meets her people. Her mother hasn't said much; I'm afraid Mr. Brent may be worse than Robin thinks. She's taken it for granted he is doing well, since he can be brought home, and she's quite happy about him. Ought we to warn her?"

"Have you said anything to suggest there may be trouble ahead?" Mary asked quickly.

"Not yet. I thought I'd ask you first. But ought we to let her go quite unprepared?"

"We don't know anything," Mary argued. "Joy, with that long journey before her—a whole day alone in the train!—you couldn't say anything that would frighten her! Think how she would suffer, with no one to speak to for all those hours! We couldn't do it unless we knew for certain; not unless her mother had asked us to warn her. Mrs. Brent hasn't said anything of the sort, although she wrote to thank you for being good to Robin. We must leave it to her."

"You think so? I'll be only too glad, but I wasn't sure if it was fair to the girl."

"It's a kind thought," Mary said, "but I'm sure it isn't our place to try to help her just now. She's going home; her mother will see to it."

"That's true," Joy agreed. "That relieves my mind. Mary, wouldn't it be fun if she married Rob?"

Mary laughed. "Joy! They only met to-day. Have you seen any sign of it?"

"Not one," Joy admitted. "He says he hasn't come hunting for castles, and that the right man will find it difficult to propose to an heiress."

"Very difficult, I should say," Mary assented. "Then you've spoken of it?"

"Only to him. I didn't say anything to her."

“I should think not! He’d have to care for her a great deal more than he could do on such a short friendship before he could face up to that difficult situation.”

Joy sighed. “He sounded as if it would be quite out of the question. It would be fun, if it came off! The estate would come back into the family, and she’d be called Quellyn, and little Quellyns would inherit it, though they wouldn’t be my little Quellyns! Good-night, Mary! Forgive me for interrupting!”

“I love to have you come,” Mary responded.

“I had to ask somebody, and Ivor isn’t pleased with Robin.” Joy paused in the doorway. “Didn’t she stand up to him pluckily at dinner?”

“She found it hard. I thought she was very brave.”

“Splendid—yes. Ivor can be rather terrifying.” Joy laughed. “Thanks for the help and advice, Mary-Dorothy!”

“What will you do, when Sir Ivor and Lady Joy go back to New York in October?” Robin asked of Rob, as the car carried the party to town early next morning. “Will you go with them? I’d like you to see Quellyn, but I don’t know how soon I can arrange it.”

“Not I! I want to see this country, now I’ve come. Scotland, too; my mother’s name was Macpherson and her people live in the Highlands. I’m going to look them up. I shall find somewhere in London for my headquarters and park my stuff there. I’ve no home, so I may as well stay for a while.”

“You don’t need to go back to New Zealand?”

“There’s nobody there now who matters.”

To Robin’s dismay, intense relief filled her mind. Startled that she should care, she withdrew into herself and became silent.

“You could leave your stuff at the Hall and live with us when you aren’t running about the country,” Littlejan suggested. “Mary-Dorothy and Jansy and I would have you. Wouldn’t we, Jan? It would be thrilling to have him coming back and telling us his adventures.”

“I think he should stay with us,” Jansy agreed. “Aunty Joy will say so, I’m sure.”

“That’s a kind thought,” Rob said appreciatively. “Then if I go to see Miss Robin’s castle, I could tell you all about it.”

He noticed Robin’s sudden silence, but put it down to anxiety on her father’s account and did not tease her with idle chatter. Jansy and Littlejan were able to supply as much of this as was needed, and Robin was left in peace to face the new thoughts roused by that strange rush of relief. They continued to haunt her as the train bore her swiftly west and north, while Rob and the schoolgirls carried out their programme of sightseeing and

amusements in London, and Joy at home wrote a long letter to Jen, telling not only of Maidlin's house and the Hamlet Club dance, but of the arrival of this new member of the family; the coming of a second Robin and the flight of the first.

"I must talk to Mother," Robin said firmly to herself as the train drew in to Pwllheli and she saw the Quellyn car waiting.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ROB COMES TO QUELLYN

A letter came from Robin to the Hall a few days later, full of thanks for the kindness that had been shown, and the new interests which had been given to her.

“It’s a brave letter and very like Robin,” Joy said gravely, and went to tell Mary-Dorothy. “It’s as we thought, Mary: her father is worse than she had guessed. She’s had a bad shock; she doesn’t say so, but one can read between the lines. Yes, read it; it isn’t private. The first part is just thanks to us all. She’s very grateful.”

“Father will always be crippled,” Robin wrote bravely. “He’ll never be able to walk again. I didn’t understand, when I came home, but Mother explained. But we may keep him with us for some time. It might have been so much worse! We keep saying: ‘What if there had been a fire, as happens so often?’ He is so glad to be at home, and we’re glad to be with him. The boys will come to see him when they’re in this country again, and Mother and I will never leave him.

“I’ve told Mother about all of you, and she asks me to say that if Mr. Quellyn would like to see the place we can easily put him up at Moranedd, the house down by the sea, and Jenny and her grandmother will take care of him. He can come to see the Plas, but we couldn’t entertain him properly here at present. He’d like Moranedd; everybody does! I don’t suppose you’d have time, or would care, to come with him; and I’m sure Sir Ivor wouldn’t come. But there’s plenty of room in the little house, if you felt like it; and we should be pleased and proud to see you and to show you everything.

“Please give my love to Queen Marigold, and to Jansy and the twins, and of course to Mary-Dorothy and yourself. I am so very happy to know you all.”

“She must come back sometime,” Joy said. “You’ll see to that, Mary? We shall be away for nearly a year. Ask Robin to come for a holiday whenever she feels she can be spared. She might come for May-day; she said she’d like to see a coronation. I’ll leave that to you. Rob must go. Isn’t she polite with her ‘Mr. Quellyn’? But I won’t go at present. There’s so much to do and so very little time to do it in; and this jaunt would take several days. I’ll talk to Rob, and if he goes soon he can tell me about it when he comes back. Ivor is refusing to show any interest whatever in Plas Quellyn!”

A letter came from Jen by the same post, telling of the interesting places they had seen and of the steady improvement in Kenneth's health. She was sure they had been right to leave home, she said; but there was an undercurrent of wistful longing which told its own story.

"Poor Jenny-Wren! She'd much rather be here. How well I know what she feels!" Joy said. "But I generally manage to enjoy the travelling. I don't think she's really having a good time. They won't stay away for a year. As soon as they can find a good excuse they'll come racing home."

"She'll stay till she's quite sure Kenneth has had all the good of the trip," said Mary, to whom she had spoken.

"Yes, I'm sure of that. But once she's happy about him she'll come home. And a good thing, too; the place isn't the same without Jenny-Wren."

Robin, walking with her mother on the turf of the great headland above Porthdinlleyn, the village on the shore, while her father slept at home, told of Rob Quellyn; of his many gifts—his pleasant music and his beautiful drawings; of his travels and his wish to visit the family haunts; and, at last, of that strange rush of relief which had filled her when he said there was no one in New Zealand who mattered to him now.

"Why did I feel like that? What does it matter to me, Mother? I'd only known him for one day. I couldn't possibly care whether he'd left crowds of friends—well, of girls, then!—behind him. And yet I did care. I was glad to know there weren't any. What did it mean?"

"It meant that you may care for him some day; that you are interested in him," Mrs. Brent told her. "You don't care yet; but it may come. You like him and you don't want to share him with any one else; though if it were with 'crowds of girls' you'd have no need to worry. One might be serious! Don't be troubled about it, Robin. You have other things to think of just now. Let matters take their natural course. But he must certainly see the place, if he cares to come. You can send your invitation through Lady Quellyn."

"But I couldn't ever marry him, Mother! And anyway, he'd never ask me. He said so."

Mrs. Brent laughed at the matter-of-fact tone. "Your heart isn't deeply touched yet! What do you mean—'he said so'? You didn't discuss the idea with him, I suppose?"

"He brought back my red dancing shoe; I'd dropped it in the barn. He called me Cinderella and said—what about the rest of the story, if he was the Prince? I said, 'Certainly not.' I'm not going to marry him just to be called Mrs. Quellyn! So I said the story went wrong there. And he agreed that it did, and that the Prince didn't marry the Queen just to make sure of a

kingdom—Quellyn, you know. So he said the story couldn't end properly this time, but that we could be friends."

"I see." Mrs. Brent spoke gravely, but with amusement in her eyes. "Very wise of you both! Wait a while and see how things work out."

"He'd feel people would say he'd done it because of Plas Quellyn, if he ever asked me."

"And if you accepted him they'd say it was so that you could change your name to Quellyn."

"Yes, Mother." Robin stood in the life-giving wind and gazed across the lovely bay of Morfa Nevin to Yr Eifl, the sharply-peaked mountain rising out of the sea.

"If you cared for one another, I hope neither of you would be so weak and silly as to think of what people would say. You know nothing about love, Robin, or you'd realise that other people and their opinions simply don't matter one scrap."

"Not if it had happened. But it might matter now."

Mrs. Brent gave her a quick look. "You're growing up, my dear. You mean that because of what people would say you might try to stop yourself from falling in love with him?"

Robin coloured. "I'm not falling in love. But he might try to stop, before it gets serious."

"You must leave him to work that out. I don't believe love can be stopped. Do you want him to come here?"

"I feel he ought to have the chance to see the place."

"Then write to Lady Quellyn. Ask her to come, too, if she cares about it. And don't worry about the future, Robin. Let things take their course. You can't encourage any deep feeling in yourself unless you know he shares it; it would be foolish. But you'll both ruin your lives, and you'll break your hearts, if you let the thought of what other people would say come into the matter at all. I must go back. Father may be waking soon. Will you come in the car? Or will you have a longer stroll and then walk home?"

"I'd like to go round by Abergeirch and Edeyrn, if you don't need me just now."

Mrs. Brent went back to the car, waiting in the village, and Robin wandered on to a lonely cove, where a stream ran out to the sea, and sat on the pebbles and thought and wondered.

Rob's visit was paid a few weeks later. He came as soon as Joy and Ivor and the children had returned to the States, and told of a quiet Hall, of Littlejan and Jansy hard at work at school and Mary busy on a new book, of Jen's babies doing well, of good news from Kenya.

Moranedd, the house by the sea, delighted him, and the Welsh girl and the old woman in charge fell in love with their guest and were amused to hear they must call him "Mr. Quellyn." The village, sheltered by a great green headland, was only one row of cottages perched just above the sand, and the wide curve of the bay lay in front. The stone wall of Moranedd's garden was washed by the waves at high tide, and the sound of water filled the air day and night.

The house was long and low and white; the sitting-room had green-washed walls, with sea pictures, and wide seats below the big windows. Rob, bidden to choose his bedroom, took possession of one upstairs and declared he would fish from his window-sill.

"It's a charming little place," he said to Robin, when she came to welcome him and to make plans. "I wonder you don't live here, instead of at the big house. Are you really going to hand it over to your friend?"

"We both like Moranedd best," Robin agreed. "It's to be Gwyneth's as soon as we're allowed to arrange it. But you'll like Plas Quellyn too."

She gave up her time to making his stay pleasant, and they rambled on the shore, strolled on the headland, and fished from one of the Quellyn boats out in the bay. With Robin as guide, Rob climbed the hill behind the great house. It was really a mountain, she insisted, as it was twelve hundred feet high. From the top beside the cairn she pointed out the extent of the Quellyn estate, and they looked together at the map spread at their feet, the sprawling Land's End of Wales, with the Atlantic on three sides and on the fourth the Snowdon and Cader Idris mountains and the wide sweep of Cardigan Bay.

"Yes, that's very satisfying," was Rob's verdict. "It's a wonderful place to live. It suggests pictures to me—in music, I think."

"Oh, do write a Welsh set of pieces!" Robin cried. "How proud we'd be!"

"We'd better go down before we're blown out to sea or across to Holyhead," he said, for the wind, roaring in from the ocean, was tearing at Robin's hair under her red cap and burning her cheeks, and his own short locks were flying wildly.

Rob was useful with sails as well as with oars. As he said: "What would be the use of living among islands if you couldn't handle a boat?" So he took Robin sailing, a little to her mother's anxiety, and they visited the seaward valleys of Yr Eifl—the mountains known to English visitors as The Rivals—which were so hard to reach by land. Robin, however, could drive the car, while he was only experimenting in motoring, so she carried him for picnics to favourite spots on all the coasts of Lley, their lonely peninsula—to Criccieth and Abersoch in the south, to Aberdaron in the wild west, to

Clynnog on the far side of The Rivals, and to Beddgelert and Aberglaslyn in Snowdonia.

His visit to Plas Quellyn, on a day when Mr. Brent was fairly well, made him revise his opinion about Moranedd. "Gosh, what a fine place! Oh, you couldn't live anywhere but here. The little sea-house is very jolly, but this is marvellous," he said, looking up at the massive grey castle, with its square central tower and rows of long windows and ivy-clad walls. "What a perfect picture! I don't wonder Joy and Ivor felt a bit peeved; really I don't blame them! Have they seen it? I thought Joy said——"

Robin had coloured at this reminder. "I don't think Sir Ivor has been here; I know Lady Joy hasn't. I hope she'll come some day."

"I shall tell her she'd better not," Rob said firmly. "She has all she wants; the Hall is her home and she'd never live anywhere else. She only wants this for the kiddies; she'd much better keep away. Ivor doesn't really care, you know. Music is the whole world to him; and music, for him, doesn't mean composing quietly in the country! It means conducting orchestras and giving concerts all over the world. There's talk of an Australian tour some day."

"Oh, poor Lady Joy! I thought she wanted to settle down at home!"

"She might not go; or if she did, she'd leave the small girls at school. But Ivor would only go for a three months' tour; he won't make a long contract for Australia or South Africa, as he did for New York. Sweden wants him, too, I believe. He'll always be hopping off to one continent or another; a place like this would be no use to him."

"But what about you?" Robin asked, with a returning touch of shyness. "Don't you feel wild that it has gone out of the family? I couldn't help it, you know." Then she grew scarlet, as she saw the opening she had given him. Would he retort: "It could easily come back into the family again, if you and I——"

Rob did not rise to the occasion, and she was grateful, for she could not believe he had not seen his chance.

"I? Oh, I'm reconciled to the idea," and he smiled at her flushed face. "Please don't look so downcast! You'll take far better care of it than I should do. I'm afraid I'm a rolling stone, and a place like this would be too mossy for me! I shall probably be off to the Islands again before long. There's a fascination about coral shores, and huge breakers on the reef, and coco-nut palms, and quiet lagoons."

"I'm sure there is," Robin agreed, with no sign of the sudden cold clutch at her heart these words had caused. "I wonder you aren't hurrying back already."

“When I go I shall carry with me treasures without price, in the shape of pictures of the places I have seen. And in the very front rank will be your beautiful castle.”

“Then I’m glad you’ve seen it,” Robin said soberly. “Come indoors and see the rest. We have some lovely specimens of Robert Quellyn’s paintings; you’ve seen the collection in London, but ours are just as fine and are the ones he cared for most.”

Mrs. Brent had already met Rob when she came to Moranedd immediately after his arrival. If she had not liked him she would have managed to keep Robin from spending so much time with him. It was proof of her real trust and liking that she had allowed them to go all over the countryside together. She welcomed him and gave them tea, and Robin led him through the lower rooms of the great house.

“Yes!” he said at last. “It’s a beautiful place, and you’re very lucky. My good wishes will always be with you, Miss Robin. Some day I hope the right man will come to share it with you. But he’ll find it difficult, if he’s worth anything at all, you know. You may have to help him.” And he smiled down at her.

“I don’t want anybody to share it, I think,” Robin said steadily. “I’m content with things as they are.”

“Oh, surely not! And yet I don’t know. You have everything you want—almost.”

At his look her eyes fell quickly. Her feelings about a husband were still very mixed, but if he was somebody like Rob Quellyn he might make life even better than it was, she knew. But of one thing she was certain: she loved her house, and she would like to know that it would belong to someone of her own, after her time. There were the boys, of course; but it would be more satisfying still to leave it to a boy of her own. It was one of the strange deep thoughts which had been awakened in her during her visit to the Hall, when she had met so many—Joy, Jen, Rosamund, Maidlin—all with their babies, happy in plans for the future. She had thought of Quellyn and had been suddenly wistful and lonely.

Rob had turned to say good-bye to Mrs. Brent. “I’m off in the morning. I’m going to look up my mother’s people in Scotland. I can’t thank you enough for letting me come and for sparing Miss Robin to show me round.”

“I hope”—and Mrs. Brent gave him a straight look which reminded him of her daughter—“that if the right man for Robin should come along, he’ll have the pluck to look beyond her inheritance and tell her what he feels for her.”

“It’s not only a question of pluck,” Rob said stoutly. “Self-respect comes in, too. A chap would feel so small and cheeky, speaking to the owner of all

this. It's hard on Miss Robin, in some ways. Please, may I walk back to Moranedd? It's a lovely evening and I know the way. I won't lose myself in your lanes. I want a stroll on that magnificent headland; I go there every night. My mind's full of pictures, suggested by all you've shown me. I'd like to go alone, if you don't mind."

"I'll be glad to have Robin's help. We'll see you off in the morning." Mrs. Brent seemed to understand.

"I'll drive you in to Pwllheli," Robin said, turning to them again. "You won't want the London train, if you're off to Scotland. You'd better go on the other line, to Chester. You'll see a lot more of Wales that way."

"Come and see us again before you go back to your Islands," Mrs. Brent suggested.

"I'd like that. Thanks very much," he said eagerly.

"Now what about it, Robin?" Mrs. Brent asked, when he had gone.

"Nothing, Mother. I told you he won't ever ask me. And I don't know that I care very much."

Mrs. Brent gave her a sharp look. "But he does! My dear girl, can't you see? He's running away from you. He's made up his mind he can't ask you to marry him, because of your inheritance, so he's going to escape before he cares too much. But I think it's too late. He shouldn't have come here; he's seen too much of you, my child. He'll go away, but he'll come back; he won't find it as easy as he thinks to forget you. You must make up your mind what you want. As he says, you may have to help him."

"Mother! How could I?"

"It's not a case of Cinderella and the Prince," Mrs. Brent pointed out. "In his mind you are the queen—of this large estate; and he is a nobody. What is he to do?"

"It may be difficult for him, but it's simply horrible for me!" Robin broke out.

"It's a problem, certainly. At present you can only wait. He isn't nearly ready for such an effort; he thinks it will be easy to go away and forget. But you must make up your mind what you want, Robin mine. If you feel he is your man, you may need to help him. For myself, I think you should. I like him very much."

Robin gave her a sudden radiant look. "Oh, Mother! So do I!"

"Good! Later on perhaps you'll do still more. Then we shall have to see what we can do about it," Mrs. Brent said heartily.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

LETTERS TO ROBIN

Littlejan Fraser had not been in bed for many minutes when a cautious tap came on her door. She was later than usual, as she had been finishing a letter; she had made it her business to correspond with Robin, and with understanding beyond her years she always put in a sentence about Rob's latest doings, his comings and goings. For Littlejan, unconscious of his scruples or of any difficulties in the way, had made up her mind that these two new friends must marry some day, and that she was the one to give each news of the other.

She looked in surprise at the door. "It's all right, Mary-Dorothy. I'm in bed now. Sorry I was late. Why, Jansy!"

Jansy, a funny little figure in a blue dressing-gown, with two smooth red plaits, crept in and closed the door. "I want to speak to somebody, and you're the best one. Do you mind?"

Littlejan reached for her green gown and drew it on. "I don't know yet. You ought to be asleep. I should be, but I've been writing to Robin. What's up?"

"I'm in a mess at school. I must tell somebody. I think you'll do. Will you listen?"

Littlejan's mind was in a whirl. She knew people went to Mary privately for help; she had done it herself. Was it possible that in the same way Jansy had come to her?

She looked at Jansy doubtfully. "Do you really want to say something? Or do you just want to gossip? And do you expect me to give you biscuits and chocolate? For I haven't any; I wasn't prepared for this—er—visit."

"I don't want anything, except to tell you what's the matter!" Jansy said indignantly.

"Well, whisper, then. Mary and Nanny might not understand. I've thought you were looking a bit odd lately. What's the row?"

"It's school!" Jansy said, in a stormy whisper. "It's no use telling Mary-Dorothy about school."

"It might be. Mary understands most things," Littlejan said cautiously.

Jansy curled up on the bed. "But you're the Queen. It's your job to help."

"Oh! Yes, that's true. Go ahead, then."

“We were talking about the Queens the other day. Most of the girls in my form are thirteen and some are fourteen; they’re all older than me.”

“Than I,” Littlejan remarked automatically. “Older than I am.”

“Oh, well! They’re old enough to think about being Queen some day, and we were saying what colours we’d have, if we were chosen.”

Littlejan nodded. Jansy would be nearly twelve and a half by May-day; Mirry, the Forget-me-not Queen, had been only twelve, but every one had agreed she had been too young. But Jansy was below the average age of her form; the others, at fourteen and nearly fifteen, might well talk over the subject of the May Queen.

“I want Jean to be next year’s Queen,” she said.

“I think she will be; we all like Ginger Jean,” Jansy assented, “and it’s awfully tempting to think of calling her Queen Jean. Oh, they don’t expect to be chosen, but they were talking about colours, just in case.”

“I see. What did they choose? It’s getting frightfully hard.”

“Maureen said she’d have white with big red circles, and she’d ask Miss Lane to paint white Mayflowers in the red spots, and be a real May Queen.”

“Sounds awful,” said Littlejan. “I hope she won’t be Queen.”

“I felt like that. Susan and Sally, from the farm, said they’d have dark brown, with creamy flowers—acacia, perhaps—to remind everybody of chocolate cream.”

“It sounds dingy, but it would look all right with their hair; it’s almost white. Anything else?”

“Daphne said she’d be a Crocus Queen, and have her train made up of violet and gold and mauve and white. That sounded rather decent, I thought. Shirley said she’d be the Holly Queen and have very dark green, like the Ivy Queen’s, but with red berries for a border. Ivy had black and yellow stripes all round her edge.”

“Your crowd seem gone on red! Did you tell them about your blue? Or have you changed your mind?”

“I told them, and that’s when things went wrong,” Jansy said stormily. “Maureen said I was swanking, and Daphne and Shirley said I needn’t think I’d be Queen just because my mother was. I didn’t swank! I only said as much as the rest had done. Marigold, they were beasts!”

Littlejan looked thoughtful. “You’ll need to be careful. No, I’m sure you didn’t swank, but it might have been better not to say anything.”

“I couldn’t. They’d have said I was sure of being chosen, and so I wouldn’t tell.”

“It might have looked as if you felt sure,” Littlejan admitted. “Look here, Jan! It’s difficult for you, and if you show any sign of expecting or even wanting to be Queen, it will be worse. There’s sure to be a gang who

will say things like that about you, and later on about the twins. If they come to school in a year or two and look frightfully pleased with themselves, they'll have absolutely no chance of being Queens, ever; and they have had a lot of fuss made about them at home! Shall I talk to Daphne and Shirley and Maureen?"

"Oh, no!" Jansy cried, shocked. "They'd know I'd told you! Oh, Marigold, you mustn't!"

"Well, you did tell me. Didn't it feel a bit like giving them away?"

"No, because you're the Queen. I told the Queen, and that's all right."

"I could sit on them for you as the Queen. As Littlejan Fraser I'd have no right to do it. But I'm sure it would be better not. You must take no notice, that's all. They won't go on talking for ever about the Queens; they've far too much to do. So have you, for that matter."

"Oh, tons!" Jansy groaned. "I can't get through it all. I know I'll be bottom this term."

"Everybody will understand, if you are. They're all a lot older than you. But the Head must have thought you could do it. And there's cricket next spring; I want to see you really good. You will be, if you'll work, and I'm going to see that you do! Don't worry, Jan; they'll soon forget. But never, *never* give them any excuse to say you swank!"

"I won't. Thank you, Marigold." And Jansy crept away, a little comforted.

"Poor kid! I suppose it was sure to happen. Some little beast was bound to say that," Littlejan said to herself. "Fancy her coming to me! It makes me feel jolly old! I shall tell her to come again, if she's feeling bad; somebody'll need to comfort her. Pity I've closed my letter to Robin! It's not such ages since she was at school; she'll know how thrilled I felt. But next time will do. I think she'll understand."

She told the story to Mary next morning. "Did you hear Jansy and me talking last night, Mary-Dorothy?" And she described what had happened. "I was rather scared, for fear I'd say the wrong thing."

"I know," Mary assented. "It's terrifying to be relied on like that."

"Do you feel afraid, when people come to you for help? But you're different; you're grown-up, Mary!" Littlejan asked, astonished.

"Not so different, all the same," Mary said gravely.

"I felt an awful kid; and yet grown-up at the same time."

"Yes," Mary agreed. "You can help Jansy enormously, Marigold. She looks up to you. Don't let her down!"

"I'll try not to," Littlejan promised, and looked thoughtfully at Mary from time to time.

Her letters to Robin told presently of the half-term party of the Hamlet Club, held in place of the week-end dancing school of the year before. Mrs. Thistle, who had come to give the Club new dances, was busy with a young baby, her first daughter, born at about the same time as Maidlin's twins; but she promised to come for a week-end during the Christmas holidays and to bring little Theodora Karen. So in October the Club was content with a long afternoon and evening of dancing in the barn, with a picnic tea and supper. Joan, Rosamund, Maidlin, the President and the White Queen all came and took turns as M.C., and the new pairs of twins and the President's small daughter were introduced to the Club before being "parked" at the Hall, as the Countess said. When Maidlin was tired she went to care for "the girls," and sent Queen Honesty to dance; Rosamund released Hyacinth for a while and sat with Rosabel and Rosalin. Joan had been urged to bring her tiny girl to join the nursery party, but had decided that Christmas would be time enough for the Club to see Jillian Rose.

All this, and much more, Littlejan told to Robin, with constant news of Rob Quellyn. He had found relations in Scotland and was spending a while with them, but his possessions were still at the Hall and he considered it his home, so long as he stayed in Europe.

Presently there were Christmas plans to tell. Joan had invited a house-party and would have Jen's big boys, Andrew and Tony, as well as her own John. Jansy would go home to be with her family; Jen's nurse and younger children were asked, but it was decided they should remain at the Hall with Mary. Littlejan was urgently begged to come to Kentisbury, to be with her schoolgirl friend, Tansy Lillico, so that they could ride together in the park and woods, as the Countess did not feel like riding at present; and she went joyfully, for the Castle was a second home and she was the best of friends with the Earl, who had given her her beloved Chestnut.

Rob would spend Christmas in Scotland and would stay for the New Year parties and festivities. Mary, alone at the Hall except for the nurse and babies, hoped for a visit from her young married sister, Bidy Verdier, who had two small French girls, Madelon Marie and Marie-Rose; the second of these Mary had not seen, and she looked forward eagerly to having Bidy and the babies with her. At the last moment their cousin Ruth, who lived in Paris, asked if she might spend Christmas with them, as her husband had to make a hurried trip to New York; and to Mary's delight Ruth brought Mary Ruth and Bridget Rose, whom those at home had not seen, though Bidy had met them in France. This meant a linking-up of the family which brought great joy to Mary, who had felt cut off from the younger girls living abroad; and the Hall, far from having a lonely Christmas, was extremely

busy, with Rosamund and Maidlin driving over to see Bidy and Ruth, and to show their babies and invite them to their homes.

Robin, in the quietness of Quellyn, read of all these doings with interest and blessed Littlejan for the trouble she took in keeping her in touch with Abbey friends. Then came the tale of the Christmas week-end school and the performance of the Folk Play, with Littlejan taking her old part as the Fool and Jansy as Dame Dolly. Joan and Maidlin drove over with their babies to join in the dancing; Rosamund brought her twins to show to Mrs. Thistle, but chose to take care of the children and send Hyacinth to learn new dances. There was morris on Mrs. Thistle's programme, and the Countess flatly refused to be a morris man at the moment; but she watched and criticised and nursed Theodora Karen.

"I'm going to call my next after you, if I have another girl," Mrs. Thistle told her. "May I? Have you room for another godchild?"

"Plenty! I'll be proud! Another little Rose?"

"Tazy Rose, after myself and you. But not yet!" And Mrs. Thistle went to demonstrate "capers" to the Club.

"No, not yet," Rosamund agreed, laughing, as she watched her. "Oh, lovely! And Joan's are just as good. I almost envy them!"

Maidlin gave her a smile from the depths of her black eyes. "But not quite, Ros!"

"No, not quite," Rosamund assented.

Maidlin sang in "The Messiah" in the Albert Hall at Christmas, and Robin in North Wales tuned in to London and listened in delight.

"Her voice is better than ever. There's so much feeling in it," she said to her mother. "I wonder if she was thinking of the twins at home, when she sang about the lambs!" And she did not know she was voicing a thought which had come to many as Maidlin sang, "He shall feed His flock."

"It's a lovely voice," her mother agreed. "I'd like to meet her some day."

Letters came from Kenya, where Kenneth had taken Jen up-country and she was enjoying her first safari. But home pulled at her, and during March there came a jubilant letter, and Littlejan passed on the news to Robin.

"We're coming home. We may even be in time for May-day," Jen wrote excitedly. "It's not what we were told to do, but Ken seems so different, so well and so full of plans for what he wants to do at the Manor, that I made him go to see Sir Arthur Jones in Nairobi, who knew him years ago, to ask if it wouldn't be all right for us to come home, instead of going on to Ceylon and Australia. We'd already seen Sir Arthur as soon as we arrived and told him the whole story of the accident and of Ken's illness, so he understood. He examined him thoroughly and said he could see no reason why we shouldn't give up the rest of the trip, if we were anxious to go home. Ken's

perfectly fit and well, and so am I. He said there was no need for us to wait—for *anything*! So we're coming, just as fast as we can, and some day soon you'll have a cable asking you to send the car to Southampton. *I'm* full of plans, too! I can't have Rosamund catching up on my nursery like this. I don't mind Joan; she's been married for years longer than I have; it's all right for her to have five. But a chit—no, I mean a child, like Rosamund——! It isn't fair!"

"What does she mean?" Rosamund said indignantly. "Why this attack on me? I've only three! You can't count Roddy; he may be in my nursery, but he's my brother."

"But if you should have twins again, you'd have five," Maidlin pointed out, the hidden smile glimmering in her dark eyes.

"If I have two more, they ought to be boys this time, and Jen will explode with wrath. She's jealous already. I say, Maid! I'll tell you a secret."

"Not really?" Maidlin looked at her incredulously.

Rosamund nodded, her eyes full of amusement. "Don't tell Jen! The results might be serious. But there's one thing you may tell her, Maid," and she grew very grave. "Tell her what I told you the other day. I can't talk of it to any one else, even Brownie. But I had to tell you."

"But Geoffrey's quite well, isn't he?" Maidlin asked, her face troubled.

"Quite all right—just now. But—well, tell Brownie what I said to you. It will help her to understand."

CHAPTER TWENTY

A BRAVE LASS

"I'd like to go just terribly much, Mother." Robin looked up eagerly from a letter. "This is from Mary-Dorothy, asking me to go for May-day, to see the crowning and Littlejan's abdication. Could you spare me? Would it be fair?"

"I'd like you to go," Mrs. Brent said heartily. "You've helped splendidly all winter. Now go and enjoy the fun and dancing. Father is as well as he is ever likely to be; there's no reason why you shouldn't go. Will they have room for you? Don't they have a crowd of visitors?"

Robin turned to the letter again. "Mary says I may sleep in the Abbey, if I'd like. Mrs. Raymond will come to the Hall, and she'll bring Mrs. Fraser with her; she's Littlejan's mother, and she's staying with Mrs. Raymond—but everybody calls her Jandy Mac, and they call Mrs. Raymond Joan. Lady Joy won't be there, but I think the house will be full. I'd love to sleep in the Abbey again! I had only one night, and it wasn't moonlight; perhaps I'll have luck and get a full moon this time. And I'll see the dancing and all the ceremonies, and the new Queen. Littlejan says Jean has been chosen and she's taken Jansy Raymond as her maid. Marigold is going to have one of the small girls from the farm for her new maid—Susan, I think; she was the Countess's maid, but Lady Kentisbury won't be in the procession this time. The other one, Sally, was Lady Jen's maid, and they seem to think Lady Jen may be home in time to take part. Oh, I am thrilled! I do want to see it all! If you really can spare me, I'll love to go."

"I shall have Gwyneth to help me." Mrs. Brent smiled at the new owner of Moranedd, who had come back from the West Indies in time for Robin's twenty-first birthday.

"I suppose you couldn't come too, Gwyn?" Robin began. "You'd like to see the crowning. They'd make room for you, I know."

The black-haired girl turned from the window, where she had been looking out at the sea. "Not I! They haven't asked me. There'll be plenty to do here. Besides, Ivor Lloyd will be home. His ship's due at Holyhead on Saturday."

"Oh, good! Then of course you can't be away. He expects you to be here when he's at home."

"And I want to be," Gwyneth rejoined, for her friendship with Ivor Lloyd dated from their childhood and was steadily ripening into something

deeper. "Will that man of yours be at the Hall?"

Robin coloured. "He's not mine, and I don't know. They haven't said anything about him. But he said he'd like to see a May-day Festival, and he thinks a lot of Queen Marigold. He may come; he hasn't seen her being a Queen."

"How old is she?"

"Fifteen and a half, Gwyn."

"She could get married in two years."

Robin laughed at thought of Littlejan married. "He'll need to wait a good deal longer than two years, if he wants to marry Marigold."

"If he wants to marry you, why doesn't he write to you?"

"I don't know, of course. I can only guess," Robin said calmly. "But I don't think he does want to marry me, so why should he write? I had a note from him at Christmas; that's enough for a girl he doesn't want to marry. And as I don't want to marry him, why worry?"

Gwyneth gave her a sharp look. "Sure, Robin?"

"No." Robin still spoke quite calmly. "But that's what I think I feel at present. I liked him when I met him and while he was here, but I'm quite comfortable not to have him here, so I can't care very much, can I?"

Gwyneth gazed at her steadily for a long moment, and Robin returned the look quietly and without shrinking. Gwyneth shrugged her shoulders and turned to the window again, as if she expected to see Ivor Lloyd's ship on its way to Holyhead, and Robin looked at her mother.

Mrs. Brent nodded approval. "When do they ask you to go?"

Robin sighed in relief at this understanding sympathy. "On Wednesday. The crowning is on Friday. I shall take my red dancing frock and shoes, in case there's a party for everybody."

She reached Paddington on Wednesday evening and changed into a train for High Wycombe. The car from the Hall was waiting, and Littlejan Fraser was on the platform.

She hurled herself on Robin. "Jolly nice of you to come! It's going to be marvellous! Oh, isn't it fun? Lady Jen's coming home to-night! Henderson has gone to meet them—and they may be at the Hall when we get back!"

"Oh, that's splendid! Another Queen for your procession! She'll go as a Queen, won't she?"

"Yes, she's promised. We need her, for we can't have Lady Joy, or Wild Rose, or Queen Stripes, or the Countess." And Littlejan looked mysterious and whispered in her ear.

"Gosh!" said Robin, and began to ask questions.

As they reached the Hall they found a big car standing at the door.

"They've arrived!" Littlejan cried. "Oh, good! Lady Jen will be hugging her babies! Auntie Joan and Maidlin are here to meet them and give them tea, before they all go home to the Manor."

In the big entrance-hall there was excitement and talk and laughter. Kenneth, looking brown and well, was answering and asking questions. Joan and Maidlin were trying to tell him everything at once, but they turned to greet Robin warmly as she came in with Littlejan.

"Hallo, Marigold!" Kenneth teased her. "About time for you to retire into private life, isn't it?"

"I expect I shall still have a good deal to do. Jean needs a lot of backing up, and I'm her Queen-godmother. Oh, here's dear Lady Jen! Are the babies all right? We've taken care of them beautifully for you!"

"You have. They look splendid. Run up and inspect them, Ken. I feel better now I've seen them." Jen paused on the wide staircase and surveyed them all. "Oh, here's the Robin! Nice of you to come, heiress! I hear the other Robin is expected too. We shall call ourselves 'Robins' Nest.' Joan and Maidie, I hardly saw you; I rushed straight to my babies. You look jolly well, both of you. Where's Ros? Didn't she care enough to drive over to greet me? Haughty peeress! I shan't speak to her at the coronation!"

"You certainly won't!" Joan laughed. "Carry on, Maid! We promised to leave this to you."

"Oh—Jen! Do you remember when Ros came home from Switzerland after losing her mother? She said exactly those same words about you: 'Didn't Jen care enough to come?' You couldn't come because Andrew was just born; Ros had to go to see you. Now you must go to see her." Maidlin stopped, breathless with excitement.

Jen stared down at her. "Maidie! You *don't* mean——?"

"Rosamund has twins again—three days ago. It was in the papers, but of course you wouldn't see them."

Jen was down in the hall in two leaps. "She *can't*! It isn't possible! It's too soon!" She gave one of her old shrieks of excitement.

"Oh, no, it's not," Joan said calmly. "Rosabel and Rosalin are ten and a half months old; and these new babies arrived two months before they were expected. Rosamund says she can't quite believe it yet, but there they are."

"Are they all right?" Jen demanded. "Not minus any parts of them?"

"Quite all right, and so is Ros. I've seen them," Maidlin assured her. "They're tiny, but they're very pretty."

"Then I call it indecent! It's too bad! It's a shame!" Jen gave a wail of wrath. "She's only been married three years and—five children! As many as I have; she's caught me up! It's—it's intemperate, that's what it is!"

Joan and Maidlin broke into helpless laughter. “We knew you’d be upset, Jenny-Wren!”

“Upset! I’m raging mad! I shall shake the Countess as soon as I can get near her! Five! She is mean!”

“Then I shall ’phone and say you mustn’t be allowed to see her,” Maidlin said. “They’re lovely babies, Jen.”

An awful thought occurred to the afflicted Lady Marchwood. “*Which?*” she asked breathlessly. “Don’t tell me Ros has had two boys?”

Maidlin eased her mind quickly. “Two more little girls. Ros calls them her boarding-school. She’s going to send them out for croc. walks, two by two, in the park.”

Jen relaxed suddenly, then dropped into a chair, and laughed till she cried. “Four girls in a year! It serves Rosamund right. She wanted lots of girls, and she’s getting them. What is she going to call them this time?”

“The elder is Rosanna Maidlin; that’s been decided for a long while,” Maidlin began proudly.

“Lady Rosanna! Oh, that’s pretty! And Number Two? I still simply don’t believe it!”

“Rosilda Mary. Mary-Dorothy is her godmother.”

“Ros—what? Rosamund made that up! Why not Rosalind?”

“Too much like Rosalin,” Joan said. “It’s another old family name, Jen. Ros found it in the ancient records. It’s very pretty.”

“Ros thinks it was once Rosehilda. It dates from the Crusades or earlier,” Maidlin added.

“Rosanna and Rosilda! And Rosabel and Rosalin! Gosh! Rosamund does things wholesale, doesn’t she?” And Jen broke into laughter again. “As soon as they can all walk they’ll look like quads! The President will be sorry she wished twins on to the Countess! Is she going on like this every year?”

“Oh, no!” Joan assured her. “The doctors won’t allow it. They insist she must take a rest for at least two years.”

“Oh, good! I should think so,” Jen said, and added triumphantly, “Then I shall keep ahead of her, after all. I’m determined to be the one with the biggest family.”

“You’ll have a chance to keep ahead, anyway.” Joan looked amused. “Rosamund’s doctor says she is to take a holiday, and ride, and dance, and travel, if she likes, and do all the things she’s been giving up lately.”

“She won’t travel. She won’t go away from her crêche,” Jen grinned. “She’ll need to find another Hamlet Queen as an extra nurse. Oh, what a shock! I’m exhausted! Didn’t everybody shriek when they heard the news?”

“You certainly did,” Joan smiled at her. “Maid has promised to tell the Countess exactly what you said.”

“Can I ’phone her? Will she speak to me herself? Then I shall ring her up to-night and tell her what I think of her goings-on.”

“She’s hoping you will, I’m quite sure,” Joan agreed.

Jen looked at Maidlin. “What about you, Mrs. Robertson? Are you going to have more twins too?”

Maidlin smiled at her. “No, Lady Marchwood. Jock won’t hear of any more family for some time. He says he wants to enjoy the girls without any little brothers or sisters butting in and taking up everybody’s attention.”

“That’s one way to look at it; perhaps Jock’s right. I expect your hands are quite full enough.”

“Quite! The babes are all over the place. It takes Lindy and Honesty and me all our time to cope with them. Jen! And everybody! I want to tell you something Rosamund said to me.”

The others looked at her in surprise, for Maidlin’s tone was suddenly very serious.

“She wouldn’t mind any of you knowing; she definitely told me to tell Jenny-Wren. But she can’t speak of it herself, so don’t talk to her about it.”

“Maidie, what are you getting at?” Jen cried.

“Just this. Ros feels she must have her family quickly and close together, if she’s to have them at all,” Maidlin said, very gravely. “She likes children and she wants a big family.”

“She’s getting it,” Jen murmured. “But do you mean——? Maidie, you don’t mean——?”

“That she doesn’t think she’s likely to have Geoffrey for very many years. He’s quite well; just now, but if his health fails again it will be difficult to build it up a second time,” Maidlin said steadily. “They’ve faced it; they’ve talked it over together; and they’ve decided, so long as they both keep well, to have their family now, in case they can’t have it later. And if it means that Ros has to bring them up alone, she’s prepared to do it. She isn’t afraid even of that. I think she’s a brick! That’s why she has had these children so soon after the first twins, even though she thinks it’s possible Geoffrey may not live to see his family grow up.”

Her friends looked at her in silence.

“I think Ros is very brave,” Maidlin said quietly.

“Oh, so do I!” Jen exclaimed. “I won’t say another word. If she likes to have more twins by Christmas—and even if they’re boys——!”

“Oh, not by Christmas!” Joan said. “It may not happen, Jen and Maidie. Geoffrey may live for years. But it does help us to understand and sympathise with Rosamund. I had no idea she was carrying such a burden.”

“She’s very happy about all her babies,” Maidlin said firmly. “She’d like to have another little boy, but she is so pleased with her crowd of girls.”

“What does My Lord say about them?” Jen asked.

“He’s pleased and proud, and so glad Ros is all right. If they don’t have another boy it won’t matter; they have both Geoffrey-Hugh and Roddy. You’ll be allowed to see Ros soon, if you promise not to excite her, Jen. I went yesterday, and Jandy Mac’s having her turn to-day. She’s staying with Joan, you know.”

“She was to have stayed at Kentisbury,” Joan observed. “Jandy says when she comes home to stay with anybody they immediately have babies. I did it two years ago, when she came for the first time.”

“I’ll promise not to shake the Countess, considering what Maidie has told us. But I shall not speak to her at the coronation, that’s certain! She’s a brave lass, and I shall tell her so to-night,” Jen said. “But I shall also tell her she’s a greedy one! Oh, Ken! Did they tell you? No? Then come and hear the news! Rosamund has more twins—girls again!”

Kenneth’s jaw dropped. “Gosh!” he said. “Really?”

“And truly. Born three days ago. Won’t there be a mob of little Ladies when they begin to grow up?”

“Hordes of ’em. The Countess evidently believes in quantity.”

“Quality, too,” Maidlin said stoutly. “They’re small, but they’ll grow, and they’re beautiful babes, just like all the rest.”

“A regular school of little yellow-haired Kaness!” And Kenneth shook his head sadly. “My dear!” to Jen. “We can’t allow this. She’ll beat our family record, if you don’t hurry up.”

“I’ll see that she doesn’t,” Jen declared. “And, anyway, hers are only girls. I want my morris side: six boys. We’ve got half of them already. We’ve wired for Andrew and Tony to come home to-morrow,” she said to Joan. “We must see them, even if term has just begun. I shall have my page at the coronation again, unless I can persuade Rosemary to be my maid.”

“Andrew’s getting too big. I don’t suppose he’ll do it,” Joan remarked.

“In a few years we shall all be able to borrow little maids from Rosamund!” And Jen went off into a shout of laughter again. “All the same, she is a brave lass, and I shall certainly tell her so.”

“Jock calls them ‘Rosamund’s Double-Two’—in dominoes, you know.” Maidlin’s smile showed in her dark eyes.

“Double-Two! Not bad. It sounds like your Jock. Does he still call his daughters ‘the girls’?”

“Always,” Maidlin assured her. “Unless he wants to tease me, and then he calls them Madgie-Joy and Dolly-Rose.”

That evening, when her babies and their nurse were once more safely at home, Jen rang up the Castle and was put through to the Countess herself.

“Oh, Ros! Jen speaking. Are you all right?”

“Quite, thank you, Jenny-Wren. I’m glad to hear your voice again. Are you going to scold me?”

“I said at first that I’d shake you, but I’ve forgiven you. How are your Double-Two?”

“You’ve copied that from Maidie’s Jock. They’re all splendid. The new ones were very little at first, but they’ll soon grow.”

“You are going it, aren’t you?”

Rosamund laughed. “Are you more jealous than ever?”

“I should have been, if you’d had two small Honourables.”

“Honourables? Oh, yes—boys. Perhaps I’ll have them some day.”

“When may I come to see the Little Pawns?”

“Little Fawns?”

“That’s quite good, but I said Pawns. You live in a Castle; you’re the Queen, and Geoffrey’s the King. You’d better send Roddy into the Church and make him your Bishop, and Hugh will be your Knight. At this rate, you’ll soon have your row of pawns. I shall call the girls your Little Pawns.”

“Call them anything you like! I’ll tell Geoffrey—and Tansy Lillico; they’re our chess experts. We’re teaching the boys to say the new names; you can’t say ‘Baby’ when there are two! Rosanna is easy, but Hugh sticks at Rosilda. His best try so far is Rosidilda.”

“I should call them Baby One and Baby Two. Are you sure you didn’t invent Rosilda?”

“It really is in the family records. Isn’t it pretty? There’s Rosella too; I’m keeping that in reserve for next time.”

“Next time! Aren’t you satisfied yet?”

“Not nearly satisfied. I can hear Rosilda beginning to murmur about her supper. She’s always the first to speak.”

“I’ll say good-night. I just rang up to tell you I consider you are greedy. But all the same, you’re a brave lass, Rosamunda, and I’m proud of you.”

“Maid has been talking,” Rosamund said, as she laid down the receiver, looking thoughtful but well pleased, for Jen’s good opinion meant much to her. “Brownie has said that before. It always cheers me immensely.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE QUEEN JEAN IS CROWNED

Robin glanced at the dark-haired person who had taken the chair next to hers, in the back row under the gallery. The big school hall was filling with visitors in the seats around the walls; the galleries held girls in white frocks; the centre of the floor was empty.

Then Robin looked a second time. "Oh! You must be Littlejan's mother! You are like her! Does everybody say so?"

Her companion laughed. "I'm used to being recognised as the Queen's mother! Girls have been looking at me and giggling ever since I arrived. I'm Mrs. Fraser, but the clan at the Abbey call me by my old school nickname, Jandy Mac."

"I've heard them say it," Robin responded, eyeing her in delight. "I'm staying with them; I'm sleeping in the Abbey, for a night or two, while you and Mrs. Raymond and Maidlin Robertson and all the husbands and babies are at the Hall. They didn't want me to go, but they're such a family party that I thought it was better."

"You were shy and ran away," Janice Fraser agreed. "I think really you wanted an excuse to go into the Abbey again. Was that it?"

"Something like that. But I knew you'd want to talk over old times and past coronations, and I thought I might be in the way."

"You're the one they call the heiress, aren't you? I've heard about you from Littlejan's letters; for her age she's a really splendid letter-writer."

"I know. She's been writing to me all winter, telling me everything about the family. They call me that because I inherited Plas Quellyn, in North Wales," Robin explained. "At one time Lady Quellyn thought it should have been Sir Ivor's, but she's forgiven me now; she's been very kind about it. Isn't Marigold glad to have you here to-night?"

"She's frightfully bucked," Janice said solemnly. "And you can guess I am! But I feel in a sort of dream. Exactly eighteen years ago I sat on this same chair—well, on the same spot! I can't answer for the chair—and saw Joy Shirley, wearing a bright green train, crown Joan, wearing violet. I expect to see them come in and do it all again. And yet it's my girl who will go up there and be crowned with forget-me-nots and crown the new Queen! It doesn't seem real."

"Marigold has been a good Queen, everyone says," Robin ventured.

“She’s enjoyed it thoroughly, and I rather think the school has enjoyed her. Here’s Miss Macey; I must speak to her. She was so very kind to me eighteen years ago. She’s retiring in a year or so; I’m overjoyed that Littlejan has had her as Head for at least part of her school life, and for her time as Queen.”

Mary-Dorothy slipped into her seat next to Robin, with a reassuring smile. “All’s going well. The new Queen looks white and frightened, but Marigold is scolding her and says she’ll be all right; she’s a shy child, though she’s so tall. Marigold herself isn’t the least nervous; she’s enjoying the occasion! And she’s so happy to have her mother here.”

“What about Lady Jen? Has her little girl come, or has she brought her big boy?”

“The boys refused to come. They say crowning a May-Queen is girls’ stuff.” Mary smiled. “Rosemary has been coaxed or bribed to come; I think she has been promised a kitten for her very own—a ginger kitten, to match the new Queen’s hair; her nickname is Ginger Jean. Rosemary’s passionately fond of animals; Jen says she’ll have to train her as a vet. She’s there, very shy and quiet, not speaking to any one and hardly looking up. But she knows most of the Queens, and they’re being kind and leaving her alone.”

“Will you let me see your new little girl?” Robin asked of Janice, as she came back to her seat.

“Cecily Rose? Of course, if you’ll come to the house. Littlejan will love to show you her sister.”

“Littlejan is very proud of her sister.” Mary smiled. “Here come the dancers!”

The hall was filling with girls in vivid frocks. The violin struck up “The Comical Fellow”, and the dancers sprang into lines.

Standing in the gangway between the seats was a fair girl holding a violin. As Robin looked up at her she said, “I’m going to relieve Margia Lane presently. I often play for them. I’ve only just arrived; I’ve come by car from London.” She turned to Janice. “I hear you’re the mother of Queen Marigold, and I can see the likeness. I have a little Marigold of my own, but in her case it really is her name. She’s three years old. I’m Maribel Marchwood; I married a cousin of the family at the Manor, and I have a little Micky, or Michael, just a year old. My husband is over there, talking to Jack Raymond and the Earl of Kentisbury, and Dr. Robertson, and to somebody else whom I don’t know.”

Robin knew very well who was the fifth in the group. She had known the moment he entered the hall, with a sort of nervous thrill which had startled her and had drawn her eyes to him in the doorway. She had looked

forward calmly to the chance of meeting Rob Quellyn at the Abbey, but now that the time had come she felt anything but calm. And she knew beyond any doubt that her life would be rich if they came together, but that it would be starved if she had to live it out alone.

But this was no place for such thoughts. Later, perhaps, alone in the Abbey——!

“Here come the Queens,” said Maribel Marchwood, and went to join Margia Lane near the platform.

The procession, led by the White Queen and then by the Golden President, had no Strawberry or Green Queens, as Marguerite and Joy were in New York. Joan, the Violet Queen, followed the President; the Blue Queen, who should have come next, had long since left the town. But Honesty was there, in her silver and dark purple train, for the experienced nurse at the Manor had delightedly taken charge of Maidlin’s little girls for the evening. The Striped Queen, Bee, and the Wild Rose Queen, Barbara, were in New York with Joy; and the Red Rose Queen, Rosamund, was necessarily absent; but Jen, in her Beech-Brown robe, was the first of a line of Queens less broken than the earlier ones. Rosemary Marchwood, a quiet little girl, with beautiful deep brown eyes and short dark hair, and wearing a yellow wreath and girdle, carried her mother’s train, her gaze fixed shyly on its flowers and leaves—cowslips, daffodils, laburnum—“little yellow things that dance,” as Jen had said when the decoration was discussed; and more than one onlooker commented on the contrast she made to her mother’s fairness. But Rosemary’s thoughts were on the ginger kitten who was to be her very own.

Maidlin, in her primrose and green, was followed by Ivy, Clover, Bluebell, and Poppy Queens; after the Gray Queen came Hyacinth, in her pastel shades of blue and pink. She had been besieged by a crowd, begging to hear about the new twins at the Castle, and had laughingly told how the Rose Queen had insisted that she must come and tell everything she could.

“We’re sending for Lilac to come and help us, as soon as her course is finished,” she explained. “So there will be another Queen at the Castle.”

Lilac was still at college and could not be present. The Heather Queen was followed by Mirry, in forget-me-not blue; and then came Littlejan, looking tall in her long white gown, a faded wreath on her dark hair, her glowing orange train held proudly by Susan Edwards from Bell’s Farm.

Robin heard a little gasp at her side, and looked quickly at Mrs. Fraser. “Marigold looks quite beautiful to-night,” she said. “She has such a lovely colour.”

“She’s over-excited,” Marigold’s mother murmured. “But—yes, she does look nice! I hadn’t realised she would, or indeed could, look just like

that.”

Littlejan knelt before Mirry, who removed the faded wreath and replaced it with a thick crown of forget-me-nots—her last public act as Queen. She slipped into the background, and Marigold stood alone and bowed to the cheering crowd, with a radiant glance at her mother.

“Speech!” cried the girls; and silence fell.

“How could I make a speech while you were making such a row?” the Queen demanded indignantly. “Thanks just frightfully much, everybody! I’ve had such a lovely year that I wish you could all be Queens too. I’m afraid you can’t, but I’m going to hand over to another Queen, and I know she’ll be a very jolly one. She’s quite terrified, but she’ll get over it. Thank you all again, very much indeed!”

And she came down the long hall to fetch her successor.

“I’m an awful ass!” Robin heard Mrs. Fraser whisper angrily, under cover of the cheering which followed Marigold as she went.

Robin looked at her and saw tears in her eyes. “I don’t blame you, when it’s your girl,” she murmured.

“That’s why.” Jandy blinked fiercely. “That they should all shout like that for my girl! I shall tell her she made me weep. It almost knocked me over. I’m all right now. Oh, what a pretty new Queen!”

“The lovely soft colours of her train suit her,” Robin responded. “Do you see Jansy Raymond being her maid?”

“I do indeed. The colours suit Jansy too. I’m her godmother; I’m very fond of Jansy.”

Littlejan came up the hall again, leading Jean, whose wide blue eyes were frightened. Her red-gold hair was uncovered and shone in the bright lights overhead; her train of lavender blue had a green border and lining, with delicate rosemary flowers painted on the green and dark rosemary twigs on the lavender.

“This Queen won’t make a speech,” Mary murmured, taking her place again; she had slipped out, at Littlejan’s earnest request, to keep Jean company in the dressing-room during those nervous moments when she had been left alone. “But she’ll make a good Queen. The girls like her, and Marigold has definitely trained her, in the hope she would be her successor. She set her heart on a Rosemary Queen a year ago.”

“She’s very pretty, and she holds herself well, although she’s so tall.” Janice was watching Jean’s progress up the hall through the cheering crowd.

“She’s St. Andrew in the Folk Play each year. She plays the part well,” Mary said.

Jean curtsied to the Queens on the platform, then knelt on a cushion, and Marigold crowned her with white flowers, and stepped back and left her

alone.

Shyly Jean bowed to the girls, and stood for a moment, and bowed again. Then thankfully she took the central throne, with Littlejan on one side and the President on the other. Jansy arranged the green and lavender train and then sat on the cushion at her feet. In answer to an appealing look from the new Queen, Margia Lane and Maribel Marchwood struck up "Haste to the Wedding" and the dancing began again.

"That's safely over!" Littlejan sighed in relief to Joan, sitting on her right hand. "I was afraid Rosemary would faint or be sick!"

Joan smiled. "When you call her that it sounds like Rosemary Marchwood."

"Jean will have left school before Rosemary comes. She's only seven, isn't she?"

"Yes, she won't come to school for a year or two yet."

"Queen Jean is sixteen. She says she's going to have training as a children's nurse, so that if one of the Rose Queen's nurses gets married she'll be ready for the job, if the Countess will have her."

"I'm sure Rosamund would like to have Queen Jean, some day," Joan responded.

Presently the Queens left the platform and went to speak to friends, and the girls thronged round Jean to admire her train, and round Littlejan to congratulate her on her speech and on her reign. She made her way through the crowd as soon as she could and went across to her mother.

"Mother! How do you like me?" And she lifted her long dress and curtsied low. "The Primrose Queen taught me to do this."

"You do it very prettily, and I like you very much to-night," Jandy assured her. "Your train is a lovely colour and I don't wonder the girls call you Marigold. But I'm stunned to have such a grown-up daughter. You look so tall."

"That's only my robes. We're going to undress and fling on dancing frocks and join in the party. You won't think I'm grown-up then. It's terribly hard to sit still while there's dancing going on! Didn't Queen Jean look marvellous?"

"She looked very pretty and almost as dignified as Joan did eighteen years ago."

Littlejan gave her a quick laughing look. "D'you feel you've gone back eighteen years?"

"I did, till I saw you, daughter."

Queen Marigold whirled away to change her frock. "Come on, Susan! Come and undress me! I want to dance!"

The other Queens were disappearing also. The Club massed together to sing folk-songs to entertain the guests, and then fell to dancing again.

The maids, in short white frocks and girdles of their Queens' colours, did not trouble to change, but came running out as soon as they had helped their ladies to lay aside their robes. In a moment the Queens followed; Littlejan in brilliant green, Maidlin in gold, Jen in vivid blue, Joan in soft grey. They made up sets among themselves, to join in "Meeting Six" and the Gloucestershire "Three Meet," and every corner of the big hall was filled with whirling rings of girls.

"What a fascinating sight!" Jandy turned to Robin, but found her gone, and presently saw her dancing gaily with Mary Devine.

"I can't stand this! I'm not so old—much younger than Mary-Dorothy!" And Janice flung aside her coat and scarf and ran to join the dancers. "I haven't proper shoes, but nobody will have time to see my feet! Oh, Joan! I couldn't bear it! You all looked so happy! Tell me what to do!"

"These new dances are very easy." Joan took her hand. "I'll take care of you. The Club will be thrilled to know that the ex-Queen's mother has danced with them. This is the 'Huntsman's Chorus'—couldn't be easier! I'll tell you what to do as we go along; you'll know it long before we become first couple. Oh, good! There's my Jack joining in, with your Littlejan; just now and then Jack condescends to dance. And Kenneth's been dragged in by Jen; Ken's a dancer all right. Lord Kentisbury can't dance, and Jock Robertson still prefers to watch Maidie; he says he never sees anybody else, if his small wife is dancing. But what has become of Rob Quellyn? I saw him during the crowning. He's very fond of your Littlejan. I hoped he'd try a turn with her."

Janice, breathless with the dance, had no time to wonder what had become of Rob Quellyn. She kept her place and soon grasped what was expected of her, and went bravely down the middle and up again, and then back to the bottom of the set to make an arch for every one else to pass through; but it was only when they were resting afterwards that she remembered what Joan had said.

"What a jolly dance! Thank you, Joan-Queen! That was fun! What was it you said just now? Fond of my girl?"

"Oh, not in that way!" Joan laughed. "I rather think the pretty heiress is going to be his girl. But he hasn't said so, and she looks quite unconscious."

"The Robin girl? I've been sitting with her. We'll wish them luck! What a suitable couple they'd make!"

"That's the trouble, if there is any trouble. It's so suitable and so obvious that they're both frightened the other one won't believe they are in earnest. What a sentence! But I don't know any other way to put it," Joan declared.

“That’s what Maidie says about them, but she may not be right. Here’s Jenny-Wren. Don’t dance too much, Brownie!”

“All right, granny—as I once said to Joy!” Jen retorted. “I’m not dancing this one,” as the rings of “Spaniard” went whirling round. “Aren’t my boys and your John young asses to miss it? They say they haven’t any use for country-dancing,” she said to Janice. “They’ll come back to it later; it’s the result of school.”

“They like morris, especially with sticks,” Joan remarked. “If we could only tame Jock Robertson and turn him into a morris-dancer we could make a set for them, for Kenneth and Jack are quite good at morris.”

“Or the new boy, Rob Quellyn. Couldn’t you rouse him to try?” Janice asked. “Then, with the three small boys, you’d have your six men.”

“The heiress might be able to work him up to it,” Jen observed. “I shall have to provide more boys, evidently. If I can only manage five we’ll take in Joan’s John to make up the set.”

“Rob has disappeared,” Joan said. “I can’t see him anywhere.”

“Has Robin disappeared too?” Jen grinned.

“No, she’s dancing with Jansy. I must say she doesn’t look as if her heart is deeply touched.”

But as “Spaniard” came to an end, Robin’s heart was like lead, in spite of her dancing feet, for she knew as well as any one that Rob Quellyn was no longer in the hall. And he had not spoken to her. She had been so sure, after each dance, that he would come.

Was it, perhaps, that he did not want to meet her in a crowd? Then tomorrow he would come into the Abbey to find her.

Looking very grave, Robin watched as a big ring formed round as many of the Queens as could be induced to make a circle in the centre, and “Sellenger’s Round” was danced, with Ginger Jean, Littlejan, and Mirry as the maypole. Then cars had to be sought for the drive back to the Abbey, and Robin found herself with Janice, Jansy and Joan, being carried homewards by Jack Raymond. And still there was no sign of Rob Quellyn.

“Tired, heiress?” Joan asked. “It’s at this stage we wish the crowning could be held in the barn. But it has to be at school.”

“Oh, yes! All those people couldn’t come to the barn. No, I don’t think I’m tired, thank you. It’s been a lovely evening.” Robin roused herself and stoutly refused to let her puzzled anxiety be seen. If no one else had noticed that one of the party had disappeared, it was not for her to point it out.

“Are you quite sure you want to be put down at the Abbey?” Joan smiled at her.

“Oh, yes, please! I love your Abbey!”

“I know, but on this particular night, when we shall be talking over the crowning, it seems so lonely for you.”

“I’d rather, please,” Robin said quietly, and did not add: “That’s why. I know you’d be kind and try to draw me in, but the Queens are your friends and you’ll want to talk about them, and I should be an outsider. It’s much better not.”

“Here you are, then! Have you your torch? Sleep well, and don’t dream of Queens and dances!”

“Good-night!” cried Jansy.

“Good-night, heiress!” smiled Janice Fraser.

The car drove on to the Hall, and Robin, feeling very serious and rather lonely, went into the Abbey.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE MYSTERY OF ROB QUELLYN

“He’ll come in the morning,” Robin said to herself. “But perhaps he doesn’t want to come. I may have to make up my mind to that.”

She wandered through the moonlit ruins, revelling in their beauty in the strange white light, her thoughts a jumble of tunes, colours, Queens and snatches of talk; but behind lay the great question—did Rob really not care even to say, “Good-evening, heiress!” when they had not met for months? Or—Robin coloured and went into her little room and closed the door firmly—did he care too much for a mere greeting? Did he want to say more than “Good-evening?”

“When he came in I felt like hiding, because I knew if he spoke to me then I should give myself away,” she acknowledged, sitting on the edge of her bed. “I was glad all the crowning was going on; it gave me time to calm down. Could he have felt the same? I could understand that. But I can’t know; I’ve no right to think it. I can only wait. It’s very difficult! If he felt as I did, and if he still can’t make up his mind—oh, it is hard! I could almost say, ‘Bother Quellyn!’ I believe that’s what is in the way. Almost, but not quite!”—as a picture of her grey Welsh castle rose before her eyes.

“I think I shall go home,” she said to herself in the morning, after an uneasy night, as she scattered crumbs for the faithful robin, who still considered the Abbey his special territory. “I’ve done all I came here for. I’ve watched the crowning, and I’ve danced with the Club again. I’ve seen everybody; I’ve even seen *him*. That was one of the things I came for,” she confessed to herself. “If nothing happens to-day, I’d better go back to Mother. I mean, of course, if Rob doesn’t come; if we don’t meet. It will be too difficult.”

She had just finished dressing when Littlejan called to her from the cloisters. “Hi, Robin! Out of bed?”

“Rather! Come in, Marigold! You’re as good as an early cup of tea.”

Littlejan sat on the bed and gazed at her. “Robin fach!”

“I taught you that, didn’t I? You say it quite well. What is it, Marigold?”

“Something so odd!”

“I’d like to hear about it,” Robin responded.

“Did you see Rob, hiding in a corner, last night?” the ex-Queen eyed her keenly.

Robin bent to fold her pyjamas.

“I did. He was with the Earl and the rest of your menfolk.”

“Yes. Well, he’s run away.”

Robin swung round and stared at her. “Didn’t he go back to the Hall with you after the dancing?”

“No. He came to the car, as I was getting in with Maidlin and Dr. Robertson and Honesty, and he said: ‘I say, folks, sorry! But I’ve got to get back to town. I’ve an appointment early to-morrow; I meant to dodge it, but I’ve been thinking it over and it wouldn’t be wise, so I’d better see the chap. Apologise for me, won’t you?’ ”

“Gosh!” Robin gazed at her. “And did he go off?”

“Right away. Dr. Jock called after him: ‘We’ll send you up to town early to-morrow,’ but Rob just waved his hand and disappeared into the dark, going towards the station. Dr. Jock said: ‘Silly ass! Shall I go after him?’ and Maidlin said, in her quiet way: ‘No, leave him alone. I believe I understand. I was watching him while the maypole was brought in, and—well, he wasn’t looking at the maypole.’ She looked at me, and I said: ‘I was watching him too. He was looking at Robin.’ Do you mind?”

“I’d rather you’d tell me.” Robin stood by the lancet window, staring out at the garth. “I think you understand, Marigold. You didn’t write those splendid letters all winter without a reason.”

“I wanted you to know about him, and I told him anything I could about you,” Littlejan admitted. “You’ll get married to him some day, won’t you?”

“I might, if he asked me. Just now he seems to have run away from me.”

“Do you think that’s why he did it? Dr. Jock started the car, and we came home. Maidlin said something quietly to him and I heard him say, ‘Right! I’m sure you know best, but I still think he’s a silly ass.’ I was in the back with Mary-Dorothy and Honesty, and we didn’t say any more. I’d have talked about him to Mary, but not to Honesty. I like her; but I don’t know her well enough to talk secrets.”

“Were people very much surprised to hear he had gone?”

“Oh, terribly! Auntie Joan and Mother came in just after us; and Uncle Jack said: ‘What have you done with Rob Quellyn?’ So we told him, and then they sent Jansy and me off to bed. I expect they talked a lot after we’d gone.”

Robin stood silent for a time. Then she said quietly, “Thanks for coming to tell me. I thought I might see him to-day; it’s better to know he’s gone.”

“Why do you think he did it?”

“I can’t possibly tell,” Robin said. “There are at least two good reasons, and there may be more. There’s nothing whatever to tell us which is the real reason. It’s no use talking about it.”

“Are you feeling bad about him?” Littlejan asked anxiously.

Robin laughed a little. “No, Marigold, but I’m bothered. I’d like to know why he went off in such a hurry.”

“There’s a secret,” Littlejan said slowly. “He told me not to tell any one. It’s about his work; his pictures,” she explained, as Robin looked at her quickly. “Not about—anybody.”

“Oh! You told me he was studying, and meeting artists in London.”

“They like his pictures terribly much.”

“I’m glad. But if he told you not to tell, you’d better not talk about it.”

“No. I guess not,” and Littlejan rose. “Will you come to the house after breakfast? I want you to see Cecily.”

“Your little sister? Or the Abbey bell?”

“Our baby. I’m frightfully keen on her.”

Robin smiled. “I’ll come. You’ll show her to me yourself, won’t you?”

“Rather! Did the robin come to sing to you?”

“He did; and I gave him some crumbs.”

“Two robins in the Abbey!” said Littlejan, as she went off. “But it ought to be three,” she added to herself. “I wish Rob hadn’t gone away like that!”

She showed her sister to Robin with great pride, later in the day. Cecily Rose was nine months old, the same age as Maidlin’s little girls, and had blue eyes and sandy-fair hair.

“She isn’t like you, Marigold,” said Robin.

“No, she’s like Father; the only one of us. The boys are dark, like Mother and me. They’re at school now, with Lady Jen’s boys, but we had the holidays together, so I’ve seen plenty of them! I hadn’t seen Alistair and Alan for years. Wasn’t Aunt Joan an angel to ask all the lot of us?”

“I’m sure she had a crowded house, but I believe she likes her house full of people.” And Robin looked at Janice and Joan, who were watching Littlejan with the baby.

“Right, heiress! She does,” Joan said heartily. “We had a lovely noisy time.”

Janice laughed. “I hope some day you’ll come to Ceylon and let me return your kindness. I hoped Jen was coming, after Christmas, but she rushed home instead.”

“If I find I need as big a change of scene as all that, I shall certainly come to you, Jandy. There’s no place, and no person, I’d rather go to see.”

“What a lovely necklace, Marigold!” Robin looked at the chain of graded ivory beads which Littlejan was wearing.

“I put them on to show you. Aren’t they too marvellous? Lady Jen brought them from Kenya, and she has some for Elizabeth and Margaret too. They’re our special presents, because we found Michael,” Littlejan explained.

“Oh, I remember that promise! They’re beautiful.”

Robin sat thoughtful for a few minutes. Then she looked up at Joan. “I’ve been thinking I had better go back to Mother. Would you think me very rude, if I cut short my visit? She’s been looking so tired lately, but I can’t make her rest or go away for a change. She wouldn’t believe I could do all that Father needs.”

“You have nurses for him, haven’t you?” Joan asked quickly.

“Oh yes! He has to be lifted and we couldn’t do it. We have plenty of help, and they’re very nice and kind. But Mother won’t leave Father, except for a little while when I’m there to take her place. She wanted me to come; and I wanted so much to see a coronation! But I feel I ought to go back to her now.” Her eyes met Joan’s steadily and bravely.

“I wonder what lies behind that quiet straight look of hers?” Joan said to herself. Aloud she replied, “You must do as you think right, but if I were you I should stay for a few days and have a real rest. Take the week-end, at any rate! We’re going home this afternoon, and Littlejan and Jansy are coming too, but they’ll be here again for school on Monday. Maid and her crowd are going back to The Pallant, so Mary-Dorothy will be lonely. Why don’t you keep her company?”

“I’d like that,” Robin admitted gratefully.

“Mary is really your hostess.” Joan smiled at her. “Jandy and Jack and I, and Maidie and Jock, are all visitors. Maid must bring her children for you to see how much they’ve grown. They were just born when you were here before, weren’t they?”

“Oh, I’d like to see them! I thought perhaps they were at the Manor.”

“No, they’re here; we fetched them after the party. Maid didn’t think she could sleep in a different house from them, and Jock was certain he couldn’t! Suppose you ask Maidlin to bring ‘the girls,’ as Jock calls them, Marigold.”

Littlejan reluctantly surrendered her small sister to their mother. “She’s sleepy. I love holding her!”

Maidlin came down the wide staircase presently, a drowsy twin on each arm. “They were just going to have a mid-morning nap. They’ve been crawling about all over the place, and they’re tired. Look at them, Robin, and then they must go to bed—as Cecily wants to do, I can see.”

She held out the dark little girls, and Robin dropped into a chair and took them in her arms. “What darlings! How they have grown! They’re looking at me with such beautiful deep brown eyes! Aren’t you terribly proud of them?”

“We are a little bit conceited,” Maidlin admitted, her own dark eyes lighting up with a smile. “Jock’s dreadful! You’d think there had never been

two babies before!”

“Not two like these. There have never been two like my girls!” Jock had followed his wife. “I had to make sure Maid didn’t fall downstairs with them,” he explained.

“Come to tea with us one day, Robin,” Maidlin suggested. “I’d like you to see the garden. The aubrietia and arabis on the banks are really worth a visit.”

“She’s talking of going home,” Joan said.

“Oh, not yet!” Maidlin gave Robin a quick look. “She mustn’t go yet. She’s only just come!”

“Her mother needs her,” Joan explained.

Robin had flushed under Maidlin’s look. “How much does she guess?” she said to herself. “I believe they all understand, though they’re being kind and saying nothing to worry me.”

“I’d like to see your garden,” she owned.

“Try to make time for us; we’ll arrange it by ’phone. And I’m sure you’d like to see Rosanna and Rosilda.”

“Are those the new twins at Kentisbury? I’d love to see them!”

“You may not see Rosamund; she isn’t allowed many visitors yet. But you could see the twins, and the older twins, and the little boys. I’ll ask her; I ring up to say good-night every evening.”

“Please ask if I may come!” Robin said eagerly.

The departure of the visitors left an empty Hall, and Mary begged Robin to come back from the Abbey to keep her company. Robin agreed rather shyly, lest in their isolation they should touch on difficult problems; but Mary was as understanding as Joan had been and asked no awkward questions. And though Robin was sorely tempted to midnight confidences, she argued with herself to such good purpose that she stayed resolutely in bed and did not go to talk to Mary.

“I’ve nothing to say,” she told herself urgently. “So what’s the use?”

Mary, too, had no explanation to give, and Rob’s sudden disappearance remained a mystery.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

ROB'S SECRET

Sunday night brought Littlejan and Jansy, to be ready for school on Monday. And Monday morning brought a letter for Queen Marigold.

"It's from Rob!" she cried to Robin, who had already recognised the writing. "Perhaps he'll tell us why he rushed away like that on Friday night!"

"I thought he told you he had an appointment?" Mary suggested.

"He hadn't meant to go to it; he said so," Littlejan retorted, and tore open her letter.

Her eyes widened and her face lit up as she read. Suddenly she gave a shout and danced round the room. "Oh, good for Rob! Oh, marvellous! And he says I may tell everybody. It's not a secret, now that it's all arranged!"

"Tell us quickly, then," urged Mary, for Robin was tense with suspense.

"It's about his pictures. He's got in touch with lots of artists, and among them are the Council who look after the Quellyn collection; they wanted to know him because of his name. They like his work enormously, and they want to have an exhibition of his drawings—I knew that much. This letter says they've taken a small room, close to the Quellyn gallery, in the same place in London, and Rob's pictures and drawings are to be hung there for everybody to go and see. He hopes he'll sell a lot; he says it's high time he turned an honest penny! He can do heaps more, if people want them. Crowds will go; they'll say: 'Robert Quellyn's cousin? Should be good! Interesting to see if his style is anything like the old man's!' It isn't, of course; it's quite different, but the art people say it's good. Isn't it thrilling? Fancy Rob having a show all on his own!"

"That's splendid news!" Mary exclaimed. "I am so glad!"

"It sounds as if pictures had conquered music," Robin said, her eyes glowing with pleasure. "I wondered if he'd settle down to one thing. Was it on that business he had to hurry away?"

"Rather! He wanted to see the secretary of the Council on Saturday; he'd thought of putting it off, but he decided that would be silly. But he hasn't given up music," Littlejan protested. "Lady Joy's last letter said how much New York had been thrilled by Rob's 'South Sea Suite,' in one of Sir Ivor's concerts. And I believe he made some new music last winter, though he hasn't told me what it's called. He isn't forgetting about music."

“Rob’s greedy. He wants to do everything,” Jansy remarked. “Come to breakfast, Marigold! We’ll be late!”

“There’s a message to everybody.” Littlejan hastily skimmed through the end of the letter. “Heaps of stuff about how sorry he was to dash off like that on Friday, and apologies to me because he hadn’t time to say he’d liked my speech and my crown and robes. And there’s a bit for Robin. He says: ‘I saw the Queen of the Castle dancing like a fairy.’ That means you, doesn’t it, Robin? He means your castle in Wales, I expect.”

Robin had reddened, at the memories called up by the title. “I’ve heard him say it. Is that all?”

Mary looked at her quickly. Robin’s voice was steady, but the romancer in Mary suggested that this might be tragedy for her.

“Almost all. He says: ‘Give her my good wishes and say I hope her Castle’s all right and her father is comfortable. Perhaps I’ll see her again some day.’ That’s all.”

“Thanks, Marigold. It’s kind of him to remember me.” Robin’s head was held high, as she took her place at the table, and her voice was as calm as usual, but her cheeks were burning, and she did not meet Littlejan’s anxious eyes.

To forestall any outspoken comment, Mary began to ask questions about the new Queen’s plans for the Hamlet Club, and for a few moments Robin was left in peace, to make the necessary readjustments in her ideas.

When the girls had gone off to school, she sought Mary and spoke urgently. “I want to go home. Do you mind?”

Mary looked at her quickly. “Go as soon as you like. We’ll arrange it. You want your mother, don’t you?”

The telephone rang, and Mary went to answer it. “I’ll be back presently.”

She found Robin still standing where she had left her, when she returned. “It was Maidlin speaking. She wants you to go to The Pallant, and when I said you spoke of going home she said it had better be to-day, and I must come too. We’ll have the car and drive over for early tea, and then we’ll go on to Kentisbury for a glimpse of the new twins. Rosamund is very well and we can see her and the babies for a minute or two. Maid had a talk with her last night, and to-day will suit splendidly. So we’ll do those two visits, and then if you still feel you want to go, you can pack in the evening and we’ll send you to the early train to-morrow.”

“That’s very kind,” Robin said gratefully, and hesitated. “I don’t want to talk, Mary-Dorothy.”

“Except to your mother,” Mary agreed.

“You understand, I know. I can’t talk to anybody else.”

“That message was a shock,” Mary said to herself, as she went about her morning duties, while Robin went into the Abbey. “She’d hoped for more. She’s sure now that Rob is absorbed in his work and has forgotten her, except as a casual acquaintance. From the way he looked at her that night I should say she had every right to expect more than a polite message. Perhaps he’ll write to her. He couldn’t say much in a letter to Marigold.”

She put this point of view to Robin, rather diffidently, as they drove to The Pallant. “Are you sure you’re wise to hurry away? Perhaps Rob Quellyn is going to write to you in a day or two.”

Robin flushed. “I don’t think so. He’d have said: ‘I’ll be writing to her soon,’ in Marigold’s letter; he wouldn’t have sent just that message. It’s been a mistake, and I may as well get used to the idea, Mary. I thought—but I was wrong. It’s all right; I shall forget about this quite soon.”

“Don’t forget too quickly. I’m not sure you aren’t making a mistake.”

“I’d rather not talk about it, please. Is that Maidlin’s garden? Oh, how beautiful! What a mass of colour!”

The slopes of Sunrise Hill above The Pallant were aglow with mauve and white and yellow from rock-plants on the banks, while the terraces were covered with daffodils and many-tinted hyacinths. No car passed along the road without exclamations from its passengers at the beauty of the sight. Maidlin’s dream had come true.

She came running out to greet them, and Robin’s sore heart was comforted by the warm welcome and the happy hour spent watching the twins at play in their Pen up at the top of the hill, guarded by Lindy Bellanne and Nurse Honesty. Rob Quellyn was not mentioned, thanks to a quick word from Mary on the telephone in the morning.

“Don’t talk about Rob, Maid! I’ll tell you later. We can’t help; she wants her mother and nobody else is any good.”

So even the exhibition of drawings was not discussed, and the whole attention of the party was centred on “the girls.”

The short visit to Kentisbury was equally satisfying. The nurse would not have the babies lifted from their cradle, but she allowed Robin and Mary to peep at them and showed Mary which was Rosilda, her goddaughter.

“Are you shocked because she’s so tiny, Mary-Dorothy?” Rosamund asked. “I was terrified at first. I felt they were just big dolls and they might break if they were touched. But they’re growing fast; they’re much more like real babies now. They’ve a lot to make up; that’s why they aren’t as fine children as the first two. But they’ll be all right; they’ve improved already.”

“Oh, but they’re so pretty!” Robin exclaimed in delight, kneeling by the big cradle. “Such tiny ears and noses! And their fingers are perfect.”

“I like their fingers and toes myself,” the Countess admitted. “I’m going to have the greatest fun dressing the four of them, when they’re past the stage of baby white.”

“Colour schemes?” Mary smiled. “Maid’s girls were in rose-pink rompers, tumbling about their Pen.”

“You must see our elder four before you go. I expect they’re in the Children’s Garden; the sandpit is the joy of Roddy’s heart. So we put all four into butcher-blue garden-suits and let them roll in it, and Hyacinth sees that they don’t eat it. They look lovely in blue, with their yellow curly heads.”

“But what about their future frocks?”

“Oh yes! You know how hard it is to choose, when you go to buy material for a summer frock?” and Rosamund looked at Robin. “You find a pretty flowery pattern, but they have it in all colours, and you can’t decide whether the blue or the green or the pink is most fascinating. I’m lucky; I shall buy four different pieces, and have a mauve baby and a blue baby and a yellow baby and a green baby. Maid can have the pinks for her darkies. My yellow-heads can wear anything. Later they may develop their own taste in colours, but from the first I mean them to see plenty of choice.”

“You won’t dress them all alike?” Robin asked.

“Now and then we may have them all in blue, but not often. Too much like a uniform; they’ll be called the boarding-school, in any case.”

“The Kentisbury rose-buds.” Mary smiled at her.

“That’s more poetical and romantic than Jock Robertson’s Double-Two or Jen’s row of Little Pawns! That’s what she calls them. Did Maid give you tea? I hope you’ll have another with Geoffrey and compliment him on his family. He’s proud of his horde of small daughters.”

“I’m sure he is! But we’ve had tea, in the dearest little garden behind the house, just outside the windows, quite shut off from the road, but getting the sun through a gap in the trees.”

“Maid had that gap cut on purpose. It’s the one bit of her garden that’s not for the public eye. All the rest is planned to cheer up everybody who passes on the road, but that private lawn is for tea and open-air breakfasts. Maid wanted one small part for themselves. She shares the terraces and banks with the world, just as she sings to the world. And she’s always having guests who need a little kindness shown to them. It’s all very like Maid.”

As they drove home Robin’s talk was of the three sets of twins and the beautiful homes, and she rejoiced in these visits because they would give her so much to tell her mother.

When she was safely out of the way next morning, in the car on the road to the early train, Mary rang up Rosamund. “You did a good piece of work

yesterday, Rosamunda.”

“Oh?”—and Mary could imagine how the Countess raised her brows. “How did I do it? I didn’t know.”

“By giving Robin so much to think about.”

“I only chattered idly about my infants.”

“She needed a new interest. It was just right.”

“I’m glad I helped, but I had no idea I was doing it. I thought she didn’t look too chirpy; do you know her brothers used to say she was always chirpy and sometimes cheeky, and that was why she was called Robin?”

“I hadn’t heard that. No, she isn’t feeling very cheerful. I don’t wonder, either. Rob Quellyn came to the crowning, and rushed back to town the same night, without even speaking to her, and sent her a polite message in a letter to Marigold. She didn’t say anything, but she’d hoped for more. She looked as if he’d hit her.”

“I expect he had. What’s the matter with the lad? They’re made for one another. To tell the truth, I thought they knew it.”

“She won’t talk to any one but her mother, so I thought it best to let her go home. I think she feels he couldn’t bear the sight of her.”

“More likely he couldn’t bear to speak to her, for fear he said too much,” Rosamund said shrewdly. “Perhaps he’ll write.”

“There’s no letter from him this morning. I suppose it’s her land and her castle that are in the way?”

“Oh, sure to be,” Rosamund responded. “He once said to Joy that some chap would find the castle a difficulty some day. I expect he’s made up his mind he isn’t going to be the chap, and he hasn’t come to the point of changing it yet. She’ll need to wait.”

“He calls her the Queen of the Castle. It’s hard on her.”

“Her mother will talk to her. I’m glad she’s gone home. It would do Rob Quellyn a lot of good if some other man began to hang around her.”

“I don’t think there is anybody else. How are the grandchildren?”

“Godchildren, Mary-Dorothy! And it’s only one. Do you want them both, greedy?”

“I meant grandchildren. I always feel your babes and Maid’s are grandchildren of the house—this house; or perhaps of the Abbey.”

“Oh! I thought you felt like our mother!” Rosamund mocked. “All the grandchildren, and your godchild, are doing well, and everybody had a good night, grandmamma!”

“It’s just what I do feel,” Mary said to herself, as she put down the receiver and then lifted it again to call Maidlin and thank her for the help of the day before.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR THE QUEEN OF THE CASTLE

“You’ll go to bed at once, Robin mine,” said Mrs. Brent, glancing at her daughter’s tired face. “Supper and bed for you; it’s a long day of travelling. I’ll come and sit by you for a little while when you’re in bed.”

“Where’s Gwyn? I thought she’d meet me with the car. I was surprised to see Charles.” Robin referred to the chauffeur, who kept the cars and the garage in order and drove the nurses when they wanted to go to Pwllheli, or even to Carnarvon, for shopping.

Mrs. Brent smiled. “Gwyneth fach is out with Ivor bach. She usually is out with Ivor. She has a new ring to show you.”

“Engaged?” Robin cried. “Ivor hasn’t lost much time!”

“He didn’t waste any time. As soon as he reached home he came to Moranedd with the ring, and told her he’d come to put it on. I’ve been expecting it.”

“Oh, so have I! But I didn’t think it would be quite so sudden.”

“Gwyneth didn’t think so, either. Apparently the sight of Ivor after so long was too much for her and swept her right off her feet.”

Robin coloured suddenly, and began to talk at express speed of her adventures; the crowning and the party, Maidlin’s beautiful house and the new twins at Kentisbury.

Her mother eyed her keenly, but asked no questions till the girl was in bed, her thick brown plait lying on her shoulder.

“Now, Robinette!” Mrs. Brent used the almost-forgotten baby name. “You have more to tell me. Why did you come home in such a hurry?”

“I said you needed me. It was true; you look so tired!”

“I’m always glad to have you here. But there were other reasons. Did you see nothing of Rob Quellyn in all these meetings with friends?”

“He was there, at the crowning.” Robin’s arm was flung up to cover her face. “I saw him across the hall. He didn’t come near me, though everybody was moving about and going to speak to friends. He made an excuse and went back to town that night; I never spoke to him at all. In a letter to Littlejan he sent messages to everybody; to me he sent good wishes and said perhaps he’d see me again some day. And that was all. Mother!” Robin’s shielding arm dropped and she spoke urgently, her eyes unhappy. “It’s been a mistake. He doesn’t care. We’ll forget all about him. Will you tell Gwyn, and—and tell her not to talk about him?”

Mrs. Brent's hand stroked her hair. "I'll do that, certainly. Gwyneth is far too busy with her own affairs to have time for anything else; you know what she is! She and Ivor are full of plans for their future. I'll see that she doesn't tease you about yours. But I'm not sure you are right in what you think. Perhaps Rob felt it was wiser not to speak to you. What about yourself, Robin?" And she gave Robin another keen look.

"It was for me like it was for Gwyn," Robin whispered. "I know how Gwyneth felt. I felt it too."

"You mean that when you saw him again after so long you felt something new?" Mrs. Brent asked gently.

"Yes! Something I'd never felt before. I'd thought I didn't care very much."

"And you found you did care. I thought that was what had happened. But suppose the same thing happened to him, and he ran away because he wasn't ready to speak to you in earnest?"

"I thought of that," Robin admitted. "If he'd come to speak to me just then I believe he'd have seen what I felt; I couldn't have hidden it."

"If he felt that too, the only thing he could do was what he did do; slip away without speaking to you."

"But that message, Mother! It was what he'd say to anybody."

"Well, my dear! What else could he say in a letter to a schoolgirl?"

"Then you think"—Robin had flung up her arm again but it dropped once more, as she looked wistfully at her mother—"that he might perhaps care a little?"

"If he cares at all, he cares a great deal," Mrs. Brent said promptly. "He cares so much that he couldn't speak to you without betraying himself. If he hadn't cared, he'd have come to chat with you, as a matter of course; it would have been the natural thing to do. What he did was so unnatural that there must have been a reason for it, and there's only one probable reason. He has tried all winter to forget you, and has kept himself busy with new interests, no doubt; he thought he had put you safely into the background—as you thought you had done with him. When he saw you he knew that he had failed, and that you mattered enormously to him; and he fled, to think it over and get used to the idea. Now he has to decide what to do. You may hear from him soon, or you may not; he has to conquer a good deal in himself before he can come to you. It depends how much he cares. He may make another effort to put you out of his mind. And I don't blame him, Robin. It isn't easy for him to overlook your inheritance."

"Oh, bother Quellyn!" Robin murmured, her face hidden.

"That's all very well, but he can't dismiss Quellyn like that. You must remember that it's harder for him than for any other man. It will look as if he

were marrying you, not merely for your castle and your land, but to get the inheritance that might have belonged to his family. It's a hard thing to ask of him. You must be patient."

"Then you think there's still something to be patient about?" Robin's arm dropped again. "You don't think it's the end of everything?"

"Silly girl! I do *not*. I don't want to be too encouraging, but I feel you have good reason to be hopeful. If nothing more comes of this you'll need to forgive me, my dear, but I should say you can very well wait a while and not be too unhappy. You must be in suspense, of course; but there's no need for despair. Perhaps you'll have to help Rob a little."

"What could I possibly do?"

"You could ask him to come here again and make the invitation urgent."

"*Mother!* I couldn't! I'd rather die!"

"There, you see! You won't do a hard thing to help him," Mrs. Brent scolded gently. "Why should you blame him if he, too, has some pride? Why should he make all the effort?"

Robin lay and stared up at her. "You couldn't expect me to ask him again, when he hasn't—he didn't——"

"He ran away from you. No, I don't think you should do it yet. But you should sympathise with him, instead of blaming him. Try to see, by what you feel yourself, how hard it is for him."

Robin caught her arm. "Mother, you are good to me! If I could be sure you're right I'd be content to wait. But it may not be what you think. He didn't show the slightest interest in me, Mother."

"Then why did he go off so suddenly, upsetting all the plans? Why didn't he come and talk over the crowning with you? To me, his behaviour seems to need an explanation, and I can see a good one quite plainly."

"If only I knew!" Robin sighed.

"You have to bear that doubt; you'll need to be brave," her mother said. "But we shall have no difficulty with Gwyneth. Rob was there, but there was a big crowd and you had no chance to speak to him. He had to hurry away on business, and you very kindly came back to help me, and so you didn't meet. It's quite easy. In Gwyneth's present preoccupied state of mind she won't ask questions. You must be careful not to betray yourself, of course."

Robin reached for her hand. "I will be good! Do you know what he calls me? The Queen of the Castle."

"Exactly. That's the trouble," Mrs. Brent agreed. "Now go to sleep, Robin. You've had a long day and you're very tired."

"I will try, Mother. And thank you so much."

"Two grown-up daughters!" Mrs. Brent sighed, as she went downstairs. "But how silly I am! It had to come. I do hope they will be happy! I feel sure

about Gwyneth, but my Robin has some way to go yet before I'll be easy in my mind about her."

As she had foreseen, Gwyneth was not hard to satisfy. The explanation given seemed reasonable, and she merely said she hoped Rob would write, and then broke into the story of her new plans.

"We shall be married quite soon, and when Ivor gets his master's certificate and can sail his own ship I shall go with him. I shall love it, Robin! Till then I shall go on waiting for him and living at Moranedd, so you aren't going to lose me just yet!"

Robin told of her visit to the Abbey and spoke of the proposed exhibition of drawings in London. "I shall buy some of them—pictures of the Abbey, if there are any," she said, steadily but with a touch of colour. "His work's good. I'd like to have some of his things here, with the other pictures."

"Better marry him and get the lot," Gwyneth grinned.

"Not at present, thank you," Robin said calmly.

There was not much time for brooding. Gwyneth was determined to marry Ivor as soon as possible, and she had no reason to wait. Her parents had died when she was a baby and she had been adopted by Robert Quellyn, the painter. His death when she was twelve had left her unprovided for, but had led to her adoption into the Brent family. She loved Mr. and Mrs. Brent and Robin and was good friends with the boys, but they were not her own people and she was eager to have her home and the husband who had been her companion since childhood.

Preparations for the wedding began at once. Robin must be the bridesmaid, of course. Her time was fully taken up, and whenever Mrs. Brent could be spared from the sick-room she came to help with advice. The girls were busy with shopping and sewing and planning, Gwyneth in a whirl of excitement and happiness which shut out every other interest and made her unconscious that Robin was thoughtful and sometimes silent. She had good reason, for a letter from Queen Marigold had brought surprising news.

"Such an odd thing, Robin fach!" Littlejan wrote. "Mary heard from Rob yesterday, and he's going abroad, now at once. He says he's beginning to feel at home in London and in the Highlands of Scotland, but he hasn't been to Europe, and when he meets people, especially artists, he feels uneducated and a foreigner. He's going to Rome and Florence, and probably to Greece and perhaps Egypt; he'll be away most of the summer. The exhibition is to go on, but he's arranged it and he isn't needed. The Quellyn Council, who planned it, will tell him how it's going and send him Press notices and let him know what people say about his work. The Secretary is to come to the Hall to look through the portfolios in Rob's room and take away any

drawings he thinks should be included; there are some of the Abbey, and those lovely pictures of the South Sea Islands, the coloured ones—did you see them? But I suppose you didn't; there wasn't time. They're rather wonderful, we think; they ought to be shown with the rest. I should have thought Rob would want to choose them himself, but he says the Secretary-man can do it better than he could. Isn't it odd that he should go in such a hurry? He seems to like dashing off unexpectedly!"

Robin, looking thoughtful, showed the letter to her mother.

"Not so odd, I think," was Mrs. Brent's comment. "He's determined to make up his mind and to keep away from everybody till he has done it. I fancy you are troubling him a good deal, my daughter. You've quite spoiled his pleasure in his picture-show. No man in his senses would go sightseeing before his exhibition was safely launched, except for a very urgent reason."

"I'm sorry," Robin began, looking troubled. "I hope the show won't suffer because he's not there."

"Don't worry about that. He's right; these people know what they want, and they can attend to hanging and placing, and later on to sales, better than he could do. You should run up to town with Gwyneth and have a night in that hotel we've used before, and go to the show and choose your pictures. They won't let you take them away, but they'll star them as sold and you'll know they are yours. Gwyn has several things she wants to do in town."

"I'd like that," Robin admitted.

"And for the rest, you must have patience, my dear."

"I'll try," Robin promised soberly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

ROBIN BUYS PICTURES

In a group of friends so deeply interested in everybody and in one another, it was inevitable that Rob Quellyn's strange behaviour should be commented on and discussed. Maidlin invited Joan and Rosamund to The Pallant to talk over the matter.

"Silly ass!" said Jock Robertson, as he watched "the girls" trying to stand and rolling over on the grass. "Try again, little Rose! Well done, young Joy! That's the idea!—Silly ass! He ought to know when his girl loves him."

"Oh—Jock!" Maidlin gave him the secret smile that he loved. "*You* didn't! You stayed away and left me to Donald!"

"I knew what I wanted. Does Rob Quellyn know?"

"But does his girl love him?" Rosamund asked. She had brought Rosabel and Rosalin to play on Maidlin's hidden lawn with "the girls," while she had tea with Maid and Jock. "I thought nobody was sure about that."

"Mary's quite sure. She's indignant with Rob for going off like this."

"If Mary-Dorothy's sure, then it's so. She knows the signs. The poor heiress will be feeling sore."

"Worried and forsaken," Joan agreed, picking up Jillian, who was crawling after "the girls," two months her seniors. "Poor Rob! How that castle does stand in his way! He can't bear the thought of seeming to ask her for it. That's how it looks to him."

"Can we do anything to help either of them?" Maidlin asked. "Would Robin come to see us again? I'd ask her here, or she could go to the Abbey."

"I'd ask her to Kentisbury, if I thought she'd like it. But I'm quite sure she wouldn't come," Rosamund said. "Rosabel, you can't eat worms; I really won't allow it. Put the nasty thing down! Come here, child!" And she went to the rescue.

"Mine prefer slugs," Maidlin remarked sadly. "Lindy has to be constantly on the watch."

"Low tastes your daughters have! Would Robin leave her mother?"

"My Jill will eat everything she can find; at least she stuffs them into her mouth. No, Rosamund, I'm sure Robin wouldn't leave her mother; Littlejan says the father is weaker, and there's this wedding on their hands."

"In any case, Robin wouldn't come to any of us," Maidlin said. "She'd be frightened of us just now."

“Yes, we know too much,” Joan agreed. “I don’t see how we can help, though I wish there was something we could do.”

“I could write to Rob Quellyn and tell him what I think of him, with the greatest pleasure,” Rosamund suggested.

“And what good would that do?” Joan retorted. “Where’s Jenny-Wren? Why didn’t she come to join the conference? Don’t say you never asked her, Maidie!”

Maidlin smiled at her. “Brownie’s coming presently. She’s gone to town to do very urgent shopping, and Kenneth and she were going to see the Quellyn Junior pictures, as Jock says they’re being called. The show opened on Monday; Jen will be the first of us to see them, and she’ll give us a full report. There’s the car; I know the horn.”

Jock ran up the steps to the second terrace and looked out over the house to the road. “You’re right, Maid. It’s the Manor car, but Kenneth hasn’t come. Blighter! She’s left him alone in London to get into mischief.”

“Tea!” Jen proclaimed, as she appeared in their midst. “Please, Maidie, may I have some tea quickly, before I die?”

“I’m sure you’d rather have it fresh. Anne Bellanne has the kettle boiling for you. Where’s Kenneth, Brownie?”

“Finishing his jobs in town. The car’s to meet the seven o’clock train, so I mustn’t stay long. I couldn’t miss my tea-party with all of you, so I came home and left him as soon as we’d done the picture-show.”

“And the shopping?” Maidlin suggested.

“Oh, rather! I’ve some lovely things. You shall see them soon.”

“What about the pictures?” Joan asked. “Were you pleased with the show?”

“Rob Quellyn should have heard the things we’ve been saying about him,” Rosamund said darkly. “Is his work really worth while?”

Jen did not answer at once, but thirstily watched the teapot which Anne was placing before Maidlin. When she had taken her first drink she looked round the circle. “They’re very fine,” she said definitely. “I liked them much better than I thought I should. I had no idea he could do such good work. He’s very nearly a genius.”

“In music,” Jock said firmly. “His stuff is original and jolly fine. If he’d drop his scribbling and daubing——”

“In pictures,” Jen retorted, with equal firmness. “I can’t criticise his music, but I do like his drawings, and his colour work is beautiful—and, as you say, most original. It’s a great pity he wastes his time making up tunes.” And she glared at Jock.

“Well, well!” he said laughing. “I retire crushed and crawl out from under Lady Marchwood’s heavy foot.”

“Heavy? Jen? Oh, Jock Robertson, haven’t you seen her dance?” Rosamund cried.

Joan looked at Jen and laughed.

“When the foot is planted on me it’s extremely heavy,” Jock declared. “I squirm beneath it.”

“Never mind him! I say, everybody, we saw the heiress!”

“Robin?” A united shout greeted this news.

“Rather! She was buying pictures—chiefly of the Abbey. She’s made sure of some beauties.”

“Oh, good for Robin! How sensible!” Maidlin exclaimed.

“Has she bagged all those of the Abbey? I’d like some,” Rosamund said.

“Fetch Rob home and make him do some more. The other girl was there, the stepsister who’s going to be married.”

“Adopted sister only,” Joan corrected her. “What is she like?”

“You’ve seen old Rob Quellyn’s paintings—the Welsh fairy-tales? The bride appears in them as the black curly-haired maiden; there’s no mistaking her, though she was just a child when he painted her. She’s much more showy than our heiress; smaller, but with vivid colouring. Robin looks like—well, like a robin!—beside her.”

“All the same, there’s something very appealing about Robin’s brown eyes. I love the calm way she looks at us,” Joan said.

“I bet Rob Quellyn knows all about those brown eyes!” Rosamund gathered her daughters into her arms. “Come along, children! We must go home to our tinies; they’ll be needing Mother.”

Jen watched her with wistful eyes. “I suppose you soon grew used to handling two? It must seem odd at first.”

“Odd, but very pleasant!” Rosamund laughed at her. “It comes quite quickly, Jenny-Wren. I was going to tell you more about the new family of cousins we’ve discovered, but it can wait. We knew of them but they were shy and wouldn’t have anything to do with us. We’re in touch with them at last, and we’ve all fallen in love with one another. Four jolly girls, two of them twins. You know our family saying: ‘Every Kane has two, usually girls’? These twins are Mandy and Minty; Amanda Rose and Araminta Rose.”

“Gosh!” Jen exclaimed. “Where did they find names like those?”

“The eldest is Virginia Rosemary, and the little one is Rosalind Atalanta. We’re trying to persuade her to be known as Rosalind, as she was at school, and to keep Nanta for the family; I think she’ll give in. You must meet them some day soon. I’m going to give a party on the lawn in the quadrangle; Virginia is a folk-dancer and a fine violinist, and she’ll play for us. You must all come and dance.”

“Oh, we will!” said Maidlin, who had heard of the new cousins before.

“I may not dance, but I’ll certainly come to meet the girls with the weird names,” Jen promised.

“Right! I’ll arrange it. Now we really must go home to our tinies! Rosanna and Rosilda will be screaming their heads off.”

“Here, young Joy! Come and say good-bye to Lady Rosabel!” Jock grabbed his elder daughter. “Little Rose, there’s Lady Rosalin for you.”

“I thought they were to be Marjory and Dorothy?” Rosamund exclaimed.

“For outside use; it would be too confusing to have more Joys and Roses. But they’re still very small!” Maidlin urged. “Jock likes to use their little names.”

“You’ll confuse their infant minds,” said Jen. “How are the littler Pawns, Ros?”

“Growing fast and looking more like real children every day. They’re not dolls any longer,” and Rosamund went to her car, escorted by Jock and Maidlin and their daughters.

“You hold the girls, my dear.” And Jock thrust his family into their mother’s arms, so that he could help Rosamund in and settle her comfortably.

Jen and Joan were talking quietly and watching Jillian when Maidlin returned, to give Jen more tea and ask questions about the trip to town. “Jock has taken the girls in to Honesty and Lindy. He doesn’t want to give them up,” she smiled. “I never would have believed he’d be so keen on babies. And he’s clever; he handles them quite neatly.”

“What is Rob Quellyn like?” Jen asked. “I left home before we heard of his existence. I saw him in the distance at the crowning, but he disappeared, and I’ve never spoken to him.”

“The only people who really know him are Mary-Dorothy and Littlejan and Jansy,” Joan said. “Joy knows him well, but she isn’t here. He arrived just after Jill was born; I’ve seen him once or twice, but though he has made the Hall his headquarters he hasn’t been there much. Littlejan is his friend and correspondent; they write long letters to one another, and I fancy she passes on his news to Robin and Robin’s news to him.”

“A useful person! Marigold should tell him one of the Quellyn heiresses is being married. He’d come rushing home to ask which it was.”

“How brutal, Jenny-Wren! We won’t resort to such drastic measures yet,” Joan said, laughing.

“Is he very well off?”

“I don’t know. He evidently has some income, and he has no home and no one to spend his money on but himself. He may just as well use it in

travelling as in settling in one place and paying rent.”

“He says he’s getting educated,” Maidlin remarked. “He hadn’t been anywhere or seen anything—I mean in Europe, of course. He knows New Zealand and Australia and the South Sea Islands, and he came home by the States and New York.”

“Quite a little bit of the earth’s surface!” Jen mocked. “But he’ll need to settle down some day.”

“He hates the feeling of asking Robin to share her castle with him,” Joan said. “Mary’s sure that’s the trouble. I don’t blame him; it isn’t easy for him. Rosamund would like to write and tell him a few home truths, but I can see how he feels.”

“Our Countess is very bracing! I’ve been told off by her,” Jen sighed. “The trouble is that she’s so often right.”

“She won’t attack Rob at present,” Maidlin smiled. “She’s much too busy with her Double-Two.”

“All the same, I agree with Rosamund this time. And she’s right, as usual,” Jen said with energy. “I’d like a chance to tell Rob Quellyn what an idiot he is! Robin’s a jolly nice girl, and he’ll be lucky if he gets her. He’d better not put it off too long. Perhaps she won’t wait for him. He’ll have to make up his mind to swallow that castle sooner or later.”

“Swallow Plas Quellyn! Oh, Jenny-Wren!” Joan and Maidlin laughed together.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX SWALLOWING PLAS QUELLYN

“Mary-Dorothy! Such an awful thing has happened!”

Mary looked up quickly, at the distress in Littlejan’s voice. “What’s the matter? I see you have a letter from Robin. Has she lost her father? But we’ve been expecting it, Marigold. Don’t look so frightened!”

“It’s more than that. He’s died—yes. But her mother—oh, Mary! Her nice mother’s very ill. She just fell down when she knew he’d gone, and she hasn’t spoken to them since. Robin is so fond of her!”

“Oh, I am sorry!” Mary exclaimed. “She’s collapsed, as soon as the need for nursing him was over. Robin’s been troubled because she seemed so tired.”

“She’s been worried. I wish we could do something!”

“Who is helping Robin?”

“The nurses are still there, and the doctor brother has been sent for. The younger one is still at sea.”

“Then Robin has plenty of help. We can only write and tell her how sorry we are,” Mary said.

“I’m going to write to Rob. He ought to know Robin’s having a bad time.”

Mary glanced at her. “Yes, you could do that. I think you should. Yes, he ought to know. But don’t tell Robin you have told him, Marigold.”

Letters of sympathy were showered on Robin and brought her real comfort. Littlejan’s time was fully occupied with school affairs, and it was three days before she could write her letter to Rob, but she sent it off at last, and waited anxiously to see if he would reply.

“I hope he’ll write to Robin, as all the rest of us have done,” she said to Mary.

Mary thought just possibly Rob might do more than write, but she did not say so.

The day after Littlejan’s letter had been posted she was busy with homework in the library, at the same time keeping one eye on Jansy, whose attention was apt to wander.

The front door bell rang, and the girls heard voices; a cry of surprise from Mary, an answer in a man’s tones.

Marigold’s books went flying. “It’s Rob! But he can’t—my letter hasn’t arrived yet!” And she rushed out to the big hall.

Rob Quellyn was gazing at Mary in puzzled surprise.

“What’s this about a letter? I’ve had no letter lately. Is anything the matter?”

“My letter!” Littlejan shouted. “I wrote to you yesterday. You can’t have had it yet!”

“I expect it passed me in mid-Channel,” Rob rejoined. “I left Venice two days ago. What is it all about? Did you expect me to come in answer to a letter?” His face grew suddenly set. “Is anything wrong? What news was in your letter?”

Littlejan looked at Mary. “You tell him.”

“Robin is in trouble, and Marigold thought you ought to know. She has lost her father, and her mother has collapsed with the strain of the long nursing, and is seriously ill.”

“I’ll go at once. I may be able to help,” Rob said, his face troubled.

“Do you think you should go?” Mary hesitated. “We’ve written to her, and I’m sure she’d like a letter from you too. But with illness in the house, will she have time for a visitor?”

“And why did you come home, just at this exactly right minute?” asked Jansy, staring from the background.

“If it wasn’t my letter, what made you come, Rob?” Littlejan demanded.

He looked round at them. “For some days I’ve had an odd feeling that I ought to come—that perhaps she needed me. I fought against it. I thought it was just an excuse, because I wanted to come so much. I think you understand.” He looked at Mary. “I’ve felt it would be unfair to ask her—what I want to ask. She’d have to give so much, and I so little in return. But if she needs me—if there’s any single thing I can do—that alters everything. What I feel doesn’t matter, if I can help her. I shall go and ask her. I won’t bother her; she can easily send me away. Nothing will stop me, now that I know she really is in trouble.”

“That’s good and generous,” Mary said quietly. “Perhaps, after all, you are right to go. To-morrow, by the early train, then. Have you come straight from Venice? You must need a night’s rest.”

“Could I go to-night?”

“From something Robin said, I think the night train means several changes. Wait till the morning! You wouldn’t like to ring her up?”

His eyes blazed with eagerness, but after a moment’s thought he said, “No, better not. And—Mary-Dorothy! Don’t tell anybody I’m here. I don’t want to meet all your crowd just now. Tell them after I’ve gone, please,” he pleaded.

Mary agreed, with understanding sympathy. “But I’d like a few words with you before you go, if you don’t mind.”

Littlejan took Jansy by the arm. "Come and finish your French. I've still a mass of maths to do. See you at dinner, Rob!"

During dinner Rob had much to tell of his travels and of all he had seen. As she went off to bed, Littlejan drew him into a corner.

"You talk to Mary-Dorothy," she said urgently. "We all do it, and she always helps."

Rob smiled down at her. "Thank you, Queen Marigold. I think I will."

"I understand you are adviser-in-chief to the clan, Mary-Dorothy," he said. "Marigold says I am to consult you. Will you let me talk?"

"I wish you would. Oh, please do!" Mary had flushed at her new title, with a return of her old diffidence. "I don't suppose I can help, but I know how much better people feel after talking a thing out. I'm sure it's a mistake to keep worries bottled up."

"I expect you're right. Mine have been corked up tightly for a year and now they've exploded." He placed chairs in a corner of the terrace in the dusk. "Will you be warm enough? Good! May I smoke? Will you join me?"

"I don't care about it, but I like to smell someone else's smoke, so please do. I want to say something too, but you'd better speak first."

"I haven't much to say." Rob spoke quietly and quickly. "I'm not asking advice; I know what I'm going to do. But I'd like to tell somebody. For a year that girl's eyes have haunted me. Wherever I go I see Robin Brent's brown eyes. I ran away, to the folks in Scotland. I ran away to London and plunged into new interests and worked in earnest at my drawings. I thought I had forgotten, and that she was comfortably put away in the past. At the crowning I saw her, and I knew I had failed. More than ever I felt she ought to be my girl. I fled to the Continent, forsaking my picture-show. It was no use; she was there, wherever I went. I can't bear it any longer. Quite apart from this new trouble, of which I hadn't heard, I came home to tell her so. I did have an odd feeling that she might be needing me, as I told Marigold; but I should have had to come, anyway. I can't go on like this. I don't know what she'll say to me, but if I've told her and she's turned me down I may not be haunted quite so badly by her eyes. Whatever it means, and whether it's right or not, I'm going to tell her."

"But why shouldn't it be right? Why haven't you told her long ago?" Mary asked simply.

"Because—oh, dash it all, Mary! They say you understand. Don't you know how I feel?" Rob cried.

"I think I do, but I may be wrong. You'd better tell me."

"How can I run after her fortune? How can I ask her to share her castle? Everybody knows we Quellyns have felt it ought to be ours. Don't you see what people will say? Can't you hear them? 'Marrying the Quellyn heiress?'"

Oh, good business! Young Quellyn has done well for himself. He knows what's what!' And ever so much more. You must see that, Mary-Dorothy!"

"And so, for fear of what people will say, you've almost lost your life's happiness, and you've left Robin lonely for months? Is that very brave?" Mary's voice was steady, but she was quaking inwardly.

"You don't mean that she cares?" Rob gave a shout.

"I can't tell you anything about that," Mary retorted. "But if you care as much as you say, it wasn't very brave to run away. What are you going to do now? People will still say all those dreadful things."

"People can go hang. I've reached a point when I don't care a— a scrap for anybody but Robin. Does she care, Mary?"

"Go and ask her! If you've reached that point, at last, there's nothing else to do. It's taken you a long time! Now I've something to say," Mary said urgently.

"I'll listen meekly," he agreed.

Through the trees came the high clear notes of the morris pipe, in a silvery lilting tune. Rob sat up. "What is it? Who is it? Is it a piccolo?"

Mary explained, speaking hurriedly. "It's Jen—Lady Marchwood, from the Manor next door. She's playing 'Nonesuch' on her morris pipe. It's an accident, Rob. I didn't ring up. I haven't touched the telephone since you came. She often comes at night for a chat. You haven't met her yet, have you?"

"I know about her, but I haven't spoken to her. I saw her dancing on May-day. I'd like to see that pipe." The musician in Rob came suddenly uppermost. "How well she plays! It almost makes one dance, just to hear her."

"'Chelsea Reach,' " and Mary rose and went to the top of the steps. "Yes, her music is very full of dance."

"You won't say anything—?" Rob asked anxiously.

"No. I promise," Mary said; and added to herself, "But you don't know Jen Marchwood!"

"Hi, Mary! I smell smoke. Have you taken to cigarettes at last?" Jen called a gay challenge from the lawn. "It smells rather like a pipe. *Mary!*"

"It is a pipe, but not your sort of pipe," Mary responded. "Where's Kenneth? I thought you weren't allowed to run about the park alone in the dark?"

"He brought me to the lane and shoved me through the gate. He's gone back to finish a business letter, and he'll come for me in half an hour. He gives himself a lot of unnecessary trouble; nothing would hurt me in the park." Jen, wrapped in a loose blue cloak, climbed the steps carefully, not leaping up as she would have done at another time. "About this pipe-

smoking, Mary! I'm surprised at you; I really am! I can't allow it! A cigarette, if you like——"

"I'm afraid I'm the culprit." Rob knocked out his pipe and came forward. "I'm glad to meet you, Lady Marchwood. That's the end of my pipe. Now may I look at yours? It has a note like a silver lark."

"This is Rob Quellyn, Jen," said Mary.

Jen stepped back and drew herself up to her full height. "I've been wanting to meet him. So you're the idiot who runs away from a nice girl because you're afraid of what people will say?"

"Jen! Jen, how can you be so rude?" Mary cried.

"He's lucky that I didn't rush at him and shake him," Jen responded. "I've been known to do that to strange men. Well, Rob Quellyn? What about it?"

"It's true," Rob said abjectly. "I am that idiot. I'm going to Robin now, to tell her so. Do you think I have a chance, Lady Marchwood?"

Jen eyed him keenly. "You're going to Quellyn? What about the mother's illness?"

"I knew nothing of Mrs. Brent's illness, or of Mr. Brent's death, till I reached the Hall three hours ago. I've come straight from Venice. I want to tell Robin that at last I know I've been an ass. Neither her mother's illness nor anything else will stop me now."

Jen looked thoughtful. "It's not the best time, you know. I can't say whether you have a chance, or whether Robin will hurl you out. What made you come?"

"I couldn't help it," Rob said simply. "I've tried to keep away, but I've failed."

"Because of Robin's castle? That's what has kept you away?"

"Exactly," Rob admitted. "I thought I ought not to go to her."

"And you've decided at last to—to swallow Plas Quellyn?"

Rob gave a shout of laughter. "Yes, Lady Marchwood. If I find Robin wants me, I've decided to swallow Quellyn, and let people say what they like."

"I'm glad to hear it," Jen said decisively. "It's taken you far too long. But if you're going to put things right I'll apologise and wish you luck."

"Thank you. Do you think I have a chance?" Rob asked humbly.

"I've no idea. Robin's a fine girl; she has her own way of looking at things. You'll be fortunate if she decides to be kind to you."

"I know it. I've known it for some time, but I wouldn't swallow Plas Quellyn, as you put it."

"You wouldn't swallow your own pride," Jen said severely. "What on earth does it matter what the whole world says if you love the girl? So long

as she knows it's herself you want and not her castle in Wales, nothing else ought to count."

"But I haven't been sure I could convince her. She might have thought _____"

"You were after her fortune. Then you don't trust her?"

"I haven't trusted myself. I haven't felt sure I could make her understand. Don't be too hard on me, Lady Marchwood! It's difficult for a man to do all the taking and accept everything from the girl. What have I to give Robin?"

Jen's foot tapped impatiently. "Yourself, and that's what she wants, if she wants you at all."

"But how can I know?"

"Ask her, idiot!" Jen blazed.

"Jenny-Wren!" Mary protested.

"Mary-Dorothy, you're shocked. But I have no patience with such silliness," Jen retorted. "Besides, he has plenty to give Robin and he doesn't seem to see it. He'll give her a name that she'll love to have; think of being Mrs. Quellyn of Plas Quellyn, instead of just Miss Robertina Brent! It's so tempting that he might very well be afraid she'd say 'yes' just to get his name."

"She wouldn't do that!" Rob said sharply.

"Then you do trust her a little bit! You might trust her to know you are in earnest as well. But there's more, Rob Quellyn. You aren't an unknown nobody; you're looked on as a rising young artist, in both painting and music. Jock Robertson says your work has made quite a stir in New York, and your London show has had a good Press and has attracted a lot of notice. People are talking about you. Go on as you're doing and Robin—if she marries you—will have good reason to be proud of you. You're making your name known and she'll be proud to share it. Go and tell her what an ass you've been and see if she'll forgive you."

"Mary-Dorothy was going to scold me too," Rob said. But he did not look unhappy.

"Jen has done it for me. That's what I was going to do—to remind you how much you have to offer Robin. Rob, I'll say this much: I believe she'll be glad to see you. Go to her and clear things up. We'll wish you both every happiness."

"And now you may light your pipe again and you may look at mine." And Jen explained the working of her three-hole wooden pipe, and walked up and down the terrace piping "Newcastle" and "Jamaica," and another tune that was new to Mary.

A window above was pushed open and two tousled heads appeared.

“What’s that last tune, Aunty Jen?” cried Jansy.

“Where did you find it? Why don’t we dance to it?” Littlejan demanded.

“I found it in the folk-dance mag. It’s a perfect pipe tune.” And Jen demonstrated the tune again. “It’s in a new formation and using polka-step; rather fun to do, I should think. We’ll try it at a party, as soon as I can be there to teach it to you. Go to bed, you bad girls! I forgot that the pipe carries so far. I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“We didn’t get out of bed till we heard the new tune. We thought you’d just come to talk to Mary, as usual.” And Littlejan went back to bed, taking Jansy with her.

“I, too, will go to bed. I see Ken’s cigarette at the end of the path. Good-night, Mary-Dorothy! I had nothing to say that won’t keep till to-morrow; I really only wanted to see you. I like to look at you now and then; you keep me steady and balanced.”

“Oh, go to bed, Jenny-Wren!” Mary cried, laughing. “And don’t come here and be rude to my visitors again!”

“Good-night, Rob Quellyn! I’m glad you’re going to swallow the castle at last. I hope Robin will put up with you!”

And Jen changed her country-dances for morris and went across the lawn piping the Tideswell processional and the Winster Reel and Galop.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

ROBIN IS KIND

Robin waved good-bye to her brother, whose work in Edinburgh could not be put aside for a longer visit, and turned back into her lonely castle.

The telephone rang, and the maid called her. "For you, Miss Robin. From London."

"London!" Robin hurried to answer. "Who is it?"

"I don't know. But he said he must speak to Miss Robin herself, whateffer."

"He? Who can it be?" Robin lifted the receiver. "Yes? Robertina Brent speaking."

"I say, Robin, it's Rob, and I'm coming to see you. I'm at Paddington, and the train leaves in about two minutes. Will you send the car to Pwllheli for me, or shall I hire? I'll be able to find some sort of cart to bring me to Quellyn. Or I'll walk, if need be, and arrive about midnight."

"But, Rob, Mother——" began Robin breathlessly.

"I know. I've only just heard, last night. I'm most terribly sorry. But I'm coming all the same. I've wanted to come for months, and nothing will stop me now. Of course, you can refuse to speak to me, but it would be a bit hard at the end of all that journey, wouldn't it? I've come to you all the way from Venice, almost without stopping, so I hope you'll say at least two words to me, even if they're only 'Go away!' Anyway, I'll chance it. My time's up and the train's just going. Robin, I'm sorry I've been such an ass. I see it now. I apologise. Good-bye! Hope I'll see you to-night!" And the line went dead.

Robin "tottered to a seat," as she said afterwards. Then she ran upstairs and crept into her mother's room.

"Mother! Oh, Mother!" she whispered, kneeling by the bed. "Mother, can you understand? He's coming—to-night! He's on the way. And it's going to be all right. Oh, Mother, speak to me!"

Mrs. Brent's tired eyes opened. For the first time for a week she spoke. "*Two* married daughters!" she whispered. "Glad, Robin, glad! Be good to him! Hard for him."

"Nurse!" Robin cried urgently. "She spoke to me, and she knew what I said! Oh, Mother, dear, you're better!"

The nurse was already bending over them. She felt the patient's pulse and looked satisfied.

“Yes, she’s stronger. This is very hopeful.”

Mrs. Brent looked at Robin again. “Better,” she murmured. “Must see Rob. Be kind, Robin! *Two* married girls!” And she closed her eyes contentedly.

“She’ll be all right. What did she mean?” the nurse whispered. “Her mind isn’t wandering, is it? Her eyes looked clear. Did you understand? She’s asleep now.”

Robin fled to her own room, not yet prepared to explain what her mother had meant. But Gwyneth fach had been married for a month, and Mrs. Brent’s meaning was plain.

All day Robin went about in a bewildered dream, while her mother slept. Wandering on the great green headland, she said to herself again and again and very firmly, “I mustn’t be excited when he comes. I must talk to him sensibly and not seem too thrilled to see him. I mustn’t make a silly of myself, as I might have done on May-day. I’ve had plenty of warning. I mustn’t give myself away.”

She went home, determined to hold her feelings severely in check, and sent the car off to meet the train, but did not go herself. She wished her brother could have been there, to stand by her. She wished her mother would wake.

“I shall wait here,” she said to herself, as the time drew near for the car to arrive; and she retreated to a small drawing-room.

The car drew up outside, and in spite of her resolution Robin found herself flinging open the great door.

“He mustn’t bang the knocker. It makes such a row,” she whispered to herself, in excuse.

Rob stood and gazed at her on the threshold. Then that happened to Robin which had happened at the crowning ceremony, and as she saw the look in his eyes, her own blazed in welcome and something more.

“May I come in, Robin fach?” he asked.

“Yes, come in!” And she held the door wide.

“You won’t kick me out?” He followed her into the little room. “Oh, Robin fach, I do love you so much! I didn’t know quite how much till I looked into your eyes!”

Robin closed the door. Then she turned to him. “Oh, Rob, how silly you have been!”

“We’ll be married at once,” Rob said firmly, half an hour later. “Yes, listen, Robin fach. We don’t want to leave your mother; we’ll take care of her between us. I lost my mother when I was fifteen, and I’ve missed her badly. I’d like to take yours in her place, if she’ll let me. But I can’t stay here unless we’re married. We’ll make your pal Gwyneth come to Quellyn

as soon as her honeymoon is over, and we'll be married, and we'll go away for a few days—for a week, if you can bear to stay so long. You can ring up and talk to Gwyneth every night. We won't have a proper honeymoon just now. Some day I hope you'll come to see my Islands and my New Zealand home; but that can wait. I've been told that Lady Marchwood—bless her! How she scolded me last night!—she waited ten years and had five children before her real honeymoon; she'd had only a week in London. We'll try to have a week; I've been planning it in the train, all the way from town—if only you didn't kick me out. There was always that awful fear in my mind. If you like the idea we'll go to the Abbey, as Mr. and Mrs. Quellyn, and let them ring the bells for us. Then we'll come home and Gwyneth can go back to Moranedd by the sea, and we'll nurse your mother till she's as well and strong as ever. How do you like that programme?"

"I can't be ready for a little while," Robin said definitely. "But if you'll give me time—yes, Rob, I'd like that."

"We've wasted long enough, thanks to me. Don't point out that it's been my fault. I know. I'm kicking myself all the time."

"You must be black and blue."

"Mentally I am. But don't be too hard on me, Robin fach. It wasn't easy to—to swallow Plas Quellyn, to quote Lady Marchwood."

"Did she really put it that way? Rob, you're quite sure you don't mind?"

"I'm quite sure only one thing matters in the whole world, and that thing is us," Rob said. "Now that we've found one another, thanks to your generous and forgiving heart, the world doesn't exist. It may say what it likes. I don't care."

"Then I'll go and tell Mother, if she's awake."

"Tell her I'm sorry, Robin fach!" Rob called after her. "Tell her I'm a worm; tell her I eat dirt. Tell her I'm an ass and an idiot, and I don't deserve to be here."

He wandered restlessly round the room, then stopped, with a whistle of surprise, before a drawing hung on the wall.

When Robin returned and saw, she laughed.

"How did you get this?" he asked.

"From your show in London. I bought several, but was told I mustn't bring them away. I begged for just one, to show to Father, and explained how very ill he was. I said I knew you a little and I had watched you doing that drawing in the Abbey. They were interested and thought they might spare one picture, and they asked where I'd like it sent to. When I said, 'To Plas Quellyn, in North Wales,' their eyes nearly dropped out in surprise."

"They would," Rob agreed. "So they let you have the chapter-house door and windows, to hang in the old family home?"

“That was about it. The others will come later.”

“How many did you buy?” Rob demanded.

Robin reddened. “Five. I wanted them, Rob, and I felt we ought to have some of your work here. We have so many of Robert Quellyn’s paintings and studies.”

“Five! Flinging your money about, weren’t you?” he teased. “Which did you choose?”

“Two lovely Highland sketches; one of a South Sea island—such beautiful colour; and another of the Abbey—the refectory windows. I love your black-and-white work. The lines are so clear and good.”

“Well, well! I’ll do some specially for you and Quellyn.”

“I shall expect that,” Robin retorted.

“There’s one thing I’d like to do, if you’re willing,” Rob said next morning, as they sat together on the headland, looking out over Porthdinlleyn Bay to Nevin Point and Yr Eifl.

“It’s odd how often I want to do the things you want to do,” Robin said reflectively. “I don’t think we shall fight much, as a married couple. That idea of going to the Abbey for a few days!—a good many people would say it was silly and we ought to be alone somewhere, but I think it will be fun.”

“They’ll let us be alone as much as we want. A more understanding crowd I never met. We’ll be ragged no end, of course.”

“That will be fun too, so long as you’re there to take part of it,” Robin said serenely. “And Mother is really better; your coming has done her good. I shall be able to enjoy the Abbey. What is your new idea?”

“To ask young Marigold here some day for a seaside holiday. She’s an Islander, as I am; and they’ve no sea at the Abbey. She’s been a brick; she’s written long letters and told me all about you, for months. I’d have gone crazy without Littlejan Fraser’s letters.”

Robin smiled. “She’s been writing to me too. She’s been very anxious we should marry. I asked her to come, Rob; before Father died I told Marigold she must come to Quellyn as soon as it was possible for us to have visitors, for the sands and the bathing and the fishing. But she pointed out that she now has two small brothers at school in this country and that she would want to spend her holidays with them—with Mrs. Raymond, or at the Manor or the Hall. And I wouldn’t want to ask three of them, she said. Then Father grew suddenly weaker and I couldn’t do any more. I quite agree with you. I’d like to see Littlejan here. But we must ask all three, and perhaps Mary-Dorothy to look after them. Marigold won’t forsake her small boys.”

“Then we must have them all. It would be great sport. Does that big radio of yours get New York?” Rob asked suddenly.

Robin's eyes widened at the change of subject. "We can get New York, but we don't often bother. There's always plenty to listen to without America. Why?"

Rob looked mysterious. "I sent something new to Ivor and it pleased him rather a lot. He's putting it on at his next concert, on Thursday night."

Robin's eyes blazed in excitement. "And we could hear it! New music of yours? Oh, Rob, is it the Welsh pieces you wanted to write?"

"They haunted me till I put them down. I did my best with them, but Ivor had to lick them into shape."

"But the ideas are yours. We must listen! What do you call them?"

"'Pictures in Lley'n.' First, 'The Sea,' a wild tempest. Then 'The Morfa,' calm and meditative and peaceful. And last, 'The Mountain.' I tried to make it strong and majestic—the everlasting hills,' you know."

Robin's eyes had ranged as he spoke over the blue bay, which could rage so madly in a gale—over the placid fields and hedges of the morfa, the low marshy land between sea and hills—and up to the mountain behind Plas Quellyn, which they had climbed together. "Oh—marvellous!" she said. "We must hear it, Rob. How proud and thrilled I'll be!"

"It won't come on till after midnight," he warned her. "I didn't mean you to sit up for it!"

"Of course I shall. I want to hear it much more than you do! I've never heard any of your music, except those little 'cello things you played at the Hall. I love your pictures; I want to know what your music's like."

"Perhaps you'll loathe it."

"I don't think so. How kind of Sir Ivor to give us a chance to hear it!"

"I thanked him for using it, but I never dreamt of such good luck as hearing it with you beside me, Robin fach!"

"I don't know much about music. You must teach me. But I'm sure I shall like yours."

"Because you like me, just a little bit?" he teased.

"That's the idea," Robin said serenely.

She turned to him presently. "I'll be so glad to have you to help me! I've missed Father so much, he used to give me good advice. Mother had to decide everything, till I came of age; she was my trustee and she had to act for me, but she always told me what she was doing and why, so that I'd understand; and Father talked to me, to prepare me for taking charge of Quellyn. With Father gone and Mother so ill, I've felt all at sea, and we don't know yet if she will be fit to help again. It's wonderful to have you. I know you'll pull me through."

Rob grinned at her. "I shall be frightfully shy, for fear you'll think I'm interfering. Quellyn is yours; you're still the Queen of the Castle. I'll be

merely Prince-Consort.”

“If you talk rubbish we shall quarrel, and that will be a pity,” Robin said calmly. “We don’t want a bad start. I need somebody to help me very badly, and I hope you’re going to take on the job. You won’t be able to give all your time to making music and painting pictures! There’s business to be done.”

“I guess we’ll tackle it all right. And—Robin fack! If we ever have a little ’un of our own, we’ll call it Robert or Roberta, and Bobbibach for short.”

Robin laughed. “I’d love to have a Bobbibach!” she admitted.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

LITTLEJAN PLANS FOR JANSY

Littlejan skipped joyfully across the Manor park, past the lake, and through the orchard to the garden. “Lady Jen! Would you like to hear about Robin’s wedding?”

It was late in September and school had started again. Queen Jean’s reign was going well, but it was recognised that she relied on her “godmother” and turned to Littlejan continually for advice. That had been expected, however, and no one was critical. The school would have liked Queen Marigold to reign for a second year; in effect, she was doing it, as Rosamund had done, when Jen, following her as Queen, had been kept at home by family troubles.

Jen looked up from her knitting; she was sitting in one corner of the lawn, while Rosemary, Michael and Katharine played in another corner, watched by Nurse and assisted by a ginger kitten.

“I heard the bells,” she smiled. “You’ll clash them again when the bride and bridegroom arrive, won’t you? Yes, do tell me, Marigold. When do they come here?”

“In about four days. Mrs. Brent is much better, and Mrs. Lloyd—that’s the Gwyneth girl—is staying at the big house, so Rob and Robin are going to be away for ten days. They’ve gone to Scotland, to see Rob’s relations in the Highlands. Robin wanted to meet them, and she loved Rob’s Highland pictures so much that she wanted to see Scotland. They’ll go to stay near the doctor brother in Edinburgh too; he was at the wedding to give Robin to Rob, of course. I’ll read you Robin’s letter. Wasn’t it decent of her to write to me so soon? They’re at the Highland farm now. Robin says something about my letters, while Rob was away, and . . .” Littlejan paused.

“Robin wants to repay your kindness,” Jen agreed. “What did she wear? It wasn’t decided when I heard about her last.”

“She wanted to have a new robin dress, brown with some red on it, and not bother with white, but her mother begged her to be a proper bride for Rob, and said she’d always hoped to see her only girl in a wedding-dress, and Gwyneth had worn white and she wanted Robin to have white too. So Robin gave in and had a long white dress and a wreath and veil; she says she felt just like a Hamlet Club Queen. It was a village wedding, in a little old church, and all the farm people and shop people and Quellyn people were

there; everybody knows all about every one else, Robin says, just like a big family. And they *are* so pleased that she's turned into Mrs. Quellyn!"

Jen laughed. "I can believe that. I'm sure it was a very happy wedding, just like those we've had here. Several of our weddings have had to be quiet, for various reasons. Mine was, and Maidlin's. But they've all been very happy days. And we've usually had dancing on the green, or in the barn. Robin must have her party when she comes here."

"Oh, yes! We've arranged it. The Club's coming to dance in the barn, and we shall try to get Rob and Robin in the middle for 'Sellenger's.' Lady Jen! That new dance I heard you pipe one night!"

"Yes? Do you want to hear it again? Then bring my pipe from the sun parlour."

Littlejan fetched the pipe, and the children on the lawn looked up as the gay little tune rang out, while the kitten dashed away among the bushes, startled by the unusual sounds. His little amber face peered out from behind a lavender bush, and Rosemary picked him up and soothed him, explaining that the strange noise was "only Mother playing a dance."

"I love the tune. When will you teach it to the Club?" Littlejan pleaded.

"Not yet," Jen smiled. "I'm afraid you'll have to wait. Unless you'd like to teach the Club, Marigold? It's very easy. I could tell you what you do."

Littlejan looked at her wistfully. "Would you let me try? I'd love it. Or—something even better, Lady Jen!"

"That sounds mysterious." Jen played the tune again and then put down the pipe. "Tell me, Marigold; or I'll guess! You think Jean should teach it; you want to keep in the background, now that she's the Queen. Is that it?"

"It would be only sensible, but Jean wouldn't do it. She wouldn't believe she could teach anybody. She'd need a terrific amount of shoving and she wouldn't be happy, so she wouldn't do it well."

"She wouldn't do it well, if she were unhappy about it, that's certain," Jen conceded. "What is your idea, then?"

"Jansy," Littlejan said firmly. "I'd like Jansy to teach the Club."

"Marigold! Surely she's too little?"

"She's nearly thirteen. I'd have said she was too little, but for what happened last night; I don't suppose you've heard. The Club gave a party to the Kindergarten infants; it was Jean's idea—she's very good with the babies. At the last moment poor Jean had the most terrific toothache, and the Head sent her to have the tooth out and then made her go to bed; she's a weekly boarder at school. Miss Macey said the party was only for the Kinder kids and Mirry or I could take charge. She didn't know that we both had to be at games committee. There was no one to run the party, except the Hamlets who had come to help Jean, and not one of them would do it.

Somebody said, 'Jansy, you're the Queen's maid. You'd better be M.C.' And Jan says that before she knew it she'd been shoved up on a chair and she was telling the babes about the first game. I heard about Jean at the end of the committee, and I rushed along to see what had happened, and there was young Jansy, still perched on a chair, teaching them that thing about, 'Catch a little fox and put him in a box'—you know! I kept out of sight, chuckling like mad, but I watched, and she did jolly well. Some of the seniors were watching too, and I heard somebody say: 'That kid's just her mother over again. Mrs. Raymond is a splendid M.C. or teacher.' I asked Jansy about it afterwards, and she said she'd felt awful at first, but then she rather liked it."

"Good for Jansy!" Jen said heartily. "The girls are right: she is like Joan. But it would be a much bigger job to teach the Club, Marigold. Why not do it yourself? You aren't nervous!"

"Not a scrap, and I'd just love it. But I'm not going to do it. It's Jansy's job. I want the Club to begin to sit up and take notice of Jan. I want them to feel she counts."

Jen laid down her knitting and gazed at her. "Are you thinking of May-day?"

"Definitely, Lady Jen. I want the girls to say Jansy is worth while."

"I see." Jen looked thoughtful! "So you're bringing her forward whenever you get the chance, and though you'd enjoy teaching the Club yourself you're going to insist on her doing it. You really are a good sort, Marigold!"

"Oh—tripe!" Littlejan blurted out, her face scarlet. "I don't mean to be rude, but—you will help me, won't you? I do want Jansy to be the next Queen!"

"I'll help," Jen promised. "Suppose you bring Jansy to me to-morrow evening. I'll teach you both the dance. You know most of it already—it's only a new formation that we haven't used before, but there are a few snags; you'd need to be prepared for awkward questions. Kenneth and I had a late evening in town about a month ago, and while he went to a lecture I watched a dance-party and they did this little dance. It looked fascinating! I longed to join in."

"Why didn't you? Wouldn't they let you?"

"Oh, yes! I was invited by several people. But I hadn't gone to dance, and I'd promised Kenneth I wouldn't. I decided to teach it to the Club as soon as I could, but it isn't fair to make them wait for me."

"Come to Robin's wedding party and teach us," Littlejan pleaded.

Jen laughed. "No, Marigold; but thank you, all the same! You or Jansy shall teach the Club. If you feel she should do it, we'll tell her what to say, and if she makes a muddle you can help her out."

“I don’t think she will. She has a very clear mind, and she uses plain words,” Littlejan said. “I’ve talked about lots of things to Jansy lately. She’s growing up.”

“Good! I’m sure you’ve helped her. Your own mind is quite clear and straightforward, so perhaps Jansy has learned from you,” Jen told her.

“There’s one other lovely idea in Robin’s letter,” Littlejan said eagerly. “She says that the only thing we haven’t got—at the Abbey, she means—is the sea, and she hopes that when any of us, from any of the families, feel we must have a seaside holiday, we’ll look on Quellyn as the place to go. It depends on how her mother is and whether they have other visitors, of course, but she hopes we’ll tell her, and if it’s possible we must go to Quellyn. The bathing and the beach and the sands and the fishing are marvellous, she says; and there are mountains to climb, and motoring, and heaps of other things to do. It sounds too wonderful for words! Isn’t Mrs. Quellyn a dear?”

“She truly is,” Jen agreed. “I hope we’ll all see her Welsh castle in time. My house on the moors won’t be good enough for holidays now. You’ll all be off to Plas Quellyn and the sea!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

BELLS FOR JEN AND ROBIN

“Look!” Rosamund whispered, and drew Maidlin and Lindy to the door of the barn. “This is great fun! Young Jansy is teaching her dance to the Club. Jen warned us, by ’phone. She’s doing it well, too.”

Jansy, in her green dance frock, was perched on a chair, giving directions.

“Hamlet Clubbers!”—Rosamund grinned at Maidlin—“Aunty Jen can’t be here to-night, but she’s seen a jolly new dance in London and she’s told Marigold and me all about it. I don’t know why Marigold has stuck me up here, but she says it will be better if she runs round on the floor and keeps an eye on you. You stand like in ‘Ruffy Tufty,’ but you make the sets round the room, in a big ring.”

“And Marigold runs about on the floor and pushes them into position,” Rosamund laughed. “Come on, Maid! Let’s be taught by Jansy and shoved into place by Marigold. What a joke! Belinda Bellanne, find a partner and make up our square for four. There’s Hyacinth looking for somebody.”

“Where’s Joan? She ought not to miss this,” Maidlin protested.

“Haven’t you heard? Jen—but I can’t tell you now! Oh, here come the bride and bridegroom!”

“How are all the little girls?” Robin laughed across at the Countess.

“Splendid! Rosanna and Rosilda are quite large. But we must listen to Teacher!”

Jansy was describing the dance. “Polka step. There’s no neutral couple, because there’s no end to the set; you go on and on, and stay Ones or Twos all the time. Ones go over first in the arches. It’s a jolly tune. Let’s try it, shall we?”

Littlejan, in a green frock the twin of Jansy’s, climbed on another chair to watch.

“You did that jolly well, Jan. If it goes all right, we’ll join in. There’s Robin without a partner, and we’ll find a fourth. It does look jolly! Come on; here’s Mary-Dorothy. With Robin and us, Mary. Oh, what’s the matter? You look so pleased about something!”

“You’ll hear presently.” Mary, with radiant eyes, held out her hand to Robin, and the last four squeezed themselves into the ring.

The dance ended at last, with everybody breathless and delighted. “We must have that regularly. It’s good fun,” Rosamund exclaimed.

“Three cheers for Jansy’s dance!” cried Queen Marigold, and led the shout that went up.

“Did they ring the bells for you when you arrived?” Maidlin turned to Robin. “Mine was the first wedding Cecily rang for, but we had no Michael. And then Cecily rang for Gail. You’re the first bride to have them rung properly.”

“I should call it clashed,” Robin said solemnly. “Oh, yes! They rang for us. We heard them as we came up the avenue.”

“Where’s your husband, Mrs. Quellyn?” Rosamund asked.

“Talking to yours,” Robin retorted. “I’m going to teach him to dance, but he won’t venture on it in public yet. I don’t see Dr. Robertson. Has he stayed at home with ‘the girls’?”

“Oh, no, he’s here somewhere. Honesty has stayed with young Joy and little Rose.” Maidlin smiled. “We wanted Lindy to come to your party, for if Lindy hadn’t made friends with you on the way home we might never have known you.”

“And I might never have met Rob,” Robin agreed. “We owe everything to Belinda Bellanne. I wonder if she’d have a dance with me?”

Lindy caught her outstretched hand. “I’d love to, Mrs. Quellyn. Thanks so much! It’s dear old ‘Christchurch Bells.’”

“What’s that?” Maidlin cried, at a new sound above the music of the violin.

“The bells again, clashing like mad,” Rosamund said. “Is it for the married couple, because this is their party? Not fair they should be rung for twice!”

“Here’s Joan,” Mary exclaimed, her voice full of suppressed excitement.

Joan came in while the bells in the Abbey still clashed joyfully. She signed to Margia Lane and the music stopped.

Joan stepped up on to Jansy’s chair. Every face turned to her and a murmur ran round.

“What is Mrs. Raymond going to say? She looks jolly pleased about something!”

“Joan, what *is* it?” Rosamund cried.

“What’s happened, Mother?” Jansy gave a shrill shout.

Joan raised her hand and silence fell, except for the excited music of the bells, which seemed to surpass all their previous efforts.

“Girls of the Hamlet Club! And all our good friends! I have news for you—splendid news. Our Brown Queen, Jen, Lady Marchwood, has twin sons, and all are doing well. Maid, your Jock is making a good job of those bells!”

“Jen—two boys?” Rosamund’s voice rose above the hubbub of delighted talk and comment. She went quickly to Joan. “Oh, Joan, really? How pleased she’ll be! And she’s beaten us all again. She still has much the largest family!”

“And she’s the only one to have two boys,” Joan smiled down at her. “She is so pleased about that. She’s been terribly afraid she’d have two girls.”

“I’m glad she hasn’t been disappointed,” Maidlin said joyfully. “She’ll be very proud and happy.”

“She is. And Christopher and Bernard are beautiful children.”

“Chris——! Are those really to be their names?” Maidlin began to laugh.

“Jen says so. She’s going to call them Chris and Barney. Still saints, like all her boys! She says they’re little Robinses, not little Marchwoods.” Joan looked at Robin. “Jen’s name before her marriage was Robins, and the fair ones among her children—that is, all the boys—are like the Robins family. The dark little girls are real Marchwoods. Jen’s delighted to have two more yellow-haired boys.”

“The morris side of six is coming along fast.” Rosamund grinned. “Good for Brownie! Nice of her to have children while the Club was dancing! What a row those bells are making! Is it Jock Robertson who is operating?”

“It is Jock Robertson,” Joan assented. “He begged to be allowed to ring Cecily and Michael for Jen. He wants us to dance ‘The Twin Sisters’ for his little girls.”

“To say nothing of mine!” Rosamund agreed. “Oh, yes! ‘Twin Sisters,’ certainly. Jansy has taught her dance, Joan. You should have been here, but I quite see you couldn’t.”

“Did she do it well?”

“Jolly well. She put it as clearly as you could have done yourself.”

“But she called us ‘Hamlet Clubbers.’ It’s not exactly polite,” Maidlin said, claiming Rosamund as her partner. “‘Twin Sisters,’ with me, Ros. We both have them; so suitable!”

“I hear the wedding-bells,” said a new voice. “Where are the happy couple?” And the President of the Club came into the barn.

“Not wedding-bells only,” Rosamund cried, as they passed her in the dance. “Go and ask Joan! Baby-bells too!”

She kept one eye on the mystified President and saw her face light up in delight as she heard the news.

“Aren’t you beginning to be sorry you wished twins on to the Abbey, nearly two years ago?” the Countess demanded at the end of the dance.

“Almost. I didn’t expect you all to take up the challenge so thoroughly,” the President retorted. “Joan is the only one who has been strong-minded enough to resist my suggestion. Shall I wish triplets on to you now?”

“Oh, please don’t! Spare us that! How is my goddaughter?”

“Shirley Rose is quite a big girl. I’ll bring her to see you—and your boarding-school—one day. What a jolly party we’ll have sometime, with your four, and Maid’s two, and Joan’s Jill, and my Shirley, all about the same age!”

“They must come to Kentisbury, as they’re nearly all Roses. We’d better have a yearly gathering. There are two little Roses in France, and Mrs. Thistle has just had her second girl, Tazy Rose; we’ll ask her too. Roddy and Hugh will be quite crushed, unless we invite Christopher and Bernard and Jimmy Raymond to keep them company.”

“But where is your bride? Isn’t the party in her honour?”

“Dancing with Queen Marigold; the brown girl, in white. You didn’t speak to her at the Coronation, I suppose. Mrs. Quellyn! Our President would like to meet you.” And in a quick aside, “Keep her talking for a moment! I’ll fetch the bridegroom. We want them for ‘Sellenger’s.’”

Cicely nodded. “I’ll see to that.”

Robin came to be introduced. “I’ve heard of you so often, Mrs. Everett. You must be glad you made the Club dance.”

“It seems a very long while ago! Yes, I am glad; I think they’ve enjoyed themselves,” Cicely Everett said, with mock seriousness. “I’m glad to meet you, Mrs. Quellyn. How odd that sounds to us here!”

“It sounds still more odd to me, and to the folk at Quellyn,” Robin assured her.

“I suppose so. I like your husband’s pictures; I’ve seen them in town. I bought a sketch of the Abbey.”

“You’d like his music too. His new Welsh suite has caused a lot of talk in New York; Sir Ivor wrote to tell him how pleased everybody was. It was broadcast, just after we were engaged, and we sat up till two in the morning to listen. Rob was thrilled to the limit at hearing it played so wonderfully.”

“And you felt very proud of him?” The President looked at her with kind eyes.

“Just terribly proud! It’s so marvellous to be a good musician as well as a fine painter. Here he is! Rob, this is Mrs. Everett, the President of the Hamlet Club. She’s bagged one of the Abbey sketches from your show.”

“I came here for a honeymoon, but it looks as if I’ll have to work.” Rob grinned. “The Secretary of that show keeps asking for more Abbey sketches; he says he can sell as many as I’ll give him. I never meant you people to buy them; I’d have presented them to you if I’d known you would care about

them. I only put them in the show because they are such a different style of work from the South Sea and Highland water-colours; they made it a much more interesting selection. But you Abbey folk have rushed at them and bagged them. I shall have to do some more, instead of running about the country with you, Robin fach!”

As they talked with the President they had forgotten the rest of the Club. Rosamund, with mischief in her eyes, and Maidlin, looking amused, were leading lines of dancers, who grasped the idea and caught hands and followed. The Rose and Primrose Queens met, and the ring was formed round the President and the bridal couple. Margia struck up “Sellenger’s Round,” and the circle swept round and back again.

“Now we’re the maypole,” Cicely said calmly.

Rob gave one horrified look. “Gosh, how awful! Let’s run for it, Robin fach!”

Robin broke into laughter. “Oh, how *mean*! Why didn’t we see? Yes, Rob, come on! Quickly!”

All the arms went up as the dancers surged towards the centre. “Now!” Robin cried.

They dived under the nearest arms, and Joan and Lindy, in laughing sympathy, made an arch and let them go.

“Into the Abbey!” gasped Robin.

They fled together through the meadow and into the Abbey, passing Jock Robertson on the way. The bells were silent at last and the cloister garth was quiet and lonely.

“Hi! What have you people been doing?” cried Jock, as he entered the barn. “The Robins are in the Abbey. They’ve run away from you.”

“We only made them into the maypole,” Maidlin explained. “We did ‘Sellenger’s’ round them.”

And the Hamlet Club laughed and went on dancing.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Because of copyright considerations, the fontispiece by Margaret Horder (1911-1978) has been omitted from this etext.

When nested quoting was encountered, nested double quotes were changed to single quotes.

[The end of *Robins in the Abbey* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]