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"I KNOW A SECRET"

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ANNE OF GREEN GABLES"

"THE LADY AT THE LAMP" by VERA CONNOLLY

Helen Topping Miller - Frederic F. Van de Water - Allene Corliss

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I Know a Secret

L. M. Montgomery

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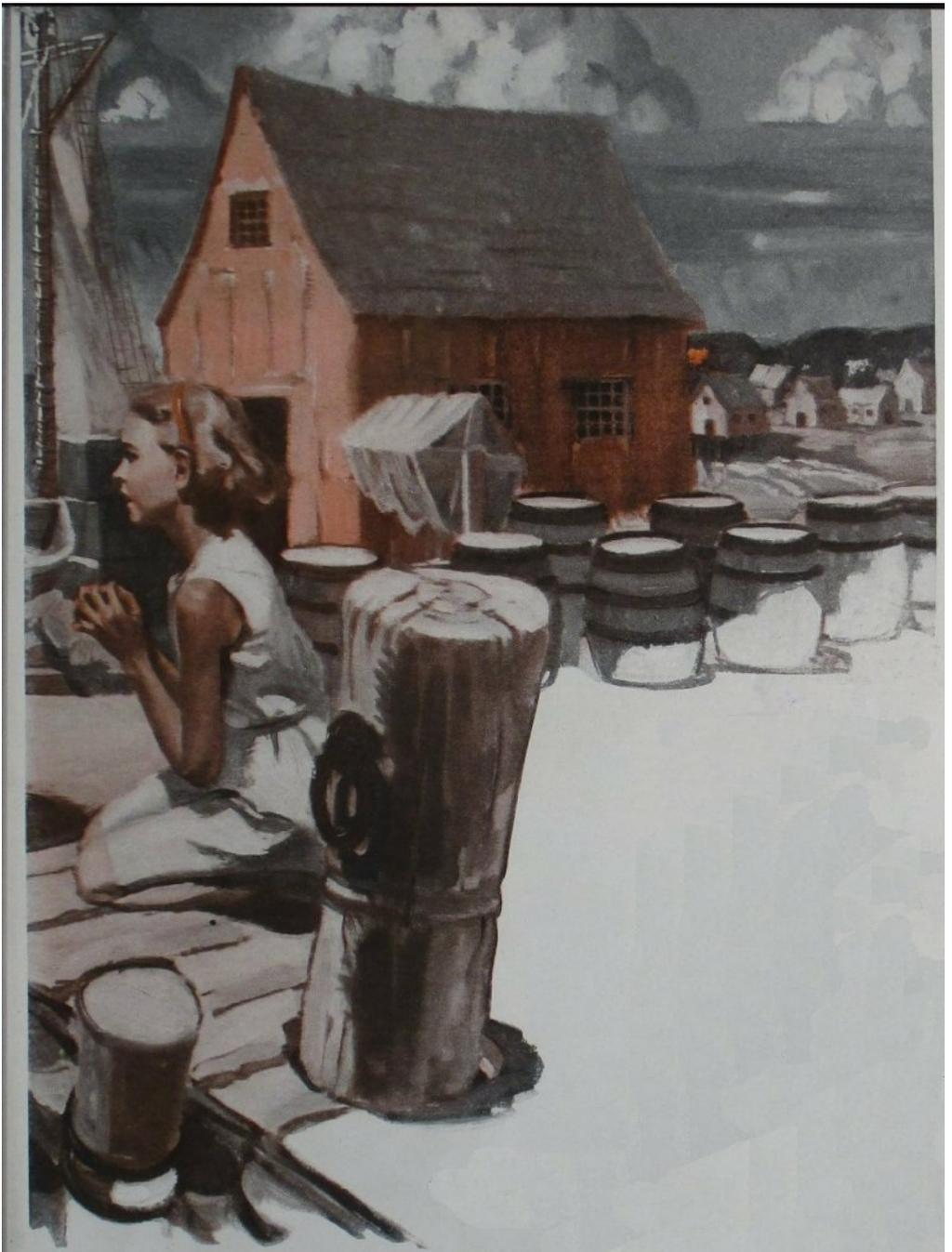
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*Dovie, Who Was Eleven,
Knew So Much More
Than Jane, Who Was Only Eight*

I KNOW A SECRET

By L. M. Montgomery





“You have so many lovely secrets. Please tell me one,” pleaded Jane. Dovie’s eyes gleamed, but all she would say was, “We’ll see when you get those apples”

I know a secret . . . I know a secret . . . I know a secret . . . and I won't tell *you*," chanted Dovie Johnson as she teetered back and forth on the very edge of the wharf.

Jane shuddered to see her, and yet the teetering had a fascination. She was so sure Dovie would fall off sometime, and then what? But Dovie never did. Her luck always held.

Everything Dovie did, or said she did—which were, perhaps, two very different things, although Jane was too innocent and credulous to know that—had a fascination for Jane. Dovie, who was eleven and had lived in Bartibog all her life, knew so much more than Jane, who was only eight and had lived in Bartibog only a year. Bartibog, Dovie said, was the only place where people knew anything. What could you know, shut up in a town?

And Dovie knew so many secrets. She never would tell them, and Jane pined to know them. Secrets must be such wonderful, mysterious, beautiful things. Jane hadn't a single secret. Everything she knew, other people knew—Mother and Aunt Helen and Uncle George. And a secret wasn't a secret if more than two people knew it, so Dovie said. If Dovie would only tell her one single secret, that would be enough. But plead as Jane might and did, Dovie wouldn't. Dovie would only wrinkle up her fat nose and look important and say that Jane was far too young to have secrets. This maddened Jane.

"You'd tell somebody. You couldn't help it," taunted Dovie.

"I wouldn't—I could so," cried Jane. "Oh, Dovie, please tell me a secret, just one. You know so many. You might tell me just one. Dovie—" Jane had a sudden inspiration—"if you tell me a secret, I'll give you six apples for it."

Dovie's queer little amber eyes gleamed. Apples were apples in Bartibog, where orchards were few. The George Lawrences had a small one, and in it were some August apples that ripened sooner than any others in Bartibog.

"Six yellow apples off that tree in the southwest corner?" bargained Dovie.

Jane nodded. Her breath came quickly. Was it—oh, was it possible that Dovie would really tell her a secret?

"Will your aunt let you?" demanded Dovie.

Every one in Bartibog knew that Mrs. George Lawrence was as mean as second skimmings with her apples, as with everything else. Jane nodded again, but rather uncertainly. She was none too sure about it. Aunt Helen let her have one apple a day—"to keep the doctor away"—but six all at once were a pretty big order. Dovie scented the uncertainty.

"You would have to have those apples right here before I could tell you a

secret,” she said firmly. “No apples, no secret.”

“I—I may not be able to get them all at once,” said Jane anxiously. “But I’ll have them in a week.”

Jane had had another inspiration. She would not eat her apple a day. She would save them up till she had six. Perhaps the doctor might come, but what of it? She liked Dr. Nicholas. He had come to see her when she had been sick in the spring, and he was rosy and jolly and twinkling. He had told her mother and Aunt Helen—especially Aunt Helen—that she must be let live in the sunshine all summer and she would be all right by fall.

“Well, I’ll think it over,” said Dovie doubtfully. “Don’t get your hopes up. I don’t expect I’ll tell you any secret after all. You’re too young. I’ve told you so often enough.”

“I’m older than I was last week,” pleaded Jane. “Oh, Dovie, you have so many lovely secrets. You might spare me one. Don’t be so mean.”

“I guess I’ve got a right to my own secrets,” said Dovie crushingly. “Get a secret of your own, Jane Lawrence, if you want one so much.”

“I don’t know how,” cried Jane in despair. “And it would be so lovely to have a secret.”

“Oh, it’s wonderful,” agreed Dovie. “I tell you, Jane, life isn’t worth living without secrets. Six apples isn’t much to pay for one. If you’d give me that little gold chain of yours now . . .”

“I couldn’t do that,” said Jane miserably. “It isn’t really mine, you see. It’s Mother’s, though she lets me wear it sometimes. Father gave it to her just before he died. It’s almost the only little bit of jewelry she has.”

“Oh, of course I know you and your mother are poor as church mice,” agreed Dovie. “Ma says she doesn’t know what you’d have done when your mother got sick if your Aunt Helen hadn’t taken you in. My, she was mad at having to do it, though. She told Ma her and George had enough to do to make both ends meet as it was. And she said as soon as Hester—that’s your ma, you know—”

“Of course I know my own mother’s name,” said Jane, a trifle on her dignity. Secrets or no secrets, there were limits.

“Well, your Aunt Helen said that she bet as soon as Hester got well again she’d have to go back to her work. What did your ma work at in town, Jane?”

“She taught school,” said Jane, “and taught it well. But the secret, Dovie—you’ll tell me one, won’t you?”

“We’ll see when you get those six apples,” was all Dovie would say.

But she had never conceded so much before, and Jane’s hopes were high.

She continued to sit on the wharf long after Dovie had gone. She liked to sit on the wharf and watch the fishing boats going out and coming in, and sometimes a ship drifting down the harbor, bound to fair lands far away—"far, far away"—Jane repeated the words to herself with a relish. They savored of magic. She wished she could sail away in a ship—down the blue harbor, past the bar of shadowy dunes, past Prospect Point, which at sunset became an outpost of mystery; out, out to the blue mist that was a summer sea; on, on to enchanted islands in golden morning seas. Jane flew on the wings of her imagination all over the world as she squatted there on the old, sagging, half-decayed wharf.

This afternoon she was all keyed up about the secret. Dovie Johnson and she had been playmates of a sort ever since Jane had come to Bartibog. The very first time Jane had ever seen her, Dovie had whispered,

"I know a secret."

That is the most intriguing phrase in the world. From that moment Jane was Dovie's humble and adoring satellite. Dovie liked Jane well enough.

"No harm in her—a bit soft," she told the other Bartibog girls, none of whom bothered much about Jane.

Would Dovie really tell her a secret? And what would it be? Something lovely, of course. Secrets were always lovely. Perhaps Dovie had been through the looking glass like Alice. Or perhaps she had seen a tiny white fairy lying on a lily pad in her father's pond. Or a boat sailing down the Bartibog River, drawn by stately white swans attached to silver chains. Perhaps the secret was something the birds told her. Or it might be that she had been to the moon.

The moon, white and frail, was hanging over the sand dunes now. Soon it would be bright and shining. Jane loved the moon. She loved to dream about it. It was a silver world of fancy where she lived a strange dream life. She never told any one about it, not even Mother, so Jane really had a wonderful secret all her own if she had only had sense enough to know it.

Perhaps Dovie knew a princess. Or, since princesses were scarce in Bartibog, just a common, everyday girl who had been changed into a toad by a witch. But no—Jane shivered—that would not be beautiful, and secrets were always beautiful. Surely Dovie would tell her one. How happy she would be when Dovie had told her a secret! She was happy now in the very thought of it, so happy that even Aunt Helen's frown when she came in late to supper couldn't squelch her.

Anyhow Aunt Helen was always frowning. Jane thought she would be glad for more reasons than one when Mother was well enough to go back to town and teach. Somehow she knew Mother would be very glad, too, though Mother was

always sweet and never answered back when Aunt Helen said mean little things. Jane didn't mind—much—when Aunt Helen said mean things to her. But she hated it when she said them to Mother. Mother was so dear and pretty and sad. And not strong. Aunt Helen was always twitting her about that. There must be something wicked about not being strong, though Jane couldn't imagine what it was. She wasn't strong herself.

“But how could she be?” she had heard Aunt Helen saying to Uncle George. “Her mother has no constitution. It was a mistake for Beverley ever to marry her. And the girls he might have had!”

Jane liked to speculate on those girls Father might have had. One of them might have been her mother. But that was horrible. Nobody could be her mother except Mother. The thing was simply unthinkable.

“I *think* Dovie Johnson is going to tell me a secret,” Jane confided to Mother that night when she was being put to bed. “Of course I won't be able to tell it to you, Mother, because no more than two people can have a secret. You won't mind, will you, darling?”

“Not at all,” said Mother, much amused.

Dovie Johnson always amused her. George said she was “a young devil,” and Helen didn't approve of Jane's playing with her—“though the Johnsons are *very* respectable.” But there was no one else for Jane to play with, and she was so taken up with Dovie.

For a week Jane denied herself her daily apple. When Aunt Helen gave it to her—grudgingly, as she gave everything—Jane would slip away, ostensibly to eat it, but in reality to store it in a box in the granary. She watched the apples anxiously for spot or blemish. Those apples didn't keep. But when she met Dovie on the wharf the next Saturday morning, she had the six apples, fair and unmarred.

“Here are the apples, Dovie,” she said breathlessly. “And now tell me the secret.”

Dovie looked at the apples rather disdainfully. “They're small,” she said.

Jane's heart sank. “They're *all* small this summer,” she faltered.

Dovie pursed up her lips. “I'll tell you the secret some other time.”

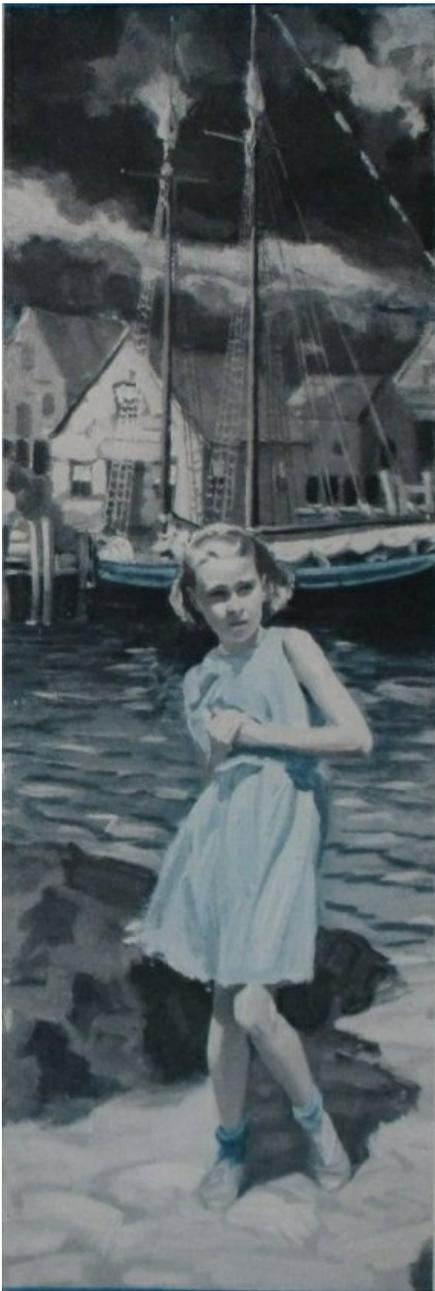
“I don't want to hear it some other time,” cried Jane. Jane had a spirit of her own, and nothing roused it more quickly than injustice. “A bargain is a bargain, Dovie Johnson. You *said* six apples for a secret. Here are the apples. And you shan't have a bite unless you tell me the secret.”

“Oh, very well,” said Dovie in a bored way. “Only don't blame me if you don't like it so well when you hear it. Swear you'll never tell any one, cross your heart and

hope to die.”

“Of course I won’t tell. It wouldn’t be a secret then.”

“Well, listen,” said Dovie.



“I’ll lock you up in that house if you don’t tell me what you want,” threatened the boy. “You let me alone,” said Jane, plucking up a little spirit.

Jane listened. The water swelling around the piers of the wharf listened. The hills across the harbor listened. Or so it seemed to Jane. The whole world was listening.

Jane shivered with delicious ecstasy. She was going to hear a secret at last.

“You know the Jimmy Thomases down at the Harbor Mouth?” said Dovie. “Six-toed Jimmy Thomas?”

Jane nodded. Of course she knew the Jimmy Thomases—at least, knew of them. Uncle George got his fish from them. But what could they possibly have to do with the secret?

“And you know Ellen Thomas?” went on Dovie.

Jane had seen Ellen Thomas once, when Six-toed Jimmy had brought her round with him in his fish wagon. She had not liked her much. Ellen was just about her own age, with jet-black bobbed hair and bold black eyes. She had stuck her tongue out at Jane.

“Well—” Dovie drew a long breath—“this is the secret. *You* are Ellen Thomas, and *she* is Jane Lawrence.”

Jane stared at Dovie. She hadn't the faintest glimmer of Dovie's meaning. What she had said made no sense.

“I—I—what do you mean?”

“It's plain enough, I should think.” Dovie smiled pityingly. “You and her was born the same night. It was when your ma and your dad were living in that little house at the Harbor Head when he was working for the Biligy people. The nurse took you down to Thomases' and put you in Ellen's cradle and brought Ellen back to your ma. Nobody but her ever knew the difference. She did it because she hated your ma. She wanted your dad for herself, and she took that way of getting even. And that is why you are really Ellen Thomas, and you ought to be living down there at the Harbor Mouth, and poor Jane Lawrence ought to be up at your Uncle George's instead of being banged about by that stepmother of hers.”

Jane believed every word of this preposterous yarn. Not for one moment did she doubt the truth of Dovie's tale. She gazed at Dovie with anguished, disillusioned eyes. This—*this*—was the beautiful secret!

“How—how did you find out?” she gasped through dry lips.

“The nurse told me on her deathbed,” said Dovie solemnly. “I s'pose her conscience troubled her. I've never told any one. The next time I saw Ellen Thomas—Jane Lawrence, I mean—I took a good look at her. She has just the same kind of ears as your ma. And she's dark complected like your ma. You've got blue eyes and yellow hair. I don't s'pose anything can be done about it now. But I've often thought it wasn't fair, you having such an easy time, and your ma keeping you like a doll, and poor El—Jane in rags and not getting enough to eat many's the time. And old Six-toed beating her when he comes home drunk. Say, these apples are dandy.” Dovie

took a huge bite out of one. “If you’ll give me six more next week, I’ll tell you another secret.”

“I don’t want to hear any more,” cried Jane passionately. She could never forget what she *had* heard. Her pain was greater than she could bear. “I *hate* you for telling me this, Dovie Johnson.”

Dovie shrugged. “I told you you mightn’t like it, didn’t I? Where are you going?”

For Jane, white and dizzy, had risen to her feet. “Home, to tell Mother,” she said miserably.

“You mustn’t—you dasn’t. Remember, you swore you wouldn’t tell any one,” cried Dovie. “The Black Man will get you if you do.”

Jane didn’t know who the Black Man was and didn’t care. But it was true she promised not to tell. And Mother always said you must never break a promise.

“I guess I’ll be getting home myself,” said Dovie, not altogether liking the look of Jane.

She gathered up her apples and ran off, her bare dusty legs twinkling along the old wharf. Behind her she left a broken-hearted child sitting among the ruins of her small universe. Dovie didn’t care. Jane was such a softy, it really wasn’t much fun to fool her.

Jane sat on the wharf for what seemed hours—blind, crushed, despairing. She wasn’t Mother’s child; she was Six-toed Jimmy’s child—Six-toed Jimmy, of whom she had always had such a secret dread simply because of his six toes. She had no business to be living with Mother, loved by Mother. Oh! Jane gave a piteous little moan. Mother wouldn’t love her any more if she knew. All her love would go to Ellen Thomas. And yet she—*she*, Jane Lawrence—was Ellen Thomas.

Jane put her hand to her head. “It makes me dizzy.”

“What’s the reason you ain’t eating nothing?” asked Aunt Helen sharply at the dinner table.

“Were you out in the sun too long, darling?” said Mother anxiously. “Does your head ache?”

“Ye—es,” said Jane. Something *was* aching terribly, but it didn’t seem to be her head. Was she telling a lie to Mother? And if so, how many more would she have to tell? For Jane knew she would never be able to eat again—never so long as this horrible secret was hers. And she knew she could never tell Mother. Not so much because of the promise—Jane had heard Aunt Helen say that a bad promise was better broken than kept—but because it would hurt Mother. Somehow Jane knew beyond any doubt that it would hurt Mother horribly. And Mother mustn’t, shouldn’t, be hurt. Jane recalled the time she had heard Mother crying in the night.

She could never forget it. She must never breathe the secret to Mother.

And yet, there was Ellen Thomas. She wouldn't call her Jane Lawrence. It made Jane feel awful beyond any description to think of Ellen Thomas as being Jane Lawrence. She felt as if it blotted her out altogether. If she wasn't Jane Lawrence, she wasn't anybody. She would *not* be Ellen Thomas.

But Ellen Thomas haunted her. For a week Jane was beset by her—a wretched, wretched week during which Mother worried herself almost sick over Jane, who wouldn't eat and wouldn't play with Dovie Johnson any more and, just as Aunt Helen scornfully said, “moped around.” Mother would have sent for Dr. Nicholas, but Dr. Nicholas was away for his vacation, and his practice was being looked after by some strange doctor who was boarding at the Harbor Hotel, and Aunt Helen didn't hold with strange doctors.

Jane had often wondered why, when people came to Bartibog for vacation, Dr. Nicholas should go away for his. But now Jane wondered over nothing except the one awful question which had emerged from her confusion of mind and taken possession of her. Shouldn't Ellen Thomas have her rights? Was it fair that she, Jane Lawrence—Jane clung to her own identity frantically—should have all the things that Ellen Thomas was denied and which were hers by rights? No, it wasn't fair. Jane was despairingly sure it wasn't fair. Somewhere in Jane there was a very strong sense of justice and fair play. And it became increasingly borne in upon her that it was only fair that Ellen Thomas should be told. After all, she didn't suppose Mother would care so much. She would be a little upset at first, of course, but as soon as she knew that Ellen Thomas was really her own child, all her love would go to Ellen, and Jane would become of no account to her. Mother would kiss Ellen Thomas and sing to her in the twilight when the fog was coming in from the sea—sing the song Jane loved best:

“I saw a ship a-sailing, a-sailing on the sea,
And, oh, it was all laden with pretty things for me.”

Jane and Mother had often talked about the time their ship would come in. But now the pretty things would be Ellen Thomas'.

There came a day when Jane knew she could bear it no longer. She must do what was fair. She would go down to the Harbor Mouth—it was only a mile—and tell the Thomases the truth. They could tell Mother. Jane felt that she simply could not do that.

Jane felt a little better when she had come to this decision; better, but very, very sad. She tried to eat a little at supper because it would be the last meal she would

ever eat with Mother.

“I’ll always call her ‘Mother,’” thought Jane desperately. “And I won’t call Six-toed Jimmy ‘Father.’ I’ll just say, ‘Mr. Thomas’ very respectfully. Surely he won’t mind that.”

But something choked her. She couldn’t eat. Again Mother said timidly she wished she could see the doctor at the hotel.

“Dr. Nicholas will be back next week,” said Aunt Helen. “We don’t know a thing about that doctor at the hotel, not even his name. And his bill would likely be terrible. There isn’t any great rush. You’re always worrying over Jane. She runs around too much. That’s all that ails her.”

“She hasn’t run around much lately,” said Mother, standing up to Aunt Helen in a way she seldom dared to.

Her eyes sparkled, and a little flush stained her soft round cheeks that had been pale so long. Jane looked at Mother, suddenly seeing her for the first time. Before this she had just been Mother—somebody who cuddled and kissed you and looked after you and comforted you. All at once she had become a different person. Why, Mother was young and pretty—very pretty. She had beautiful soft dark eyes with long lashes, beautiful black hair in little waves about her face. Black hair! Jane’s heart was torn by another pang. Ellen Thomas had black hair. Of course. Wasn’t she Mother’s daughter? Jane herself was fair—“like Beverley,” Aunt Helen had said. Only unluckily she had never said it in Jane’s hearing.

Nothing came of Mother’s little flare-up. Aunt Helen was unmoved. Jane knew that Mother had to be patient until she was strong enough to go back to work.

Jane went right off after supper. She must go before it was dark, or her courage would fail her. Mother and Aunt Helen thought she was going to the wharf to play with Dovie. But Jane walked right past the wharf and down the harbor road, a gallant, indomitable little figure. Jane had no notion that she was a heroine. On the contrary, she felt very much ashamed of herself because it was so hard to do what was right and fair, so hard to keep from hating Ellen Thomas, so hard to keep from fearing Six-toed Jimmy, so hard to keep from turning round and running back to Mother.

It was a lowering evening. Out to sea were heavy black clouds. Fitful lightning played over the harbor and the dark wooded hills beyond it. The village of fishermen’s houses at the Harbor Mouth lay flooded in a red light that escaped from under the low-hung clouds. Dozens of children were playing on the sand. They looked curiously at Jane when she stopped to ask which was Six-toed Jimmy’s

house.

“That one over there,” said a boy, pointing. “What’s your business with him?”

“Thank you,” said Jane, turning away.

“Have ye got no more manners than that?” yelled a girl. “Too stuck up to answer a civil question.”

The boy got in front of her. “See that house back of Thomases’?” he said. “It’s full of rats, and I’ll lock you up in it if you don’t tell me what you want with Six-toed Jimmy.”

“Come, now, behave like a lady,” said a big girl tauntingly. “You’re from Bartibog, and the Bartibogers all think they’re the cheese. Answer Bill’s question.”

“If you don’t, look out,” said another boy. “I’m going to drown some kittens, and I’m quite likely to pop you in, too.”

“If you’ve got a dime about you, I’ll sell you a tooth,” said a redheaded girl, grinning. “I had one pulled yesterday.”

“I haven’t a dime, and your tooth would be no use to me,” said Jane, plucking up a little spirit. “You let me alone.”

“None of your lip,” said Redhead.

Jane started to run. The rat boy stuck out a foot and tripped her up. She fell her length on the tide-rippled sand. The others screamed with laughter. But some one exclaimed,

“There’s Blue Jack’s boat coming in.”

Away they all ran. Jane picked herself up. Her dress was plastered with sand, and her stockings were soiled. But she was free from her tormentors. Would these be her playmates in the future?

She must not cry; she must not. She climbed the rickety board steps that led up to Six-toed Jimmy’s door. Like all the harbor houses, Six-toed Jimmy’s was raised on blocks of wood to be out of reach of any unusually high tide, and the space underneath it was filled with a medley of broken dishes, empty cans, old lobster traps, and all kinds of rubbish. The door was open, and Jane looked into a kitchen the like of which she had never seen in her life. The bare floor was dirty. The sink was full of dirty dishes. The remains of a meal were on a rickety old wooden table, and horrid big black flies were swarming over it. A woman with an untidy mop of grayish hair was sitting on a rocker nursing a baby—a baby gray with dirt.

“*My sister,*” thought Jane.

There was no sign of Ellen or Six-toed Jimmy, for which latter fact Jane felt thankful.

“Who are you, and what do you want?” said the woman rather ungraciously.

She did not ask Jane in, but Jane walked in. It was beginning to rain outside, and a peal of thunder made the house shake. Jane knew she must say what she had come to say before her courage failed her, or she would turn and run from that dreadful house and that dreadful baby and those dreadful flies.

“I want to see Ellen, please,” she said. “I have something important to tell her.”

“Indeed, now!” said the woman. “It must be important from the size of you. Well, Ellen isn’t home. Her dad took her up to West Bartibog for a ride, and with this storm coming up there’s no telling when they’ll be back. Sit down.”

Jane sat down on the broken chair. She had known the harbor folks were poor, but she had not known any of them were like this. She had once been in Mrs. Tom Fitch’s house with Uncle George, and it was as neat and tidy as Aunt Helen’s. Of course, every one knew that Six-toed Jimmy drank up everything he made. And this was to be her home henceforth!

“Anyhow I’ll try to clean it up,” thought Jane forlornly, but her heart was like lead; the flame of high self-sacrifice which had lured her on was gone out.

“What are you wanting to see Ellen for?” asked Mrs. Six-toed curiously. “If it’s about that Sunday school picnic, she can’t go—that’s flat. She hasn’t a decent rag. How can I get her any, I ask you?”

“No, it’s not about the picnic,” said Jane drearily. She might as well tell Mrs. Thomas the whole story. She would have to know it anyhow. “I came to tell her—to tell her that—that she is me, and I’m her.”

Perhaps Mrs. Six-toed might be forgiven for not thinking this very lucid. “Are you cracked?” she exclaimed. “Whatever on earth do you mean?”

Jane lifted her head. The worst was over now. “I mean that Ellen and I were born the same night, and—and—the nurse changed us because she had a spite at Mother, and—and—Ellen ought to be living with Mother and—and—having advantages.”

That last phrase was one of Aunt Helen’s, but Jane thought it made a dignified ending to a very lame speech.

Mrs. Six-toed stared at her. “Am I crazy, or are you? What you’ve been saying doesn’t make any sense. Whoever told you such a rignarole?”

“Dovie Johnson.”

Mrs. Six-toed threw back her tousled head and laughed. She might be dirty and dragged, but she had an attractive laugh. “I might have knowed it. That’s Dovie all over, the young imp. Well, little Miss What’s-your-name, you’d better not be believing all Dovie’s yarns, or she’ll lead you a merry dance.”

“Do you mean it isn’t true?” gasped Jane.

“Not very likely. You must be pretty green to fall for anything like that. Ellen’s a good six months older than you. Who on earth are you, anyhow?”

“I’m Jane Lawrence.” Oh, beautiful thought, she *was* Jane Lawrence!

“Jane Lawrence! Beverly Lawrence’s little girl? Why, I remember the night you were born. I was down at the Biology Station helping out in the house. I wasn’t married to Six-toed then—more’s the pity I ever was—and Ellen’s mother was living and healthy. I knew your dad well. A nice young feller he was, even if he didn’t live long. You look like him—you’ve got his eyes and hair. And to think you’d no more sense than to fall for that crazy yarn of Dovie’s!”

“I am in the habit of believing people,” said Jane, rising with a slight stateliness of manner, but too deliriously happy to want to snub Mrs. Six-toed very sharply.

“Well, it’s a habit you’d better get out of when you’re round with any of the Johnson tribe,” said Mrs. Six-toed. “Sit down, child. You can’t go home till this storm’s over. It’s pouring rain and dark as a stack of black cats. Why, she’s gone—the child’s gone!”

Jane was already blotted out in the downpour. Nothing but the wild exultation born of Mrs. Six-toed’s words could have carried her home through that storm. The wind buffeted her, the rain streamed upon her; only the constant glare of the lightning showed her the road. Again and again she slipped and fell. Once she cut her wrist on a sliver of broken glass. But at last she reeled, dripping, mud-plastered, blood-stained, into the kitchen at Uncle George’s, where Mother, as pale as ashes, was pacing frantically up and down. Even Aunt Helen was looking disturbed.

Mother ran and caught Jane in her arms. “Darling, what a fright you have given us! Oh, where have you been?”

“I only hope your Uncle George won’t get his death out in this rain searching for you,” said Aunt Helen, but there was some shrewish relief in her voice.

Jane had almost had the breath battered out of her. She could only gasp as she felt Mother’s dear arms enfolding her:

“Oh, Mother, I’m me, really me. I’m not Ellen Thomas.”

“That child is delirious,” said Aunt Helen. “Well, it’s a very inconvenient time for her to be sick.”

Much water had flowed under Bartibog Bridge before the October day when Dovie Johnson held a group of girls spellbound on the school playground while she told them a secret.

“Of course, everybody will soon know it. Jane’s mother is going to be married

to Dr. Oswald King. It's all very romantic. When Jane was so sick the morning after that thunderstorm in July, her mother just went haywire and vowed she would have the doctor from the hotel, Mrs. George or no Mrs. George. They didn't even know his name, but when he came—what do you think? He was an old beau of Mrs. Lawrence's, and she had liked him real well, too, only she liked Bev Lawrence better. But Dr. King never liked any one else, and he had never married. And now he's going to marry Mrs. Lawrence in a week's time. I'll bet she'll be glad to get away from Mrs. Second-skimmings!"

"How will Jane like it?" asked a girl. "She's always been so wrapped up in her mother."

"Oh, Dr. King was so good to her all the time she was getting over the pneumonia that she's just crazy about him. They're going to take her on their honeymoon in Europe. And when they come back, Jane's going to a very private and 'sclusive school in Halifax. I'm glad of her luck. I always liked Jane, though she was a bit soft! That kid would believe anything you told her!"

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *I Know a Secret* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]