

# Two Joans at the Abbey



ELSIE J. OXENHAM

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*On the sunny, green lawn a "square of four" was being danced.*

T.J.A. (See page [40](#))

# TWO JOANS AT THE ABBEY

*by*  
ELSIE J. OXENHAM

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*To*

KAY GLEN

WITH THANKS  
FOR HER UNFAILING KINDLY INTEREST  
IN THE ABBEY GIRLS

## CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. SURPRISES FOR EVERYBODY	<a href="#">7</a>
II. NEWS FOR EVERYBODY	<a href="#">17</a>
III. A MYSTERIOUS GOVERNESS	<a href="#">25</a>
IV. JANICE COMES TO THE HALL	<a href="#">30</a>
V. ARRIVAL AT THE ABBEY	<a href="#">38</a>
VI. BAD NEWS FOR LITTLEJAN	<a href="#">46</a>
VII. BUNS AND BISCUITS AT MIDNIGHT	<a href="#">53</a>
VIII. THE STORY OF BELL'S FARM	<a href="#">64</a>
IX. A BILLET FOR CHESTNUT	<a href="#">72</a>
X. TEA IN THE HEATHER	<a href="#">80</a>
XI. "TWINS' TUNNEL"	<a href="#">91</a>
XII. A GREAT DISCOVERY	<a href="#">100</a>
XIII. THREE BURIED GIRLS	<a href="#">110</a>
XIV. ANOTHER BURIED GIRL	<a href="#">120</a>
XV. A SECOND RESCUE	<a href="#">125</a>
XVI. TWINS IN DISGRACE	<a href="#">132</a>
XVII. THE TITHE BARN	<a href="#">142</a>
XVIII. JOAN DANCES "PRINCESS ROYAL"	<a href="#">149</a>
XIX. CLAIMING THE BARN	<a href="#">157</a>
XX. SATISFYING JANDY MAC	<a href="#">166</a>
XXI. OUTPOSTS OF THE ABBEY	<a href="#">173</a>
XXII. LITTLEJAN'S COMFORTERS	<a href="#">180</a>
XXIII. OLD MOLES IN THE BARN	<a href="#">187</a>
XXIV. A GIFT FROM AMBROSE	<a href="#">197</a>
XXV. CECILY AND MICHAEL	<a href="#">206</a>
XXVI. INVITATION TO THE DANCE	<a href="#">210</a>
XXVII. THE VOICE OF THE ABBEY	<a href="#">217</a>

## CHAPTER ONE

# SURPRISES FOR EVERYBODY

Jansy Raymond went dancing into her mother's room. "I'll be a surprise for little Joan, won't I, Mother?"

Joan looked up from the cradle. "Jansy, you almost woke him. You must remember there's a baby in the house again."

"I'm most frightfully sorry." Jansy tiptoed to the cradle to peep at her new brother. "I'll try to be careful. Isn't he a funny little thing? Not a scrap like the rest of us."

Joan smiled as she tucked in the bedclothes. "He's his father's boy. The rest of you are all like me."

Jansy, leaning against her shoulder, shook back dark red curls, which matched the long plaits wound round her mother's head. Her small brother, John, and her smaller sister, Jennifer, had the red curls too; the new baby was yellow-haired and blue-eyed, while the eyes of all the rest were brown.

"I will be a surprise, won't I, Mother?" Jansy asked again. "You didn't tell little Joan I was coming home?"

"No, I didn't tell her. But you'll be an unpleasant surprise if you call her 'little Joan,' my child. She's thirteen and a half; you're only ten. What do you suppose she'll say to you?"

"Oh well!" Jansy wriggled. "I won't say it to her, of course, but she is little Joan. You're big Joan; she's called after you. Aunt Jen called her little Joan."

"Are you sure it wasn't Littlejan? I believe that's her nickname."

"She must have had a marvellous time staying at Kentisbury Castle. D'you think they let her ride the horses? I love to see Aunt Rosamund riding. I'm dying to have a try."

"I shouldn't think so," Joan remarked. "Littlejan has been at the Castle for only three weeks. She'd have plenty to do without learning to ride. As for you, Jansy, you can wait; there's no need for you to begin riding yet. It would only make John and Jennifer want to ride too."

"They're littler than I am. They could wait!"

Joan laughed. "But you couldn't, naturally!"

"That's different. I want a pony, Mother!"

"If you look in the corner of the garage, you'll find something rather nice, though it isn't a pony."

"A new kitten?" Jansy shouted. "Has Mrs. Black had another family?"

"She wanted to have the family in Baby's cot. I had to be very stern with her," Joan began.

But Jansy had gone, rushing to the garage to see the new family. She had only arrived that morning, after coming from the north the day before and spending the night with her twin cousins at the Abbey; and there had been no time yet to ask for Mrs. Black, whose regular supply of children was Jansy's great delight.

Half a mile away, two riders attended by a groom were cantering along the white road at the foot of the Downs.

"Not tired, Littlejan?" asked the slim youthful mother, dark-haired and dark-eyed, who rode a big black horse.

Her daughter, on a chestnut pony, was very like her, with the same dark eyes, and dark hair cut in the same wavy mop, and with the same straight back and almost as good a seat, although she had been riding only for a fortnight. But small Joan was a born rider, by inheritance from her Australian mother, and she had been an apt pupil of Ferguson, the groom.

“Not a scrap tired, thanks awfully!” she said cheerfully. “I say, Mother, we’ll be a surprise for Aunt Joan, won’t we? She won’t be expecting us in breeches!”

“I don’t suppose she will,” laughed Janice, after whom Jansy Raymond had been called.

“I wish Jansy would come home,” the younger Joan sighed. “I’d love to show her Chestnut.”

“Time enough for that. I wonder if we ought to ask Joan to send us home in her car, for your sake? Ferguson could take the horses. I feel it’s rather far for you to ride both ways, Littlejan.”

“Oh *no*, Mother! Oh, don’t be brutal!” Joan wailed. “I’ll have a long rest before we go home. I’d loathe going back by car. Think how Tansy would shriek!”

“If you look tired I shall do it, all the same. It’s only what Lady Kentisbury had to do, when she came here three weeks ago.”

“That was different,” Joan argued. “She knew it would be bad for Hugh if she was too tired; she said so. I haven’t got a tiny baby!”

“True,” Janice laughed.

“And you’re not to call me Littlejan. Please, Mother!”

“I’m sorry. I keep forgetting, don’t I? Joan-Two, then. I must do something about it, or you’ll think I mean you every time I speak to Mrs. Raymond. I can’t possibly call her anything but Joan.”

“Do you want terribly to see her again? You liked her when you were at school with her, didn’t you?”

“Terribly much,” her mother said gravely, but with amusement in her eyes. “It will be marvellous to see dear old Joan again.”

Joan the younger shot a look at her. “You’re ragging; I don’t mind. But I do wish Jansy could have been here. Then I could have gone off with her while you talked to your old chum.”

“Here we are.” Janice smiled as she remembered their first visit, on the day the new baby had been born. “We shan’t need to go away disappointed this time! Oh, there’s Joan! At the window—look, Littlejan!”

An upper window was pushed more widely open and Joan’s red head appeared.

“Jandy! Jandy Mac! Where did you steal those horses? How nice you look!”

Janice waved a joyful greeting and pointed her whip at her daughter.

Joan laughed and nodded, and disappeared. By the time they had dismounted and handed over their steeds to Ferguson, she was running down the steps to meet them.

“Jandy, it’s lovely to see you again! Fifteen years and three children haven’t changed you; you’re just yourself. Is this my namesake? Joan Fraser, I’m very glad to see you!”

“Thank you. How do you do, Aunt Joan?” Joan-Two shook hands politely.

“I do extremely well, thank you very much! But why the horses, Jandy? Wouldn’t Rosamund lend you a car?”

“We wanted to be a surprise.” Jandy’s dark eyes laughed at her. “It was Littlejan’s great wish that we should ride.”

“Mother! You promised!” Joan-Two cried.



“But I forget when I get excited, and I’m so terribly thrilled by seeing Joan again,” Janice pleaded, her eyes full of laughter as she looked at her friend.

“I know all about Littlejan,” Joan said promptly. “It’s a charming name; I like it, and I mean to call you by it. It’s much nicer than Joan-Two.”

“It’s infantile,” Joan pouted. “Who told you?”

“Jen, in letters, and Rosamund, by ’phone. What a jolly pony you were riding, Littlejan!”

“He’s mine!” Joan shouted, forgiving the nickname in her delight. “He’s called Chestnut, and he’s my very own!”

Joan raised her eyebrows. “Did you bring him from Australia? Jansy will burst with envy!”

“No, he was a present from Lord Kentisbury. When is Jansy coming home, please? I want to see her most terribly much.”

With a shriek of excitement, Jansy came flying round the corner of the house. “You might have called me! I didn’t know—and then I saw those marvellous horses! Oh, can you ride? Is it hard? How did you learn? You’re Littlejan, aren’t you?”

“Jansy! You’ve come home!” Joan-Two echoed Jansy’s shriek. “When did you come? Why did nobody tell me? I’ve been dying to see you!”

“And I’ve been dying to see you! I asked Mother not to tell. I wanted to be a surprise. Was I a surprise?” Jansy demanded.

“You jolly well were! I am glad you’re here!”

“You’re a surprise too.” Jansy eyed Joan’s neat breeches enviously. “*Please* tell me all about that gorgeous red pony! He’s a perfect lamb!”

“He’s chestnut,” Joan-Two protested. “It’s his name.”

“Did the Countess lend him to you?”

“Lend! He’s mine!”

“And she’s bursting with pride,” Janice said, laughing, while Jansy’s brown eyes grew round in amazement. “My horse is only lent to me, Jansy. So you’re my namesake! Joan, she’s as like you as Joy used to be, or as those twins at the Abbey are! What about the rest of your crowd?”

“John and Jennifer are redheads too.” Joan smiled. “Come and see baby; I’ve just put him to sleep. I was so sorry you had to go away disappointed last time!”

“That was entirely our own fault.” Janice followed her into the house, while Joan-Two and Jansy raced off to the stables to watch Chestnut being made comfortable for a long rest.

“Look at my little Jim.” Joan turned back a blue blanket as they bent over the cradle together.

“Oh, but he is a surprise!” Janice exclaimed softly. “Not like you at all! He’ll spoil the look of the family, if all the rest are Abbey Red-Heads!”

“He’s his father’s boy. We’re glad to have a change; the rest are all so much alike. I’m pleased about Jimmy’s yellow head and blue eyes. Joy has achieved something much funnier; did you know? The twins—the image of Joy, and of Jansy, of course—have a small stepbrother whose hair, what there is of it, is black. A dark little Welshman; and he belongs to Joy!”

Janice laughed. “I expect the twins are proud of him, all the same.”

“Very proud of their ‘half a little brother’, as Margaret insists on calling him.”

“Half—oh, does she really?”

“Always. We’ve argued with her that every bit of him is there, but she heard ‘half-brother’ said by somebody and she sticks to it that he’s half a little brother. Now, Jan, tell me all about yourself! Those two small boys you’ve left in Samoa—how old are they? And are they like Littlejan?”

“Just like Littlejan,” Janice smiled. “The poor bairn will have to put up with her baby name, evidently. She’s fought so hard against it.”

“Oh, but it’s so jolly! She should go through life as Littlejan, and have a name that nobody else has ever had—one that is all her own.”

“She hasn’t thought of that. Perhaps if you put it to her that way, it may console her.”

“Tell me about your journey, and everything. Is Rosamund all right again? You told me by ‘phone of the terrible shock you had had. I understand young Joan’s pony, of course. Tell me the whole story once more, Jandy Mac, and then we’ll have tea. I’m afraid you won’t see Jack—my husband, you know; but you’ll have plenty of chances of meeting him later on. He had to go to town and he chose to-day because, as he said, you’d be company for me and I shouldn’t need him. He’s the world’s shyest man, or one of them; he was frightened of you and so he fled to town. But he really had some very important business. If I hadn’t married him just in time he’d have settled down, when he left the Army, into a country hermit and devoted himself to photography, which is his great hobby. He’s a real artist as a photographer. Fortunately for him he has a wife and family and he’s had to come out of his shell and be sociable; but he’s never keen on meeting new people. I’ve tried to laugh him out of it, but it’s no use.”

In the stable Jansy was asking a score of questions of Ferguson, about the black horse, about Chestnut, about learning to ride. A blunt Scot, he firmly refused to let her try the pony without her mother’s permission, and at last she had to retire defeated.

“He is a pig! Come and see my new kitten, Littlejan. He’s Mrs. Black’s child really, but she’s mine, so he must be mine too, mustn’t he?”

“I say, you know, I wish you’d stop calling me that!” Joan remonstrated. “Oh, what a lamb! Isn’t he wee? May I hold him? He doesn’t cover one hand!”

Mrs. Black lay gazing up at her with long-suffering yellow eyes, used to having her offspring fondled by Jansy long before she, motherwise, considered they ought to be touched by humans.

“They grow big awfully quickly. Quite soon he’ll be skipping about all over the place.”

“He doesn’t look like it just now. Has your brother come home too? When did you come?”

“Only this morning. John stayed in Yorkshire with Andrew and Tony. I went to the Abbey for the night and came on after breakfast; the car was bringing Miss Mary for a few days at the Hall, so they let me come too, to see Jimmy—that’s our new baby. And I wanted to see you too. Was I a surprise?”

“A marvellous surprise! I never dared to hope you’d be here. Was Chestnut a surprise to you? And my breeches?”

Jansy nodded enviously. “I’d love to have breeches, and to ride. I’ve wanted it for ages. Betty and Peggy will want to ride too, when they hear about you. I don’t see why we shouldn’t all learn together; a sort of riding-school. You know Bet and Peg, don’t you? They said they’d seen you.”

Joan stared at her. “When? I’ve never heard of them. Who are they?”

Jansy’s brown eyes danced. “Oh, you *have* heard of them! You’ve seen them. The twins at the Abbey, you know.”

“Elizabeth and Margaret! Oh, I know them! But why do you call them Bet and Peg? I’ve never heard anybody do that.”

Jansy chuckled. “No, you wouldn’t; we’re not allowed to say Betty and Peggy. It’s what they call themselves; just sometimes, you know. I heard Elizabeth saying, ‘Oh, Peggy dear, don’t cry!’ one day, when Margaret had fallen down and scratched her knee; she’s awfully good at doing it! And Margaret wept, ‘All right, B-B-Betty, I won’t!’ So I call them Betty and Peggy too, but not when any grown-up can hear.”

“Oh, I see. I like their real names best.”

“So do I,” Jansy grinned. “When I call them Betty and Peg they call me Jinny. But when you’re told not to say a name on any account—well, you know how it makes you feel, don’t you?”

Joan’s grin answered hers. “Sure I do! But I guess I won’t mess up their names, just for that reason. We’re going to stay at the Abbey soon, so I shall see them again.”

“Tea!” cried Jansy, as a deep-toned gong rang out from the house, and she led Joan in a wild race to the French window opening on the lawn.

Their mothers were waiting for them, Janice with her soft hat thrown off and one knee cocked over the other in a boyish fashion which matched her riding kit.

“Come away, girls,” Joan Raymond said. “I’m sure Littlejan is ready for her tea and a good rest. And after tea I’ve a bit of news for you all.”

“Another surprise?” Jansy shouted. “Oh, Mother, why do you have secrets from me?”

“My surprise for everybody,” her mother laughed. “I haven’t had much time to tell you, have I? Between Jimmy, and Mrs. Black, and that chestnut pony—to say nothing of Littlejan and Jandy—we’ve been fairly busy, and you only arrived at twelve o’clock. Come and wait on Jandy and Littlejan; here are plates, and scones, and bread and butter. After tea will do for my news.”

“Do *you* know?” Jansy carried a plate to Mrs. Fraser.

“I’ve no idea, Jansy. People are always keeping secrets from me till after tea,” Janice said mournfully. “The Countess teased me that way too.”

“The sooner you sit down and have your tea, the sooner you’ll hear my news, Jansy,” Joan Raymond remarked.

Jansy sighed. “Are you being firm? Oh, right-o! When Mother’s being firm it’s no use saying any more,” she said to Joan-Two, who looked at Mrs. Raymond and nodded.

## CHAPTER TWO

# NEWS FOR EVERYBODY

“Now, Mother!” Jansy jumped up and down in her eagerness. “Everybody’s had quite enough!”

Joan-Two looked again at Joan Raymond. “We’d better collect the cups and plates, and let that tray be taken away,” she said.

Her hostess laughed. “You’re well trained, Littlejan. Quite right! Are you going to help Jansy to clear away?”

“Yes, please,” and Joan-Two and Jansy piled the plates on the tray, while Mrs. Raymond rang for the maid.

“Now, Mother!” Jansy pleaded, when all was tidy.

Joan the elder turned to Janice Fraser. “You and Littlejan are going to stay at the Abbey, with the twins and Maidlin, aren’t you? I wanted you to come to me, but——”

“Oh, not while your baby is so small! Perhaps later on; but not yet,” Janice protested.

Joan agreed. “I’d feel more free to look after you if Jimmy were a little older. But there’s more to tell than that. For a long time,” and she looked at Jansy, “we have been planning to make alterations to this house, amounting almost to rebuilding. I know, Jansy; we didn’t say anything to you children, but the house wasn’t meant for such a big family. Now that we have two babies—for Jennifer is still only a baby—they must have the nursery to themselves, and you and John must have a playroom; and now that you are so big, you ought to have better bedrooms. Father wants a bigger dark room and a studio for his photography.” She turned to Janice. “His studies are really good; but he has never had enough space to work in comfort. Also we want a billiard room; and a larger night-nursery for Jennifer and Jim. So we’ve been planning for some time to build on another wing and enlarge some of the present rooms; but we thought we wouldn’t start until Jimmy was safely here. The idea is that we should hand over the house to the builders; that’s what has taken Jack to town to-day; he’s making final plans with the architect. And we’ll all take possession of the Hall for three months, while Joy and Ivor are still in New York.”

Jansy sprang up with a shriek of joy. “Oh, what sport! We’ll live with the twins for the whole summer! Oh, we will have fun! And will Littlejan be there too?”

“So I’m going home to the Hall, quite soon, with Jim and Jennifer and Jansy,” Joan went on, speaking to Janice again. “And if you and Littlejan come to stay there, *I* shall be your hostess, instead of Joy.”

“What a fascinating idea!” Janice exclaimed. “Somehow I couldn’t quite imagine the Hall without you in it.”

“What a thrill! Come and make plans, Littlejan! I’ll tell you the things we do at the Hall!” Jansy dragged Joan-Two away to the window and began to whisper urgently to her.

“It wouldn’t be possible if Joy and Ivor were at home, but they can’t leave New York for two months at least,” Joan explained. “There’s plenty of room at the Hall, and I really feel we shall be useful there. Maidlin and Mary Devine are in charge, but Mary is being all the help in the world to Jen, away in Yorkshire, and Maidlin’s engagement necessarily takes up her time and thoughts. Rosamund would tell you about that; Maid is to be married in the autumn and she ought to be making her preparations. And, of course, Dr. Robertson claims a good deal of

her time. They're hunting for the right place to build their house, and Maid has to be consulted and carried off to see every new site he discovers. It will be an immense relief to her to know I'm taking charge of the house and the twins."

"Who are quite a handful, I'm sure," Janice added. "I only saw Maidlin for five minutes, in the garden, and we could speak of nothing but Jen's trouble; the accident to Sir Kenneth had just happened. I saw the lovely ring she was wearing, and later I heard about her engagement from the Countess."

"Maid's radiantly happy; we've never seen her entirely and absolutely happy before. She's been a stormy, dreamy little person; it's easy to be both! She was quiet and withdrawn, but inside her she felt everything deeply, even tragically, and now and then she had wild outbursts of anger or heart-break. Now she's better balanced and happier than she has ever been in her life. But it's her playtime, and her engagement days oughtn't to be clouded by home cares. I can relieve her and set her free, and I'm eager to do it. She'd hoped to have the help of her friend, Cecily Perowne, the violinist, but Cecily's invalid mother is very ill in Switzerland, and Cecily's place is with her. Maidlin wants to go and stay with Rosamund to do her shopping, since Joy isn't here to mother her; it's only a year and a half since Rosamund bought her own trousseau, and she and Maidie are such chums that they'll have a very happy time choosing the outfit. But it's only possible if I take charge at the Hall. I hope you'll come and stay with me, when Rosamund takes Maid away!"

"Oh, I hope we shall! It sounds a most delightful arrangement for everybody."

"Including our namesakes!" Joan smiled, glancing at the window, where Jansy and Joan-Two were whispering together eagerly. "But what about Scotland, Jandy Mac? Aren't you going north to see your relations?"

"We are, of course, but they've asked us to put off our visit for a short time. Aunt Mary—the one who brought me up and came home with me on my first trip—has been ill and she isn't strong enough yet to have us there. She came back to Scotland to live, about ten years ago, when my other Australian aunt died; I'd gone to live in the Islands and there was nothing to keep her in Sydney. So she came home to Vairy, in Scotland, to be with the remnants of the family. We must go to see her as soon as she's fit."

"I hope you'll have a little while with me at the Hall before you have to go. It will help to make Littlejan feel at home with Jansy and the twins."

"We'll be a sort of gang, we three and you," Jansy was urging. "You'll be Captain Littlejan, because you're so much older and you've come half-way round the world, and you've been in big ships and in Australia. I'll be your Chief Mate, and Elizabeth and Margaret will be the crew and we'll keep them in order. We'll do all sorts of things."

"The twins may object to being only the crew, when we'll be living in their house," Joan-Two pointed out, very reasonably. "We'll be visitors; they may try to keep us in order! And anyway, I'm much more grown-up than any of you; you're only ten, aren't you? I'm nearly fourteen; I think you and the twins had better all be the crew and let me boss the lot of you."

"I'm eleven at Christmas, and you aren't fourteen till then; Mother told me. It's only three years!" Jansy protested.

"But you're only a year and a half older than the twins. You're much nearer them than me," Joan-Two said seriously. "I say, is your mother very strict? I've a feeling that she could be, if she tried."

"She can, when she likes," Jansy acknowledged. "You can't fool about with Mother; if she says a thing she means it. You can sometimes wangle things with Auntie Joy—she's the twins'

mother; but it's no use trying that game with Mother. But she's terribly nice, you know; I always like her, even when she's being really firm."

"That's what I thought. We may find we're all being kept in order. Was she ever a schoolmistress?"

"She wanted to be; she told me one day. She wanted to teach girls drill and games. But she got married instead."

"She'd have made a good teacher," Joan-Two said with conviction. "I expect she'll drill the lot of us. Won't your brother be coming home?"

"I expect John will stay at The Grange with Andrew and Tony. Mother won't want him in somebody else's house with a crowd of girls," Jansy said shrewdly. "And Aunt Jen says it's just as easy to look after three boys as two. I say, you know, the twins have a governess now."

"Oh! Oh, that's a blow!" Joan wailed. "What's she like? Will she be very interfering?"

"I think perhaps she will." Jansy considered the governess thoughtfully. "She's not very big, but she's rather bossy."

"The little ones are the bossiest sometimes," Joan groaned. "Oh, what a nuisance! Between your stern mother and a stodgy governess we shan't be able to do a thing. I didn't see any governess when we went to the Hall; where was she? The twins said they were doing their lessons with Miss Maidlin."

"Miss Belinda had gone to Manchester for a few days. She's come back now; I saw her at the Hall this morning."

"Miss Belinda? How ghastly! Is she as bad as her name?"

Jansy's brown eyes gleamed with mischief. "She's Miss Belinda Bellanne. She came to the Hall for a holiday, but she decided to be the nursery governess for the twins, so she went back to Manchester to pack up her things. Betty and Peg like her quite a lot," she added reassuringly.

"Miss Belinda! How can they possibly like her? Is she strict?"

"She's firm, like Mother. Perhaps," and Jansy looked thoughtful, "we could coax her to be the Captain and you'd be the Chief Mate. Then we could do all sorts of things and nobody could say a word, if the governess did them too."

"We couldn't possibly! What a mad idea! A governess would never understand!"

"Miss Belinda's rather a peculiar governess. I think perhaps she might do things with us," Jansy hinted.

Joan-Two eyed her sternly. "How is she peculiar? Are you pulling my leg? What's odd about her?"

Jansy grinned. "You'll know when you see her. Your mother thinks it's time to start; you've a long way to go. Couldn't I have five minutes on your darling Chestnut?"

"We'll ask your mother. Do you know Tansy, at the Castle?"

"Not very well, but I've seen her when we've gone there to tea."

"She's got a gorgeous black horse, called Black Boy."

"She never used to have a horse! Where did she get him?"

"From the Earl. He was a present, like my Chestnut."

"But why did the Earl give you both horses?"

"Oh, because——!" Joan turned suddenly shy. "Never mind. He thought we'd like them, that's all."

"Is it a story?" Jansy cried eagerly. "Tell me!"

“No. You didn’t tell me about the governess. You looked mysterious, as if you were keeping a secret.”

“I will tell you!”

“No, I’ll find out,” Joan-Two said decisively.

“Does Mother know the story about the horses?”

“I don’t know. I think she said she understood about Chestnut.”

“I shall ask her, when you’ve gone,” Jansy cried.

“I don’t mind that, but I’m not going to tell you.”

Jansy looked at her curiously. “Did you do something frightfully brave, or terribly good, that you don’t want to talk about?”

“Are we going to start, Mother? May Jansy have one minute on Chestnut before we go?” Joan-Two called across the room.

Janice looked at Joan Raymond. “May she?”

“One minute, if Ferguson is there to hold her on,” Joan conceded.

And the girls forgot everything else and rushed to the stables to find Ferguson and to plead for his help.

## CHAPTER THREE

# A MYSTERIOUS GOVERNESS

"I hope it won't break your heart, Littlejan," Joan Raymond observed, as they watched Jansy's ecstatic progress down the drive in Ferguson's care, "but I can't possibly let you have that pony at the Hall. You'll need to leave him at Kentisbury and go over once or twice a week for a ride in the park."

"Oh, *no!* I couldn't go without him!" Joan-Two wailed. "Oh, please! Why? Oh, do you think the twins will want to ride him? But I won't let them!"

"The twins *and* Jansy. We shouldn't have a moment's peace."

"Couldn't they all learn to ride?" Joan-Two pleaded.

"Not while the twins' mother is away. She'd have to be consulted."

"You could write and ask her."

"Oh yes, I could do that," Joan Raymond agreed. "But I know quite well that she'll say they had better wait till she comes home in August or September; and Jansy can wait too. But none of them will be willing to wait if you take Chestnut to the Hall. Besides, where would you keep him? The stables were converted into a garage years ago."

"We could find somewhere! He could stay with somebody who has horses!"

"You can look round and find a billet for him, when you come to the Hall. Then if Joy agrees, we might let all the children learn to ride in the autumn; it would be good for them. We've always meant them to ride some day, but not just at this moment. I'm sorry, but it's the wrong time, Littlejan. Cheer up! You'll find plenty to do at the Hall, and I know Rosamund will keep the pony for you and let you ride him in her park. I'll see that you have plenty of chances."

"It's what you'll have to do when you go to school, my child," Janice remarked. "You can't take Chestnut to Miss Macey's. Have you told Jansy that you aren't going back to Sydney? Will she have you at school with her?"

"Yes, I told her." Joan-Two sounded very downcast.

"Once our house is rebuilt, I hope you'll spend your holidays with Jansy," Joan Raymond said. "We shouldn't have room for you at present, but I'll see that we remember you in our plans for the new house. Consider yourself invited for the holidays, when your mother goes away, Littlejan."

"That's terribly nice of you," Joan-Two said, but she still sounded subdued.

Joan laughed. "I am sorry! I've disappointed you bitterly, I know. But when you think it over you'll see I'm right, Littlejan. You wouldn't want to have Elizabeth and Margaret—especially Margaret!—teasing you to lend Chestnut to them, all day long. You and Jansy couldn't possibly keep him to yourselves. He'll be far more yours if you leave him safely at Kentisbury."

"There's something in that," Joan-Two admitted. "Those twins might have been all over him, all the time."

"I'm quite sure they would. I hear you're invited to the Castle for holidays too? And I'm sure the twins will want you. You'll have to divide your time between us all."

"I can ride!" Jansy shouted in triumph, as Ferguson brought her carefully up the drive again.



With a grim smile he lifted her down, and she flung her arms round Chestnut and kissed his forehead.

“You lamb! You angel! How I love you! I’ll have to do something awfully brave and good, so that somebody’ll give me a pony too! Mother, what did Littlejan do? I know there’s a story, but she won’t tell me!”

“D’you call that riding?” Joan-Two mocked. “You only toddled a little way, like a baby in a pram!”

She was so quiet as they rode home that Janice looked at her suspiciously. “Tired, Littlejan? Has it been too much for you?”

“Not a bit. I was thinking about saying good-bye to Chestnut.” Joan sighed.

“Oh, don’t be silly!” Janice said ruthlessly. “It will be a very small good-bye, if you come to see him twice a week, and you ought to, if Ferguson is to have the chance to train you thoroughly. You must go on with your lessons; I’d like you to ride properly, if you do it at all. I should think you’d be very grateful to Joan and Rosamund for helping you to keep Chestnut to yourself. He’d never seem really yours if you had to share him with the crowd at the Hall, and you would have to do that, if you took him there. I’m quite sure those twins are used to having their full share of everything. And you’ve known you couldn’t have Chestnut during term time. If you go on looking so gloomy, I shall suggest that you go to school with Jansy at once, instead of having holidays till September. I expect Miss Macey would take you.”

“Oh, Mother!” Joan protested.

“Well, cheer up, then! Don’t look so unhappy!”

Joan hurriedly assumed a less gloomy look, and to help matters she changed the subject. “Mother, what’s wrong with the governess at the Hall?”

“I didn’t know there was one. I thought Maidlin taught the twins?”

“So did I, but Jansy says they have a governess. She was in Manchester the day we were there, but she’s come back now.”

“Oh! Well, I expect she’s very useful. The twins are almost ready for school.”

“Yes, but there’s something odd about Miss Belinda, and Jansy wouldn’t tell me what it is.”

“Miss Belinda?” Janice laughed. “Something odder than her name?”

“It sounds ghastly, doesn’t it? Jansy said she was peculiar, and then she wouldn’t say any more, but she looked mysterious. Is there a secret about Miss Belinda?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, Littlejan. We’ll have to wait till we see the lady.”

“Jansy seemed to think she might be willing to do the sort of things we like, but that sounds silly to me. How could anybody called Miss Belinda care about games?”

She put her question to the Countess at dinner that night. “Lady Kentisbury, do you know the twins’ governess, Miss Belinda?”

Rosamund looked at her, laughter lighting up her blue eyes. “I’ve seen her, Joan-Two. Why?”

“Jansy Raymond wouldn’t tell me about her. She said she was odd, but she wouldn’t tell me how. Why did you laugh?”

“At something I thought of. You’ll see Miss Belinda when you go to the Hall, and you’ll know all about her then, Joan-Two.”

Joan groaned. “Won’t you tell me anything?”

“Not anything at all,” the Countess said firmly. “Jandy Mac, Maidlin came over unexpectedly to tea while you were out, so we made our plans. She told me Joan’s

arrangements, and as soon as the new family is settled at the Hall, if you don't mind joining them, Maid will come here and we'll start on her shopping. I don't want to take Baby to London, so we shall come back here at night; it's an easy and a pleasant drive to town, and we won't go every day. But we shall think of nothing but frocks and undies and travelling clothes and household goods."

"You ought to stay, to cheer me up, Mrs. Fraser," the Earl remarked.

"I dare say you'll survive. You know how fond you are of Maidlin," Rosamund retorted.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### JANICE COMES TO THE HALL

“Oh, can’t I get out?” Joan-Two cried, as the car drove up a tree-hung lane and came to a low wall, beyond which rose the ancient grey stone gate-house. “You go on to the house and arrive at the front door properly, but let me go through the Abbey! We didn’t see much of it when we were here before; I’d love to explore the ruins on my own.”

The Countess shook her head at her. “Don’t you want to arrive properly?”

“I’d much rather not! It would be fun to go through the Abbey. Please, Lady Kentisbury!”

“Shall we let her, Jandy Mac?” Rosamund said a word to the chauffeur. “Out you get, then, Joan-Two! We’ll have a better talk with Joan and Maidlin without you jumping round!”

“Oh, but I shall go off with Jansy and the twins! I shan’t stay long in the Abbey alone, but I do want to see it again,” Joan pleaded.

“Don’t be late for lunch!” her mother warned her. “Lady Kentisbury is taking Miss Maidlin back with her, you know, and they want to be home for tea. So don’t keep us waiting. Don’t fall into any holes in the Abbey and have to be rescued!”

Joan chuckled. “I won’t go down any holes to-day, until there’s somebody there to haul me out again.”

“Very wise,” Rosamund agreed. “Tell Mrs. Watson that you are on your way to the Hall; then she won’t feel she has to charge you a shilling.”

“Mrs. Watson saw Littlejan when we were here for an hour last month,” Janice remarked, as the car drove on. “She said she was so like what I was when she knew me before.”

“I’m sure she is, though I didn’t know you then. I let her go because I know what will happen,” Rosamund explained. “The twins have a schoolroom in the Abbey, and Joan-Two will probably run into the whole crowd, doing their morning lessons.”

“Oh!” Janice laughed. “I understand! And will the great Miss Belinda be there too?”

“She’ll be there, if the twins and Jansy are. So Joan-Two’s questions will be answered.”

Maidlin came running down the terrace steps to greet them, as the car drew up before the Hall. “Welcome to Joy’s house, Jandy Mac! I may call you that, mayn’t I? Joan does it all the time.”

She was small and slight, with Italian-black eyes and thick black hair coiled on her neck. She was wearing a morning frock of pale green linen; there was a ruby ring on her left hand, beside one of silver with enamelled white and green and gold daisies, and her eyes were alight with her new great happiness, which had been dimmed when Janice had seen her for the first time by her sympathy for Jen, who lived next door and had been in terrible trouble.

“Please call me Jandy Mac! I like it better than anything. It takes me right back to my first visit to this dear place, when I was still almost a schoolgirl,” Janice said earnestly.

“You went back to being quite a schoolgirl and wore a gym tunic like the rest, didn’t you? I’ve been hearing stories about those days,” Maidlin smiled.

“Do you always rush down the steps to welcome people, Maid?” Rosamund asked severely. “Isn’t it rather undignified for an almost married woman?”

“It was a lovely welcome,” Janice cried. “Don’t listen to her! She’s only ragging.”

“I know when Ros is ragging,” Maidlin’s dark eyes held a glimmering smile. “She teases me a lot just now; but I like it! I arrange my welcome according to my visitors; carefully

graduated—very best—hearty welcome—just friendly! Yours was very best, because you're such an old friend of the family. I have to take Joy's place and try to welcome you as she would do, so it doesn't matter a scrap that I hardly know you myself."

"I feel deeply honoured to have been given a very best," Janice said laughing.

"I hope my welcomes will always be friendly, even to people I don't know at all; that's the lowest grade." Maidlin gave her another of her hidden smiles. "It's to be my work after I'm married, so I've thought about it a good deal."

"Welcoming people, do you mean?" Janice asked, as they stood on the terrace and looked across the lawn.

"Being a hostess for the people Jock wants to entertain. Some girls get married knowing they're to be housekeeper or cook, but Jock can arrange all that for us; what he wants me to do is to keep a jolly home and welcome other people into it and make them feel we're friendly. He's never been able to invite his friends to his house, because he's never had one; he's lived in London, and it's not the same. He's aching to have a lovely house, and to ask people to it; so my place is quite obvious."

"You'll do it beautifully," Janice agreed. "But will you like always having visitors? Won't you sometimes want your house to yourself?"

"Oh, we've arranged for that," Maidlin assured her gravely. "We haven't built the house yet, but we've provided for ourselves; we've found our hidie-hole, and we shall escape to it when we've had enough of other people. It's to be my wedding-present; a doll's house near the sea, in Sussex, with just room for us two. I shall cook and Jock will garden, and nobody else will be invited. All the servants and gardeners will be left behind at The Pallant; that's the big house, you know."

"Pallant? I never heard the word before."

"It means palace," Rosamund mocked. "Maid married means to be a queen."

"It means an enclosed place, like a sheepfold, with a paling round it," Maidlin retorted. "A palace is merely an enclosure. Come indoors and look for Joan, Jandy Mac; she's your real hostess, as I'm going to desert you and go off to Rosamund's Castle after lunch."

Joan was coming from the big door to welcome them, her bronze hair blazing in the sunshine. "Come away, Jandy and Rosamund! Maid begged to be allowed to be the first to greet you."

"For practice," Rosamund teased. "She did it very prettily."

"It makes this house look really homelike, to see you at the door, Joan," Janice said.

"I'm feeling thoroughly at home again," Joan laughed. "But where's the daughter, Jandy Mac? Don't tell me she has stayed behind with Chestnut?"

"Oh no! We put her out at the Abbey gate. She begged to be allowed not to 'arrive properly', as she said."

"The twins and Lindy are in the Abbey, but they'll be coming back presently." Joan led the others into the big entrance hall, bright with flowers and sunshine, yellow and pink roses lighting up the shadows of old oak settles and ancient oil portraits on the walls.

"It's nice to be here again!" Janice sighed happily, as she looked round. "Lindy? Did you say Lindy? Who is she?"

"Miss Belinda, the twins' stern governess," Rosamund said promptly, before Joan could speak. "Joan, in her funny way, calls Miss Belinda Lindy."

Joan glanced quickly at her. "Is Littlejan expecting a stern governess? Haven't you told her? Oh, Rosamund, have you been teasing the child? Too bad!"

“Joan-Two knows all about Miss Belinda by this time,” Rosamund laughed.

“But I don’t!” Janice protested. “Who is Miss Belinda?”

“Maidlin’s first protégée; her adopted child. You’ll see her presently. There’s a letter waiting for you, Jandy; it came this morning. I suppose the sender thought it might miss you if it went to Kentisbury.”

“It’s from Scotland.” Janice looked troubled. “I hope—do you mind if I look at it at once?”

“Oh, please do!” Joan exclaimed. “I hope there’s nothing wrong. Maidlin will take Rosamund up to her room, while you read your letter.”

Janice skimmed the pages, with an exclamation of dismay. “History is repeating itself! Do you remember how I was telegraphed for, because Granny was ill, on the day we found the highwayman’s hidden treasure? This time it’s Aunt Mary; she’s worse, and as I’m in this country they’d like me to go at once. Oh—Joan! I am so sorry! I was looking forward to being here with you!”

“Oh, Jandy! And I was looking forward to having you!” Joan exclaimed.

“I’ll have to go. Aunt Mary was like my mother, until I married. But it’s a great disappointment! I may come back, as soon as I can be spared, mayn’t I?”

“Of course, you must. And you’ll leave Littlejan with me. If there’s serious illness they won’t want her.”

Janice looked thoughtful. “It would be very much better that way. But may I, Joan? It seems a shame to park the child on you, for our convenience.”

“Unless you think your aunt will want to see her, I shall insist on keeping her,” Joan said. “Jansy and the twins would be terribly disappointed if she was snatched away from them now.”

“Aunt Mary will want to see her when she’s better—if we manage to pull her round,” Janice said soberly. “But from what the letter says I can’t help feeling it would be better not to take Littlejan at present. So if you’re sure you don’t mind, Joan—! But I feel it’s too bad to bring her here and dump her on you. You’ve more than enough with the twins and your own Jansy, and your two babies.”

“The previous baby and the present baby. But you forget I’ve Miss Belinda to help me. She’s very stern, in case of need,” Joan said. “And I can get Mary Devine at any time, by ’phoning to Jen. Don’t think any more about it, Jandy. Littlejan must stay here, of course. We’ll be glad to have her.”

“You Abbey people always come to the rescue and take in anybody who’s left stranded. It’s the tradition of the house,” Janice said gratefully.

“Come and tell Maid and Rosamund what a blow we’ve had! We’ll send you to town by car to catch the night train, if that’s what you’d like best,” Joan said.

“Yes, please. I’m sorry to be so much trouble to you.”

“I’m desperately sorry to lose you so soon, Jandy Mac. But aunts who have been like mothers have certain rights, and one must be fair to them. I remember her when she came with you to see the Abbey; I liked her so much.”

“Shall I take Joan-Two back with me?” Rosamund asked instantly, when she heard the news. “I don’t think she’d be very much upset. There’s Chestnut, you know!”

“I’m sure Chestnut would weigh down the scales heavily against Jansy and the twins,” Joan agreed. “But you and Maid are going to plunge into shopping lists. No, Littlejan will stay with us. I can’t let Jansy down; she’s counting so much on having her company.”

“You’re sure it won’t be too much for you?”

“That’s what I said,” Janice remarked. “But she seems to think the governess will help.”

“Miss Belinda—oh, yes! Joan-Two will like Miss Belinda,” Rosamund assented.

“I ought not to go away, Joan. I’ll stay and help you,” Maidlin began.

Joan laughed. “My dear, you will *not*! I won’t have you. I have Nurse for the babes, and Lindy for the twins, and Jansy goes to school each day. Where’s the difficulty?”

“Send Joan-Two to school too,” Rosamund said. “The dear Head would squeeze her in, for your sake.”

“If I have any trouble I could do that, but I don’t expect any. Here comes the avalanche! We let Jansy stay at home to-day to welcome Littlejan, of course. She wishes the school would take measles or dip., so that she could stay at home altogether.”

“It sounds like past history,” Rosamund said, drawing Janice, who was looking very sober, to the window. “Do you see the stern governess, Jandy Mac?”

“I hope history won’t repeat itself in that way! I don’t want Jansy to bring measles or dip. here, and she has a gift for taking anything that’s going!” Joan exclaimed.

“But I don’t see any governess!” Janice remonstrated, as the red-haired trio, Jansy and the twins, came running across the lawn from the Abbey gate. “And who is the new pretty girl? Surely you don’t mean——?”

Joan-Two, following, was talking eagerly to a girl of seventeen, whose bobbed yellow curls made her look even younger.

“Miss Belinda, the nursery governess!” Rosamund announced, and laughed at the unbelief in Janice’s face.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# ARRIVAL AT THE ABBEY

Joan-Two waved good-bye to the car and turned to the grey gate-house, which led to the Abbey ruins, looking up with a touch of awe at the high vaulted roof and the broken figure of a saint in a niche above the door.

“Perhaps this little hole led to the porter’s lodge, where a monk was always waiting to welcome travellers,” she said to herself. “Mother told me about that. He must have left something of himself behind; the Abbey’s a friendly welcoming sort of place. I feel as if it was trying to say—‘Come in! Glad to see you! We’ll take you in and be good to you.’ Perhaps the old monk left his ghost to go on with his work, a jolly friendly kind of ghost.—My aunt! What’s that? That doesn’t sound like monks or ghosts!”

She was crossing the low bridge over the fish-stream, the grey wall of the Abbey buildings before her, on her way to the door which gave entrance to the ruins. A high clear voice rang out, from within the walls, singing a lilting dance tune.

As Joan ran to the gate and peered through the bars, a child’s voice pealed out, “That’s right! That’s very good indeed! Now let’s dance it, and you sing again, Miss Belinda!”

“Gosh! Has the old girl got a voice like a public singer?” Joan murmured. “That was a twin; one of them. They’re in the Abbey; what sport!”

She tapped urgently on the gate, for the caretaker stood just inside, watching something that was happening on the garth, and there was no need to clang the bell and startle everybody.

Mrs. Watson turned quickly and came to let her in. “Eh, Miss Janice! They said you’d be here to-day.”

“I’m not Janice, thank you very much! I’m Joan; didn’t we tell you? I’m called after Jansy’s mother.”

“Aye, but you be the very picture of Miss Janice when she were here before, fifteen years ago. They be waiting for you out there, Miss Jan—Joan.”

“Don’t tell them! I want to see what they’re doing. And please don’t call me Jan—Joan! It sounds dreadful,” Joan urged.

Mrs. Watson chuckled. “I’ll mind your right name now, Miss Joan. Young Jansy is teaching school to-day.”

She stepped aside, and Joan-Two slipped past her and stood watching in the doorway.

On the cloister garth, the sunny green lawn shut in by the grey walls of the monks’ dwelling-places, a “square for four” was being danced. The twins, in golden smocks, faced one another, Margaret’s hand given to Jansy, who looked very much a schoolgirl in a navy tunic and green girdle, with her dark red hair in the two little tight plaits demanded by school, Elizabeth leading an elder girl, whose bobbed curls were yellow and hung closely round her face and neck, and who wore a short blue tunic-frock, with badges sewn on the breast, and with wide white collar, yellow tie and girdle, which looked almost like a school uniform. They were all far too busy, as they led away from the other couple and came running back to turn single with their partners, to notice that Mrs. Watson in the doorway had a companion.

The elder girl was singing the tune, in the sweet clear soprano which had come soaring over the wall to Joan beside the fish-stream. The twins were watching her set and turn single critically; Jansy, in charge of the proceedings, was calling out directions.

“Siding—oh, you’ll have to practise that! Set to your partner! Now go to your own wall—put your hand across you, Lindy; you’re being a woman. Now give your right hand to me; I’m a man—your *right*, I said!”

“I can’t think about right and left when I’m doing the music too,” the girl called Lindy protested, as the dance ended and she hurriedly bobbed a milkmaid’s curtsey.

“It is hard lines,” Jansy admitted. “But if you know what you’re supposed to do, we can practise it on the lawn and ask Auntie Maid to play for us, with the doors and windows open.”

“Auntie Maid’s going away, silly,” Margaret said crushingly.

“Did I take care of you nicely?” Elizabeth held her partner’s hand and gazed up into her face. “Did you listen to me when I said ‘right hand’ and ‘turn single’, or did you only hear Jansy?”

“I was the teacher. She ought to attend to me,” Jansy urged. She suddenly assumed a grown-up air, quoting her mother, whose country-dance classes she had watched. “Now I want to see that again. Be careful of your setting! Margaret sometimes puts one toe in front of the other; she mustn’t do it—it’s wrong. Remember what hand to use when you lead out; left the first time and back with the right; then the other way round. Music, please!”

The girl in blue began to sing again, but forgot to give the correct hand, in spite of Elizabeth’s warnings. The dance left her breathless, and she protested loudly that it was not fair to ask her to be both musician and dancer.

“No, it isn’t,” Jansy conceded. “But we must have four.”

“Make Mrs. Watson join in, and I’ll watch. Then I can sing for you.”

Jansy grinned and the twins giggled. “Fancy Mrs. Watson dancing ‘Ruffy Tufty!’” Elizabeth said.

“I’ll ask her!” Margaret shouted. She dashed to the entrance, then stopped short at sight of Joan. “Here’s somebody! Here’s our Number Four—oh, it’s little Joan!” and she rushed forward and flung herself on Joan. “You’ve come back! We were waiting for you! Come and dance! Jansy’s the teacher of this class; we’re teaching Miss Belinda country-dancing!”

“I took care of Miss Belinda in ‘Ruffy Tufty!’” Elizabeth proclaimed, as she and Jansy swept down on the newcomer.

“It’s Littlejan she’s called.” Jansy had heard Margaret’s shout. “How’s Chestnut? Where’s your mother? How did you come?”

“She’s certainly not called little Joan, by any scrap of a twin,” Joan said vigorously. “Where’s your Miss Belinda? I don’t see her anywhere!”

With a shout, the twins seized the fair-haired girl and dragged her forward. “She was the music. This is Miss Belinda. She’s our governess just now, but some day she’s going to sing in the Albert Hall with Auntie Maid.”

“I’ll say she’ll sing, though I don’t know where the Albert Hall is! I heard her right out by the gate. Are you really the governess?” Joan’s face was alight with laughter and surprise. “Jansy, you wretch, you might have told me!”

“What didn’t she tell you?” the nursery governess demanded.

“That you were—oh—well! She let me think you were old and strict, you know.”

“A real governess, in fact. So you didn’t know I was just Lindy!”

“I never heard you called anything but Miss Belinda. Do you really teach the twins?”

“Oh, rather! We’ve a proper schoolroom. Come and see!”

“She’s terribly strict,” Margaret said pensively, as Lindy led the way to a little room in the wall of the ruins.



"I came here for a holiday, with my sister," Lindy explained to Joan. "Miss Maid was short-handed and was glad of help, so I asked if I might be the governess. We're completely thrilled about our schoolroom; we thought it all out for ourselves."

The pride of the twins was evident, as they danced towards the tiny room. At the door Elizabeth drew back and held Margaret off also. "Better not go in, Twin. It will be too full of people. Do you think it's nice, Littlejan?"

"Have to do dancing and singing and drilling outside. It's too much of a squeeze in here," Margaret explained. "But there's plenty of room on the garth, and if the bell rings we scoot back into our hidie-hole."

The bed which had once nearly filled the room in the wall, and had been used by many friends, had given place to a steady table and three chairs. The shelves on the walls held books, ink, and papers, and the deep sills of the narrow lancet windows had vases of pink roses.

"I did those," Margaret said proudly. "Miss Belinda's teaching us to make flowers look nice."

"See what we're making, Littlejan!" Elizabeth brought a small basket of cane and coloured raffia, half finished. "Miss Belinda knows lovely things to do. And she tells us stories."

"My basket's pink and white," Margaret shouted, rushing forward to look for it. "Twin's is green and yellow, so Mother will know which of us made which one."

"We sing while we're making them. Miss Belinda sings all the time," Elizabeth added.

Joan looked at the governess. "Is it really your name? And are you going to be a singer?"

"I'm Belinda Bellanne. Miss Maid thinks I'll be good enough to sing in public; I've always wanted to do it. She's going to train me," Lindy explained.

"Littlejan, tell me about Chestnut," Jansy pleaded. She had been waiting in the background for her turn.

Joan whirled round. "I couldn't bring him, because you haven't any stable for him here. But if we could find somewhere for him to live, then we could ask your mother again. There must be people in your village who have horses, or farms, or somebody who would look after him for us! You'll help, won't you?" She turned eagerly to Lindy, knowing in a flash of joyful understanding that Jansy had been right when she said the nursery governess might be willing to 'do things' with them. "Oh, I am so thankful that awful old stodgy person I've been dreading has disappeared!"

Lindy's high clear laugh rang out. "I'm sorry I've been haunting you! It was too bad of Jansy not to explain."

"And you'll help us to find a home for Chestnut?" Joan and Jansy cried together.

Miss Belinda looked extremely prim. "I shall have to consider the matter and consult your mother, Jansy dear. We must do nothing rash."

The twins shouted in glee. "That's right, Miss Belinda! You tick off Jansy and little Joan!" Elizabeth said.

"Don't let them have everything they want, just because they're bigger'n us," Margaret added.

"Bigger than we are," Miss Belinda reproved her.

Jansy grinned. "Better mind your grammar, Margaret-Twin! Remember you have a stern governess now."

“Oh well! I like to say ‘bigger’n us’,” Margaret argued. “‘Bigger than we are,’ sounds batty, I think.”

“Who taught you to say ‘batty’?” Miss Belinda demanded.

“Jansy did. We heard her say it.” Elizabeth rushed into the fray, in her twin’s defence. She seized Lindy’s hand and gazed persuasively up into her face. “Forget about grammar and bad words, Aunty Lin. Hadn’t we best be going home to dinner?”

Lindy smothered a laugh and her eyes met Joan’s. “I think so, Elizabeth. It’s almost time. We’d better—not *best!*—we’d better go home now.”

“Why not best?” Margaret shouted. “Twin didn’t say anything wrong!”

Lindy took a hand of each twin and led them to the tresaut passage, gravely explaining the better of two ways of action or the best of several.

“Don’t see that it matters one scrap,” Margaret cried, dancing impatiently.

Elizabeth disagreed. “I think it’s most awfully interesting, Twin. Two ways; one must be better than the other. You couldn’t say one was best than the other.”

“I could. And you did say it.”

“I shan’t say it again. It’s babyish not to understand. I say, Twin, doesn’t Miss Belinda know a lot of queer things?” and she gazed up at laughing Lindy in admiration.

“She’s most terribly jolly!” Joan fell behind with Jansy. “You were a little brute to let me worry about her all this time!”

“I knew you’d like her as soon as you saw her,” Jansy said complacently.

“You said she wasn’t very big! She’s bigger than you are; as big as any other grown up person!”

“Oh well! I meant ‘not very old’. But I couldn’t say that, or you’d have guessed,” Jansy protested.

“You really were a little pig!” Joan-Two said indignantly. “I’ve worried for ages about that stodgy old governess, and she never existed!”

Jansy chuckled. “No, Miss Belinda’s just Lindy after all. You’ll like her as much as the rest of us do.”

“I like her already,” Joan-Two said emphatically.

## CHAPTER SIX

### BAD NEWS FOR LITTLEJAN

"I'm going to desert you, Littlejan," Janice said, when she had shaken hands with the nursery governess and greeted the twins. And she told of the letter from Scotland.

"Oh Mother!" Joan-Two's face fell. "I'm not feeling exactly at home here yet," she whispered. "I haven't even been inside the house!"

"That's your own fault," Janice said promptly. "You wouldn't arrive properly, you know. I've been indoors, and you're coming right now, to tidy yourself before lunch."

"Couldn't I go back to the Castle? I feel at home there. And there's Chestnut." Joan's eyes gleamed.

"And leave Jansy and the twins?"

"They're all so much littler," Joan pleaded. "And Jansy goes to school. I like the twins, but they're only nine."

"The Countess would have you; she proposed it at once. But I don't advise it, Littlejan."

Joan was very sober as she washed her hands and brushed her wavy brown mop. She was quick-witted, and she saw plainly that with Tansy, her companion at Kentisbury, gone back to school, and the Countess and Maidlin absorbed in their shopping, there would be no real place for her, in spite of Rosamund's hospitable invitation.

She heaved a deep sigh. "Couldn't I go with you to Scotland?"

"You'll come presently, I hope. You'll be very happy here, Littlejan. That nice pretty Lindy won't let you be lonely."

Joan sighed again, and went downstairs looking extremely serious.

Jansy's father, Jack Raymond, tall, fair, and quiet, came in to lunch, and at first justified Joan's description of his shyness. But Rosamund and Maidlin were old friends, and Janice and Littlejan were the only strangers, and he soon thawed, drawn into the talk in spite of himself by the Countess's questions about the re-building and especially about the new studio for his photography.

He looked across at Janice and said shyly, "I hear you are leaving your girl at school, when you go back to your island. Would you like a study of her to take home with you?"

"Oh, how very kind!" Janice said gratefully. "I'd like it better than anything! Would you really do one for me? Joan—your Joan!—showed me some of your work; really exquisite pictures of Jansy and the twins."

He smiled at Joan-Two. "We must see what we can do. Small Joan will have to help me. Perhaps I could"—he paused, and looked at his wife.

"Lovely, Jack, if you could," Joan agreed. "But would you have time?"

"Could what?" Joan-Two burst out. "What's he going to do?"

"That's a secret," Joan Raymond told her. "But he'll need your help, so he'll have to tell you. You shall hear about it after your mother's gone to Scotland."

Joan-Two looked at her and then at him, and then at her mother. "Do you know what they mean?"

"I've no idea, Littlejan, but knowing them I'm sure it's something nice."

"I know!" Jansy said importantly. "But I shan't tell Littlejan, of course," she added, as her mother gave her a warning look.

Joan-Two sighed. "Everybody's being firm! Then I s'pose I'll have to wait."

The twins had been sent to the nursery for their early dinner, in Lindy's charge, but Jansy had been allowed to join the grown-ups, for Joan-Two's sake, and Mrs. Raymond declared that when Maidlin had gone off with Rosamund, and since Janice would no longer be there to keep her company, she intended to have family meals.

"I like seeing children all round my table. Jansy and John are used to being with us, so we shall join together, except for dinner at night," she said. "Jack will have to be out often during the day, seeing how things are going at home. I don't want to sit in solitary state for my meals!"

"Maid and I must get away quite early, if you'll excuse us, Joan," Rosamund remarked. "I ought to get back to my young Viscount, and we're expecting Jock Robertson to dinner, to tell us of his latest search for the perfect site for their house."

"He must take us all to see it, when he really finds it," Joan said. "Jandy Mac, you and I will have one afternoon together, at least. You needn't start till after tea. Shall we go into the Abbey?"

"Oh, please!" Janice exclaimed. "I'd like that better than anything."

"Littlejan may come too, if she likes." Joan smiled at her namesake. "You want to keep close to your mother while you still have her, don't you?"

"Yes, please. And I want to hear you talk about the Abbey. She told me you did it better than anybody else," Joan-Two said shyly.

"I don't know about that. But we'll show you some of it, for a beginning, if you like."

When the car had driven off with Rosamund and Maidlin, and Jansy, protesting loudly, had been sent for a walk with Lindy and the twins, Joan Raymond led Janice and her daughter round her Abbey and told again some of the stories of the monks and of Lady Jehane of the Hall.

"Mrs. Watson is almost past the job," she observed, as they stood in the dormitory and looked down at the garth. "We keep saying we'll have someone else and let her rest, but it isn't easy to find just the right person, and she doesn't want to give up. She really does it very well, so we keep on putting off making the change. I know I ought to train her successor, while I'm here on the spot, but I haven't anyone in mind who would be exactly right."

"I am so sorry to have to leave this dear place at once!" Janice sighed. "I can't fail Aunt Mary, Joan, but I'd give anything to stay here with you!"

"You must come back as soon as ever you can." Joan spoke with deep sympathy.

Jack Raymond, driving his own car, took Janice off to town after tea, to catch an evening train, and Joan-Two stood on the terrace waving good-bye and looking very desolate.

"Now, Mother!" Jansy shouted. "Tell her—what we said, you know! Give her something new to think about!"

Joan, sitting on a green cushion on the stone balustrade of the terrace, smiled and held out her hand. "Come here, namesake! You feel dreadfully forsaken, don't you? I'll tell you what Jansy means. Her father is going to make—not one picture—but a book of pictures, for your mother to take away with her. That was what he meant when he looked at me. He does them for presents. The Countess had a Book of the Hall, when she was married and went away from here; it was her home for years, you know. Jack came over and took photos of her bedroom and the garden and the orchard and the library and the big hall; she was so pleased with it! I've had a Book of the Abbey, which is one of my most precious possessions, and Maidlin is to have one, when she marries; Joy took a Book of the Twins to New York with her. Jen, at the

Manor, has a Book of Babies, which Jack made for her. Yours will be the Book of Littlejan; about a dozen photos of you, mounted on brown pages, in positions that are characteristic of you—that means, in poses that will remind your mother of you. We must have one showing you on Chestnut, and another wearing those breeches as you were when I saw you first.”

“It will be sport making it,” Jansy added. “You are pleased, aren’t you, Littlejan?”

Joan-Two’s eyes had widened. “It’s the most marvellous idea I ever heard! You are kind people! Would he really do all that work for Mother and me?”

“It was his own idea; you saw that. I didn’t suggest it to him,” Joan assured her. “He’ll make time for it, but he’ll need to study you before he starts, to choose the best ways to pose you. He doesn’t know you very well yet. And you’ll have to help him with ideas. It will give us all something to do for your mother.”

“Mother will simply love it. I should think she’ll cry with joy!” Joan-Two said fervently.

Joan, with rare understanding of the needs of small girls, had arranged that Joan-Two and Jansy should share a room, leaving Janice to sleep alone. So the sudden change of plans did not mean any alteration, and Littlejan, still looking sober, went off to take possession of the second bed in Jansy’s room.

“I shall come presently to make sure you aren’t feeling lonely,” Joan promised, as she kissed her good-night.

“Thank you, Aunty Joan.” Littlejan sounded very subdued.

“Don’t chatter to-night, Jansy. Littlejan doesn’t feel like it,” Joan said.

“Doesn’t she want her mind taken off things?” Jansy asked, in an injured tone. “I was going to amuse her nicely.”

“Not to-night. She doesn’t want it, do you, Littlejan?”

“No, thanks. I’d rather not. I don’t feel chattery.”

“Oh well! I can always go to sleep. I’m terribly good at that.” And presently Jansy rolled into bed, and true to her word, slept almost at once.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# BUNS AND BISCUITS AT MIDNIGHT

Joan-Two—why, she could not have explained—lay still and pretended to be asleep when Joan the elder looked in half-an-hour later. Her thoughts were with her mother in the train, speeding into the darkness away from London, thinking about her, Littlejan was sure; she wanted to respond to those thoughts, not to be comforted, no matter how kind the comforter.

Joan looked at her from the doorway, and seeing how still the little brown head lay on the pillow, slipped away without disturbing her. “I think she’s asleep, though I can’t be quite sure. I hope she is; she’s a sensitive little person and it’s been a shock to her to lose her mother so unexpectedly. She’ll be happy enough in a day or two; presently I shall have to go in and stop her and Jansy talking. But I was sure she didn’t want to chatter to-night.”

She went to lift her baby and feed him and settle him for the night, and then to await her husband’s return from the trip to town; and the Hall became very quiet.

But Joan-Two could not sleep, and tossing and turning and thinking of her mother, she wished Joan would come back and was sorry she had let her go away. She sat up and gazed resentfully across at Jansy, sleeping soundly on the other side of the room.

“You lucky kid! Your mother isn’t in the train, perhaps having railway accidents! Oh, I know I’m an idiot, but I *can’t* go to sleep! It’s beastly!—Gosh! What’s happening?”

The door was opening without a sound. There came a shaft of light from a small torch. Round-eyed, Joan stared and held her breath.

Into the room crept the nursery governess, in a blue gown and slippers and with wildly-tossed yellow curls. At sight of Joan sitting up in bed she nodded, pointed to Joan’s dressing-gown, beckoned to her to follow, and disappeared into the dark passage again.

Ablaze with eagerness, Joan pulled on her gown, found her slippers, and sped after her.

“Why? What? How?” she whispered excitedly.

Lindy put her finger to her lip, and drew her into a little room close at hand. Noiselessly she closed the door and then switched on the light and put out her torch.

“You must whisper. The twins are just through there,” nodding at the wall. “If they wake, you’ll have to go away. Curl up on my bed and pull the quilt round you; or get inside, if you’d rather. I knew you wouldn’t go to sleep,” she explained, as they made themselves comfortable. “It’s like the first night at school. New girls often don’t sleep much.”

Joan gave a gasp. “Oh, you do understand! I didn’t want Jansy chattering about other things, and—and I pretended to be asleep when Aunt Joan came. But I was paid out for it, for when I tried to go to sleep I couldn’t, and it seemed hours, and I began to think about Mother —”

“I know,” Lindy cut her short. “But there’s no reason in the world why the train should crash just on this particular night, is there?”

Joan gave a tremulous laugh. “No, of course not. I’m an awful ass. It was marvellous of you to come. I’d rather have you than anybody. How did you know?”

“I guessed. I’m nearest your age. Jansy’s too little, isn’t she? And everybody else is too old, however kind they are.”

Joan reached out and gripped her hand. “That’s just it. You’re simply marvellous! I wanted somebody most frightfully badly. But don’t you mind? Aren’t you sleepy?”

Lindy grinned at her. "We'll go to sleep presently. You'd better go back to your own room, in case Jansy wakes; she'd raise the roof with yells if she found you weren't there. But it may help if we talk for a bit."

"Oh, I'm sure it will! Perhaps I'll stop thinking after that."

"I don't believe Jansy's sort of talking would have kept your mind off your mother, but perhaps mine will," Lindy said mysteriously. "Here—tuck in! It's almost midnight, and I'm starving." And she pushed a tin box with a gaudy cover towards Joan.

"Oh!" Joan's gasp of delight came from her heart. "Buns!—and biscuits! And chocolate! Oh, you angel! I'm frightfully hungry!"

"A midnight feast." Lindy's eyes gleamed, though her tone was solemn. "First night of term, and all that. Help yourself! You've been to boarding-school, haven't you?"

"Oh yes, for ages; in Sydney, you know."

"I thought so. It makes you heaps older than Jansy. I've been at school for years; I only left at Easter."

"Did you want to leave? Did you know you were coming here?"

"Rather not! I'd have wanted to leave all right if I'd had the slightest idea what was going to happen. No—and yes. I liked school, and I was a prefect and in the First Eleven; I had a jolly good time. But I wanted to be a singer and I was dying to get started. Then, when I came home, Nan—my sister, you know; we've nobody else—said we couldn't possibly afford it and I'd have to be trained for something more useful."

"With your lovely voice? Oh, what frightfully hard lines!"

"We simply hadn't the money for good teaching. I was desperate, but Nan had lost her job, and I knew it was true that we couldn't manage it. She had been ill, and we came here for a holiday, and Miss Maid said I might help her by teaching the twins; then one day she heard me singing for them in the Abbey, and she said she'd train me and later on see that I had good teachers."

"Lucky for you!" Joan commented.

"Simply marvellous, of course. Dr. Robertson teaches singing and after they're married he and Miss Maid will look after my training."

"You'll need to call her Mrs. Maid, then."

"Gosh! How odd it sounds!" Lindy laughed.

"Where's your sister now?"

"Visiting friends in the North. Father lost his money, and Nan—she's really Anne—was trained in cookery; she makes the most gorgeous cakes and puddings. After Miss Maid is married and the new house is built, Anne's going to be their cook and housekeeper and look after them like a mother; they're so much in love that she's sure they'll need it."

"What a jolly job!" Joan exclaimed.

"She's looking forward to it. It will be much better than making cakes in the tea-shop; her last shop failed. She's paying a round of visits, so that when she settles down at The Pallant—that's to be the name of the house—she won't want to go away for a long while. She cooked for us here for a month, while the regular cook was ill; but Mrs. Spindle has come back now, so Nan seized the chance to go and see people she used to know. I said I'd rather come back to the Abbey and go on teaching the twins. We call it teaching, but it's really playing with them."

"But you teach them heaps, without their knowing it," Joan said shrewdly.

"I try to, of course. And we do real lessons each morning. Margaret's sums are dreadful, and Elizabeth's writing leaves much to be desired," Lindy said primly.

“That was Miss Belinda speaking.” Joan laughed.

“Hush! We don’t want them dashing in here, demanding buns. The grown-ups do this, you know; I’ve been here long enough to discover that.”

“Do what? Eat buns at midnight?”

“I don’t know what they eat; I’ve smelt coffee, after I’d gone to bed. Miss Maid goes to Miss Mary’s room and has long private talks; and when Lady Joy was at home two months ago, she went too. Miss Mary’s older than any of them; they like to talk in her room at night. Have you read her books?”

Joan nodded. “The Countess lent them to me. I want to see her.”

She was prowling round the room, and suddenly she came to a stand before a photo on the mantelpiece.

“Did Uncle Jack make this picture? They say his photos are lovely. Who is she? It’s a dancing dress she’s wearing, isn’t it? What jolly curls!”

“A ballet dress. She’s a famous dancer, and I was at school with her, only three years ago. She’s Miss Maid’s cousin. We’re all frightfully bucked about her,” Lindy said proudly. “I, because I knew her before she made her name; and everybody else because she’s related to the Abbey.”

“Gosh!” Joan-Two exclaimed. “Tell me about her!”

“I didn’t know she was Miss Maid’s cousin. I hadn’t the faintest idea, but one day Miss Maid called me into her room for something, and there on the wall was a big picture of Dammy Ellerton. I just shrieked—‘That’s good old Damson! Damaris Ellerton from school! Do you know her?’ And Miss Maid said—‘She’s my young cousin; one of them. How do you know her? Oh, were you at St. Dorothea’s?’ She’d never heard where I’d been to school. So I told her how I’d been at Dorothy’s, as we used to call it, and how Damson used to dance to us at night, and how we’d been so completely thrilled to hear of her success as a dancer. Some of the girls came to town to see her as ‘The Goose-girl’ in the holidays, but of course I couldn’t afford it. So Miss Maid said she’d take me to the ballet some night; perhaps you’ll go too.”

“How I’d love it!” Joan-Two sighed wistfully. “You will remind her, won’t you?”

“Rather! I’m fearfully keen. Captain Raymond made a copy of the picture for me. There’s the car,” Lindy remarked. “Captain Raymond’s come back. It was good of him to take your mother all the way to town, and I expect he gave her dinner before putting her in the train. He could quite easily have driven her to Wycombe and let her go on from there; it takes a long while to go to town by road. But nobody who lived here could do a thing like that. They’re all kinder than kind, and they do everything anybody could do to help and then a little more.”

“It was marvellous of him to take her all the way,” Joan admitted, looking contrite. “I hadn’t thought it would make him so late. Why are they so kind?”

“In some mysterious way I believe it’s connected with the Abbey,” Lindy said thoughtfully. “I don’t quite understand, but it used to be a holy place, filled with monks who did all sorts of good deeds, and I sometimes think the people living here now try to carry on. Miss Maid has an odd feeling about the Abbey; she won’t talk about what she feels, but perhaps there’s an inherited something, like an atmosphere, that gets inside you if you live close to the Abbey for long enough. One can’t ask anybody, of course; but it’s there, the friendly feeling. Mrs. Raymond would have it, if anybody has, for the Abbey belongs to her.”

“What a marvellous idea!” Joan exclaimed. “I know it feels friendly. I said so myself, when I went through the gate this morning, as if one of the old monks had left a friendly ghost



behind him.—What’s that? Somebody isn’t in bed yet!”—as a door opened and closed softly, near at hand.

“You must allow poor Captain Raymond to go to bed!” Lindy argued. But she looked worried and slipped across the room towards the door. “You’ll have to be careful when you go back to your room. Perhaps I’d better put out the light for a few minutes.”

Before she could reach the switch, however, the door-handle turned quietly.

“Oh!” gasped Joan, staring wildly from the bed.

Lindy waited, dumb with dismay, as the door opened and Mrs. Raymond stood gazing at them.

Joan-Two’s wide-eyed stare was half of horror, half of fascinated admiration, for Joan the elder wore a bright green kimono and her wonderful red hair hung in two thick plaits on her shoulders.

She looked at the girls and waited quietly for an explanation.

“She couldn’t sleep,” Lindy spoke up bravely. “I guessed and I went to see. It’s like the first night at a new school; I’m a senior and she’s a new junior. I felt I ought to see her through.”

“You haven’t any twins hidden anywhere? It isn’t a party?” Joan asked.

“No—oh no! And we didn’t wake Jansy.”

“No, she’s sound asleep. I went to your room, Littlejan, to tell you—if you were awake—that your mother had found a comfortable carriage, with nice companions, and had every chance of a pleasant journey. My husband did what he could for her and she went off in quite good spirits. The last thing she said was to send you her love.”

“Oh, how good of you to come to tell me!” Joan-Two’s lips quivered. “And it was marvellous of him to be so kind to her! Do you mind my being here, Aunt Joan? Truly, I couldn’t go to sleep, and it seemed such a long time. We’ve been very quiet.”

“It was my fault. I went and fetched her,” Lindy said sturdily. “I know what a first night’s like.”

Joan smiled, a sudden kindly smile of sympathy and comprehension. “I’ve no doubt you’ve helped her more than I could have done. All right, Littlejan! I quite understand. Miss Belinda’s nearer your age, isn’t she? But I’d rather like you to go back to your own bed now. Has she comforted you nicely?”

“I’m afraid I haven’t done it at all. We just talked,” Lindy confessed.

“But it helped a most frightful lot!” Joan-Two said earnestly. “She’s given me the most lovely new things to think about.”

Joan glanced thoughtfully at Lindy. “How did she manage to do that?”

“About the Abbey—and being kind to people—and how good you and Captain Raymond had been to Mother—and how you help everybody,” Joan-Two said, all in one breath.

Lindy reddened. “It was only something I’d been thinking.”

“You seem to have had some very sensible thoughts.” Joan eyed her keenly. “I’m glad you shared them with Littlejan. But I want to go to bed, and I want you girls to go too. Couldn’t you take the lovely thoughts with you?”

“Oh yes! I shall go to sleep now—especially after that marvellous message about Mother,” Joan-Two said happily. “I won’t wake Jansy; I’ll creep into bed like a mouse.”

“Just wait one moment! It’s to-morrow morning.” Joan smiled again. “Aren’t you hungry? Shall I bring you something to eat?”

“Oh, Lindy thought of that! She had some biscuits and chocolate and buns.”

Joan looked at Belinda again. “Careful preparations for the occasion! Do you often do this, Lindy Bellanne?”

“I haven’t done it since I came here,” Lindy said stoutly. “And I won’t do it again, if you don’t like it. But I knew Littlejan would have a rotten night; anybody would, whose mother had had to go and leave her in a strange house, however nice it was. When I saw her room was close to mine, I—well——”

“You made your plans. Well, girls, we’ll talk about this in the morning, but I’d really like you to go to bed now!”

Joan Two smothered a laugh. “Aunt Joan! Why don’t you row us like a headmistress and order us to bed, instead of sort of begging us to go?”

Joan’s brown eyes gazed into hers. “Would you be any more willing to go if I ordered you than if I begged you, Littlejan?”

“No—less, much less!”

“Very well, then; isn’t my way better?”

“Yes, rather! Good-night, Lindy—Miss Belinda, I mean!” Joan-Two scrambled off the bed and crept from the room.

“Thanks terribly much for understanding!” Lindy whispered, as Joan turned to follow her.

Joan smiled back at her from the doorway. “Thank you for doing my job, Miss Belinda!”

“Angel!” Lindy murmured, as she put out the light and went back to bed.

Joan bent over her small namesake, tucking her in cosily and kissing her good-night. Joan-Two sprang up, to fling her arms round her and hug her. “Oh, you are kind!” she whispered.

Joan laughed quietly, tucked her up again, patted her shoulder, and left her to think and sleep.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# THE STORY OF BELL'S FARM

"I want to speak to Littlejan and Miss Belinda upstairs," said Joan, after breakfast next morning.

"What have you two been doing?" Jansy asked suspiciously. "Why did you leave me out?"

Joan-Two looked across at Lindy. "The headmistress!" she murmured.

Joan turned in the doorway. "You'd better hurry, Jansy. The car will be ready in five minutes. Don't keep Frost waiting."

"I don't see why I should go to school, now that Littlejan's come!" Jansy protested.

"Don't you? You teased till we let you go. Now you must finish your term; there are only three weeks more. If you aren't ready when Frost comes round I shall have to send you by train next week."

Jansy vanished hurriedly to find her coat and shoes, and Joan turned again to the elder girls. "Come to my room in ten minutes, you two."

"Will she go back on what she said last night?" Joan-Two murmured anxiously. "She was so jolly about it!"

"No, I'm sure she won't. It must be something else." Lindy marched the twins off to the bathroom and then sent them to collect their "elevenses" from Mrs. Spindle and their books and pencils for the morning's work. "They feel important when they make a fuss about being ready for school," she explained, as she went upstairs with Joan. "They see Jansy putting her things in her case, and they want to be like her in everything."

"You're almost due in your schoolroom, aren't you, Miss Belinda?" Joan smiled at them as she sat with Baby Jim in her lap. "I won't keep you long; we're just going to bath and feed this boy. But I'd like to say a word more about last night. It's quite understood that it was a special occasion, isn't it?"

"Oh, absolutely!" Lindy said earnestly. "It really seemed the right thing to do."

"It probably was, but I don't want you to make a practice of it. Sooner or later you'd wake Jansy, and the twins would find out and then nobody would have any peace."

"Oh, Mrs. Raymond, we won't do it! I'm responsible for the twins," Lindy exclaimed.

Joan-Two stirred uneasily, however. "Do you want us to promise, Aunt Joan?"

Joan looked at her, a smile playing about the corners of her mouth. "No, Littlejan. But I want you and Miss Belinda to remember that it's a privilege to be allowed to pay evening visits and that I trust you not to abuse it."

Joan-Two's face lit up. "We may do it sometimes, then?"

"Only when there's a real reason for it," Joan warned her.

Her namesake looked pensive. "But that would mean there was something wrong, and we don't want horrible things to happen."

"We certainly don't! What I mean is—don't do it too often and don't stay too long when you do visit Lindy. Don't take advantage of the permission, if I give it."

"We won't. I'll see that we don't," Lindy promised.

"But it's so hard, when you get talking. Time goes so quickly," Joan-Two urged.

"Don't I know it! Much better not begin," Joan suggested. "Now, Miss Belinda, that's all; I know you won't forget. Run along to your schoolroom! What are you going to do with

yourself, Littlejan? Won't you be very lonely?" she asked, when Lindy had gone to call the twins.

Joan-Two's eyes danced. "I might ask Miss Belinda to have me in her school. Do you think she would?"

"Poor Lindy! I'm sure she wouldn't. It would be rather silly to send you to Wycombe with Jansy, so near the end of the term. They're beginning exams, and you'd be very much in the way. I don't know quite what to suggest. I thought your mother would be here with you, of course."

"You didn't expect to have me left on your hands like this, did you?" Joan-Two looked at her apologetically. "I'm sorry about it."

Joan laughed. "I can cope with the situation, I'm sure. As a beginning, come and help me to give Jimmy his bath. Do you like tiny babies?"

"I'd like to see you do him," Joan-Two agreed.

"Nurse is busy with Jennifer, so I shall attend to Baby myself this morning."

The nurse brought the bath water, and Joan tested it with her elbow, rolling up her sleeve.

"Mother used to do that, when she bathed our boys," Joan-Two exclaimed.

Joan laughed and added some cold water. "I'm sure she did. We don't want a boiled baby! That's better; now come along, young Jim!"

"How clever you are!" Littlejan watched her admiringly.

"I've had three before him. I like washing babies; they love it so much. See how he's enjoying it!"

"May I talk, or will it worry you?"

"Not a bit. What do you want to say?"

"Is it true that grown-up people in this house go and sit on other people's beds at night, and talk? Lindy said they did."

Joan glanced at her. "It has been done, Littlejan—if you could call them grown-ups. It's a custom that has come about since I married and went away; Joy—the twins' mother—and Jen, when she lived here, were given to bedtime confidences, but we didn't do it so much in my time."

"And Miss Maidlin talks to Miss Mary—the one who writes the books, doesn't she?"

"I've no doubt she does. But that's no reason why people who are not grown-up should do it!"

"Oh, but don't you think we might inherit the custom?" Joan-Two asked solemnly. "Perhaps it's in the air, like other things—like kindness and being friendly, and trying to be like the old monks were."

Joan gave her a quick look. "Is that what Lindy said last night? Clever of her! No, Littlejan, I do *not* think you must inherit that custom! Inherit the rest as much as you like."

Joan-Two sighed. "Are you being firm? Jansy said you could be. Oh—well!"

"I'm being very firm," Joan informed her. "Now,"—as she lifted the wet wriggling baby into her lap and cuddled him in a warm towel—"Jimmy and I will be busy for a few minutes and he'll go to sleep. It's a lovely day; why don't you go out and explore?"

"Oh, but there's something I must do!" Joan-Two cried. "I'd forgotten, but I must find a place—a billet, you know—for Chestnut. Then if Lady Joy comes home and says the twins may learn to ride, he could come here. I'd better go and look at the village."

"Bell's Farm would be the place. I wonder if there'd be any chance there?"

“Bell’s Farm? Is it somewhere near? Oh, Aunt Joan, tell me, please! Could I go and ask Mr. Bell?”

“There isn’t a Mr. Bell. The farm belongs to Mr. John Edwards.”

“Oh! Then why is it called Bell’s Farm?”

“We can’t imagine. It’s always been a mystery to us. I was so puzzled at one time that I hunted through the old church registers, to see how long it was since anyone called Bell lived there. And there never was a Bell; at least, not within the last four hundred years. But it’s always been known as Bell’s Farm, or sometimes Bell Farm, in the old days. We’ve never solved the mystery of the name.”

“Perhaps they kept some sort of fire-bell, or alarm-bell there,” Joan-Two suggested. “Wouldn’t it be marvellous if we could find out, after all this time?”

“An alarm-bell, to ring in case of invasion by the Spanish Armada,” Joan laughed. “But there’s no local legend about it.”

“Is Bell’s Farm up on the hills, where they could light a bonfire?”

“A warning beacon? Oh no, nothing like that. Bell’s is next door to the Abbey. You know that line of dark trees, just beyond the gate-house field? They’re evergreen oaks, or holm oaks; ilex is the real name. They don’t lose their leaves in winter as ordinary trees do, but stand there, thick and dark, until the spring, while everything else is bare. The old leaves fall off as the new ones come, so ilex trees are never really bare. The farm is on the other side of those dark trees; the Abbey’s tucked in between it and the grounds of this house. But the Abbey is older than either of them.”

“If it’s so close, it would be the very place for Chestnut!” Joan-Two said yearningly. “Do you know Mr. ———what was it?”

“Edwards. No, we’ve never managed to make friends. The farmer was an old man, with a name for being a churlish customer, when we came to live at the Abbey nearly twenty years ago—really in the Abbey, you know. Joy, my cousin, used to wander all over the country, and she trespassed in some of Mr. Edwards’s fields, and he was very angry. Mother made Joy go and apologise, but nothing would put matters right. Mr. Edwards wouldn’t forgive her and he wouldn’t be friendly. So though we lived so close to him, we never went near the farm; and soon after that Joy’s grandfather died and we came to live here, and we had so much to do and to think about that we didn’t trouble any more about a sulky old man.”

“He doesn’t sound likely to be friendly about Chestnut.”

“He died last year, and his son, who had been living in America for years, owns the farm now; that’s why I said there might be a chance. I’ll see if anything can be done about it, Littlejan. I’d like to be more friendly with our next-door neighbour, when his land comes right up against mine! The old man had a grudge against the Abbey, as well as against Joy, but his son may be more sensible.”

“But why should he object to the Abbey?” Joan-Two asked. “Did he want any of it for his farm?”

“He’d had it. Haven’t you heard how the Abbey ruins were used as farm buildings for two or three hundred years? They were leased to the Edwards family, who turned them into extra barns and storehouses for their farm stuff. My lovely chapter-house was used that way, and no doubt the refectory and the dormitory too.”

“Oh, but how awful! How could they? It’s such a wonderful old place!”

“It wasn’t wonderful to them. They were country folk, and all they saw was four walls and a roof and the chance of storing hay and turnips and apples inside. They never noticed that the

roof was beautifully vaulted, and the windows of the chapter-house pure Early English, or that the refectory was the most perfect Perpendicular. The Abinger family—this is Abinger Hall, you know—lived in London and cared no more about the ruins than the farmer did. Then it passed into the hands of Sir Antony, Joy’s grandfather, and he came to live here and saw the Abbey, and realised what it was and what it could be again, and he took it back from Farmer Edwards and restored it to its original condition, so far as it could be done.”

“And the farmer didn’t like it?”

“He didn’t want to part with it; it was useful to him.”

“So there’s been a sort of war between the Abbey and Bell’s Farm ever since?”

“I shouldn’t put it as strongly as that.” Joan hushed the baby, who was clamouring for food. “We’ll say there’s been no friendship. We’ve ignored the farm, for all these years; we’ve never been inside it, although it’s so near us; and the farmer has never forgiven us. Now that the old man is dead, there might be a chance of making friends, and I’d be glad. We’ll think it over, Littlejan. Don’t try to tackle John Edwards by yourself; let me help! Now you must really go. I can’t keep this young man waiting any longer. Don’t go into the Abbey and disturb the schoolroom; that would be hard on Miss Belinda. Go the other way, into the Manor grounds; or up the lane towards the hills. Don’t fall into the Manor lake—what a lot of don’ts! Forget them all, and just be sensible, Littlejan.”

“Thanks awfully for telling me the story of Bell’s Farm! I do hope Chestnut can be billeted there soon,” Joan said eagerly, as she set out on a tour of exploration.

## CHAPTER NINE

### A BILLET FOR CHESTNUT

With Chestnut's future in her mind, Littlejan turned first towards the village and stared through the open gate into the yard of the farm next door, but remembering Joan's warning she did not go in. She could see barns and stables, and there were cocks and hens pecking in the yard. Several dogs were wandering about, and Joan shrank away in dismay and decided to leave all enquiries to Joan Raymond, for one was a bulldog, who drew back his lips and grinned, and came strolling towards her. Joan moved off hastily, with a vision of something even more terrifying at the back of her mind, for following the bulldog had come a huge creature, with great drooping ears and long heavy face and frightening red eyes; she had never seen anything in the least like it, and though it looked merely interested and not at all fierce she did not stay to consider that, but went at top speed up the lane towards the shelter of the Abbey gate.

"What an awful animal! I wouldn't go into the farm alone for anything—not even for Chestnut's sake. It was the biggest dog I ever saw; and why were its eyes red like that? But all the same I do hope Chestnut can be billeted there. It would be so frightfully convenient, right up against the Abbey like that," she said to herself, as she went along the lane to have another look at the orchard and gardens of the Manor, where she and her mother had spent one night a month ago.

In the afternoon, climbing the hill with Lindy and the twins, by the wood steps and the chalky track which she knew, from her mother's stories, to be the Monk's Path, she looked down on the Hall and the Abbey, and then gazed wistfully at the farm buildings next door.

"There's some sort of big barn among those trees that border the Abbey grounds," Lindy remarked; they had been discussing Chestnut's future as they came up the hill. "I can see a bit of a pointed roof."

"We'd see more in winter, if the leaves were off the trees," Joan-Two said. "Oh, but Aunt Joan said those trees had leaves on them always. No wonder that big place doesn't show much! It's almost hidden. But we might be able to see a little more than we can see in the summer; the trees may not be all—what was their funny name?—illex, was it? Twins, have you ever been up here in the winter? What's that big house down there, close to the Abbey?"

Margaret was hopping on one foot near the rim of the quarry. "Don't know. Haven't ever been there."

"This isn't a winter walk, Littlejan," Elizabeth explained, in a tone of reproof. "We don't come up the hill in the winter. It's too cold, and the wind would blow us over."

"And that old path's too sloshy," Margaret shouted. "You'd fall down, right to the bottom."

"It's chalk. It must be slippery when it's wet," Lindy agreed.

"Too slidey," Elizabeth added. "And there isn't nothing to come for; can't have picnics in the winter."

"Isn't anything to come for," Lindy scolded. "Elizabeth, you are a careless girl!"

"I don't care. Why d'you want to know about that old farm?" Elizabeth seized Joan's hand and gazed up into her face.

"I want to find a stable, or a bedroom, or a billet, for my Chestnut," Joan explained.

"We'll find one for you, shall we? Shall we, Margaret-Twin?"

"Yes! Yes! We'll find a billet for Chestnut and then she'll let us ride him," Margaret sang.

"You needn't trouble," Joan said laughing. "Aunt Joan's on the job. She'll see to it."

"We could do it just as well," Elizabeth asserted.

"I'm sure you couldn't!" Joan teased.

Elizabeth's firm little chin grew firmer still. "You'll see! She'll see, won't she, Twin?"

"Oh yes! We'll show her! Race me to the Hermit's Cave, Lizbeth-Twin!"

And they rushed off across the quarry, to dive into the hole in the cliff, in which Janice and Joy and Joan had once found treasure.

"Will you tell me something?" Littlejan looked at Lindy. "That blue dress you wear—it's green to-day, but it's the same pattern and badges and girdle—is it a school frock? What do the things on the front of it mean?"

"Sixth Form at Dorothy's—St. Dorothea's, near Liverpool," Lindy said promptly. "Blue or green, just as we liked; most girls had both and wore them alternately. This is my prefect's badge; this means First Eleven, and so do the violet stripes across my tie. Anyone who knew Dorothy's would understand. When I settled down as the twins' governess, Miss Maid asked if I hadn't any school frocks I'd like to wear out, and I was only too glad to go back to mine. It was after I'd found out about Dammy Ellerton, of course, or Miss Maid would have known; she'd seen Damson wearing Dorothy frocks, and she'd seen Rachel's Sixth Form colours. Rachel is Dammy's sister; Damson left too soon to be Sixth, but Rachel had her golden colours; First Eleven stripes and prefect's badge too. We all thought Rachel rather marvellous; you know what kids at school are like!"

Joan-Two nodded; she knew very well. "Where is she now?"

"Taking care of Dammy in town, and writing stories in her spare time; jolly good stories too."

"What a thrill! What did you mean about golden colours? I can see your First Eleven stripes."

"The Sixth had golden ties and girdles. Each form had its colours; you'd have been a ruby, I should think—Third; or amethyst—Fourth."

"I see." Littlejan was deeply interested. "Then anybody could tell you were Sixth. Weren't you terribly bucked when you'd worked up to gold?"

Lindy laughed. "Oh, rather! A marvellous feeling! The twins are definitely awed by my badges!"

Joan agreed, looking not a little impressed herself.

In the shallow cave, the twins were whispering together.

"Littlejan doesn't know," Elizabeth remarked. "But you and me—we know, Peggy-Twin!"

Margaret grinned back at her. "Even Miss Belinda doesn't know. Must have secrets sometimes!"

"But we'll have to take care," Elizabeth added. "There's the Horrible Enemy, you know, Peg. I'm very fond of dogs, but that creature can't be a dog; it's a horse, or an elephant. It's too huge for a dog."

"It's the Enemy," Margaret agreed. "But we won't go by the gate, Betty-Twin. The Enemy stays near the gate. We've our own private way; no enemy there."

"Be careful! Don't talk about it, or it won't be a secret any longer," Elizabeth warned her, as Lindy and Joan-Two followed them to peer into the shallow cave.



It was not easy for the twins to have secrets, with Miss Belinda always beside them during their waking hours. At times she went to the piano to practise her singing exercises, but Aunt Joan generally managed to be somewhere about during these periods, and now there was Joan-Two also, and Jansy at week-ends and in the evenings. The only chance of private discussion was in bed at night, but they took full advantage of the opportunity, and as soon as everybody had been in to say good-night and they had been left, in their small separate beds, to go to sleep, Margaret would leap out and fling herself on Elizabeth, with chuckles of triumph and glee. They would curl up together and whisper till one of them fell asleep, and would be found and scolded by Lindy, or by Nelly, their nurse, in one bed in the morning.

"I'm sure we could do it; find Chestnut's billet, you know." Elizabeth made room for Margaret, on the evening after the climb to the quarry.

"Yes, because we found You-know-what," Margaret agreed mysteriously. "Nobody knows we've found it, do they?"

"No, and they won't, unless you forget and tell them. I believe You-know-what will be a new way into that big house Littlejan was looking at, close to those trees, and we wouldn't need to go near the Horrible Enemy."

"It's a frightfully good plan." Margaret wriggled in delight. "We thought You-know-what would come in useful some day! Isn't it a good thing we didn't tell Jansy?"

"Jansy calls us babes, because she goes to school. 'Tisn't likely we'll tell her our secrets. She can have her own secrets about school; ours will be about the Abbey."

"When can we go and make sure?" Margaret asked. "We don't really know where You-know-what leads to, do we?"

"We'll need to wait for a good chance. We ought to have done it while Auntie Lin was in Manchester," Elizabeth sighed. "Such crowds of people everywhere now! Miss Belinda—and Jansy—and Littlejan!"

"And Auntie Joan and the babies, and that Nurse of theirs. Would have been a lot easier when we was doin' our lessons only with Auntie Maid, but you wouldn't come then, Betty."

"Sorry about that," Elizabeth admitted handsomely. "But it was fun to have a secret and I didn't want to spoil it by knowing all about it too soon. We kept on saying: 'Some day we'll find out about You-know-what.' I was looking forward to doing our bit of finding out, Twin. We're always hearing how Mother and Auntie Joan and Auntie Jen found things in the Abbey I thought we were going to begin too."

"Well, p'raps we are. Can't we start soon?"

"I want to, as much as you do, but we must wait for a good chance. We can't have crowds of people dancing round us while we're finding out about You-know-what."

"Should think not! We'll have nobody there but just us. I think we'll need to go in the night, Twin."

"Well, I don't, then!" Elizabeth said heatedly. "Just you remember what happened when we went in the Abbey in the night before! You were as frightened as a baby because something screamed at us, and it was only an old bird."

"Don't like owlies in the night," Margaret muttered.

"Then we won't go out and look for them," Elizabeth said tartly. "We won't go exploring You-know-what till we can do it in the daytime, even if we have to wait for weeks or years."

"By that time Littlejan will have found a billet for Chestnut by herself," Margaret grumbled.

“Perhaps Littlejan won’t. Perhaps we’ll manage it to-morrow. You never know what will happen.” Elizabeth tried to console her.

What happened next morning put their plans off into the future, however. It was Saturday, and Maidlin rang up from Kentisbury to suggest a picnic.

“We’ve found the site for our house, and I promised the twinnies they should see it at once,” she said eagerly to Joan. “Couldn’t you all come this afternoon, and meet us there? Rosamund will bring food for everybody, and we’ll picnic in the heather.”

“Is the house to be built on a common?” Joan asked. “Our Sussex commons are lovely with heather. Oh, we’ll come! We’ll love it.”

“It’s on the slope of a hill, and the hill’s all heather. We’re going to have a terraced garden; roses on one level, fruit on another, tennis on another, and steps leading down with rock plants on each side.”

“It sounds marvellous, Maid! I can see it—great banks of saxifrage and aubretia and rock rose, and people on the road below will look up and gasp with pleasure.”

“That’s the idea,” Maidlin exclaimed. “How quick you are to understand, Joan!”

Joan laughed. “But is there any water? Is it chalk or sand? I know those Sussex hills and commons. Sand, I suppose, if there’s heather. Where does your water come from?”

“I’d never thought of that, but Jock did, of course. There’s a wonderful little stream, and a pond, at the bottom of the hill; we shall put the house fairly close to the water and the garden will run up behind, and we’ll have a shelter at the top, where we can sit and look down our garden to the house.”

“Excellent, Maid! Where is it? We’ll certainly come.”

She heard Maidlin’s gurgle of laughter over the ’phone. “It’s Sunrise Hill, near Blackdown, just inside the Sussex border. The Pallant, Sunrise Hill, will be our address. We didn’t make it up, Joan; Sunrise Hill is really its name. Isn’t it marvellous?”

Joan laughed out. “How delightful! It faces east, I presume?”

“Better still—south-east, but it’s open to south and west as well. We shall have lots of sunshine.”

“I congratulate you, Maid. It will make a lovely home. We’ll come, you may be sure. Please thank Rosamund in advance for our tea.” And Joan rang off and called to the twins the news of Sunrise Hill.

## CHAPTER TEN

### TEA IN THE HEATHER

Joan-Two was conscious, all that first day and all through the picnic, that Jansy's father was watching her quietly. She remarked on it to Jansy. "Is he thinking about photos?"

"Of course. He's studying you, to find out how to take you—what will be most like you, you know. He wants your mother to say—'That's Littlejan exactly!'—not—'Who's this funny-looking girl? I don't know her!' Presently he'll be ready to start," Jansy explained.

Jack Raymond made one useful suggestion, as they drove out to find Sunrise Hill. "Couldn't Littlejan get hold of her breeches? I want to see her in them. Sorry I didn't think of it before; the car from Kentisbury could have brought them."

"I could come home in them, the first time I go to the Castle for a riding-lesson," Joan-Two said eagerly. "The car's to fetch me and bring me back to you, after I've had my ride in the park with Ferguson. I could bring my frock and wear my breeches."

"Right! You remember." Jack did not waste words, but was already friendly in his silent way. "But the Kentisbury car mustn't make two journeys, just for you. If they'll fetch you, I'll come for you and bring you back. I can work it in with a run home to see what sort of a start the men have made."

"If you *could*," Joan began, tremulous with eagerness, "then why couldn't you bring the camera and take me riding on Chestnut?"

"Some day I will, to be sure. Very suitable," he agreed.

"Your book will have thrills in it, Littlejan," Jansy said enviously.

"We want to see Chestnut," Elizabeth began.

"We're dying to see Chestnut!" Margaret shouted. "Why can't she bring him to the Abbey to be photographed?"

"Much better not," Jack said promptly, shooting a look back at his wife on the seat behind.

Joan, holding Jimmy carefully, nodded her assent. Lindy was nursing Jennifer, and Margaret was tucked between them and Joan on the back seat, while Elizabeth and Joan-Two had the small seats, facing them, a tactful arrangement which separated the twins and left Jansy to sit with her father in front.

"Goin' to see Aunty Maid's new house." Elizabeth looked up at Joan-Two in the confiding way she had when she was feeling friendly.

"I'm afraid you're in for a disappointment, Twins," Joan Raymond said. "Did you really think Aunty Maid had built her house since Thursday?"

"Oh well! Won't there be any house at all?"

"Not any at all," she was assured from every side.

"Then I don't see what we're going for."

"To have a picnic, Twin. Tea on the grass is always fun," Margaret cried.

"In this case it will be tea in the heather, which is more fun still, I think," Joan said.

"What's heather?" asked Joan-Two.

The twins and Jansy jeered. "We'll show you! Fancy not knowing heather!"

Lindy intervened, telling of her old home in the Wirral, where sheets of heather covered the hills and little sandy paths ran among dull red rocks, and there was water on three sides, two rivers and the sea.

“What’s on the last side?” Margaret asked instantly.

“Oh, country, and the smoke of towns. That’s where it joins on to the rest of the world.”

“What are those lovely patches of flowers?” Joan-Two asked. “Over there—all purple-pink?”

“Heather!” There was a shout from Jansy and the twins.

“Now do you know heather?” Elizabeth looked up at her.

“I shall, when I’ve been close to it,” Joan said cautiously.

“You shall sit in it; lie in it, if you like.” Joan Raymond smiled at her.

Jack was consulting his map. “We should be near—yes, there’s the Kentisbury car. Then this is Sunrise Hill.”

“Maidie, what a lovely spot for a house!” the elder Joan cried, as they drew up beside the other car and Maidlin came to greet them.

“Our first visitors at The Pallant!” Maidlin’s eyes smiled a welcome. “Can you see it in your mind, as I do? A grey stone house, rather low and spread-out, with big windows looking over that little pond to the wide stretch of country, and a coloured garden going up the hill behind, in steps, and a little sheltered place at the top for an even bigger view? Come and congratulate Jock; it’s his discovery. He is so proud of it!”

The big party soon broke up into its natural divisions. Jack Raymond, fresh from discussions with his architect, was tackled by Dr. Robertson on the subject of drainage and lighting, and Lord Kentisbury, older than either of them, criticised their ideas in the light of his own experience. “I know something of these matters. You can’t imagine how much I had to do to Kentisbury before I could take Rosamund to live there,” he said. “The bathrooms were most inadequate, and it seemed impossible to get the place warm. I thought I should have to pull it down and rebuild.”

“I can quite believe it,” Jock Robertson assented. “These ancestral halls always look chilly and cheerless, but you’ve made a good job of Kentisbury. It’s the height of comfort now. Maid and I are fortunate to be beginning from our foundations. We can have things as we want them.”

Joan and Rosamund sat in the car with Jennifer and the baby, while Maidlin led the twins to the exact spot where the house would stand. “I should think we’re in the kitchen now, Twins,” she said seriously.

Elizabeth chuckled. “Doesn’t look much like a kitchen! I’m sorry for Miss Anne Bellanne, if she has to do her cooking here. Where’s the drawing-room?”

“Over here. Uncle Jock has a picture of where all the rooms will be.”

“Where’s the nursery?” Margaret shouted.

“Oh—Margaret!” Maidlin’s laugh rang out. “You don’t ask people that before they’re married!”

“But why not?” Elizabeth gazed at her severely. “Nurseries are very important. Where will you put the children, if there isn’t any nursery?”

“What’s the matter, Maid?” Rosamund called from the car. “What are you shrieking about?”

“Shrieking!” Joan mocked. “Maid has the most beautiful laugh I ever heard—full of music, like her speaking voice.”

“We’re hearing more of it than we used to do,” Rosamund remarked. “I tell her Jock Robertson has set free her laughter; she always kept it so bottled up. I wonder what the twinnies have been saying, to set her off like that?”

The twins rushed to her. “We only asked her where the nursery was. She’d shown us the kitchen and the drawing-room. Isn’t the nursery the most important, Auntie Ros? It’s nothing to laugh about!”

Maidlin leaned on the door of the car and looked at Rosamund, her eyes dancing. “Elizabeth wants to know where I’m going to put the children.”

“Quite right, Elizabeth,” Rosamund agreed. “The nursery is the most important. Auntie Maid will find the best place when she’s ready. But let them build the house first. You know you want to have a nursery, Maid!”

“Well, is it likely I wouldn’t, with you, and Joy, and Jen, and Joan before my eyes, all with beautiful nurseries?” Maidlin retorted. “But don’t ask me to discuss the nursery before Jock and your husbands! Twinnies, come up the hill and see the place where the summer-house is to be. You can see for miles; almost to the sea, but not quite. We’re going to call it the Pen—like a play-pen for babies, or a sheep-pen, you know.”

“Or a pig-pen?” Margaret inquired.

“If you like. You can be the little pig inside it, when it’s made. ‘Pallant’ means a sheepfold or a sheep-pen; I’ve told you about that.”

“The Pen and The Pallant!” Elizabeth repeated. “Funny!”

“Come and see the Pen!” Margaret caught Maidlin’s hand and dragged her away. “Come on, Twin.”

Joan-Two and Lindy were lying in the heather. Joan rolled over and pushed her face into it. “Oh, I do like this!”

“I love it,” Lindy assented. “The smell of it takes me right back home again.”

Joan-Two looked up from the nest in which her nose had been buried. “Were you sorry to go away?”

“I was sorry not to go back. I was sent to school, and that was a big thrill. But behind it there was always the thought that home wasn’t there any longer, and that holidays would mean going to Nan’s rooms in Manchester.”

“Why didn’t you go back to the heather place? Is it rude to ask? It sounded rather like the sort of question Margaret would fire at you.”

“I don’t mind. Father lost his money, and he died. We had nothing to live on. I don’t mind having a job, but I’d have liked to feel we could go home some day. I loved it so much.”

“Perhaps you’ll make a fortune as a singer and buy it back again.”

Lindy laughed and shook her head. “Miss Maid says I’ll be here with her a good deal, when the house is built, and it will be Nan’s home, if she housekeeps for them. So I shall have plenty of heather.”

“I suppose it wasn’t much fun in Manchester?”

“In some ways it was better than at home. There were concerts; I heard Miss Maid sing in the Free Trade Hall—that was the first time I saw her, though I’d heard her sing in *The Messiah* on the wireless. And I wanted to have good lessons and start on my career. But I was always sorry we’d had to leave the Wirral.”

“Perhaps you’ll go back.” Joan-Two plunged her face into the heather again.

“Have you heard Miss Maid sing?” Lindy asked.

“Not yet. Mother heard her, on the wireless, when she sang at a children’s concert.”

“Her voice is marvellous. You’ll have a chance to hear her soon; she’s singing at a concert at their old school next month, and we shall all go,” Lindy explained.

“Isn’t she too good for school concerts? I should have thought she’d save herself for London.”

“She doesn’t feel like that. It’s an Old Girls’ Concert to help the school funds, and she wants to do her bit. She says she belongs to the school; she’s one of the queens, you know. Of course, her name on the programme will help the concert no end.”

“I guess it will. It’s jolly decent of her to feel that way,” Joan-Two said warmly.

Jansy had rushed away and climbed the hill. She stood waving derisively to the twins as they stumbled towards her. “I got up here first! What a bumpy garden you’ll have, Auntie Maid!”

“Wait till there are steps, and a good path, and seats half-way up,” Maidlin told her, as they sank on a flat grey stone to rest and gaze about them.

“On top of the world, like up on the hills at home,” Elizabeth said dreamily.

“Just like that, Lizbeth. And it really isn’t very far away from the Abbey. Now I see Auntie Ros beginning to set the tea. Who’s going to help?”

With shouts of “Tea! Tea!” the twins and Jansy galloped down the hill, and Rosamund had plenty of willing assistants.

“Did you bring enough to eat?” Margaret shouted across the heather. “There’s such a lot of us to-day.”

“Even if we don’t count Jennifer and Jim,” Elizabeth added.

“I counted Jennifer, but not little Jim. I told Miss Lillico I wanted plenty of tea for seventeen people,” the Countess said solemnly.

“Seventeen?” Elizabeth stared at her. “Where are they? I can only count twelve; three fathers, two mothers—that’s you and Auntie Joan—Miss Belinda and Auntie Maid, and five children. Where’s the rest?”

“Littlejan’s one of the children, isn’t she?” Margaret cried gleefully. “She thinks she’s big, but she isn’t, really.”

“Yes, but Jock Robertson isn’t a father,” Rosamund murmured to Joan.

“From Elizabeth’s point of view men and fathers are the same thing,” Joan laughed back at her.

“Is anybody else coming? Why did you say seventeen?” Elizabeth demanded.

“Because I counted each of you five people as two, so that you’d be sure to have enough tea,” Rosamund explained.

The twins danced in delight. “Two of everything—two buns—two cakes each—two scones!”

“You know how to make lovely teas, Auntie-Countess!” Margaret proclaimed.

“Well, I used to live in a tea shop, didn’t I? Go and fetch the fathers, Twins; they’re talking about drains. And call Littlejan and Miss Belinda. I think they’re eating heather.”

“They look like it,” Elizabeth chuckled. “You call them, Jansy; we’ll fetch Uncle Jock and the others.”

“I’m so very glad about *that!*” Joan remarked, as she came from the car carrying Jimmy, to the heathery seat Maidlin had chosen for her. “Where are we sitting, Maid? In the kitchen?”

“The lounge hall, I think.” Maidlin’s dark eyes laughed at her. “Or perhaps the dining-room. Glad about what, Joan?”

Joan glanced up the hill after Jansy. “This close friendship between my namesake and Miss Belinda. I wasn’t sure how Littlejan would fit in, and it felt a bit awkward when her

mother had to leave her on our hands. She's too old for Jansy, and much too old for the twins; she'd soon have been bored and I should have had to entertain her."

"That's how I felt, when I had her at the Castle," Rosamund said. "Travelling has made her older than her age at times. That was why I sent for Tansy Lillico, who is almost fifteen."

"You mean she's found a friend in Lindy Bellanne?" Maidlin asked.

"She's fallen in love," Joan agreed, with a laugh. "Lindy was understanding, when Littlejan felt deserted and lonely on her first night, and it has made a fast bond between them. Young Joan looks up to Lindy, and the gap that surrounded her is bridged. I'm so very glad about it."

"Lindy's a dear. She'll be a great help to small Joan," Maidlin said. "Did she comfort her, when her mother went away?"

"With biscuits and buns; a bedroom feast at midnight," and Joan told the story. "They've promised not to do it too often. I can trust Miss Belinda."

The twins rushed up the hill again after tea, waving off Jansy and Littlejan. "Don't want you. We're going together, just us, to see the Pen again. Don't come, Jansy!"

"I'm going to pack cups, Littlejan," Lindy suggested. "Perhaps Jansy would like to help too."

"Must get away from crowds sometimes!" Elizabeth panted. "Such a lot of people! Now are we in the Pen, do you think?"

"I should think so; it's where we were before. It was a terribly nice picnic," Margaret said pensively. "I'd like to have it all over again."

"Yes, but not just at once! I couldn't eat all those buns over again; it would be a frightful waste to have it just at once. Twin, did you hear what they planned at tea?"

"Littlejan's going to Kentisbury on Monday for her riding lesson. Jansy will be at school, doing those silly exams. If we can get away from Miss Belinda, that will be our chance to see about You-know-what."

"About the billet for Chestnut. Then perhaps he'd come and we'd see him," Margaret cried. "But it's frightfully hard to escape from Miss Belinda, when we're supposed to be doing lessons, Betty-Twin!"

"Perhaps we'll have a stroke of luck, like we had when Littlejan came and danced on our lawn that first day and Auntie Maid had to go and see the gardener," Elizabeth said optimistically. "At least Jansy and Littlejan will be out of our way and we'll be in the Abbey, all ready for You-know-what!"

"We'll hope for the best," Margaret agreed. "But you won't ask me to go near the Horrible Enemy, Twin?"

"I should hate to go anywhere near him myself," Elizabeth assured her, with vigour. "Auntie Joan saw him at the gate of the farm, and she says he's called a bloodhound. I call him a ghastly nightmare! She's waving, and Miss Belinda's coming to fetch us. Don't say a word, Peggy-Twin!"

"Not a word!" Margaret promised fervently.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### “TWINS’ TUNNEL”

Fortune favoured the twins, though they did not deserve it. They were poring laboriously over their arithmetic in the little schoolroom, on Monday morning, when the telephone which linked the Abbey with the Hall rang insistently and Mrs. Watson called that Miss Belinda was wanted.

Lindy ran to answer and found Joan speaking. “Lindy, could you come and help me for a few minutes? Nelly has had an accident; scalded her hand rather badly, and Nurse is seeing to it. If you could keep an eye on Jennifer, I can see to Baby. Could you leave the twins with some work to do for half-an-hour?”

On an ordinary occasion there would have been no difficulty. The twins were sufficiently fond of Miss Belinda—and also slightly in awe of her wrath, if they gave trouble—to be obedient and go on with their work alone. But to-day both were full of a great idea and it swept away their scruples.

As soon as Lindy had gone they hurled their books aside and crept out to dodge past Mrs. Watson.

“It’s our chance, Twin. Come on!” Elizabeth whispered, catching up the satchel which held their biscuits and slices of cake for ‘elevenses’. “I brought a torch,” she said triumphantly.

“Oh! Well, that’s a good thing! How jolly clever you are! I never thought of a torch,” Margaret mourned.

“Not much use going to You-know-what without a torch,” Elizabeth chuckled.

Once more luck was with them. The caretaker was opening the gate to a party of tourists. The twins slipped into the crowd, unconscious of the admiring looks cast at their red curly heads, and the whispered comments—“Must be the Marchwood twins, Lady Quellyn’s daughters; just like her, aren’t they?”

“Miss Margaret! Miss Elizabeth! Come back at once!” called helpless Ann Watson.

“No fear! We’re not coming!” Margaret gave a naughty shout of triumph.

“It’s all right. We’re going to have a look at the gate-house,” Elizabeth said with dignity.

She darted after Margaret, across the plank bridge over the fish-stream and into the shadow of the great arched gateway.

The visitors laughed. “Green sprites! I wonder what they’re up to?”

“Shall I fetch them back?” a girl suggested.

But Mrs. Watson was leading the way to the cloister garth, to begin her recitation of dates and stories, and they had to follow and leave the wicked twins to their wanderings.

“Now for You-know-what!” Elizabeth said darkly, in the shelter of the ancient gate.

“We dodged old Watson beautifully!” Margaret chuckled.

“Twin! You mustn’t call her that. It’s rude,” Elizabeth exclaimed, in a shocked tone. “Remember she’s Aunty Maid’s Aunt Ann!”

“I f’got,” Margaret admitted. “She doesn’t seem like Aunty Maid’s aunty, Betty-Twin.”

“I know. It’s frightfully odd. I don’t understand, but I suppose we shall know all about it some day.” Elizabeth pondered the strange relationship, which puzzled her deeply. “Oh well! Doesn’t matter to us, but you mustn’t be rude to Mrs. Watson, Twin.”



“No, I’d better not. I’m sorry. Now let’s go on and find out things, shall we?”

Elizabeth dismissed the problem. “Yes—come on! Miss Belinda will be calling us back to those pigs of sums soon.”

In a game of hide-and-seek, racing across the gate-house meadow, Margaret had stumbled on what she firmly believed to be a great discovery. To anyone else there was very little to see or to be excited about, but to the twins, accustomed all their lives to mysterious underground passages leading from the Hall to the Abbey, and long tunnels which had openings up on the hill, the dark hole, into which Margaret had tumbled and where Elizabeth had fallen on top of her, was obviously the beginning of a secret passage and must lead somewhere. It was under the high beech hedge which enclosed the gate-house meadow; above the hedge rose the line of dark ilex trees which Joan-Two had noticed from the hill, dividing the Abbey from Bell’s Farm; and behind the trees was the big building she had pointed out.

To the twins it was all very simple. Chestnut must be given a billet in that big house, or stable, or barn, and they must be the ones to find his lodging, so that Joan-Two in gratitude would let them ride her pet. They dared not go near the gate of the farm for fear of the bulldog, whom they did not like, and the bloodhound, who had filled them with acute terror. But the dogs were on guard at the entrance; if a way could be found into the yard in their rear, Elizabeth was sure she could coax the farmer into consenting to receive Chestnut, and Margaret, with great faith in her powers, had no doubt whatever that all would be well. They were convinced that they had found a safe and secret road, and that “You-know-what”, as Elizabeth had named their discovery, would be the way out of their difficulty.

Elizabeth switched on her torch. “It’s a very small hole. We’ll need to crawl, Twin. I wonder how far in it goes?”

“Come on!” Margaret crept delightedly into the opening under the hedge. “D’you think rabbits made it to live in?”

“Or foxes,” Elizabeth began doubtfully.

Margaret drew back and sat on her heels and gazed up at her. “I wouldn’t like to meet a fox in there, in the dark.”

“I don’t think the fox is there now, because of those dogs on the farm. Foxes and dogs aren’t friends. But perhaps a fox had his house here one day.”

“Oh well! So long as he’s not here now!” Margaret turned to her quest again.

“Twin, something funny here,” Elizabeth exclaimed.

Once more Margaret emerged from the burrow. “You won’t let me get started!” she grumbled. “What is it this time?”

“Somebody made this hole; some person, not a fox. There are bricks in the roof.”

Margaret scanned the top of the hole, in the torchlight. “There are, too! Marvellous of you to see them, Twin. They’re buried in the earth, but I can see them.”

“It is a tunnel, not a hole,” Elizabeth said exultantly, “Everybody will call it ‘Twins’ Tunnel’; we’ve found a new passage for the Abbey! One of those old monk-men wanted a private way to get out—or he had a friend at Bell’s Farm—or he had some business in that big house behind the trees, that Mother and Auntie Joan have never been into. So he made this secret way for himself.”

“Come on! Let’s see where it goes to!” Margaret’s impatience broke bounds and she plunged down into the tunnel.

Elizabeth followed closely, holding the torch. “We must be quick. Miss Belinda will be coming back, and then she’ll start looking for us.”

“She won’t look for us under a hedge,” Margaret chuckled. “Oh, I say, I’ve found the end! It doesn’t go on! It’s blocked up with earth!”

“Let’s see!” Elizabeth wormed her way past her. “Oh, my goodness, it is blocked up all right! But it must lead somewhere; it’s been made for some reason—look at that wooden bit holding up the roof! And more bricks in the wall. It’s not a chance tunnel, Twin.”

“The roof’s fallen down,” Margaret suggested. “Perhaps it’s only a lump in the passage and we could dig through it and go on again.”

“Nothing to dig with. We can’t do much with only our hands.”

“Could we go out and find a spade?”

“No,” Elizabeth said firmly. “If we go out somebody will see us and we’ll be dragged back to those ghastly sums. Find something to dig with here, Twin.”

“Gosh! That won’t be easy,” Margaret protested.

“A stick. We might be able to push it through the lump,” Elizabeth began. “It’s only soft earth that’s fallen down.”

“Can’t see even a stick. I’ll crawl out and find a bit of hedge. Nobody will see me.”

“Well, if they do, it’s the end of You-know-what as our secret,” Elizabeth said heatedly.

“Twins! Twins! What on earth are you doing in there?” cried a voice, and the light from the outlet was suddenly blocked by a figure, who, on hands and knees, was peering in.

“Gosh and goodness!” gasped Margaret. “What is it?”

“It’s Jansy!” Elizabeth groaned. “Jansy, you can’t be here! You’re at school in Wycombe!”

“Looks like it, doesn’t it?” Jansy grinned and crawled in to join them. “I was at the gatehouse, coming to you and Miss Belinda in the Abbey,” she explained. “I saw you two rush across the grass and I came to see where you’d disappeared to. I say, this is marvellous! How did you find it? Where does it go? Have you been all the way? Does it lead to anywhere?”

“Why aren’t you at school?” Elizabeth demanded wrathfully. “It’s our tunnel; we found it. We don’t want anybody helping us to explore it!”

“And anyway, there isn’t any more. You’ve seen the whole of it.” Margaret sounded distinctly sulky. “Go back to school! You’ll get into a fearful row; and serve you jolly well right!”

“There isn’t any row. I’ll tell you about it later. Look here, Twins, I won’t butt in. It’s your discovery all right.” Jansy’s sense of justice admitted their claim. “I’ll tell everybody you found it. But I want to know more about it. Where does it go to?”

“We don’t know. You can help us to find out, if you’ll tell everybody we were here first. As you’ve found us, I suppose we can’t turn you out.” Elizabeth’s clear mind realised that Jansy might be useful as an ally, but that, repulsed as an enemy, she would be dangerous.

“Don’t want Jansy to help!” Margaret muttered.

“Don’t be silly, Twin!” Elizabeth said severely. “She’s here, and we can’t get rid of her.”

“That’s sensible!” Jansy grinned approval. “I’ll be fair, Twins; it’s your discovery.”

“You’ll let it be our tunnel?”

“Yes, rather! Now show me all the rest of it!”

“There isn’t any rest. It doesn’t go on.” Margaret resigned herself gloomily to the inevitable.

“But it’s been made by somebody. It isn’t a fox’s hole,” Elizabeth added, turning her torch-beam on the bricks.

“I see.” Jansy’s interest deepened. “Do you think it’s a part of the Abbey? A new bit that nobody’s found? Can’t we go on? It must lead into Bell’s Farm somewhere.”

“Yes, but we can’t get through this lump of earth. You don’t happen to be carrying a spade, do you?” Elizabeth asked hopefully.

Jansy giggled. “I don’t take spades to school, but I could go and fetch one.”

“And give away our secret to everybody! No, you don’t!” Margaret shouted.

“You’ll bring the roof down, if you shriek and jump about in a rage.” Jansy looked at the obstruction carefully, and then hunted around for something with which to dig.

“I do want to know what you’re doing here, Jinny,” Elizabeth remarked.

“Well, you won’t, if you call me that, for I won’t tell you,” Jansy retorted. “I say, do you think we could get that slab of wood down? We could use it as a spade.”

“Oh yes! A topping spade!” Margaret cried. “Can you reach it, Jinny?—oh well! Janice, then—if you must be prim and proper!”

“But s’pose it’s holding up the roof?” Elizabeth began.

Jansy was already tugging at a loose end of the plank, steadying herself on a pile of broken soil. It gave way suddenly and she rolled on the ground with a shout of triumph.

“Here’s our spade! It’s a jolly good one!”

“Oh, what’s happening?” Margaret shrieked.

“The roof! It’s coming down on us!” Elizabeth screamed. “Oh, let’s get out, Twin!”

“No, stay here!” Jansy grabbed them and held them back, as, with an ominous rumble, earth clattered down between them and the entrance.

Then, with a terrifying roar, the whole bank seemed to slide over them. The light at the doorway disappeared; the air was filled with dust and soil. Gravel and scraps of earth rained down, and the trembling children shrank against the inner wall of the passage and hid their faces. Margaret flung herself into her sister’s arms, sobbing piteously; Elizabeth clutched her and pressed as close to the wall as she could and buried her head in Margaret’s shoulder. Jansy crouched on the ground, her face on her knees.

The rumbling ceased and there was quietness, broken by Margaret’s heartbroken sobs. Elizabeth, shaking all over, was silent.

Jansy raised her head. “Are we all here? Twins, are you all right?”

With a long sigh, Elizabeth looked up. “I thought we were killed. Margaret-Twin, you aren’t hurt. I put myself in front of you. Don’t cry any more!”

“I know you did. It was awful brave of you, but I didn’t want you to be killed, any more than me,” Margaret sobbed. “What happened? What was that frightful noise?”

“If Elizabeth had spoken about the roof one second sooner I might not have pulled it down on us,” Jansy said. “But nobody’s hurt, except in their feelings, and the torch isn’t broken. Might have been worse, Twins.”

“Yes, but what do we do now?” Elizabeth was the first to grasp the full extent of their plight. “I say, Jansy! We can’t get out, can we?”

Margaret’s shriek echoed through the tiny hollow which was all that was left of their tunnel. “We’re shut in at both ends! Oh, I want to go home! I want Lindy! I want Mother! Oh, Twin, what are we goin’ to do now?”

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# A GREAT DISCOVERY

Elizabeth looked at Jansy, her lips trembling. "They'll find us soon, won't they?"

"Of course they will," Jansy said stoutly, though her heart was like lead and she felt very cold. "Miss Belinda will be looking for you already. We only need to keep quiet and wait."

"But nobody knows where we are." Elizabeth's voice shook. "They'll never think we could be under the bank. Won't they find us ever, do you think?"

"I'm goin' to dig through that mud and stuff an' get out somehow!" Margaret cried.

Jansy held her back. "Don't try; you'll only bring down more earth. We're frightfully lucky not to be hurt; don't start it all over again."

"It looks as if more was just going to fall, Peggy." Elizabeth had turned the torch on the wall that blocked their exit. "I shouldn't touch it, if I were you. We'd better wait to be saved by somebody."

"If it falls on you next time you won't like it, Margaret," Jansy added.

"But we can't do nothing!" Margaret wailed. "Nobody knows where we are! We'll be here for days and years!"

Jansy drew her into a corner. "Listen, Margaret. We'll wait for a little while and see if somebody comes. If it's too long we'll try some digging, but I'm sure we ought not to risk it unless we have to. We aren't really buried just now; we're only shut in. We might be buried altogether and not be able to move, or even be badly hurt, perhaps, if it happened again."

Margaret, sniffing pathetically, stretched out her hand to Elizabeth. "Twin, I want you close. Jansy's very nice, but I like you best."

Elizabeth crouched beside her. "It will be all right, Peggy-Twin. It will be a lovely adventure to tell people about, when they've come and dug away the earth and we're safely home."

Jansy nodded. "That's sensible, Elizabeth. Crying won't help."

"But I *feel* like crying!" Margaret sobbed.

Elizabeth put her arms round her. "No, you don't, not really. You want to hear about Jansy. She's going to tell us why she's run away from school."

"Of course! I didn't tell you, did I?" Jansy exclaimed. She was badly frightened, realising their plight even more fully than did the twins, but the responsibility of her own extra year and a half in age filled her so completely that she had forgotten her own fear in their need. Margaret's terror and Elizabeth's courage called out Jansy's latent strength, and she plunged into the task of distracting their attention and keeping them cheerful, with no time to spare for considering dreadful possibilities.

"And, I say, Twins!" she added eagerly. "I flung my hat and coat and satchel on the grass. Somebody's sure to find them, and then they'll wonder where I am."

Margaret raised her head. "Close to our tunnel? Did you put them down before you came in after us?"

"No, I dropped them near the gate-house, I think," Jansy admitted. "I know I wasn't carrying anything when I dashed after you to see where you'd vanished into the earth. But somebody will pick them up, and my name's on them. They'll think it so odd I should be here in the middle of the morning!"

"We think it odd, too," Elizabeth said pointedly. "Aren't you ever going to tell us? Listen, Margaret-Twin!"

Jansy laughed. "School's got mumps; well, a girl in my form has. Miss Macey sent us home; she said she'd 'phone to Mother. She only found out this morning. It's so near the end of the term that she said the holidays had better begin at once. The big girls are going to have their exams; they hadn't been near us, so they won't catch it. I came home with Minnie Smith, who goes to Watlington; we came in the train together and I walked up from the station through the woods; at least, I ran most of the way. I didn't go to the house; I came in by the Abbey to give you a surprise."

"You gave us a surprise all right, when you came shouting through our tunnel," Margaret said resentfully. "And another one when you pulled the roof down on us."

"Will you have mumps, Jansy?" Elizabeth asked. "What kind of thing is it? Does it hurt?"

Margaret edged away, so far as the limited space would allow. "Will she give it to us? We've just got better from measles; we don't want anything else. Horrid being in bed in the summer!"

Jansy laughed. "Don't worry! I had it years ago, and nobody has it twice—or almost never. When I had it I heard Mother say—'Well, that's over, so far as Jansy's concerned!' I can't give it to you, if I don't have it myself. Yes, it hurts a lot, but I haven't seen Doris—she's the girl who's got it—since last Friday, so I can't possibly have brought any of her mumps home with me. I told Miss Macey I'd had it; I thought that was only fair; but she laughed and said the rest of the form hadn't and she couldn't have classes only for me. So I won't need to do the exams, after all."

"I thought you wanted the exams!" Elizabeth protested. "You said they'd be fun!"

Jansy looked pensive. "I may have said it, but I didn't quite mean it," she admitted. "I was just a scrap frightened of the exams, Twins. I've never done any before; it's my first term, you know. And I've been away quite a lot, with those weeks at The Grange, when Uncle Ken was so ill. I was afraid people would find out that I don't know very much about the lessons we're supposed to have been learning."

"Then you'll have holidays now? Or will you do lessons with us and Miss Belinda?"

"I shall have holidays," Jansy said promptly. "I said I ought to, now that Littlejan's here."

"I say, you know!" Elizabeth exclaimed. "We didn't come down this ghashly tunnel just for fun! We were finding a billet for Chestnut."

"Because of the Horrible Enemy at the gate of the farm," Margaret added. "We wanted to find another way in."

Jansy listened to their ideas with respectful interest. "You needn't panic about the dogs," she remarked. "Why didn't you tell me you were frightened of them? I've seen them. Bulldogs look awful, but they're not; Father says they're almost always friendly, unless they have to fight an enemy."

"But s'pose he thought we was an enemy?" Margaret urged.

"He wouldn't. They're very sensible animals; you don't look like anybody's enemy. The bloodhound's all right too; they're usually nice quiet creatures."

"He doesn't look nice and quiet," Margaret said, with a shiver. "What makes his eyes so red?"

"He can't help it. They all have eyes like that."

"He's got a simply dreadful voice," Elizabeth said doubtfully. "He sounds like a bull or a lion. We've heard him—baying, Miss Belinda called it."

"I want to go back to Miss Belinda and do sums!" Margaret broke down again. "I'm tired of this place! Being buried isn't really very nice."

"I call it simply horrid," Elizabeth's voice quivered.

"I can hear the Enemy!" Margaret cried suddenly, before Jansy could point out that being buried was an adventure that did not happen to every girl. "Listen, Twin! He's somewhere quite close!"

They all heard the baying of the big hound, and in spite of Jansy's reassurance the twins shivered and clutched one another again.

"I think it's a good thing we're buried, just for this minute," Margaret whispered.

"He's going away, Twin. He's much farther off." Elizabeth bravely tried to be comforting.

"Twins, that's given me an idea!" Jansy exclaimed. "We must be near the farm-yard; that dog sounded close to us. It looks awfully risky to disturb the roof any more, so we can't go back; but perhaps we could go on. There may be only a tiny bit of earth between us and the yard; and we've got our spade now. We haven't tried it yet; we'll see what we can do. You keep out of the way; I'd better do the digging, as I'm the biggest."

Enthralled, the twins drew back as far as they dared towards the blocked entrance, where soil and stones still fell at intervals, and watched hopefully as Jansy made a cautious onslaught on the other end of the tunnel.

Jansy pulled off her green school blazer and threw it to Margaret. "Hold it for me. Put it on, if you're cold."

"We're hot. It's beastly stuffy in here," Margaret retorted.

Jansy paused to stare at her. "Yes, but we can breathe all right? Why didn't we think of that before? There must be air coming in somewhere, or we'd all be dead. We aren't even sleepy. There must be holes in the earth, letting some air come in. I've heard Mother tell about when she and Aunt Joy and Littlejan's mother were buried under the gate-house, and Mother said—'We could breathe all right, so we knew air must be coming in somewhere, and we felt better after that.' Twins, you're to feel better too. If air can come in, we can get out."

"Don't see that," Elizabeth said at once. "We might not be able to reach the air; it might be too high up. Mother and the rest had to be pulled out by men with ropes."

"We won't need ropes here; the roof's only just over our heads." Jansy turned to her task again.

"Well, don't bring it down on us on this side as well as on the Abbey side," Margaret urged. "We don't want it right on our heads!"

"That would be quite too bad luck, when I've just had three weeks of holidays given to me!" Jansy agreed.

Suddenly she gave a triumphant shout. "I went through! There's a hole in this earth—my spade can't find any more of it!"

Elizabeth and Margaret hurled themselves on the barrier to enlarge the opening, using their hands like dogs. Then Elizabeth drew back and stared at Jansy.

"It's all dark through the hole. Why don't we see the sun? Is it night already? Have we been in here all day?"

Jansy laughed. "It's only dinner-time. *Is* it dark?" She bent and peered through the gap. "Yes, it is, rather, but not quite, Twins. There's one streak of sun. Don't you see? We must be looking into some place; a pigsty, or a stable, or something."

"The big barn!" Margaret shouted. "The barn where Chestnut's to live! We've found a way into it!"

Elizabeth beamed in delight. "It's what we were trying to do. Isn't that jolly clever?"

Jansy was kneeling and working hard to clear away the loose earth. "This hole will soon be big enough for us to crawl through. There's the bloodhound baying again; but he isn't likely to be in the barn. There! I've done the work, so I'm going first."

"We found the tunnel!" The twins protested in unison.

"Can't help that. I must see what it's like out there. Suppose the dog was wandering about, after all? He might come to kiss my nose as I crawled out of the hole; you wouldn't like that, Twins."

"No, we wouldn't like that a bit," Elizabeth admitted sadly. "You'd better go first and see."

Jansy grinned and crept through the gap she had made.

There was a breathless pause, while she rose to her feet and looked about her. Then she bent and called through the hole. "I say, Twins, come and see this place! It's quite safe; there's no bloodhound. But it's queer. Come and tell me what you think."

With whoops of relief, the twins hurled themselves through the opening and stood staring wide-eyed about them.

"It's like a church," Margaret began, in a cautious whisper.

"Like a bit of the Abbey." Elizabeth glanced doubtfully at Jansy. "Where are we, Jansy? We can't have gone back—and there's no place in the Abbey we don't know. But this makes me think of the Abbey."

"Like the refectory," Margaret added.

"That's what I felt," Jansy assented. "I don't know where we are. Or rather, I do know; we must be in that big barn with the high roof, behind the trees. But I don't know why it should look like a bit of the Abbey; and it does. You're quite right, Twins."

"It is a high roof, just like the refectory, as Twin said," Elizabeth agreed. "It's queer, isn't it, Jansy?"

"Not a bit like a barn ought to be," Margaret whispered.

They stood in a great shadowy hall, with closed double doors, lit only by narrow slits of windows high up in the walls. It was too dark to see much detail, but the proportions were so perfect, the vaulted roof was so high, the windows were so sharply pointed, the indefinable atmosphere so familiar, that to the twins, brought up on the threshold of the ruins, and to Jansy, familiar all her life with her mother's stories of the monks, there was no possible doubt that they stood in a new and unknown part of the Abbey. What it could be they had no idea, but they recognised the signs of age, of loving prayerful care in the building, of the presence of ancient holy men.

"They made it; the monks, you know," Jansy said, her voice hushed as if she were indeed in church.

"Twin, where's your torch? Let's see some more!" Margaret begged.

Elizabeth's light flashed on, and the beam, sweeping round the walls, found something above the big doors; a niche, and a sculptured figure, battered but indisputable.

A shout broke from the twins. "A man! Over the door!"

"I guess it'll be that old Michael again, like on the gate-house," Margaret suggested. "They were frightfully keen on him."

"That settles it," Jansy exclaimed. "It's a new bit of the Abbey all right. We must tell Mother quickly."

"And we found it!" the twins cried joyfully. "We've found something for the Abbey, like all the others used to do!"

Jansy's face lit up. "They'll be thrilled! But how are we going to get home, to tell them?"

"By that door, of course," Elizabeth began.

"But perhaps we can't open it——"

"I'm not going that way!" Margaret said firmly. "Twin, you've forgotten the Horrible Enemy. Are you going to walk right into him?"

"No, I'm not!" Elizabeth was equally definite.

"But we can't stay here," Jansy argued.

"There's the Enemy! I'm not going to stay here any longer! He'll come in at that door in a minute!" and Margaret dived back into the tunnel, as the hound raised his deep voice in excitement.

Elizabeth followed close on her heels. "We couldn't go out and meet that creature. Perhaps he won't find us under the earth," she said hopefully, as the baying came again, from somewhere close at hand.

"Seems to me it's nearer us in here," Jansy murmured. "But I must stick to them." And she crawled into the tunnel after the twins.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THREE BURIED GIRLS

The telephone from the Abbey rang wildly in the Hall. Joan, called by the maid, went to answer and heard Lindy's voice.

"I can't find the twins. I've hunted everywhere. Could somebody come to help? They're lost."

"Lost? Nonsense!" Joan exclaimed. "They must be hiding somewhere."

"I've looked everywhere. Mrs. Watson says they ran out, while she was busy with visitors, and they said they were going to the gate-house. There's no sign of them there, but—oh, Mrs. Raymond! It's so odd! I found Jansy's hat and coat, and her satchel, lying in the grass!"

"Jansy's? Lindy, this is crazy!" Joan cried.

"I know—it's quite mad. Too difficult for me alone. I'll go on hunting for the twins, but I want help."

"I'll come. Baby and Jennifer are asleep; Nurse can watch them. The twins must be hiding, Lindy; but Jansy——! That's absurd!"

"I know," Lindy said again. "But it is her coat; her name's on it."

With an incredulous exclamation and looking much disturbed, Joan hung up the receiver and went to explain to Nurse.

The telephone rang again, as she reached the stair, and she said to a maid—"Please see who it is! Call me, if I'm needed."

"It's Miss Macey, from the school, ma'am," said the girl.

Joan ran down and took the receiver from her. "This will explain Jansy. One less bit of madness to cope with!"

She listened to the Head's explanation, her face clearing. "Thanks very much, Miss Macey. I've just been told that Jansy is home, and I couldn't understand it. I haven't seen her yet. Oh yes, she's had mumps; I don't think there's any danger for her, or for us here. I have two babies with me, as well as the twins; we certainly don't want mumps! I'll speak to our doctor, but I think we're safe enough. A good deal of mumps in Wycombe? Thanks for the warning; I'll keep the children at home for the present. I'm sorry your term has been spoiled. Many thanks!"

"And now for those naughty twins!" Joan turned to the stair again. "Where can they be hiding? Jansy's with them, of course; she must have come through the Abbey and found they were up to something. The gate-house! They'd never go into Ambrose's tunnel alone; and anyway, the door's kept locked."

She told Lindy the explanation of Jansy's presence, as soon as they met. Lindy, looking worried, agreed that all the lost ones must be together. "But I can't think where they can be," she added.

"I know the Abbey better than you do. We'll soon find them," Joan said hopefully.

Although Mrs. Watson was certain that the children had not re-entered the Abbey and that she had not seen Jansy, Joan made a hasty thorough search of every likely hiding-place, for the gate-house and the field around it seemed to offer no possible solution. But at last, convinced that the truants were not in the ruins, she sent Mrs. Watson to find Evans, the gardener, and went back with Lindy to the spot where Jansy's belongings had been found.

“Look carefully for anything unusual, Lindy. Some small sign may give us a clue. I’m sure they wouldn’t go out into the road. They’ve promised never to do that, and they always keep their word. But they are very enterprising and full of adventure. Some wild idea must have occurred to them, and Jansy has gone to help. And they may have found themselves in difficulties of some kind.”

Her voice was steady but there was deepening anxiety in her eyes. Lindy shot a quick look at her. “Ghastly for her—Lady Joy’s children, as well as Jansy! And I’m supposed to have been in charge; but I wasn’t there.—We’ll find them soon,” she said reassuringly. “I’m sure we shall. I’ll scout round and look for clues, and the man will be an enormous help.”

Joan gave her a grateful understanding smile. “That’s nice of you, Lindy. If only Jansy’s father was here! But he’s gone to our old home, you know.”

Lindy nodded and darted off to make another search.

“Could they have tried to go through that hedge to the farm? It’s the only way out, except by the road or the Abbey,” she said to herself.

Then in a moment she was shouting wildly to Joan. “Oh, come and look! Something’s happened here! The bank under the hedge has fallen in. Do you think—oh, you don’t think—oh *no!* They couldn’t be——”

“Underneath.” Joan was white. “Lindy, meet Evans and tell him to bring a spade—several spades. The bank has fallen on them. They may be—hurt.”

“She means dead,” Lindy thought, as she ran. “Lady Joy’s children, and her own little girl! Oh, *no!* They mustn’t be killed!”

She met the gardener and panted out her story. With an exclamation of concern, he turned to go for spades; then he came running back, following her.

“Quicker to fetch them from the farm. And their men will help.”

“Oh, good idea!” Lindy ran to Joan to explain.

Joan, very white, but steady and calm, added a suggestion. “Ask if they’ll lend us the dog, the big hound. Let him smell Jansy’s coat. He’ll tell us whether she’s under this earth or not.”

“Oh—clever! I’d never have thought of that!” Lindy raced after Evans, shouting to him to stop.

“Right! The dog will smell them out, if they’re there.”

He was back in a very few minutes with the farmer, John Edwards, and one of his men, who led the bloodhound.

“Got something of the children’s to show her?” asked Mr. Edwards. “She’s a rare one for following a trail.”

Lindy approached the big hound rather nervously. Joan saw how she felt, and came forward quickly and took Jansy’s coat from her.

“Good girl! Find Jansy! Where is she?”

The hound whined in excitement; then, released, she dashed away, her nose to the ground, straight to the pile of earth where the bank had collapsed. Baying furiously, she began to dig.

“Good enough!” her master exclaimed. “We’ll get them out for you, ma’am. Stand back, Bess!”

“Don’t let the twins see the dog!” Lindy cried. “They’d have a fit. They’re terrified of it already.”

“She wouldn’t hurt them. She’s as quiet as a lamb,” said one of the men.

“Yes, but they won’t believe that. If she finds them she’ll jump on them, and they’ll just about go crazy,” Lindy said. “They call her the Horrible Enemy; I’ve heard them say it.”

The man grinned and held Bess back by the collar, while Evans and the farmer attacked the earth with spades, their faces grim and anxious.

Joan, not needed to help, turned almost blindly to Lindy. "They may have been under there for nearly an hour. Can they still be alive? Oh, what can I say to Joy? And if Jansy—her father——"

Lindy pushed her gently down on to the bank, just beyond where the men were digging. "I'm sure you ought to rest. They'll be all right; I know they will. Just a minute or two more, Mrs. Raymond, dear!"

"You don't know. We can't tell." Joan's fingers were knit fiercely together. "It's all right, Lindy; I'm not going to faint—don't be frightened! But until we know—oh, if only they would be quick!"

The hound was baying in excitement. Lindy turned to the man. "Could you take her away? She won't be needed again, and it's a very alarming noise. The children must have had a terrible fright already."

Bess broke loose and rushed to the hole in the earth, snuffing and scraping eagerly.

"Knows they're in there," said the man, going to drag her off.

Joan, tense with anxiety and almost unable to bear the suspense, hid her face in her hands and sat very still.

Mr. Edwards bent suddenly and shouted. "Anybody there? Hi! You all right in there?"

He listened and then turned to Lindy, who stood waiting, rigid with eagerness. "Somebody answered. Tell her to come. They won't know my voice."

Joan had heard and, leaping up, came running to his side. "Jansy! Twins! Are you there?"

"Yes, all of us!" It was a triple shout.

"Tell me quickly, are you all right?"

"Quite all right, but we want to get out," Jansy cried.

"That awful dog's somewhere quite close," Elizabeth added.

"Please send him away; a long way off!" Margaret begged.

"The dog!" Joan gave a laugh that was half a sob, in her relief. "Don't they realise what might have happened? They're only thinking of the dog!"

"Oh, what a good thing!" Lindy said fervently. Her arm slipped round Joan, as Joan stood back to allow the men to dig again. "Mrs. Raymond, dear, how brave you were! Don't you want to cry, or shout, or dance or something?"

"I only want to see them safely out of that hole." Joan, shaking all over, sank down on the bank again. "I'm all right, really, Lindy. Nothing matters now! But I did have a bad fright—and so did you, child. You were as white as I'm quite sure I was. Sit down for a moment. It's been very hard on you, and I was no help, was I?"

"You were simply marvellous!" Lindy whispered, dropping on the bank beside her. "I don't know why you didn't have hysterics and scream."

"I don't know why we both didn't. But wouldn't it have been awful for the men, if we had?" Joan's laugh was very shaky and might easily have been tears.

"Beastly for them. But all the same——"

Joan roused herself. "That's enough. We won't give way any more. As soon as we have the children safely out, they're going back to the house and to bed, for the rest of the day. There's to be no talking about this accident. If they haven't realised the danger they've been in, that's something to be thankful for; they'll forget it all the more quickly. What they will know is that they've been very naughty, to run away from school, and they must be punished

for it. A day in bed will do them good. You and I may feel so glad to have them safe that we'd like to pet them and make much of them, but we mustn't do it. They must feel they're in disgrace."

"I see that," Lindy admitted. "But what about Jansy? Perhaps she went after them to try to get them out."

"Yes, we mustn't be unfair. I'll ask her—oh, what is it now?"

A scream had come from the almost-opened tunnel, and shouts from the men, who dug in frantic haste. As Joan and Lindy ran to them, the farmer said tersely, "Something's fallen down in there. We've been as careful as we could. We'll have them out in a second. Gently, men!"

The loose soil and bricks were flung aside, and he knelt and crept into the gap. "Now then, what's all this? Oh, I see! Was she in front of you two? And that brick had worked loose; yes, well, she'll be all right. Don't cry!"

Very gently he drew Jansy out after him, and the twins followed, crawling on hands and knees.

Joan gave a strangled sob. "Give her to me!"

"What happened?" Lindy whispered, in horror at the sight of Jansy's closed eyes and white face, and a long scratch on her forehead.

"A brick fell from the roof, just as we reached them. This one had shoved the other two behind her, and it hit her on the head. I don't think it's much, but best get her to bed and let the doctor look at her. Will you carry her?"—to the gardener. "I'll take one of these two." He looked at the twins and then doubtfully at Joan.

"We don't need carrying!" Margaret said indignantly. "We can walk all right!"

"If you're sure that enormous dog isn't anywhere about," Elizabeth added cautiously.

"Then go with Lindy to the house," Joan said sternly, her anxious eyes on Jansy, as Evans carried her towards the Abbey.

"Have we been bad?" Elizabeth asked. "We've found something awfully lovely and exciting for you, Aunt Joan. Shall we tell you about it?" and she took Joan's hand and gazed up into her face doubtfully.

"I don't want to hear anything just now, Elizabeth. I must see to Jansy. I'm afraid you've been very naughty. If you want to be good now, come home with Lindy and let her put you to bed. You're to stay there all afternoon."

She hurried after Evans, pausing in the Abbey to 'phone for the doctor.

The twins looked at one another ruefully. "I'm afraid we were rather bad. Aunt Joan's quite right, you know, Twin," Elizabeth admitted.

"Don't want to go to bed. Nothing the matter with us," Margaret grumbled.

"But we did tell a lie to Mrs. Watson; very nearly a lie, anyway," Elizabeth said sadly. "We said we were only going to the gate-house, and we knew quite well we were going to You-know-what. That hole under the hedge was what we called You-know-what," and she looked up into Lindy's grave face. "We crawled in, and then Jansy came and she helped us to dig, and then the earth fell in and we couldn't get out. Twin, shall we tell Miss Belinda what we found?"

"No!" Margaret burst out. "Not if she's going to put us to bed. We won't tell anybody till they let us get up again."

"I feel that way too," Elizabeth agreed. "And we ought to wait for Jansy. She helped us to find it. And she jumped in front of us when that ghastly brick fell out of the roof; she was

awful brave. She ought to help us to tell people what we found.”

“We won’t tell anybody anything about it,” Margaret said sulkily.

“D’you mind if we don’t tell you what we found, Miss Belinda?” Elizabeth glanced up at Lindy.

“I don’t want to hear anything from you just now. If you tell me I shan’t listen,” Lindy said, looking very grave. “What I do want to hear is why you ran away from school? You ought to be doing sums.”

“Oh, well!” Elizabeth wriggled indignantly. “We haven’t any reason. We just wanted to go.”

“Then we’ll just go to bed,” Lindy said firmly.

“Miss Belinda’s a pig. So’s Aunty Joan. So’s everybody,” Margaret muttered.

“So are the twins,” Lindy retorted, and led them back to the house, both silent, Margaret resentful, Elizabeth sad but philosophic and resigned.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### ANOTHER BURIED GIRL

Joan-Two, driving home from Kentisbury, turned eagerly to Jack Raymond, who had called for her as he had promised. He had come earlier than she had expected, saying he had had a 'phone call from the Abbey and he must hurry home; but he had not explained to Littlejan what the message had been about.

"Here's the Abbey gate. Please let me get out and walk through the Abbey! I love to go that way."

Jack drew up. "Right! Off you go!" And he drove on again, anxious to see Jansy for himself, although Joan had assured him the doctor had said the injury was slight.

Littlejan, a slim figure in neat breeches and jersey, ran across the grass by a short cut to the old gate-house. She was going towards the plank bridge over the fish-stream when something unusual caught her eye.

"Somebody's been digging over there. I wonder why? Is there anything to see?" and she raced to the hole under the hedge and knelt to peer into the opening.

"Looks like a tunnel going through to the farm. What sport! Who found it, I wonder? I'm going to have a look!" And she dived into the passage, just as Jansy and the twins had done.

Something glinted in the light of the entrance. She snatched it up and gave a whoop of delight. "Elizabeth's torch! I put a new battery in it for her last night. They've been here exploring. I must see what it's all about!"

Cautiously she crept down the tunnel on her hands and knees, laughing as she realised that she was discovering what was probably a cherished secret. "I mustn't spoil it for the twins; they'll want to tell me about it. Can I pretend I haven't seen it? I hope I'm not messing up my darling breeches! But they're much better than a skirt for this job. I seem to be getting somewhere; there's a faint light ahead."

She crawled on towards the end of the passage. "Won't Mother be thrilled to hear about this? It's the sort of adventure she used to have when she was here years ago. Now where have I come to?—oh, what a huge place!"

She stood in the dimly-lit barn and gazed about her in awe. "I wonder if the twins came as far as this? What a marvellous barn! I suppose it is a barn? It must be the big house we saw from the hill, with the high pointed roof. It's high and pointed all right! But this is far too lovely a place to billet Chestnut in. It ought to be cleared out and used as a hall for meetings. There's hay stacked over there, and turnips, and an old machine of some kind—for ploughing, perhaps. This is used as a store place for farm things; it's rather a shame. It's just like they say the whole Abbey used to be—turned into a bit of the farm. Could it possibly be a part of the Abbey? It looks exactly like it."

Wide-eyed, she wandered round, tried the big door and found it barred, and turned back to the tunnel.

"I'll have to go home the way I came. That's rather a good thing; I don't really want to go into the farm alone and meet those huge dogs. And Aunt Joan did tell me to leave it to her."

She crept down the passage again, looking about eagerly in the torchlight. "The roof's very low in some parts. Oh, I say, that's not safe! It might easily kill somebody, if they ran into it."

An ugly-looking brick was projecting from the roof of the tunnel, loosened along with the one which had struck Jansy down, though Joan-Two knew nothing of that. Thinking only of possible danger to the next explorer to come along, Joan tugged at the brick to clear the passage.

Once more there came the terrifying roar of falling earth, and once more the tunnel was filled with dust and rubble. With a stifled scream Joan sprang back and hid her face. The whole roof seemed to collapse upon her, and she fell, and lay still and silent on her side, under the mass of soil and stones.

Soon all was quiet again, save for an occasional trickle of gravel. Slowly her eyes opened and with a sobbing gasp she remembered.

"I never meant any harm! Oh, I never did! I was only trying to help anybody else that came along. It looked so awfully dangerous. How could I know the roof wasn't safe?" she moaned.

Then, growing more wide awake, she began to realise her plight. "How am I going to get out? I can't move. There's tons of earth sitting on me. And—oh! Oh no, I can't! That hurts!" Her attempt at movement had been too painful, and she knew something must be wrong. "I'd better keep still. They're sure to find me soon. That pain was like a knife running into me; I don't want it to come again. Oh, I am a baby! But I just can't help it."

Tears had forced themselves to the surface and were running down her cheeks. "I'm howling like a kid," she thought brokenly. "But it is rather beastly. If only there was one other person with me! It's so frightfully quiet, and I can't do anything at all. If I could dig myself out I wouldn't mind, but I can't stand that pain, and it comes if I try to move. I suppose they will find me soon? I hope they'll be quick!"

Her mind, very active in its distress, went over the possibilities. They would wonder why she did not come to the house. Presently they would come to look for her. The twins must know about the tunnel, for she had found Elizabeth's torch inside, though in the collapse of the roof it had fallen from her hand and now lay beyond her reach.

"They're sure to find me. It's all right," she said again and again. "But, oh, I do hope they'll come soon!"

The dark silence and the loneliness were very frightening. Joan found them hard to bear, and tears came again, in spite of all her efforts to be brave.

"Messy!" she muttered unsteadily. "And I can't get at my hanky. I wish I wasn't such an infant! I might be one of the twins. Would it do any good to shout? But I feel it might hurt—badly! And they must know about this place. They'll come soon now."

Presently a terrible idea occurred to her. "Suppose they don't know? What if the twins have kept it a secret? What if nobody ever comes?"

In sudden terror she tried to wrench herself free from the weight that pinned her down. But it was no use; she fell back with a stifled groan and lay biting her lips fiercely.

"Something's running into me whenever I move. I mustn't be an idiot; I shall go nuts if I think of awful things. Of *course* they know!—or if they don't they'll see the entrance, as I did, and they'll come to look for me here when they don't find me anywhere else. The hole may be blocked up by earth, but I'm sure it will still show; it couldn't disappear altogether. I've only to wait till I hear them begin to dig, and then I'll try to shout."

But waiting, in the loneliness and dark, was not easy. Terrible fears came to haunt her mind and had to be fought off with all her might; and her strength was waning. The air was poor, and she grew hot and clammy both at once and felt herself stifling.

“If I’m here much longer I shall go to sleep,” she thought drowsily. “I don’t see that it could do any harm, and I’d stop thinking. That hateful pain doesn’t jab me, if I keep quite still. It only aches all the time.”

Then suddenly she was very wide awake, for somewhere near there were voices.

“Help! I’m here! Oh, please come quickly!” The sharp pain in her side was unheeded now. “I thought I’d never hear people speak again,” she sobbed, almost breaking down now that friends were near. “Oh, help me, somebody, please!”



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### A SECOND RESCUE

“Littlejan’s staying a long while in the Abbey,” Joan said, as she turned wearily with her husband from the bed where Jansy lay, in a healthy sleep that would soon heal her bruised head.

“She’ll be along presently. I expect she saw that wretched tunnel and went to have a look at it,” Jack Raymond said. “Did the men cover the hole? We don’t want people falling into it.”

Joan turned to him with startled eyes. “I’ve no idea. I could think of nothing but Jansy. Oh, Jack, you don’t think small Joan would go in alone, do you? The roof might easily fall again. Hadn’t we better go and see?”

“Not you. You’re worn out,” he exclaimed. “I’ll go at once and bring the child back, to show you she’s all right.”

“I must go too.” Joan had been seized by a sudden premonition of danger. “If she has hurt herself you’d need help. Oh, I do hope this doesn’t mean more trouble! And her mother is so far away!”

“You’re nervy. All this has been a nasty shock; it was the worst possible luck that it happened when I wasn’t here to stand by you. Don’t come, dear. Go and lie down, and I’ll fetch young Joan.”

“No, I’m coming. I believe something has happened,” Joan said decisively. “She’d have been here long ago if she had come straight through the Abbey. We’ll take Evans, just in case we need help.”

An inquiry of Mrs. Watson assured them that Joan-Two had not passed through the ruins. Joan’s fear deepened with every moment; and Jack looked anxious on her account as well as on Littlejan’s.

They hurried across the grass to the hedge, and Evans pursed his lips at the look of it.

“Has more fallen since we were here?” Joan cried, at sight of his face.

“Looks like there’s been some more come down. I’ll have a go at it,” and he attacked the loose earth with his spade.

“Oh, be careful!” Joan almost whispered. “If she’s in there alone, and if you disturb it again—but we must find out! It’s just a marvel the twins weren’t hurt at all and Jansy only a little. Oh, Jack, do you think Littlejan would go in all alone?”

“It would be a foolish thing to do, but just like a small girl. She’s a venturesome lassie.” Jack told the man to stop for a moment and knelt in the mouth of the tunnel and listened. Then he called loudly—“We’re coming! Cheer up! We’ll have you out in a minute. Are you hurt anywhere, Joan-Two?”

“A little.” The answer was unsteady. “I can’t do anything to help you. There’s tons of stuff on top of me—I can’t move.”

“Don’t try. Leave everything to us. Just lie still and wait; we’ll soon have you out.” He drew back quickly and said a word of caution to Evans, then turned to Joan. “She’s there; says she’s hurt a little—plucky kid! She must have had a bad time, all alone. I heard her calling for help.”

“Oh, poor baby!” Joan said brokenly. “It must have been a terrible time for her! Oh, those twins! It’s their fault, Jack; they found the hole and decided to explore it by themselves, and

so they made a secret of it. Lindy made them tell her how it happened. Jansy went in after them, and she protected them when the roof fell in. Don't let Evans bring it down on Littlejan! It might kill her."

"He'll be careful. We'll have her out in a moment."

"It's so hard to wait. It's the second time to-day," Joan said unsteadily, and she swayed a little as she stood.

His arm went round her. "Dear, I wish you hadn't come."

"Oh, Jack, nonsense! You know you're glad I'm here!" Joan pulled herself together bravely. "If Littlejan is hurt, you'll need my help. We'll send Evans for something to use as a stretcher, as soon as the child is safely out."

It was a difficult business, but Evans, with his former experience in mind, was wary and went very cautiously. Bit by bit he drew away the soil and gravel and uncovered one outstretched arm, in a green jersey. Joan crept into the tunnel beside him, in spite of Jack's protests, and clasped the small grimy hand closely.

"I'm here, Littlejan. It's Auntie Joan. Don't try to talk; just be brave for a minute or two longer."

Joan-Two's grip of her fingers was almost painful, but she did not speak again. Now that help had come, she was crying quietly, and Joan heard the catch in her breath and understood.

"Poor babe! But this arm isn't broken, anyway; she couldn't cling to me like this, if it were."

Soon Evans had the earth cleared away, so that they could see. He pointed to a sharp-edged brick which had fallen on Littlejan's body and had been pressed into her side by the weight of earth.

"Broke a rib, most like. We'll get her out and then I'll go to the farm for a door to lay her on. That other chap will come to help again."

Joan-Two gave a gasping sob when he lifted off the brick and drew her out to the sunshine. Biting her lips and very white, she gazed steadily up at Joan. "You won't tell Mother, will you?"

"Oh, you brave girl!" Joan cried. "Don't trouble about that just yet, Littlejan. We'll see what the doctor says."

At Evans's hint, and without waiting for him, Jack had gone racing to the farm for assistance. Evans, kneeling by Joan-Two, gently tested her limbs.

"Can you kick, missy? Oh, well done! This foot too? That's first class; your legs are O.K. And that other hand—can you hold on to me? Good lass!—No limbs broken," he said to Joan. "And her back's all right; she's come off lightly. We won't touch her side; it must be bruised, and perhaps more, but——"

"Please don't!" Littlejan jerked. "It hurts like—like fun, when I move."

"Doctor'll soon strap that up for you, and then you'll be comfy," Evans said cheerfully. "I did same thing myself, falling off a ladder, and I was about again, all tied up and nice and stiff, in no time. Don't be frightened, missy! You'll be well again quite soon."

"Evans, you're a treasure," Joan Raymond said fervently.

"I'm a family man, and she's a plucky youngster. I'll go and help them with that door," he said, and strode off to escape from the sight of the small strained face.

"Then you needn't worry Mother!" Littlejan whispered in triumph. "I'm all right, really, if I keep still. Something was running into me and it jabbed me when I tried to move, but it's gone now."

“It was a big sharp brick, that had fallen on you,” Joan explained, fondling the grimy hands between her own.

“Oh, the beast! I saw it sticking out of the roof, and it looked frightfully dangerous for anyone else going through, so I pulled it down, and then everything crashed on top of me. I didn’t mean to make a mess of things and worry you, Auntie Joan,” Littlejan pleaded, in apology. “I’m most terribly sorry. Did I gave you a beastly fright?”

“Well, what do you think yourself?” Joan smiled wearily at her. “Somebody else’s girl—in my care—and I didn’t know whether she was alive or dead for quite a long while. Would you like it, Littlejan?”

“No—ghastly. I am so sorry! But I didn’t think there’d be any harm in having a look at the hole, and then I found Elizabeth’s torch and knew they’d been inside. They didn’t hurt themselves, did they?” she asked, in sudden anxiety.

“They’re all right, but they had to be dug out, as you did,” Joan explained. “And Jansy was with them; she had been sent home from school, and she saw the tunnel, and followed the twins to see what they were doing. The roof fell and trapped them, and we had to get the men to help.”

“And didn’t you know they were all right?” Littlejan grasped the situation. “Did it happen twice over? Oh, Auntie Joan, what a brute of a time you’re having, with all the lot of us!”

“I feel like keeping all the lot of you in bed, where I know you’ll be safe, for a day or two,” Joan retorted.

“I’ll be glad; I’m frightfully tired. I’ll stay as long as you like. And I am most terribly sorry.”

“Don’t talk any more for a little while. We must let the doctor look at you. He had to come to Jansy this morning; a brick hit her head and she had very slight concussion, but she’s sleeping it off nicely and she’ll soon be all right.”

“Oh, how horrible for you! I wonder if her brick was as sharp as mine! Mine was a brute.”

“It was quite sharp enough. The twins are in bed in disgrace,” Joan added. “They were the first to find the hole and they kept it a secret. That’s why all these disasters happened. If they had told us we’d have helped them to explore and no one need have been hurt.”

“It would have been a better way, when you think about it,” Joan-Two acknowledged. “But you can understand how they felt. They must have been completely thrilled.”

“I wish they’d been a little less thrilled!” Joan said, with vigour. “Now here comes your stretcher, Littlejan. The men will lift you as carefully as they can, and you must hold my hand. You’ll be all right when you’re lying flat. Don’t be frightened!”

It was a painful business, but Joan-Two was brave, and she made no outcry, but clung tightly to Joan’s hand, and only sighed in relief when she was laid safely on the door the men had brought. They carried her gently homewards, Jack Raymond pausing in the Abbey to ring up the doctor, while Joan walked by the stretcher, still holding Littlejan’s hand to comfort her.

“You ought to keep a doctor in the house!” Joan-Two murmured. “Twice in one day, poor man!”

“I’m sure he’ll say so.” Joan smiled down at her, thankful to hear her try to joke. “Let’s hope we won’t need him again for a long while.”

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### TWINS IN DISGRACE

Lindy, putting the twins to bed, told them frankly what she thought of them for running away from school, and accused them of being unsporting towards their Aunt Joan. "You knew quite well I had only gone because she needed me. I thought you could be trusted. It's dreadful to be unsporting girls."

"We wasn't!" Margaret glared at her through tumbled red curls.

"I think you were. Girls at school don't run out into the garden if their teacher has to go away for a few minutes."

"Twin, we *were*. We didn't think, but we were." Elizabeth's lips were quivering. "We knew we were bad, but we didn't know we were unsporting. It wasn't sneaky to run away, was it, Aunt Lin?" she pleaded.

"Don't you think it was, just a little bit? It wasn't playing the game." Lindy's stern tone showed no yielding and no amusement.

Elizabeth flopped down in her bed and turned her face to the wall. "Don't come, Twin. Stay in your own bed. I'm not going to talk; don't want to. We've been pigs. We're sorry, Miss Belinda."

"I'm not!" Margaret muttered rebelliously. "We found some more of You-know-what! But we won't tell anybody."

"You are sorry. You're very sorry," Elizabeth said firmly, over her shoulder. "And you can't tell anybody anything until we've talked to Jansy."

"You won't talk to Jansy for a day or two," Lindy observed.

She was sitting by the window with a book, while the twins lay in bed, Elizabeth meditating silently on her sinful condition, Margaret murmuring defiant remarks to herself, when the little procession came from the Abbey path—the stretcher borne by Evans and the farmer, Joan walking beside it and a small figure lying on it.

"Gosh!" gasped Lindy, in spite of herself. "What's happened now?"

The twins were out of bed and at her side in one bound. "Gosh!" Elizabeth echoed her cry. "Who is it, Aunt Lin?"

"Somebody else is hurt!" Margaret shouted. "Oh, can't we go and see?"

"No, certainly not!" Lindy pulled herself together hurriedly. "Go back to bed at once!"

Elizabeth gazed at her earnestly. "Do you suppose it's our fault too, like Jansy's head was?"

"I shouldn't wonder. If you'll get into bed *and stay there*, I'll go and ask somebody."

Elizabeth scrambled hastily into bed again, but Margaret lingered at the window for one more look. "It's Littlejan. I can see her breeches. She's holdin' Aunt Joan's hand. What d'you think's the matter with her? Do you suppose she's dead?"

"Gosh and goodness, I hope not! Aunt Janice in Scotland would be upset if Littlejan was dead. If you really want to know, Twin, get into bed, like Miss Belinda said," Elizabeth ordered, sitting up with anxious eyes. "I feel inside me that it's been our fault, but I can't imagine how."

Margaret took a flying leap on to her bed. "Now you can go and ask, Miss Belinda Bellanne! I won't get off my bed, not if the house goes on fire."

“You’ll be like Casa—that horrid boy, you know,” Elizabeth remarked, as Lindy opened the door, very anxious to know what had happened.

She came back presently and found the children awaiting her nervously.

“Did we do it to poor Littlejan?” Elizabeth demanded.

“I don’t see how we could have,” Margaret argued. “We’ve been in bed, and quite good, for about a week. But Twin keeps saying she thinks we did it.”

“I’m afraid you helped. It happened in your horrid tunnel, anyway.” Lindy sat on Margaret’s bed and told them the story.

“Oh well! I don’t see that it was our fault,” Margaret said in great relief. “There wasn’t any need for Littlejan to go poking about in our tunnel.”

“I think I’d have done it, if I’d been her,” Elizabeth admitted. “And I’m quite sure you couldn’t have seen a new mysterious tunnel without crawling into it to see where it went to, Twin.”

“All the same, I don’t see that Littlejan can blame us,” Margaret insisted. “Nobody wanted her to go into that hole.”

“Is she very bad?” Elizabeth asked anxiously.

“She’ll need to be in bed for a few days, and she won’t be able to ride Chestnut for some time,” Lindy said severely.

“Gosh! She won’t like that.” Elizabeth sounded contrite.

“It might have been very much worse. You’ve all come off more lightly than you deserved,” Lindy told them.

“How long are we to go on staying in bed? We aren’t ill a scrap,” Margaret cried.

“No, you’re not ill; you’re just naughty. You’re not to get up again to-day.”

Margaret gave a wail of wrath, and jumped up and down on her bed. “I want to go out! It’s sunny. We haven’t had a walk to-day!”

“That’s your own fault. Lie down and be quiet!”

“Miss Belinda, could we be both of us in one bed?” Elizabeth pleaded. “We have been very good, for hours and years. I want to talk to Twin now.”

It was obviously impossible to keep them silently doing nothing any longer. Lindy decided on a reading lesson after tea, and for the moment she relented and allowed them to be together.

Elizabeth hurled herself into Margaret’s bed and pulled her down beside her. “Be quiet, Twin. Stop jumping! I’ve a thing to say to you.”

Margaret realised the importance of this and curled up close to her. “Go on, then. Is it something nice?”

“No, horrid.” Elizabeth’s voice dropped to a whisper. “Twin, how far down our tunnel do you suppose Littlejan went? Do you think she went all the way and found our new bit of the Abbey?”

“If she did, and if she tells Aunty Joan, she’ll be a hundred times a pig,” Margaret said bitterly.

“Oh well! She might not understand nobody knew but us. But it would be ghastly bad luck,” Elizabeth groaned.

And they lay discussing the possibilities, while Lindy, relieved to have them quiet, wondered what all the whispering was about.

The doctor came and examined Joan-Two gently, talked of cracked and broken ribs, and put a tight bandage all round her which gave her wonderfully comforting support. Then,

saying something about shock, he made her drink some medicine, and she fell asleep and lay without moving for hours. He glanced at Jansy, who was also sleeping quietly, and nodded in approval.

“Best thing for them both. Twins still all right? Then I’d advise you to put yourself to bed too, Mrs. Raymond. You’ve had a trying time; you’ll be all the better for a good rest.”

Joan protested, but Jack Raymond backed him up and begged her to give in. She yielded so far as to go and lie down, and, in deep thankfulness that matters were no worse, she fell asleep also, and the Hall was very quiet.

“Shall I ring up Kentisbury and tell them the horrible tale?” Jack asked that night.

“No, don’t do that,” Joan said quickly. “Maidlin would come at once to see if her precious twins were all right. We don’t want to frighten her.”

“Have they said they’re sorry yet?”

“I went to ask them, at bedtime, and Elizabeth greeted me with the news that she was sure they wouldn’t sleep, as they hadn’t had enough exercise,” Joan said laughing. “They’re very sorry about Jansy and Littlejan, but it wasn’t their fault that bricks fell on them; they never meant it to happen. But they aren’t sorry they went alone into the tunnel. They say I’d have done it myself, if I’d been there.”

“I’ve no doubt you would, at one time,” her husband agreed.

The morning brought an early phone call from Maidlin. “Oh, Joan! Would it trouble you, if I came for lunch? Ros has to be out with Geoffrey, and I’d be alone. We collected piles of boxes and parcels in town yesterday, so I might bring a few home and have them out of the way.”

“Oh, do come, whenever it suits you, Maid!” Joan responded heartily.

The welcome in her voice was a trifle forced, however, and Maidlin’s sensitive ear heard it. “Sure it’s all right for you, Joan? I don’t want to be a nuisance; another day would do.”

“No, please come. It’s only—you’ll need to know, if you’re coming here—we had a bad time yesterday, and we’re still recovering from shock—several shocks.”

“Joan! What has happened? Is it the twins?” Maidlin cried, taking fright at once.

“The twins are all right. But I have Jansy in bed with a broken head, and Littlejan in bed with bruises and broken ribs, thanks to them.” And Joan told of the adventures of the day before.

“Oh, I am so sorry!” Maidlin wailed. “They will do it—keep secrets and have plans of their own; and they’re so small—and silly—that things go wrong. I must come, Joan! Perhaps I could help in some way.”

“Come and see they’re all right, by all means, but there’s nothing to do. Both patients have slept well and are better this morning, but I shall have to keep Jansy quiet for a few days. The twins are teasing to be allowed to see her, but that’s out of the question.”

“Oh yes! They’d excite anybody,” Maidlin agreed. “I’m most frightfully sorry they’ve worried you, Joan, and I’m terribly upset about Jansy and Littlejan. I’ll be with you about eleven, and I’ll scold Elizabeth and Margaret for you.”

Over coffee on the terrace the twins listened to her frank opinion of them, Elizabeth looking troubled, Margaret defiant.

“The thing is,” Elizabeth argued, “that not any of you understand. If you knew, you’d be glad we dug that tunnel. But we can’t tell you till we’ve talked to Jansy.”

“You don’t know! Not one of you knows, only us,” Margaret asserted.

Joan and Maidlin looked at one another.

“What don’t we know, Twinnies?” Maidlin asked sternly.

“Why we made the tunnel, Auntie Maid.”

“And what we found at the end of it,” Margaret shouted.

“What did you find?” Joan demanded.

“Something you’ll like awfully much. But Jansy found it too, and it wouldn’t be fair for us to tell you. It would be letting her down,” Elizabeth explained carefully.

Joan knit her brows. The twins were so evidently in earnest that it was impossible to ignore their scruples.

“You can’t see Jansy to-day, so we shall have to wait,” she said. “Go back to school with Miss Belinda, Twins, and never run away from your lessons any more.”

The children raced off to the Abbey, while their elders looked at one another again.

“What do you think they mean?” Maidlin began.

“I suppose they weren’t just teasing us? I don’t know them as well as you do, Maid. Do you think they really have found something?”

“I’m sure they think they have. They wouldn’t tell fibs just to tease.”

“Then we’ll ask Littlejan if she can explain. She’s quite able to talk and she was in the tunnel. She must have seen whatever the twins saw.”

“Have you told Jandy Mac?” Maidlin asked, as they went upstairs to see Littlejan, who had been carried to the room prepared for her mother, leaving Jansy alone and quiet.

“Not yet. She begged so hard that I gave in. She’s going on all right, and the doctor agreed there was no need. Jandy Mac would come racing back to see her, and she has only just arrived in Scotland. It would be very hard on her, and it would distress Littlejan; she’s really upset because she feels she’s being a trouble to us.”

“I wish the twins could feel like that!”

“They’re too young,” Joan said tolerantly. “That will come later. Littlejan has been with her mother and other grown-ups so much that she has times of being really thoughtful for other people. I wish she had thought before going into that tunnel! But one can hardly blame her; she knew the twins had been there; she wouldn’t think of any danger.”

Joan-Two, lying very still and looking drowsy, smiled shyly up at Maidlin. “Isn’t it awful? I haven’t been here a week yet, and look what’s happened! Auntie Joan’s been incredibly nice about it, but I feel terribly bad.”

“You’ll soon be all right again.” Maidlin smiled back at her. “We want you to help us, Littlejan.”

Joan sat on the bed, while her namesake gazed at her with wondering eyes. “Littlejan, did you find anything in that tunnel?”

“Yes, Elizabeth’s torch; but I lost it again.”

“Nothing else? The twins say they found something at the end of the tunnel, something that we should like, but they won’t tell us what it was.”

Joan-Two’s eyes filled with laughter. “The little brutes! Then they did go all the way. I wasn’t sure.”

“What are you talking about?” Joan and Maidlin spoke together.

“Haven’t you been to the other end of that tunnel?” Joan-Two’s eyes danced. “Don’t you know where it leads to?”

“Into the farm yard, I supposed.” Joan looked down at her, much puzzled. “Where else could it lead to?”

“It isn’t fair to ask me!” Littlejan protested. “The twins found it first. They’ll hate me for ever, if I tell you.”

“We’d better go and see for ourselves, Maid,” Joan remarked.

“Through the tunnel? It’s frightfully low in parts, and it fell in on me. You’ll need to dig it out again. Oh, please, Aunty Joan, have I spoilt my dear breeches? I’ve been worried about them.”

Joan laughed. “They’re muddy, but it will brush off. Are you really not going to help us, Littlejan? The twins say they can’t tell us until they’ve talked to Jansy, but I daren’t let them see her for a few days. The doctor says she must be kept very quiet, and she only wants to sleep.”

“If I could talk to the twins first, I’d feel better about it,” Littlejan pleaded. “It was their discovery; it really is a discovery, Aunty Joan, and you’ll like it. I don’t want to spoil it for them.”

“Shall I fetch them?” Maidlin suggested.

Joan agreed. “If you would, Maid. They’ve been begging to be allowed to see her all morning. I’ll come back presently, Littlejan.”

She went out with Maidlin and left her patient for a few moments of quietness.

“What do you suppose it’s all about, Maid?”

“I can’t imagine! But they’re all sure it’s something that will please you,” Maidlin said. “I hope Joan-Two can make the twins see reason.” And she ran off through the garden to the Abbey.



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### THE TITHE BARN

“We’re very sorry.” Elizabeth, looking rather frightened, stared at Joan-Two from the doorway. “We never meant you to be hurt. Are you better now?”

“Why did you go down our tunnel? It was your own fault,” Margaret argued, creeping a little closer.

Littlejan laughed, and caught her breath. “Ow! That hurts. I mustn’t laugh, Twins. Yes, it was my own fault, but I didn’t mean it to happen, you know. There was a horrid brick sticking out of the roof, and I knew you’d be coming back and I thought it might run into your heads. So I pulled it out and the whole place came down on top of me.”

“You’re better! You laughed!” Much relieved, the children ran to the bed and were only just prevented by Joan and Maidlin from hurling themselves upon her.

“Yes, she’s better, but you mustn’t jump on her. You’d hurt her very badly indeed,” Joan explained. “You may look at her, but you mustn’t touch her.”

Elizabeth curled up at the end of the bed. “We won’t go any closer than this. We’d simply hate to hurt her. Come here by me, Twin, and I’ll hold on to you, in case you forget.”

“What did she want to see us for?” Margaret demanded. “Aunty Maid said it was important, so would Miss Belinda please excuse us from our lessons. It was spelling, so I was jolly glad.”

Littlejan grinned. “I bet you were! I say, Twins, how far did you go down the tunnel?”

“All the way!” Margaret began to jump in excitement. “Did you go right through into that marvellous barn? Did you see it?”

“The barn!” Joan and Maidlin spoke together. “Does the tunnel lead to the big barn?”

“Then you really didn’t know?” Joan-Two looked up at them.

“Now you’ve gone and told them, Twin!” Elizabeth wailed. “What about waiting for Jansy?”

“Oh, gosh! I f’got,” Margaret admitted limply.

Littlejan grinned again, finding it easier than laughing.

“You’ve given the show away, Margaret-Twin. We may as well tell them all about it now. I didn’t want to spoil your secret, so I hadn’t told them.”

“Twin’s spoiled the secret herself,” Elizabeth said severely. “She always forgets when things are secrets.”

“I don’t! It was an accident!” Margaret cried.

Joan interposed. “Twins, if there’s any arguing you’ll go back to Miss Belinda, and Littlejan shall tell us the story. She’s been very kind to leave it to you. Now, if you can, tell us sensibly what you found at the end of the tunnel. I’ll see that Jansy understands.”

“A most marvellous big place, like a church; as big as the refectory, with shadows in all the corners!” Margaret gave a shout of triumph.

“It’s a bit of the Abbey,” Elizabeth added. “Yes, really and truly, Aunty Joan, it is a bit of the Abbey. The windows are Abbey windows, and there’s old Michael over the door.”

“Gracious!” Joan exclaimed, and looked eagerly at Maidlin.

“Are you sure, Elizabeth? You ought to know, by this time. You know the Abbey well enough,” Maidlin began.

“Oh yes, we’re sure, and Jansy said it too. She said you’d all be so frightfully pleased.”

“Jansy said the monks made it,” Margaret added.

Joan looked at her namesake. “What did you think of it?”

“I thought of the Abbey, too. There are ploughs and things stored in it, so I thought it might be a bit of the Abbey that hadn’t been rescued from being part of the farm. And I thought it ought to be cleared out and used for meetings. It’s too good to be wasted on ploughs and turnips.”

“Oh, a marvellous idea!” Elizabeth cried. “We could dance there, Aunt Joan!”

“Country-dance parties, in our own barn, without needing to go all the way to Darley’s place!” Margaret shouted. “Oh, Aunt Joan, do go and look at it quickly!”

“I’m going.” Joan rose, determination in her eyes. “Come, Maidlin! We must see this new bit of my Abbey!”

“We’ll come too!” The twins sprang up. “We’ll show it to you. And we’ll show you the way through the tunnel. But you’ll have to dig, Aunt Maid.”

“We aren’t going through the tunnel. We’re far too big,” Joan assured them. “We shall go to the farm and ask Mr. Edwards to let us see the barn.”

“Oh no! We couldn’t go to the farm.” Margaret hung back.

Elizabeth’s face had clouded. “Because of that big dog, you know. He’s our Horrible Enemy; we heard him making ghashly noises when we were in the hole.”

“He is rather large.” Joan-Two spoke from the bed, with some sympathy for their fear.

Joan sat down and held out her hands and drew the anxious children to her. “Twins, you don’t understand. First of all, that is a mother dog and she has some little babies somewhere.”

“How did you know?” Elizabeth demanded, staring at her.

“Didn’t look a scrap like a mother,” Margaret protested.

“I think she did,” Joan said laughing. “I’m quite sure she has babies.”

“Will their eyes be red, like his?” Margaret queried.

“I suppose we should say like hers, but it sounds awfully odd,” Elizabeth said. “Are you sure, Aunt Joan?”

“We’ll ask the farmer. I want to tell you a story about her. You’re glad we came to find you in that hole, aren’t you?”

“Gosh! Yes, we are. We couldn’t get out.” The twins spoke together.

“It was ghashly, and so stuffy,” Elizabeth added.

“Beastly stuffy,” said Joan-Two, with deep feeling.

“When we couldn’t find you, we wondered if you could be under all that earth, below the hedge,” Joan went on. “But we didn’t want to spend time digging, if you weren’t there, because you might have been needing us very badly somewhere else. You can understand that.”

The children nodded, looking deeply interested.

“How did you find out we were there?” Margaret asked.

“Did you hear us calling for help?” Elizabeth suggested.

“Only after we’d begun digging. We fetched Bess—that’s the big dog’s name—and asked her. We showed her Jansy’s coat and said, ‘Find Jansy, Bess!’ She was excited and began to bark; that was what you heard. Then she ran to the hole and began to dig, and we knew you must be underneath. We took her away, and then we dug you out. That was how we found you.”

“But how frightfully clever!” Elizabeth said admiringly.

“Simply marvellous, I call it! How did he—she!—know about us?” Margaret leaned on Joan’s knee and gazed up into her face.

“It’s her job to find lost things; that’s the work she does. Now don’t you want to say ‘Thank you, Bess’?”

The twins looked at one another and shook their heads.

“I don’t want to go too close. I’ll say ‘Thank you!’ across the farm-yard, if you like,” Elizabeth began.

“But you mustn’t let it come any nearer,” Margaret added hurriedly.

“That’s being silly. You’ll like Bess; you’ll soon be great friends with her. Now come along! Or go back to your lessons, if you’d prefer it.” Joan turned to the door. “I’ll tell you all about it presently, Littlejan.”

“Wish I could come with you!” Joan-Two sighed.

Elizabeth looked back at her from the doorway. “We were trying to find a billet for Chestnut. That’s why we went into the tunnel. Didn’t you know?”

“We thought the barn would be a good billet,” Margaret explained. “And we thought the tunnel would take us into the barn. We couldn’t go by the gate, because of the Enemy.”

“How marvellous of you!” Littlejan gave them a tired smile. “That was awfully kind of you.”

“We thought you’d let us ride Chestnut, if we helped you to find his billet,” Elizabeth said simply.

Littlejan grinned. “Oh, I see! It wasn’t all kindness.”

“It was! It was!” Margaret shouted. “Kind to you, and kind to us, and kind to Chestnut!”

“I’m afraid I won’t be able to ride him myself for some time,” Joan-Two said ruefully. “I don’t feel like it at present. Auntie Joan!” she called, and Joan turned in the doorway. “There’s something I want awfully badly! Couldn’t Miss Belinda come and talk to me sometimes? I’m not a twin, but I feel I need a nursery governess!”

“Or a comforter,” Joan smiled at her. “Lindy will be glad to come, Littlejan. I’ll tell her.”

“What do you suppose this barn really is, Joan?” Maidlin asked, as they went through the Abbey, with the twins skipping beside them, and Lindy following to keep an eye on them in case they wandered off into mischief.

Joan gave her a quick eager glance. “The tithe-barn, Maid. There was sure to be one belonging to the Abbey, but we’d found no trace of it. We’ve never been inside the farm next door, because old Mr. Edwards was so difficult, and we’d never dreamed of looking for the tithe-barn there.”

“What’s a ty-barn?” Elizabeth caught her hand and gazed up at her.

“Tithe-barn, Elizabeth. The farms had to give a share of their harvest to the monks, called a tithe, and the barn was where the tithes were stored.”

“Then it is a bit of the Abbey, but it’s a barn as well?”

“That’s about it. It must be the Abbey barn.”

“I wouldn’t have given my corn to the monks,” Margaret said.

“Oh yes, you would. You’d have wanted to do it,” Joan assured her. “The monks were very good to you and to your farm-men. You’d have been glad to help them.”

“Are you glad to have a tive-barn?” Elizabeth asked.

“I haven’t got it yet,” Joan said laughing. “We’ll have to see what Mr. Edwards has to say about it.”

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### JOAN DANCES “PRINCESS ROYAL”

“Oh, what a lovely place!” Joan’s voice was hushed almost to a whisper, as she stood with Maidlin in the yard and gazed up at the tithe-barn.

It was solidly built of stone to stand for centuries, as indeed it had done. The roof was orange with lichen, rich glowing colour in the morning sunshine. The walls were upheld by great buttresses of ancient brick; the entrance was by a huge square gabled porch, like one of the transepts of a church; over the door were sculptured and much mutilated figures of saints; the windows were long narrow slits, widening inwards, and some were set high in the walls, as if there had once been a second floor.

The farmer, John Edwards, was out in a distant field, a girl at the farmhouse had told them. She had sent a boy to fetch him and had given them the key of the big barn, saying there was nothing in it and nothing to see, but they could look at it, if they liked.

The key was large and heavy and suited the door, at which Joan and Maidlin gazed in delight and the twins in wonder, for it was very old and studded with great nails, and the iron scroll-work of the big lock reached right across in ornamental patterns.

“Lovely work!” Joan murmured. “Just like my old monks in their later days, the days of the refectory, when they began to make things beautiful. It wasn’t allowed in the early times, of course.”

The twins were keeping close to Lindy, on the look-out for Bess and the bulldog. But the dreaded foes were not in the yard and there was no alarming baying to be heard.

“It’s fearfully interesting, Twins!” Lindy murmured, as Joan put the big key into the lock.

“Marvellous to be finding something new. Auntie Joan’s thrilled about it,” Elizabeth agreed.

Joan heard and smiled at her. “Really thrilled, Elizabeth! And you found it, didn’t you?”

“We did! We did!” Margaret shouted. “We’ve been in there already! We all of us saw it before you did! We know what the inside’s like!”

Joan laughed and put her shoulder to the heavy door to push it open.

“Oh—glorious!” she whispered. “Look, Maidie! How wonderful!—and we never knew!”

The shadows in the great barn were pierced by shafts of light from lancet windows. One fell on some carving high on the wall; another, as they moved across the floor, lit up the figure above the door.

“There’s more carving up here. There must have been an upper storey, and these are the places where the beams began,” Joan said quietly, as they flashed torch-light about and looked into the corners.

“There’s a bit of the second floor left over here.” Maidlin’s eyes were shining with excitement and delight. “We’d need a ladder to get to it, though. Oh, Joan, what a find! Why did we never guess?”

“Because we never came near the farm while the old man was alive; and because that grove of ilex trees was between us and the barn and hid it from us even in winter. Ilex keep their leaves till the new ones come, you know; the trees were never bare.”

“I know they’re very lovely trees. They’ve kept the secret well,” Maidlin agreed.

“I must get it from John Edwards somehow!” Joan exclaimed. “Cleaned out, with a wooden floor instead of the trodden earth, what a hall it would make, Maid!”

“For dancing! Oh, Joan, would you let us use it, as we’ve used the barn at Darley’s Farm?” Maidlin cried wistfully. “There’s the musicians’ gallery all ready for us!” and she pointed to the part of the upper floor which still remained.

“For dancing, and for meetings. You and Joy could entertain the W.I. Oh, but I forgot! You won’t be here, Maid.”

“I shall be here when there’s dancing in our own barn,” Maidlin said firmly. “Jock will bring me; it’s not far from Sunrise Hill. You must get it from the farmer, Joan. It’s obviously Abbey property.”

“Even the children could see that,” Joan agreed. “Yes, Elizabeth? What now?”

Elizabeth, tugging at her hand, said urgently, “Dance something, Aunty Joan! Then it will belong to us, for dancing. Aunty Maid could sing.”

Joan raised her brows and looked at Maidlin with a laugh. “Oh, Maid! Could you? Shall we take possession?”

“With a morris jig.” Maidlin’s eyes gleamed, and she held out a blue handkerchief that matched her linen frock, and began to sing “Princess Royal.”

“Oh—wonderful! That’s perfect, Maid! Start again.” Joan pulled out her own green handkerchief and stood ready, her eyes alight. “This is Once to Yourself.”

Maidlin nodded, as she sang with the perfect rhythm of the dancer to whom every step was familiar, and went back to repeat the strain of the music.

The twins drew Lindy into a corner. “We’ll be jumped on. It’s ‘Princess Royal’. Aunty Joan will go all over the place in a minute,” Margaret told her.

“She’ll go all round our hall,” Elizabeth amended.

Lindy watched, wide-eyed, the side-step and the high springing capers in a big circle round the barn. “I never saw anything like that before!” she cried at the end. “Mrs. Raymond, that’s simply marvellous!”

“For an old married lady of thirty-two, who’s badly out of training, perhaps it wasn’t too bad,” Joan said laughing. “Haven’t you seen any morris, Belinda Bellanne? Not yet? Oh, somebody must teach you!—Funny thing, Maid! When Joy and I danced on the garth and won Sir Antony’s heart, we were wearing blue and green overalls,” and she made circles above her head with the coloured handkerchiefs. “And when we went to repeat our minuet for him at the Hall we did ‘Princess Royal’ as well.”

“Do ‘Old Mother Oxford’,” Maidlin said. “Those Headington circles reminded me. It’s an easy tune to sing, and Belinda Bellanne will like your capers, if they’re as good as they used to be.”

“I’m quite sure they’re not,” Joan remarked, as the tune began.

“I don’t see how they could be better than that, if you mean the high jumps,” Lindy exclaimed, as she paused for breath. “The twins say the high parts are capers. Couldn’t you four dance something and let me sing for you? There’s the tune I sang for the twins and Jansy the other day.”

“‘Ruffy Tufty’!” The twins leapt forward in delight, and seized Joan and Maidlin. “Be partners for us! Now, Miss Belinda, we’re all ready!”

“Oh, good girl!” Joan cried, as the dance began. “This is a real party, to claim the barn for folk-dancing! Maid, what a lovely voice she has!”

“Will have, when it’s trained,” Maidlin corrected her. “She’s going to sing with me in the Albert Hall. I hope she’ll be ready for Covent Garden too.”

“I shouldn’t wonder.” Joan bowed to Margaret, who bobbed a funny little curtsey. “Lindy Bellanne, thank you! That was a very great treat, and most suitable.—Oh, Mr. Edwards!” She broke off, laughing, as the farmer came from the doorway. “We’ve been taking liberties with your barn. It’s so wonderful, and such a perfect place for dancing. How long had you been there?”

“Long enough.” He looked from her to the twins, all so much alike with their dark red hair and brown eyes. “Where’s the other youngster; the one who hurt her head?”

“She’s still in bed, but she isn’t seriously hurt. She is my daughter; these two belong to Lady Quellyn.”

“But we’re Marchwood twins,” Elizabeth said hurriedly.

“Aye, you should be at the Manor,” he told them. “Fair mixed things up among you, you have. Marchwood twins at Abinger Hall, and no twins at Marchwood Manor!”

“But there’s plenty of other children at the Manor,” Margaret argued. “There’s Andrew—he’s my boy friend!—and Tony, and Rosemary, and Michael, and Katharine—she’s the baby.”

“But none of them are there just now, Twin,” Elizabeth reminded her.

John Edwards laughed and looked at Joan. “Well, ma’am! And do you like your barn? I saw you dance all round it, like a young un.”

“My barn! I want it to be my barn! It must have belonged to the Abbey in the old days,” Joan said eagerly. “It is the Abbey tithe-barn, of course, isn’t it?”

“Oh, aye, it’s the tithe-barn, and what’s more, it’s yours.” He gave her a sheepish grin. “I’d have told you all right. My old father wouldn’t have it that the barn was yours, but I didn’t hold with that.”

“What do you mean?” Joan exclaimed, flushing in excitement, while the twins and Maidlin came nearer to listen.

“When Sir Antony Abinger took the Abbey ruins away from my father—refused to renew the lease, and said he was going to clean up the place and make it into an Abbey again—my father was fair mad, for the rooms had been useful to him. He fought against it all he could, but he couldn’t make Sir Antony give him another lease. But he listened, Sir Antony did; and he said we could keep the barn, for storage. He was keen on the places the monks had lived in, but he didn’t care about the barn. I was only a kid and I knew nothing about it; but when Sir Antony died, nearly twenty years ago, my father told me, and I said the barn ought to go back to the Abbey. Seemed to me like it all belonged together, and it wasn’t honest for us to stick to the barn and say nothing about it. It wasn’t ever ours; it was only loaned to us, to make up for losing the rest of the buildings. My father said we’d had it in the family for so long that it was ours right enough by that time, but I just couldn’t see it. You and Miss Joy at the Hall didn’t know anything about this barn; I said you ought to know, but he said there was no need. We had a big row—not only about the barn; there were other things too. He had a mighty hot temper, my dad; and he said things I couldn’t stand. I cleared out and went off to the States, and I only came home after he’d gone. I couldn’t go behind him by writing to you, so I waited; I knew the farm would be mine in time—he’d never have let it go out of the family and I was his only son. I thought when it came to me I’d tell you about the barn. I’d have done it too, but we’re still clearing up his affairs, and what with that, and you being married and gone away, and Miss Joy—that’s now Lady Quellyn—in America, I let it slide for a while. But the barn’s yours, or hers, I don’t know which. I guess you won’t fight about it.”

“The Abbey is mine, and the barn is part of the Abbey property, as much as the gate-house and its meadow,” Joan said. “Oh, that’s splendid news! But I can’t just take it from you, Mr. Edwards! Can’t I do something in return?”

“Sure, there is one thing,” he said. “And it’s a thing I want very badly, see? I’ve got two small girls, and next term I’m sending them to that good school in Wycombe, where they have the dancing and the queens. I want to do the best I can for the kids; I’d like them to have more education than I had. Could you put in a word for them with somebody, to make things easy for them at the start? You went to that school yourself, didn’t you?”

“I did! I’ll help your girls, with pleasure. I was a queen, and so was my friend here; and Lady Quellyn and Lady Marchwood from the Manor were queens too.”

“Who’s talking about Lady Marchwood?” cried a voice from the doorway.

Then, with a shout equal to any of Margaret’s, a tall person in blue was in their midst, demanding wrathfully, “Joan Shirley, how could you go making discoveries at the Abbey without me? What is this lovely place? Tell me all about it!”

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

# CLAIMING THE BARN

“Jenny-Wren!” Joan and Maidlin dashed towards Lady Marchwood.

“Aunty Jen!” shouted the twins, wild with excitement.

The farmer drew back from the group and winked at Lindy Bellanne. “Old friends meeting, eh?”

“For one night only,” Jen told them solemnly. “I’ve left Kenneth to Mary, and come to see if my house is still there. I rang you up and was told you were at Bell’s Farm. That sounded so unlikely that I jumped into the Rover and came rushing round to see for myself what you were doing. What are you doing, Joan and Maid?”

“Five minutes ago you’d have found us doing ‘Rufty Tufty’,” Joan said laughing.

“Or you’d have seen Joan leaping round the barn in ‘Princess Royal’ capers,” Maidlin added.

“Maid was the music. I was claiming my barn for folk-dancing, Jenny-Wren.”

“I don’t blame you.” Jen looked all round. “Tell me about it. How did you find it? What is it? I can see it’s meant for dancing in, but how did it get here? Why didn’t we know? Has it been here all along?”

“For five hundred years, at least,” Joan said. “Look! There’s your friend, the Abbot Michael, over the door.” And she explained how the barn had escaped their notice for so long.

Jen raised her brows. “It kept its secret, just as the gate-house did, because we never looked at it. Do you remember? We never suspected the gate-house of underground entrances and so we never looked for them, until Jandy Mac sent home her mysterious map. Where is Jandy? Why have you left her out of this? You do seem to have kept it to yourselves, Joan and Maidlin! Why couldn’t you have waited for me? I ought to be here when you make discoveries in the Abbey!” Her voice rose in mock indignation.

“You ought,” Joan agreed. “But you see you weren’t.”

“You might have waited! I’d have come——”

“I’m afraid I don’t love you as much as all that, Jenny-Wren,” Joan said gently, while Maidlin stood and laughed at them. “You might not have come for weeks.”

“Well, Jandy Mac, then! You’ve left her out too. And Littlejan; she’d have loved to help you to make discoveries!”

“She did help; she saw the barn before I did. Jandy is in Scotland. Littlejan is in bed with broken ribs. Jansy is in bed with a broken head. Now you know all about us.”

Jen stared at her with wide blue eyes. “Joan! Are you pulling my leg?”

“I shouldn’t dream of it. All the horrors are true.”

“And you have nothing to do but dance ‘Rufty Tufty’ in a barn?”

“The invalids are going on well; I don’t need to hold their hands.”

“Poor Jen! You might tell her how we found the barn. Then she’d understand about Littlejan and Jansy,” Maidlin said.

“We found it! We did!” The twins had been waiting for their chance. “Aunty Jen, Twin and me found the barn!” they chanted in unison.

Jen whirled round on them. “Oh, you did, did you? Then I don’t wonder there are broken heads and ribs. What did you do to Jansy and poor Littlejan?”



“It wasn’t us! It was bricks!” Margaret shouted.

“In our tunnel. It comes in over here, where the wall’s broken. It begins near the gate-house,” Elizabeth explained.

Jen looked at them and then at Joan. “And this,” she said sadly, “is what comes of letting Joan come home! These are the results of Joan at the Hall! Broken walls—broken heads—broken ribs! Oh, Joan, couldn’t you do better than that?”

“It wasn’t my fault,” Joan said indignantly. “If these young limbs will keep secrets and have adventures on their own, accidents are sure to happen!”

Jen perched on one of the old ploughs in a corner. “Tell me everything,” she said, her tone resigned.

In a few words Joan told the story.

“Oh well!” Jen commented. “It was rather rotten for you. I’ll take back what I said. But you ought to know better than to call off Miss Belinda; whatever happens, those twins shouldn’t be left alone for a minute. You never know when they’re planning some wickedness.”

“Stuff!” Margaret cried. “Stuff an’ nonsense!”

Elizabeth’s squeal of delight drowned Joan’s reproof. “In Aunty Jen’s pocket—sticking out—her pipe! Look, Twin! Now she can play for us to dance!”

Jen laughed. “I meant to announce my arrival by a little tune, but your barn so thrilled me that I forgot.”

The twins made a dive for the pocket. She held them off and drew out her wooden morris pipe. Putting it to her lips she began to march up and down, and the high sweet notes filled the shadowy barn.

“‘Ladies’ Pleasure’, because we’re all so pleased! Now a procession round the hall!” and she broke into the Helston Furry Dance.

Joan and Maidlin, each with a twin as partner, followed her laughing, while Lindy and John Edwards watched from the doorway.

“My girls are wild to learn this dancing,” he said.

“So am I. Perhaps they could come to the Hall and Mrs. Raymond could give us lessons together. Then they’d know a little before they go to school,” Lindy suggested.

His eyes brightened. “They’d like that.”

Jen, taking command, piped “Hey, Boys,” for the four to dance, and then “Jockie to the Fair,” for Joan and Maidlin alone.

“Aunty Joan danced ‘Princess Royal’ all round the barn,” Elizabeth remarked.

“We had to go in the corner, or we’d have been jumped on,” Margaret added.

Jen looked at Joan with laughing eyes. “Did you? Oh, I must see that! I love your ‘Princess Royal’! But what did you do for music?”

“Maidie sang,” Joan smiled. “It was quite fascinating music to dance to; perfect lilt and rhythm. I enjoyed it.”

“Could you do it again, Maid? You’ve recovered from ‘Jockie’ now! I’d love to hear it—I won’t try to play it!—and I’d love to see Joan do capers round the barn. *Please*, Joan and Maidie!”

Joan laughed, but gave in for the sake of old times, when, on Jen’s first night at the Hall as a small girl of thirteen, she had danced the jig with Joy as her partner.

“Jolly good! Your capers are marvellous, as light as ever. And I love Maid’s music. That ends our little party,” Jen announced. “We won’t have anything more to spoil the memory of

that. And we've thoroughly claimed your barn for folk-dancing. Now I can't spare any more time for you people. I have to hunt for some papers for Ken; he's well enough to think about business, and things are worrying him. Nobody else could find them, but I think perhaps I can; I've had enough directions given me! Joan, will you feed me? I didn't tell Cook I was coming and she's rather distraught."

"We will, Jenny-Wren. How did you come, by the way? At this time in the morning, I mean? You can't have driven from The Grange to-day."

"Spent the night in town," Jen explained. "Ken wanted me to see some people for him and one of them made an appointment for nine o'clock this morning. So I had a night in a hotel and went to the ballet in the evening, to see young Mary Damayris dance again. Maid, aren't you very proud of your little cousin?"

"Very," Maidlin assented, a smile in the depths of her black eyes. "I'm proud of them both, Jenny-Wren."

"What's the matter with Rachel?"

"Matter?" Maidlin looked startled. "Nothing, so far as I know. What do you mean, Jen?"

"I thought she looked a little anxious. I didn't wait to speak to her, so I may be wrong; she was going round to the stage door to collect Damaris, as usual. I watched her when Damaris wasn't dancing and I thought she was worried."

"I haven't heard of anything wrong," Maidlin said, her voice troubled. "I'm going to meet the girls one day soon, when I'm in town; I haven't seen them for some time. When I ring them up Rachel always says they are all right. Was there anything wrong with Damaris, so far as you could see?"

"Not with her dancing; she was better even than usual, I thought. She seemed very sparkling and full of life, and as happy as she always is. I may have been wrong about Rachel. Don't worry; sorry I said anything! I'll see you all at one o'clock. I've heaps to do at home."

"Are you going to Kentisbury to see Rosemary and Michael?" Joan asked.

Jen's bright face clouded. "Not this time. I rang up the Castle, but Rosamund begged me not to come, if I could possibly bear it. She says my infants are happy and settled down, and that if they saw me they'd want to come home. I must do what's best for them; but I do want to see them!"

"It would unsettle them. Rosamund's right, but it is hard, Jenny-Wren," Joan said sympathetically.

Jen glanced at Maidlin, who was standing in the doorway looking troubled.

"Sorry I said that about Rachel; I may be wrong. Maid's so fond of those girls. But I must rush off. I suppose I can't go through the tunnel, Twins?"

The twins shouted with delight. "You're much too big, Aunty Jen. You'd block it all up!"

"I'm afraid I should. And my car's at the gate. Shall I give any of you a lift?"

"No, thanks, we'll take the short way through the Abbey," Joan smiled at her. "I must speak to Mr. Edwards again. He's being very sporting about this place."

"And there's one thing I have to do," she said to herself, as she turned towards the farmer. "Don't take the children home yet, Lindy. I want them here for a moment."

She talked with John Edwards, gladly promising that his girls should have some lessons in country-dancing before they went to school. Then she called to Lindy and the twins.

"Mr. Edwards is going to show us something before we go home. Come and see, Twinnies!"

The farmer, grinning in a friendly way, offered a hand to each small girl and led them across the yard. They danced along beside him, asking eager questions.

“Is it something nice? What will you show us, please?”

“You wait and see, little missies. In here.” He led them to a small stable and into an empty horse-box.

“Look what my big Bess has got to show you!” he said.

“Oh!” The twins drew back, but stared with fascinated eyes at the large mother dog and four tiny babies, who crawled blindly over one another and pushed their noses into her side. Her tail flapped a welcome, and her red eyes gleamed up at them, gentle, not fierce at all.

“I told you she had little babies,” Joan said quietly. “She doesn’t look like an enemy now, does she?”

“Would you like to stroke her?” Mr. Edwards suggested. “No, not the babies; that might make her angry. But she’d like you to pat her back. Look!” He clapped Bess gently. “Good girl! Clever lass, ain’t you, Bess?”

Margaret hung back, clinging closely to Joan. “No, thanks. Don’t want to.”

Elizabeth looked up at her elders. “If Auntie Maid would hold my hand, I might.”

Maidlin took her hand, and she crept nearer, and bent, and very gently touched the big grey head. The heavy tail flapped again, and Elizabeth’s eyes glowed. “She likes it. Twin, come and do it too. She’s pleased; she’s a dear old thing.”

She squatted on the straw and sat stroking Bess and watching the squirming pups. “Have they got red eyes?”

“Eyes aren’t open yet,” said Mr. Edwards.

“May I come and see them when they are open?”

“Sure. Would you and the frightened little one like to have a baby, when they’re old enough to leave their mother?”

“I’m not a frightened little one!” Margaret said hurriedly, and summoning all her courage she crept up to Bess and gave her a timid pat.

“That’s better. She’s as gentle as a kitten.”

“Oh, *would* you give us a baby?” Elizabeth cried, in ecstasy. “Twin, we wouldn’t be frightened of a bloodhound that was only an inch long, would we?”

“’Course we wouldn’t.” Margaret, growing bolder, sat stroking Bess also. “Gosh, aren’t they funny little things? They keep knocking one another over. They’re bigger’n an inch already, Twin.”

“Oh well! They’re very little. What will we call our baby?”

“Tunnel, ’cause their mother found us in the tunnel,” Margaret said promptly.

“That wouldn’t be a nice name at all,” Joan interposed. “Now we’re going home, Twins. Shall we leave you here?”

“No, thank you.” Elizabeth scrambled to her feet hastily. “But we can come back to see our baby, can’t we?”

“To see Tunnel,” Margaret said firmly. “Twin, ask him! You know—about Chestnut.”

“Oh, please, have you billets here for ponies?” Elizabeth cried.

John Edwards looked an inquiry at Joan. “Billets?”

“The little girl whom you rescued from the tunnel yesterday afternoon has come back from her riding lesson. She’d like very much to find somewhere near home for her pony to live. I wonder if later on—not at present, I think—you would be able to put him up, so that she could ride without going so far?”

“I guess I don’t see why not. He could share this stable with my Daisy. I saw the lass had breeches; I thought she’d been riding.”

“Oh, good! Come and tell Littlejan!” Margaret cried.

“We’ve found a tunnel, and a barn, *and* a billet for Chestnut,” Elizabeth said, with great satisfaction.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### SATISFYING JANDY MAC

Jen came to the Hall, to lunch, to see Jansy, and to have a word with Joan-Two. When Maidlin had been driven off to Kentisbury, eager to tell the story of the tithe-barn to Rosamund, Jen—her papers found—came to tea and to spend the evening with Joan.

“Jack will be in presently,” Joan said. “He’s very keen to be sure everything about the rebuilding is right at the start, and yesterday he came rushing back early when he heard about Jansy. So he’s had a long day on the job, and he’ll come home very hungry for his dinner.”

“I shall start early to-morrow,” Jen said. “It is nice to see you here again, Joan-Queen! You look so much at home. I’m not altogether sorry Jandy Mac had to go to Scotland; it’s like old times to be here with you.”

“You’d lose a lot, if you went back to the old days, Jenny-Wren. Five little people of yours, and four of mine, and three, now, of Joy’s; and Jandy’s daughter, as well as her two boys we haven’t seen. It is odd, isn’t it? But all very happy.”

“Rosamund starting her family too, and Maid planning her own home. Isn’t she the happiest thing you ever saw?”

Joan laughed. “Poor Maidie! We had a picnic on the site of the new house, and she told the twins where the kitchen would be, and the dining-room—all in the heather, you know. And Margaret immediately asked which was the nursery, and Elizabeth said the nursery was very important—where was she going to put the children?”

The telephone rang, as Jen laughed, and Joan rose to go in from the terrace to answer it.

Jen sprang up. “It will be for me. I asked Mary to ring me here, between six and seven; I knew I should spend the evening with you. She’s to tell me if Ken and the boys are all right.”

Joan sank into her basket chair again and gazed dreamily across the beautiful lawn to the beech avenue, along which Jack’s car would come presently. Then she sat up in keen attention, as Jen’s voice came through the open windows. The call was not from The Grange, after all.

“Oh, don’t do that! You mustn’t do that! You can’t possibly—Joan! No!” hurriedly. “Don’t come, Joan! I’ll see to it. Go away, Joan!—I say, Jandy Mac, you really can’t have Littlejan at present, so don’t come all that way to fetch her. She’s quite all right; really and truly she is. But she’s had a little accident and she’ll need a few days in bed.—No, not in the least serious; the doctor’s absolutely satisfied. Yes, I’ve seen her; I’m here for one night.—Oh well, here’s the whole story in two words. The twins made a tunnel under a hedge and then went off and left it. Littlejan knew nothing about it, but she saw the hole and she crept in to investigate; you really can’t blame her! *You* can’t, and *I* can’t, and Joan can’t, after the way we plunged into tunnels in our own young days! And everything would have been all right if your young Joan hadn’t been public spirited enough to pull a heavy brick down from the roof, because it was sticking out dangerously and she was afraid the twins would come back and they might run into it. Unfortunately it brought the roof down, and the brick fell on her. She was dug out quickly, not much the worse; but she has bruises and I’m afraid a rib is broken. There’s not the slightest need to worry; she’s in bed and quite comfortable, and she’ll be perfectly well in a few days. But she couldn’t possibly travel to Scotland yet.—Oh yes, we’d have let you know soon; it only happened yesterday. But Littlejan begged so hard that we wouldn’t tell you; it

was the first thing she said to Joan, after they hauled her out; and then she apologised for giving so much trouble; plucky kid! She's looking forward to writing to tell you the whole story, as soon as the doctor will allow it. Now don't come dashing back to see her, there's a good girl! It would only worry her—though she'd love to see you, of course. But you've had such a very short time at Vairy, and it's such a long way.—Oh well! It wouldn't seem a long way to you; you're such a mighty traveller. But—oh yes, that would do; that's the best plan. Yes, I'll tell Joan. She had a beastly time yesterday; first the twins lost and buried—and Jansy with a horrid cut on her head—and then your Littlejan needing to be dug out and carried home on a stretcher. It's a wonder poor Joan isn't raving; but she's not. She's quite calm, and she's looking after them all beautifully. I'd have been demented! You should have seen her dancing 'Princess Royal' this morning!—Oh, ask her to-morrow! I know it sounds mad, but it wasn't; there was every reason for 'Princess Royal'. She'll tell you about it. Good-bye! Littlejan's quite all right, Jandy Mac! If you come rushing back to see how she is, it will look rather as if you don't trust Joan, won't it?"

And with that parting shot, Jen hung up the receiver and turned to find Joan standing in the doorway.

"That was Jandy Mac, saying she was coming to fetch Joan-Two, as the aunt is well enough to see her," she exploded. "There was a jolly nice thing to happen to me, having to tell her all about it! But I've satisfied her for you, I think."

"I guessed it was Jandy," Joan said mildly. "Why did you tell her, if you felt like that? You could have called me. I seem to remember you shrieked at me to go away."

"Well, I thought it would be horrible for you and you'd feel bad, and you had a simply ghastly time yesterday, so I tried to save you one little spasm," Jen explained.

"That was very sweet and kind, Jenny-Wren, and I'm deeply grateful. It really was extremely thoughtful!" Joan exclaimed.

"I rather thought it was. Jandy Mac was awfully upset at first, but I made her believe it was all right. She's going to wait till to-morrow morning and then ring up again, when she's had time to think it over. So you can speak to her then. This will be my call from The Grange now," and she went back to the 'phone, as the bell rang a second time.

Joan was standing on the terrace when Jen came out and laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Children really are the limit! Why do we have them?"

Joan looked at her quickly. "What have yours been up to? Or is it my John?"

"Your John and my Tony had a good old fight with Andrew, who's quite a match for the two of them. They chose the yard, and Tony fell into the duck-pond. That ended the fight, for the other two had to drag him out and rush him to the house. Oh, they're all right! I'm not worried—so long as Tony doesn't have pneumonia. Andrew knows how important it is to be quick, when anybody falls in the pond; it's happened before! I can depend on Andrew, but he can't resist a fight. I'm *not* worried, Joan! But it's just as well I'm only taking two nights away from home."

"It's hard lines they should choose to duck Tony on the day you were away, Jenny-Wren," Joan said, in deep sympathy and amusement.

"I shall see for myself to-morrow that they're all right," Jen said ruefully. "I sympathise with Jandy Mac rather more than I did ten minutes ago! It's all very well to be assured your family's O.K., but you want to see, to be quite certain about it."

"It's a pity they told you, as you're going home so soon."

“Mary didn’t mean to tell, but she can’t keep a secret from me. I knew there was something, and I made her own up. I’m not going to worry, Joan. Let’s change the subject! You will have a big party to handsel the barn, won’t you? And you will invite me? You won’t forget me, if I’m still in Yorkshire? I’ll come for the night, just on purpose. Don’t leave me out!”

“As if I could! It wouldn’t be a real party without you. Aren’t you a queen of the Hamlet Club? We’ll give you plenty of warning when the date’s fixed, but I must have my invalids well again, and I must teach the farmer’s girls a few easy dances, before we have the party. Oh, we’ll certainly have one, and you’ll have to be there, Jenny-Wren, to—what was that odd word you used? To claim the barn; but you said something else.”

“To handsel the barn,” Jen repeated. “You really did it with your first ‘Princess Royal’, but that wasn’t a public occasion.”

“What does it mean? Is it Yorkshire? I never heard the word before.”

“Handsel? My Scottish sister-in-law says it. It means using a thing, or a place, for the first time. Or it can mean giving the first wages when you’ve engaged a new servant; something on account to seal the bargain! Or it can be the first gift in the New Year. It’s much better than ‘claim’,” Jen asserted. “We’ll handsel the barn with a country-dance party.”

Joan laughed. “We will. It’s a useful word. I was afraid perhaps you meant ‘whitewash the barn’, and I simply couldn’t allow that.”

“Heavens, no! What a horrid mind, to have such an awful idea! I shall bring my boys to dance, and your John, so tell Jansy and Littlejan to get well quickly.”

“Margaret-Twin will be pleased. I heard her tell Mr. Edwards that Andrew was her boy friend.”

“Margaret has bagged Andrew as a partner for years. I’m not sure that he’s as keen as she is. She looks up to him enormously; Andrew is everything that’s wonderful, to Margaret. I say, Joan, apologise to Jandy Mac for that last thing I said to her!”

“About not trusting Joan? It was too bad of you,” Joan agreed. “I nearly hurled you away from the ’phone, to reassure Jandy on the spot.”

“Yes, it was brutal and I’m not really brutal. Or am I, Joan?” Jen wailed. “Oh, I hope I’m not often as unkind as that!”

“Not often,” Joan said laughing. “I’ll tell Jandy Mac how retribution fell on you instantly. You know you’re in a hurry to go home and see if Tony is all right!”

Jen sighed. “Yes, it’s true. I deserved this blow. Tell Jandy I’m really sorry, Joan.”

“I will. Now here comes Jack, to hear all about our barn! We didn’t know it was there, when he went off this morning.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### OUTPOSTS OF THE ABBEY

“Joan—oh, Joan!” Janice, on the telephone, spoke from Scotland. “If I say I want to see Littlejan, will you think what Jen said?”

“That you don’t trust me? No, Jandy Mac, I think you should come. Not that there’s the slightest need; Littlejan’s going on well and is very bright and jolly this morning and full of plans for learning to dance in time for a party we’re going to have soon. But she’d love to see you, and you’d be happier if you’d inspected her. Jen sent you an urgent message; she’s sorry she was so brutal. She was punished for it within five minutes, and she sent deepest apologies to you.” In a few words Joan told of the message which had come from The Grange. “I’ve heaps more to say, but it will keep till you come. When shall we see you?”

“I’ll travel to-night; I sleep well in trains. I’ll reach Euston at eight to-morrow morning.”

“Eight! That’s early,” Joan said dubiously. “Could you spend an hour or two in town, to give Jack time to come to fetch you?”

“You mustn’t dream of meeting me at that hour,” Janice said hastily. “I shall have some breakfast, taxi to Paddington, and take the train to Wycombe.”

“Well, wire your time and we’ll meet you there. I hate to think of your arriving in London un-met,” Joan said wistfully.

As she rang off her face shone with a sudden idea, and looking much happier, she rang up Kentisbury Castle and asked for Maidlin. After a few words of explanation, she made her suggestion.

“Maid, your little cousins—the dancer and her sister. They’re in London, and Jandy would love to know them. Couldn’t one of them meet her at Euston, give her a meal, and put her in her next train and wire to us? It would seem so much more welcoming, and we like to welcome people properly.”

“Rachel. She’ll do it beautifully and enjoy it,” Maidlin exclaimed. “She loves meeting new people; they’re all stories to Rachel’s novelist mind. I’ll ring her up and tell her. How shall I describe Jandy Mac?”

“You know what she’s like. She was wearing dark-green, and her suitcase had Australian hotel labels—Sydney.”

“That will be enough for Rachel. She’ll do it, Joan.”

“After all, Rachel and Damaris are the outposts of the Abbey in London, aren’t they? Our only representatives there.”

“Rachel will love that idea. I’ll tell her to represent the Abbey,” Maidlin agreed.

So it came about that Janice, following a porter and her much-labelled suitcase up the platform, was hailed by a bright-faced brown-eyed, brown-haired girl, with the cheery greeting—“You must be Mrs. Fraser. I’ve come to take care of you, on behalf of the Abbey people, as it’s too early for any of them to be here.”

“But how very kind!” Janice cried. “May I ask who you are?”

“Rachel Ellerton. Maidlin is my cousin. I’m living in town at present, so Mrs. Raymond and Maid asked me to be here to welcome you. I’ll see to everything; I’m sure you’re tired. Have you any more luggage? No? Then we’ll have a taxi.”



There was something very steady and capable about Rachel Ellerton, Janice thought; she could be depended on and she knew what to do, although she looked very young, perhaps even not twenty-one yet. Surrendering gladly to the welcome assistance, Janice found herself in a taxi, being whirled through early-morning streets and answering questions about her journey.

“I’m afraid my young sister may come to breakfast in pyjamas,” Rachel apologised. “We have very late nights and I left her still in bed. We’re trying hard not to drop into careless so-called artistic habits; I call them slipshod! Marry doesn’t care; she’d do anything that was comfortable; but I’m very firm about it. But she has a matinée to-day, so I wanted her to sleep as long as she could.”

Janice looked a question, and Rachel explained—“She’s a dancer in the ballet, you know.”

“Oh! Lady Kentisbury told me about her, but I didn’t connect you with Maidlin’s cousin, who has become a great dancer so quickly. I shall be so glad to meet her! I’m coming to town to see her dance soon.”

“I’m the elder sister in the background,” Rachel smiled. “Marry must have somebody to look after her. Her name is Damaris, or Mary Damayris on the posters; but I’ve always called her Marry.”

“And you write, I’ve been told?” Janice looked at the keen eager face with interest.

“I’ve made a start,” Rachel admitted. “I hope to do something worth while some day.”

“I heard you’d done very well already,” Janice hinted.

Rachel laughed and coloured. “I enjoy trying, anyway, and I’ve plenty of time, when Marry’s busy rehearsing. She works very hard. Do you know where I’m taking you for breakfast?”

“To your rooms? That would be more interesting than an hotel or restaurant.”

“That’s nice of you! I should say just the same. But our digs aren’t ordinary ones. Didn’t Lady Kentisbury explain?”

“Why, yes, she did, but I’d forgotten. She said you were living at her town house.”

“With the housekeeper, who is a dear and looks after us beautifully. Everybody insists that we’re too young—they don’t say too silly!—to live in real digs. I’m not quite twenty yet, and Marry’s a year younger. So we live in the servants’ quarters, with Mrs. Bloom; much more homelike than the great rooms upstairs. Will you mind going in by the tradesmen’s entrance? Bloomy will open the big doors, if you’d prefer it.”

Janice laughed. “I’ll love to have breakfast in the housekeeper’s rooms. I can well believe they are more cosy and intimate than the Kentisbury state apartments!”

“Rather! Here we are. I know you’re starving, but breakfast will be waiting for us.”

That meal, in the Ellerton girls’ sitting-room in the servants’ quarters of Kentisbury House, lived in Jandy Mac’s memory as a lively and happy experience. Damaris—or Mary Damayris by her stage name—greeted her in the completely natural way which was one of her greatest charms, and was apparently entirely unconscious of her tousled yellow curls, blue pyjamas, and white dressing-gown.

“I hope you’re hungry, Mrs. Fraser, for I’m starving, and Bloomy’s cooking the most priceless eggs and bacon. I can polish off a huge quantity. I hope you won’t be shocked.”

She chattered all through breakfast; of the Abbey and Maidlin; of ballet and the theatre; of her own part in *The Goose Girl*, and of *Rainbow Corner*—“My first ballet, you know. I made it, the whole of it—except the story and the music, of course!”

“And the title!” Rachel mocked. “Oh, you made the dances and arranged the whole thing, we know. But *I* found the story for you and *I* gave you the title!”

“And you keep me in order and don’t let me get too uppish,” Damaris said mournfully.

“We’re very grateful to you, Mrs. Fraser,” Rachel remarked, as Janice came from the bathroom, after a refreshing wash and brush up.

“You are? I’m glad to hear it. I thought I was very grateful to you, for your welcome and your kind hospitality,” Janice protested.

“We’ve enjoyed it. We’re grateful because you’ve given us a new name. We’ve looked on ourselves as hangers-on to the Abbey, or offshoots, or perhaps distant connections. We love the place and all the people, but we really can hardly say we belong to them. We’re only Maidlin’s cousins; and when she marries and has her own house there won’t be any reason for us ever to go back to the Abbey—except that we shall want to see it so badly! But when Maid told us about you, she said Mrs. Raymond had called us Outposts of the Abbey—its representatives in London. That’s a lovely idea; far better than being just an offshoot.”

“Clever of Joan!” Janice agreed. “And jolly for the Abbey people to feel they have deputies who can take on their duties in town.”

“It makes us feel as if we’ve been adopted by them, because we can be of use to the Abbey, and not just because we needed to be looked after,” Rachel explained. “They were more than kind in their welcome, when we had no home and nowhere to go; and they made us feel we belonged to them, for Maidlin’s sake, and that we could go there whenever we liked. We spend our week-ends at the Hall when we can, and they always make us feel they’re glad to see us. It’s very satisfying to know we can do something for them too.”

“If you can be their deputies in London—or outposts, to use Joan’s good word—you’ll be really useful to them,” Janice assented.

“Maid hinted at other ways we might be useful. We meet so many people; we may easily come across girls who are needing country holidays but can’t afford them, and Lady Joy would ask them to her hostel in the village.”

“You’ll be most valuable. And you manage things so well; you’ve looked after me quite beautifully, and the way you picked me up on that platform was most efficient.”

Rachel laughed. “I’ve trained myself in jobs of that sort. It would have been part of my work. Oh, didn’t you know? I was to be Maidlin’s secretary and travelling companion; I’d have looked after her on her journeys to Italy, and she’d have sent me to meet friends at stations or to put them in the train when they went away. I felt so bucked when she asked me to meet you!”

“I hadn’t heard about that plan. You’d have been a splendid secretary.”

“We didn’t know she was going to marry; she won’t need that sort of help now. And when Damaris insisted on being a dancer instead of a chicken-and-bee-farmer, it was obvious she would need me very badly. Maid said that was my real job; to look after Damaris for her. Now I’ll taxi you to Paddington, and then ring up Mrs. Raymond and tell her your time of arrival at Wycombe. Here are the morning papers and a magazine. It isn’t a long journey this time.”

“Efficient to the last!” Janice smiled at her and went to say good-bye to a very neatly dressed and brushed Mary Damayris.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### LITTLEJAN'S COMFORTERS

"Did Rachel look after you nicely?" Joan had come herself in the car to Wycombe.

"Oh, excellently! Joan, what jolly girls! Isn't Maidlin proud of them?"

"I'm sure she is. I haven't seen much of them, but I like them both. I hope they'll come for some week-ends while we're at the Hall."

"You've completely won Rachel's heart by calling her an Outpost of the Abbey," Janice observed.

"Oh?" Joan raised her brows. "She liked the idea?"

"She spoke with real feeling of the Abbey and of you all," and Janice repeated what she could remember of Rachel's words.

"How nice of her!" Joan exclaimed. "We must use her, if she feels like that. I didn't know the Abbey had cast a spell over her to that extent. I must warn Joy when she comes home; then she can make use of Rachel too. Rachel has helped us already, you know. Months ago she wrote to Maidlin about a girl in the ballet, a weedy delicate child who wasn't really fit for anything so strenuous, but who was intensely musical and yet was almost entirely untrained in music. Maid invited her to Joy's Music School in the village, and the regular quiet life and the country air, with good teaching in music, are making a new girl of her. In a year or so she'll go back to the stage with quite a fresh outlook, and a real understanding of music; and with new health and strength she'll dance as she has never done before."

"Thanks to Rachel, Outpost of the Abbey! She didn't tell me that story. She had earned her title before you gave it to her."

"Nice girl, Rachel," Joan remarked. "Maid thinks quite as much of her as she does of Damaris. You must go to see Mary Damayris dance one day. How long can you stay with me, Jan? Is it just a flying trip, to inspect Littlejan's bandages? Or will you stay till she's able to go back with you?"

"If you don't mind, I'll go back to Vairy for a few weeks and then come and fetch her, when she's strong again. I'd like to stay here, but Aunty was so touchingly pleased to have me and she's all the mother I've ever had, that I can remember. And she hasn't seen me for ten years."

"Yes, she has first claim," Joan conceded. "But I hope I'll have you for a while too. You must come back for the party. It's not to be till Littlejan and Jansy are well enough to dance."

"Party? I hadn't heard of it. A party to welcome Joy home?"

"No, a party to welcome the Abbey barn! Jenny-Wren says—'to handsel the barn.' We've found the loveliest old tithe-barn, Jandy Mac, and there's no doubt that it's Abbey property; nobody disputes it. We're going to turn it into a hall for folk-dancing and village meetings; your young Joan suggested it, the moment she saw it. Joy has built a good hall in the village, but this is much nearer to us and much more our own. And it's definitely a part of the Abbey; even the twins and Jansy felt that at once."

"But where is it?" Janice asked. "And why didn't you know?"

"You shall see it this afternoon. Rosamund and Maidlin are driving back from their shopping in town by way of the Abbey, because Ros is so eager to see my tithe-barn, so after

tea I'll take you all to see it." And Joan told of the feud between the Hall and Bell's Farm, which had kept even Joy, in her wandering adventurous days, from exploring within the gates.

"The name's a mystery," she added. "It has always been known as Bell's Farm, but so far as we can find out, no one called Bell has ever owned it. Nobody seems to have any theory as to the reason for the name."

"Perhaps a beautiful milkmaid called Bell lived there in Elizabethan days," Janice suggested.

"What a charming romantic idea! And all the young men went courting to Bell's Farm," Joan said laughing, as she paused and sounded her horn at the end of the lane from the hills. "It's as good a notion as any I've heard. Now I'll take you up to Littlejan and leave you with her; she's pining to tell you her story, so I haven't spoiled it for her. I must go and take Jimmy from Nurse."

"So you've got yourself into trouble already, Littlejan!" Janice sat on the bed and gazed at her daughter severely.

"Oh, Mother, you are an angel to come!" Joan-Two burst out. "I've wanted you most terribly. Mother, I may have been silly, but I wasn't wicked; really, Mother! Auntie Joan isn't upset about me one scrap."

"Then it's very forgiving of Auntie Joan. Suppose you tell me just what happened. I haven't heard the whole story yet. I'm waiting to hear it from you."

It did not take Janice long to realise how completely happy Littlejan had become at the Hall, and her mind was at ease about leaving her again. Also, before very long she discovered that Littlejan and Jack Raymond had a secret which must be kept from her. Joan-Two made mysterious hints, which she would not explain; Jack said little, but he smiled at small Joan in a way which betrayed an understanding between them.

"They're great friends," Joan explained. "Littlejan begged that Jack would come and talk to her while she has to be in bed. Yes, they're planning something, to be attended to when she's about again, but it's between themselves, so I can't tell you what it is. They're polite enough to consult me, but they wouldn't expect me to pass on what I know."

Janice laughed. "Then I must be patient. I'm satisfied that anything your Jack has a hand in will be something sensible and pleasant."

"I'll tell him. He's keeping Littlejan thrilled and interested when she might be getting bored."

"I can see that. Whatever the secret is, I'm deeply indebted to him. And I suppose I shall know some day."

"Oh yes! You'll know, some day," Joan nodded.

While they talked downstairs, Jack was sitting by Joan-Two's bed, gravely discussing a knotty problem.

"You're sure you won't let me have a snap of you all bandaged up?" he asked seriously. "It would make a thrilling addition to your book; most original! Nobody else has a photo of bandages, in her book."

Joan-Two giggled. "I don't believe Mother would like it one bit, and I'm quite sure Father wouldn't!"

"Well, could you lie down at the beginning of that tunnel and look white and wan, and rather grubby, as you did when we pulled you out of the horrible hole?"

Littlejan's trill of laughter reached Joan and Janice on the terrace, and they smiled in sympathy.

“Jack on the job,” Joan remarked.

“Blessings on him!” Janice said fervently.

“No, I couldn’t,” Littlejan was retorting. “And nobody would like the picture, if I did.”

“But don’t you think it might make them laugh?” Jack’s voice and face were earnest.

“More likely to make them cry!”

“Oh, well, we don’t want anybody to cry. Now I’ve had another idea, Joan the Second. You wouldn’t jump if I let off a flashlight, would you?”

“No!” Joan said scornfully. “We had a school photo taken indoors by flash, in Sydney.”

“And you all came out with staring white faces. I want to make a picture called ‘Missing Her Mother,’ or ‘The Deserted Daughter.’ It will be you and the nursery governess, eating buns at midnight on Miss Belinda’s bed.”

Littlejan eyed him suspiciously. “What makes you think Mother would like that?”

“Wouldn’t she want to know how much you missed her, that first night?”

“You do tease!” the invalid protested. “Mother would say I ought to have been asleep.”

“Honestly, it would make a jolly picture—candle-light and all that, you know. Oh, you didn’t use a candle? Never mind; we’ll give you one—it will help the general effect. And the point of it, to your mother, will be that Miss Belinda understood and came to comfort you. *I* think Mrs. Janice will be pleased.”

“Mrs. Janice! How funny!” Joan-Two grinned.

“Well, our Jansy is Janice without the Mrs., isn’t she? Now as soon as you’re out of bed we must get to work, or your book won’t be ready in time. We’ll pose you with the twins and Jansy—at the door of the tithe-barn, if you like. And there are the pictures of Chestnut, with you on his back, and you standing beside him, and letting him eat sugar out of your hand. And you in your breeches without any Chestnut in the picture.”

Joan-Two’s eyes glowed. “Father will be most frightfully thrilled. Could there be one, taken in the holidays, of Tansy on Black Boy?”

“If you’re there too, on Chestnut. There can’t be any pictures in the Book of Littlejan that haven’t some bits of Littlejan in them.”

Littlejan grinned again. “Better have the whole of me, not only bits. You’ll have to come to Kentisbury one day, when Tansy’s home for the holidays, and work really hard.”

“It will be a hard day for me,” he agreed. “Shall we have a picture of you with the big hound from the farm? The twins are quite friendly with her now. You wouldn’t be frightened, would you?”

“I don’t think so.” But Joan-Two sounded a little doubtful.

“Wait till you have seen her babies! Now are you going to get well quickly, so that I can make a start on your book?”

“*We’ll* make a start! You can’t do it without me!”

“No, that’s the trouble. If you retire to bed with broken ribs and bruises, and if you won’t let me photograph your bandages, how can I get on with your book?”

“I’ll get well as fast as ever I can,” Littlejan promised. “How’s Jansy now?”

“Better. But she must keep quiet for a few days, so of course we can’t let her come to see you.”

Littlejan eyed him suspiciously again. “I’m not noisy! I wouldn’t excite her.”

“Oh, you might! She might catch broken ribs from you or something.”

Littlejan laughed again. “It doesn’t hurt me now. I must be better. The Countess is coming to tea; did you know? She’s going to tell me how Chestnut’s getting on without me.”

“You’ve found a new job, as comforter to small girls in bed.” Janice greeted Jack later in the day.

Jack retreated into himself at once and fled, murmuring something about “liking Littlejan—jolly kid—lots of practice.”

Joan smiled. “It isn’t a new job. As he says, he’s had experience. Although Jansy is strong enough, she has a gift for taking anything infectious that comes her way; I say she’s greedy, like a magpie, and she picks up everything that’s going. She’s had several illnesses, and she’s usually rather miserable at the start and very bored during convalescence; and Jack has been simply invaluable to me in keeping her amused and thinking of things to do in bed.”

“Oh, good man! What a useful sort of husband!”

“He’s a very kind one, and he likes little girls,” Joan agreed.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### OLD MOLES IN THE BARN

“Lindy, bring the twins along to the barn after tea,” Joan suggested, as she waited for Rosamund and Maidlin to come. “If I know the Countess of Kentisbury, she’ll feel as we did and she’ll want to dance. We can’t do ‘Ruffy Tufty’ for ever, so we’ll have ‘The Old Mole.’ Anybody can sing that, but we’ll need you three to make up the set. Unless you can tackle it, Jandy Mac? Lindy is only learning it.”

“I can only do it in one place, and that’s first woman,” Lindy said hurriedly. “But I’d love to dance in the barn.”

“I can’t do it anywhere,” Janice assured her. “I haven’t danced, or even seen a country-dance, for fifteen years. And I only did a very little, even then. ‘The Old Mole’ means nothing to me, neither tune nor movements.”

“It will. You’ll remember, when you see it,” Joan said. “I’ll be first man and take care of you, Miss Belinda. The twins make a good third couple.”

“Will they have to make arches? We shall need to creep under their arms like real old moles,” Lindy laughed.

“We couldn’t let Rosamund go under an arch made by a twin. She’s almost as tall as Jen,” Joan observed. “We’ll put her in the middle, and she’ll make the arches for the rest of us. There’s the car! Will you ring for tea, Lindy?”

“Are the twins good enough to have small presents, Joan?” Maidlin asked, when tea on the terrace was over. “I don’t want to do the wrong thing.”

“Oh, Maidie!” Joan protested laughing. “They don’t need presents! What have you been doing? And how nice of you to ask me!”

“You’re in charge of them,” Maidlin explained. “I must have your leave. I went to the Rose and Squirrel to fetch Margaret’s daisy ring; oh, haven’t you heard that story? They had rings from the Rose House, like mine,” and she showed the silver circlet, with tiny enamelled stars of white and green and gold, like daisies, which had been her first engagement token from Jock. “Margaret dropped hers and trod on it at last May-day’s Coronation, and Elizabeth very nobly put hers away and wouldn’t wear it till Margaret had saved up and bought another. I was given the money and asked to bring it for her, so we drove to town by way of the Squirrel House, and I saw something else I thought they’d like, if you didn’t mind.”

“I can give them fairly good characters, at the moment,” Joan smiled. “Shall we send for them?”

Margaret gave a shriek of joy at sight of her ring.

“Now you can wear yours, Twin! Isn’t that marvellous?”

“Well, you be careful this time,” Elizabeth said tartly. “I don’t want to be having to put mine in a box always.”

“Look, Twins! As you want so much to see Littlejan’s Chestnut, I brought you these to go on with.” Maidlin set two small figures on the tea table. “Little blue horses, from the Rose and Squirrel.”

“What a lovely blue, Maid!” Joan exclaimed.

Maidlin nodded. “I couldn’t resist them.”

The twins, with shouts of delight, seized the pottery figures. “Horses for us too! They’re different. Which is for which of us?”

“Can I have the one what’s tossing his head?” Margaret pleaded. “He looks so wild. I just love him.”

“Then I’ll have the one that’s eating his dinner,” Elizabeth said promptly. “I like him much the best.”

“A good thing Miss Belinda isn’t here,” Joan laughed. “She’s a purist where grammar’s concerned.”

Elizabeth fondled the horse whose head was bent. “He looks much happier than your fierce pony. Yours is a regular wild beast of a horse.”

Margaret’s steed had his head thrown back, as if hurling a challenge at an enemy. “He’s saying, ‘Come on; I’ll fight you!’ He’s a pet.”

“Mine’s called Blue Cap,” Elizabeth announced. “I know he’s blue all over, but I can’t call him just Blue.”

“No, for mine’s blue too,” Margaret shouted. “I shall call mine Blue—oh, what can he be? Blue what?”

“Blue Stocking,” Rosamund suggested.

“Blue Bonnet,” said Maidlin. “‘Bonnetts So Blue’, you know.”

“Blue Bonnet! That’s his name,” Margaret cried gleefully. “Then I’ll think of him whenever we dance ‘Bonnetts’ at a party.”

“I shall think of mine when we dance ‘Scotch Cap,’ at a party,” Elizabeth said instantly. “I’m sure Scotch caps were blue.”

“Well, of course they were,” Rosamund admitted. “‘Blue Bonnetts over the Border,’ were the Scots, weren’t they?”

“I’ve always thought so. You must be careful of them, Twins,” Joan warned them. “Those pottery things break very easily. You don’t want Blue Bonnet without his wild head, or Blue Cap with no feet. Put them on your mantelpiece and look at them, but don’t carry them about.”

“Good idea,” Elizabeth exclaimed. “If you break Blue Bonnet, Twin, I shan’t put Blue Cap away in a box. I can’t go on putting things away for ever, all my life, just because you’re a smasher.”

“I’m *not* one!” Margaret protested. “Twin, I aren’t! I’m not!”

“Well, you be careful, then. I’m going to show Blue Cap to Littlejan and Jansy, and tell Littlejan we’ve got ponies too.”

“Come on! She’ll want to see Blue Bonnet!” Margaret raced away.

“Twin! Go slowly!” Elizabeth’s shriek was worthy of Margaret herself. “If you fall on Blue Bonnet, he’ll be smashed to pieces!”

Margaret calmed down to a sedate walk. “Thank you for reminding me. Very kind of you, Twin!”

“That was a good thought, Maid,” Joan said, as the children disappeared. “You’ve made them very happy. Now come and see my barn! It’s quite our latest treasure.”

“What I want to know,” Rosamund said, when they stood together in the barn, “is how we missed this place for all these years? I feel rather crushed, as if Maid and I had been very unenterprising. We used to trespass in the Manor grounds; do you remember how we nearly drowned you in the lake, Maid? But we never went inside Bell’s Farm, though it’s much closer than the Manor.”



"I used to trespass by the Manor lake too," and Joan smiled at Janice, who nodded.

"But Joy had asked us not to get into trouble with the old farmer, Ros." Maidlin, sitting on the ancient plough, looked up at her friend. "She was very firm about it. We'd never have done anything that would worry her so much."

"You wouldn't, anyway," Rosamund agreed. "Joy's smallest wish was law to you. And I never left you out of things."

"Joy was very anxious to have no trouble with old Mr. Edwards," Joan observed. "So we all gave Bell's Farm a wide berth, and nobody dreamed it was keeping a secret from us."

"More than one secret! Why Bell's Farm? It's absurd!"

"I know, Rosamund. But we don't seem able to solve that mystery. I keep meaning to ask John Edwards if he has any theory about the name, but he's had to make a sudden rushed journey back to the States, and he won't be home for a few weeks. His wife's an American, and her mother has been taken ill suddenly, so Mr. and Mrs. Edwards went off at a moment's notice, hoping to be in time to see her. The small girls are left here—in charge of a grandmother, I believe, but I haven't been invited to go to the house, so I've only seen the children. I'm so thankful to have a happier feeling between the Hall and the farm that I don't want to do anything to endanger it. They might feel I was going too far if I went to the house. The children are to come here for lessons in country-dancing, and I shall ask them to the party when the Hamlet Club comes to dance in the barn."

Rosamund's blue eyes swept wistfully over the empty floor. "Couldn't we have one little dance? I've heard about your 'Princess Royal.' Won't you do it again for me? Here's Maid, always ready to sing. Or could we have a set for four?"

"The next dance will be 'The Old Mole.' Take your partners!" Joan assumed the voice of the teacher of the Women's Institute. "Here come the twins and Miss Belinda. Twins, you're third couple; Lindy and I are first. So Ros and Maidie must be middles."

Rosamund gave a whoop of joy. "Oh, come on! Old Moles are most appropriate in barns! Can't I have a twin for a partner?"

"I can make arches!" Margaret shouted. "I can!"

"Yes, but you wouldn't be a good second woman; it's a hard place to remember and you always forget," Joan retorted. "Aunty Maid will do it much better."

"Twin does forget," Elizabeth admitted. "Twin, you dance with me; be my man. You know you like to be a man, but you couldn't possibly be a man and Aunty Ros be a woman. She's three times as big as you. Isn't Aunt Janice going to dance? Oh, then, she'll have to sing!"

Janice took Maidlin's place on the plough. "I'm the audience. I'll be sorry for you if I'm the whole of your music."

"We'll all sing," Joan said. "We'll take turns, or there'll be no music left for the heys and the cast-off. The twins and I will begin; then Rosamund and Lindy can carry on, and Maid's voice will be the triumphant finale."

"Don't pitch too high or too low. You have to suit both Lindy and me," Maidlin said. "I'll give you a note." And she held out her right hand to Rosamund, who led her to second place in the line.

"What pretty dancers the twins are already!" Janice thought, as she watched. "And Maidlin's dancing is full of music, like she is herself, while Rosamund keeps her dignity even when she's skipping a figure-of-eight. Joan always was very good, of course. But little Margaret is careless; she nearly went wrong. There! I believe it's happened!" at an agonised cry from Elizabeth—"Pass right, Twin—right! Oh, you are a silly girl!"

"I aren't!" Margaret shouted, striving wildly to correct her mistake and failing completely.

"Six old moles in the tive-barn!" Elizabeth chuckled, when the dance had ended almost in a riot, because Margaret had lost her place in the hey and had dashed round bumping into everybody she met.

"It seems too bad to have had to leave out Jansy and Joan-Two," Rosamund remarked.

"We'll have a family set of 'Newcastle' at the party," Joan suggested. "I'll coach you, Jandy Mac; it will come back to you quickly. You'll have your Littlejan and I'll have Jansy; Ros and Maidie shall each have a twin for a partner. I hope they know 'Newcastle'?"

"We do! We do!" Margaret jumped in excitement. "Only I get lost sometimes in the lines."

"I'll tell you where you go," Elizabeth promised. "We'll practise, and Miss Belinda and Nelly Bell can be Auntie Ros and Auntie Maid."

"But won't we be one too many? We shall have Jen for the party!" Janice protested. "You'd better leave me out."

"No, you must dance with your daughter. If I know Jen, she'll want to pipe, standing in the musicians' gallery, as she calls that bit of the upper floor left in one corner. She's greatly intrigued by it," Joan said.

"You saw my little cousins this morning, didn't you?" Maidlin asked of Janice, as they went out to the gate, where the Kentisbury car was waiting. "Well, I mean my young cousins. They're both bigger than I am, but they're hardly grown up yet," as Janice gave her a laughing look.

"I thought them delightful, and Rachel was most helpful. She couldn't have been kinder."

"I'm glad. Did it seem to you that there was anything wrong with her?" Maidlin asked anxiously.

"Not an atom. Why should there be? She seemed to me extremely well and jolly."

"Oh, good! Jen must be wrong, but she isn't often wrong and she sees so much and understands people so well that I've been feeling rather troubled. She went to watch Damaris dancing the other night, on her way through town, and she said Rachel looked worried."

"I saw nothing whatever wrong," Janice said decidedly. "Jen must have been mistaken, for once. I should say both girls are perfectly well and happy."

"I'm very glad. It's a great relief to my mind. I've been worrying about them—when I think of them at all," Maidlin admitted, giving her a shy smiling look. "I'm afraid I'm thinking only of my own affairs at present."

"Oh, but that's right and natural!" Janice exclaimed.

"What did you think could be wrong with Rachel, Maid?" Joan had heard the question. "Wouldn't she tell you if there was any trouble?"

"She might not," Maidlin said gravely, the radiance of her own happiness dimmed for the moment. "She'd tell me if she could tell anybody, but there might be things she couldn't speak of to anyone."

"Such as——?" Janice asked curiously.

"You mean, if Damaris were having a love affair?" Joan understood at once.

"That's what I was afraid of," Maidlin agreed, "She's too young, Joan; not quite nineteen."

"But it's sure to happen, in the life she's leading," Joan said gently. "You're prepared for it, aren't you, Maid?"

"Oh yes, sometime! But not yet, Joan!"

"I don't believe there's anything of that sort going on," Janice exclaimed. "The girls seemed to me absolutely normal, keen only on their work and on one another. I saw no sign of

anything else.”

“I’m very much obliged to you!” Maidlin drew a long breath of relief. “Now I can be quite happy again. Thank you so much, Jandy Mac!” She gave Janice another shy smile. “It sounds so much more Abbey-ish than Mrs. Fraser! Now where has my Countess gone? We’ve lost our Rosamund!”

“Not lost yet. Come and have a look!” Rosamund’s voice came from under the hedge, where she lay on her face, peering into the tunnel, a twin on each side of her. “I had to see where the horrible disasters happened,” she explained, rising and brushing the dirt and twigs off her blue suit.

“We’ll clean you!” the twins shouted.

“Please do! I can’t let Mr. Burnett see me looking like this; he’d be shocked.”

“Is he the one that drives the car?” Margaret cried.

“There! You look just like a beautiful Countess now,” Elizabeth stood and gazed at her admiringly. “Nobody would believe you’d been lying on your front on the ground.”

“That’s a good thing. Thank you very much,” Rosamund said gravely. “Now, Maid, hop in! I must rush back to my young Lord Verriton. He’ll be yelling his head off, if I’m away much longer. Thank you all for a jolly little dance in your treasure of a tithe-barn!”

“Thank *you* for being an old mole with us!” the twins shouted, as they waved farewell.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### A GIFT FROM AMBROSE

It was the evening before the party which was to “handsel”—Joan insisted on using the new word—the Abbey barn.

Jandy Mac had arrived from Scotland, had been met once more by Rachel and sent on her way, and would take Joan-Two back with her in a few days to see the invalid aunt. Jen had come from Yorkshire, leaving her husband well on the way to recovery, and bringing her sons, Andrew and Tony, and Joan’s elder boy, John. Joy was expected, with Sir Ivor and Baby David, in a few weeks’ time, but Joan had decided that the barn must have a welcome on its own account and that another party, to receive Joy, could be held later.

A vigorous game of cricket was in progress in the paddock adjoining the orchard behind the Hall. The twins, Lindy and Littlejan, had challenged the three boys and Jansy, and their shouts and cheers came ringing through the evening air.

On the terrace Joan, Jen, and Janice sat talking of old times, though Jen’s face was a little wistful as she heard the crack of ball on bat.

“I am enjoying this,” she said defiantly. “It’s lovely to have you two together here. But”—and she laughed.

“But you’d like to go and play with the younger crowd,” Joan said. “Run along and be a schoolgirl again, Jenny-Wren. Shall we come too?”

“Not to-night. We mustn’t butt in on their game,” Jen said firmly. “They’re very evenly matched, for the twins aren’t up to much as cricketers yet; let them play it out. But one day we’ll have a game for all the lot of us. Littlejan’s going to be as good as you used to be, Jandy Mac. She’ll have to choose between cricket and dancing at school. Perhaps the tragedy of my young days will be repeated.”

“She’ll choose to dance,” Janice said. “Joan says she’s going to be quite good.”

“I’ve been having classes, for her and the Edwards girls, and Lindy,” Joan explained. “I’ve chosen the programme for to-morrow night and they’ll be able—there’s the ’phone. Perhaps it’s Jack, to say he’ll be late home; he thought it might happen.”

She went indoors, and they heard her voice presently. “Oh, certainly! I’ll come at once. Thanks very much.”

“Not Jack, I think,” Jen remarked.

“It was Mr. Edwards, from the farm.” Joan looked at them from the doorway. “He’s home again, and he’s been preparing the barn for the party. He’s found something he wants me to see. I said I’d go now. Care to come?”

Jen was already on her feet. “*Care* to? As if we’d let you go finding things without us! What on earth can it be? Did he find it in the barn?”

“Surely the barn can’t hold any more secrets?” Janice cried. “Oh, we’re coming, of course, Joan!”

“Come on, then. I know no more than you do, and I’m fearfully curious. Mr. Edwards sounded so mysterious,” Joan said eagerly.

Much mystified, they went bareheaded through the garden, through the Abbey, and across the gate-house meadow. A gap had been broken in the hedge, so that it was no longer necessary to creep down the twins’ tunnel, and this opening-up of the back of the barn had

disclosed another porch-entrance among the ilex trees, like the one by which Joan and Maidlin had found their way in, directly opposite the first. "Like the transepts of a church," had been Joan's comment. "North and south transepts; the barn makes the shape of a cross."

Entering by the south transept, they found John Edwards awaiting them. The floor of the barn had been smoothed and levelled, and later on a wooden floor would be laid down. Propped against the projecting bit of the old upper storey, which Jen had called the musicians' gallery, was a ladder, and she turned to the farmer in breathless eagerness, before Joan could speak.

"Is it up there—what you've found? Up where I'm going to stand and pipe for the dancing?"

"I thought I'd see what there was up in that corner." John Edwards looked at Joan. "It's all dusty and cobwebs, so I thought it should be cleaned out before your Club comes here to dance. I went up and got poking round in a great heap of soil, that's piled in one corner; funny place to put it, away up there! Why not in a corner down here? Looked as if somebody'd done it a purpose, to hide something, perhaps."

They gazed at him, entranced. "And what did you find?" Jen gave a shout.

"How like the Abbey!" Joan exclaimed. "Heaps of earth in a queer corner, undisturbed for centuries! Please tell us quickly, Mr. Edwards!"

"Is it a skeleton?" Janice murmured, amusement in her eyes at this hark-back to their schooldays.

"I thought perhaps you'd like to see for yourself," he began.

Jen darted to the ladder. Then she drew back. "You first, Joan. But oh—do be quick!"

Joan laughed. "Up you go and tell us what you find, Jenny-Wren. I'm not afraid of ladders, but I'm sure you're even better on them than I am."

"May I? Oh, you angel!" Jen went up the ladder like a squirrel, in spite of her height.

There was a moment's pause. Janice caught Joan's eye, and a grin of excitement passed between them. Jen was looking at something in the corner, in the light that came from a high west window, just a narrow slit in the wall.

She came to the edge of the little platform. "Joan! Better come up and have a look. It's an old bell—a big one."

"A bell?" Joan sprang to the ladder.

Jen's hand shot out to grasp hers and draw her up. "Come on, Jandy Mac. There's room for three, even if I'm one of them."

They bent together over the old bell, still half hidden in the soil in which it had been buried.

"How odd!" Janice said softly. "Why is it here, do you suppose?"

"What do you think, Joan?" Jen's voice shook with suppressed excitement. "Did it come from the Abbey?"

"The Abbey bell," Joan said quietly, her tone full of deep feeling. "I should say there's no doubt about it. The barn was Abbey property. Somebody—perhaps even our dear old Ambrose!—rescued the bell and buried it here, and no one thought of it again for four hundred years. Why should they? It's only an old bell, from a church that has vanished!"

"But to us? To you, Joan?" Janice queried.

"To us—another treasure for the Abbey, of course——"

"Joan! Joan! Jandy!" Jen gave one of her old childish shrieks of excitement. "Don't you see? The bell—Bell's Farm! It solves our mystery; we've always wondered why it was called

Bell's Farm!"

Joan sat on her heels and gazed up at her. "I believe you're right, Jenny-Wren. You think the farm was called after the bell?"

"The Bell Farm, because in the old days everybody knew the bell was hidden there; then they forgot, but the name stayed on, but was altered by people to 'Bell's Farm', because it sounded more sensible," Jen said breathlessly.

"She's right, Joan!" Janice cried.

"What a satisfaction, to understand at last!" Joan drew a long breath. "We'll ask Mr. Edwards what he thinks. I'm going down to speak to him. The bell won't run away, after all these centuries."

"What shall you do with it?" Jen demanded, as Joan backed cautiously down the ladder. "Oh, let's hang it above the barn, and ring it when there's to be dancing!"

Joan laughed and shook her head. "It's the church bell. It must go back to the Abbey. Mr. Edwards, why is your farm known as Bell's Farm? There has never been anyone called Bell living in it, has there?"

"No, but there has been a bell!" Jen murmured irrepressibly. "Oh, I *am* so glad it was we three who saw it first! Pity Joy couldn't be here too! But nobody else—none of the children, nor even Ros and Maidie! Just us!"

"There's been a story in our family," John Edwards was saying, "that the Abbey bell was brought to us by one of those old ones who lived in the Abbey—a brother—some queer word \_\_\_\_\_"

"A lay brother?" Joan's eyes were bright.

"Aye, that's it—a lay brother. But no one knew where she was; she's been lost for hundreds of years. When I saw that old bell I wondered, and so I rang you up."

Joan's eyes met Jen's. "A lay brother of the Abbey," she said, deep meaning in her tone.

"Ambrose again," Jen said quietly. "Oh, Joan, of course it was Ambrose! He was just like a squirrel for burying things, dear old chap! We've said so before."

"He saved as much as he could from the ruin of the Abbey," Janice added.

"They do say it was the very old chap as lived in the gate-house and was buried down below." John Edwards eyed them, with interested sympathy.

"I found the place. He's a pal of ours," Jen explained. "The bell feels like a present from him, Mr. Edwards."

"Folks have forgotten about the bell, but I once asked my grandmother—she's ninety, but she remembers things all right—why we were called Bell's Farm, and she told me the old story."

"That explains it. We've never heard a whisper of it," Joan observed.

"What'll you do with her, ma'am?"

"The bell? I shall have to think about it."

"Hang it in the Abbey and ring it for weddings," Jen suggested.

"Weddings! What weddings can you see ahead? Maid's, of course; but after that the poor bell would have to be silent till the twins grow up."

"Oh, you never know! Maid's Damaris might marry and she'd want it to be here; she has no other home."

"But you couldn't ring a single bell for a wedding!" Janice objected. "You want a peal to sound joyful."

“Are there likely to be any more bells hidden somewhere, Joan? Were your monks allowed to ring peals of joy?” Jen asked.

“It wouldn’t be like them, would it? They were always restricted to simple things. They never had more than two bells, which had to be chimed by the same man; queer idea! You couldn’t do very much with two bells and one man.”

“Doesn’t sound quite like a wedding,” Jen admitted. “Well, hang the bell in the Abbey, and ring it for help, whenever the twins get themselves into a mess!”

Joan laughed. “I’d hope it would be silent for ever, if that was to be its duty! It’s the Abbey bell, Jenny-Wren; we’ll take it back and hang it on the refectory wall, where there’s a bell-cote waiting for it. It was meant for the bell that called the brothers to meals; our bell came from the church, I’m sure, by its size. But we’ll hang it on the refectory wall, in the cloister garth; it’s the best we can do, as the church has gone. And when people are shown over the Abbey, Aunt Ann—or whoever takes her place; she’s really past the job—will sound the bell to show its beautiful note. It’s sure to be lovely—if it isn’t cracked!”

“She isn’t cracked. I looked her over careful. I’ll fetch her down for you,” John Edwards said.

“We must say ‘she’, not ‘it’, evidently,” Joan smiled. “Why not ‘he’, Mr. Edwards? Would the monks have a lady hanging in their church?”

“Bells is always shes,” said Mr. Edwards. “Why I do not know, but ’tis so.”

“Like cars, and engines, and ships,” Jen murmured, grinning at Janice.

“We didn’t know, but we’ll remember,” Joan said. “You fetch her down, and we’ll hang her up, and then we can hear her voice. She looks very heavy!”

“Weighs a ton, I should think,” Jen suggested.

“Not more than a quarter,” Mr. Edwards said decisively.

Joan looked at him. “Would it—she!—weigh as much as that? Five hundredweight?”

“Or six or seven; not more. She isn’t a big bell, as bells go. A very big one might weigh a couple of tons.”

“Gosh!” said Janice. “I’d no idea they were so heavy!”

“Don’t pull down the refectory with her weight, Joan,” Jen warned her.

“The wall will stand that much. My plan’s rather nice, you know, Jen. We shall hear her in the house; she’s sure to carry a long way—you may even hear her at the Manor. And we’ll know people are in the Abbey, enjoying it.”

Jen nodded. “I like your idea. Our own private Big Ben, saying: ‘Guests in the Abbey!’ at all hours of the day. And I shall think: ‘Lucky dogs, seeing it for the first time!’”

“But you could ring it—her!—for the dancing to-morrow night, just to introduce her voice to us, Joan,” Janice pleaded.

“To tell the Hamlet Club of our newest treasure,” Joan agreed. “I think we must do that, Jandy Mac. Don’t say a word to anybody, even the children. We’ll give everyone a surprise. I do hope she has a deep rich tone!”

“Not like that clangy thing you have at the door, for tourists to summon Mrs. Watson,” Jen remarked. “But don’t use her as a door-bell, Joan! It wouldn’t be dignified.”

“Oh no! We won’t degrade her into a door-bell,” Joan said quickly. “She’s the Abbey bell, and she shall be treated with proper respect.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE CECILY AND MICHAEL

John Edwards went up the ladder again and, producing a small torch, looked over the bell carefully.

“We hadn’t a torch and that window doesn’t give much light,” Jen exclaimed.

“I wonder what he’s looking for?” Joan began.

“There’s letters on her, ma’am. Words and verses,” John spoke from the high platform. “Bells often has verses on them, and dates, and their names. Care to have a look?”

“An inscription!” Jen and Joan sprang to the ladder, with Janice close behind.

Once more Jen drew back. “You first, old dear! Go up and read her name.”

Joan went up the ladder at top speed, with Jen and Janice on her heels.

“Thank you so much, Mr. Edwards! May we see?”

He held the torch low so that they could read the words, inscribed in ancient letters round the bell.

Near the top they were small, but plain to see.

CECILIA IS MY HOLIE NAYME  
TO PRAYSE YE LORDE MY ONLIE AYME

“Cecilia!” Jen gave a subdued shout. “Oh, *Joan!*”

“How marvellous!” Joan spoke under her breath, while Janice watched her eagerly. “That’s a lovely name.”

“Yes, but you don’t see it all yet!” Jen cried. “Cecilia—Cicely—Cecily! It was Cicely who gave us folk-dancing and made us friends. But for Cicely I might never have known you and nothing would ever have happened. It was Cicely who first brought the Club to the Abbey; Cicely, who *made* the Hamlet Club!—And Cecily; that’s red Cecily Perowne, who so often fiddles for us to dance! *Now*, Joan! Isn’t it unbelievable good luck that our bell should be called Cecilia?”

“It’s a very good name for a bell,” Janice remarked. “Wasn’t St Cecilia the saint of song and music?”

“It’s very satisfying that our bell should be Cecilia,” Joan agreed. “Jenny-Wren, you’re quite right, and it is thrilling, but if you fall off this platform you won’t pipe from it to-morrow night.”

“Nor dance.” Jen calmed down. “I’ll be careful. But—gosh! I am glad she’s called Cecilia!”

“There’s more on her waist, where she’s bigger,” said John Edwards.

Joan grinned. “Her waist would be bigger than her neck. Let’s see! She may have more to tell us.”

“Come on, Cecilia! Out with it!” Jen murmured. “Tell us all your secrets!”

Joan read the larger letters on the wider part of the bell.

WITH HOLIE MICHAEL HEERE I STANDE  
AND JOYFULL SINGE ATT HIS COMMANDE



“How difficult they made things for themselves, by that complicated spelling!” Janice murmured.

Joan and Jen were looking at one another.

“What does she mean?” Jen demanded. “Where’s Michael? Oh, Joan, was he the second bell—the one we haven’t found?”

“Might be,” Joan said cautiously. “But she may mean the Abbot Michael. He’s sure to have had a hand in making—don’t you say casting?—the bells. ‘At his command’; that sounds as if he had put her there.”

“If ‘his’ had a capital H, it might be ‘the Lord’s command’,” Janice suggested.

“Yes, we can’t tell. Michael may be the abbot, or he may have been the second bell.”

John Edwards pointed to a third couplet, on the lower rim of the bell. “There’s more,” he said. “Two lines, right round.”

“Good girl, Cecilia!” said Jen. “She has lots more to tell us. They’re long lines, to go right round the edge.”

CECILY AND MICHAEL WE SERVE YE LORDE RIGHTE MERRILIE  
JOYFULL SINGE BOTH LOW AND HIE PRAYSE HIM PRAYSE HIM TO YE SKYE

“Most suitable, for bells—‘to the sky’,” Janice commented.

“It sounds like two bells,” Joan observed.

“Oh, there must have been two!” Jen said quickly. “Cecily alone couldn’t sing both low and high! I wonder if we shall ever find Michael?”

Joan smiled up at her. “I’m sure we shall, some day, though I’ve no idea where or how. We always seem to find things, don’t we? Some day we shall have Michael too.”

“Cecily and Michael! Darlings!” Jen murmured. “I shall always call her Cecilia.”

“Will you still feel you can ring her for to-morrow’s party, Joan?” Janice asked wistfully. “I do want to hear her voice. But all that about ‘my onlie ayme’ and ‘praise the Lorde’. What do you think?”

“I think,”—Jen broke out, before Joan could speak, “that anything which makes us, and so many other people, so perfectly happy must be praising the Lord in the best possible way. I say, ring Cecilia for country-dancing always, Joan!”

“I agree.” Joan smiled up at them, as she knelt. “Cecilia shall do her old job and praise the Lord when we’re going to dance. When I come away from a party where everybody has been happy and jolly, I often feel really thankful that we’ve found something so good and sound and wholesome and been allowed to pass it on to others. It seems to me that to feel like that is ‘praising the Lord.’ Cecilia shall put it into beautiful music for us.”

“Oh, good!” Janice said happily. “Good old Cecilia! You shall have your share in the jolly times at the Abbey again. I do hope you have a lovely voice!”

“It can’t be very deep. Michael would be the lower note. Cecilia must have been the high one,” Joan remarked.

“I’d like to point out,” Jen said, with energy, as she patted Cecilia’s round bronze shoulder, “that she sang ‘merrilie’ and she was ‘joyfull’. She says twice over that she was joyful; she says nothing about being solemn. Most suitable for her to call people to dance and be merry and joyful!”

“It’s true, Jenny-Wren,” Joan smiled again, as she backed down the ladder. “I’m sure Cecilia was a happy lady. We’re all longing to hear her joyful voice.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

### INVITATION TO THE DANCE

“Is your white frock all right for the party, Littlejan?” Janice asked that evening.

Joan-Two looked suddenly mysterious. “Quite perfectly O.K., Mother dear. I haven’t worn it since we were at the Castle. I’ve been in bed nearly all the time I’ve been here.”

“It sounds very sad,” Janice said laughing. “But you’ve had quite a good time, you know.”

“Oh, a marvellous time! And I’ve been all right for days, but I haven’t had on my white frock.”

“Well, dress early and come to me and let me see,” Janice commanded.

An hour before the guests were due to arrive, Joan-Two danced into her mother’s room, wearing a loosely-swinging frock of vivid green. “Mother! *Look* at me! Isn’t it a glorious colour?”

“I am looking,” Janice assured her. “What’s the meaning of this?”

“It’s a real Hamlet Club dance-frock, and it’s a present from Aunt Joan. She says white’s all right but colours are nicer, and the more brilliant we can look the better.”

“We shall certainly look brilliant if we dance together!” said Janice, who wore a summer frock of pale yellow, which suited her dark colouring as well as the green suited Joan-Two.

“The twins and Jansy have dresses of this same green. They look lovely in green,” Littlejan said eagerly. “So in ‘Newcastle’ you four men will have four little green women for partners.”

“What a fascinating idea! You’ll make a pretty star, when you four go into the middle,” Janice said laughing.

“The lines will look marvellous, with us in between all your colours!”

“So they will. I wonder what the other ‘men’ are wearing?”

“Aunt Joan has a lovely pale grey; she says she always wears it for dancing. It makes her hair look redder than ever! The Countess will wear blue, and Miss Maid has a goldy frock, something like yours. They were afraid she’d wear pink, as she had a new pink dress for the Coronation last May; so Aunt Joan rang up and said we couldn’t have any pink, with four Abbey red-heads in the set!”

“Very wise of Aunt Joan. Our family set will look most attractive, with our four little green women!”

“We want you downstairs. I came to fetch you,” Joan-Two said mysteriously. “You’re ready, aren’t you? Come on, then! Uncle Jack and I have a surprise for you.”

“Oh, I’m to hear about it at last, am I?” Janice teased, as she picked up her dancing shoes and followed.

It was hopeless to expect Jack Raymond to make the presentation, however. He had flatly refused to do it, and it was Joan who laid the brown-paper book of pictures in Jandy’s hands.

“For you, Jandy Mac, from Jack and Littlejan. He’s too shy to speak for himself.”

“How very kind! But what is it?” Janice exclaimed. “I thought perhaps it was the picture of Littlejan which he promised me.—Oh, Joan! Oh, this is far too good of you!” and she went quickly to Jack, her dark eyes suddenly soft with gratitude. “What a lot of trouble you must have taken! I do thank you very deeply.”

“We enjoyed making it, Joan the Second and I,” he said, colouring at the depth of feeling in her tone.

“Look at it, Mother! It’s *eight* pictures of me, and he’ll do four more, at least. He’s left pages blank for them. Which do you like best?” Littlejan came eagerly to her mother’s side. “Look at them all, and say which is the nicest, and Uncle Jack will make it into a really big one for you. You’re to choose the one you’d like.”

“They’re all very clear. Any of them will enlarge,” Joan said.

Jandy’s hands shook a little as she sat down and turned the pages, and Jack watched her and was satisfied that his time and labour had been well spent. The photos were full-plate size, so were reasonably big already, and were neatly mounted on large brown pages. They were carefully posed and beautifully taken, and Janice knew the book would be an endless joy on her lonely voyage across the world, when the time came to say good-bye to her only girl.

Littlejan in breeches—on Chestnut in the park at Kentisbury—in her dressing-gown, lying in a chair on the terrace and entitled “The Interesting Invalid”—crouching on a bed with Lindy, by candle-light—Littlejan and the twins at the door of the barn—Littlejan and Miss Belinda beside the chapter-house windows—Littlejan standing in the arch of the old gate-house, the way she loved to enter the Abbey—and last of all, Littlejan in the green dancing frock—each picture told its story and would be full of happy memories to Janice.

“We want you to choose the last four pictures,” Joan-Two whispered, with a glance at her mother’s deeply-moved face. “Tell us what you’d like me to be doing, and we’ll make it for you. Isn’t he a dear, Mother?”

“A perfect dear, Littlejan. I shall take you back with me on the ship, after all. It’s a beautiful thought, and beautifully carried out.”

“Will you dance with him at the party? He wants you to; he said he’d like it. But——”

Janice laughed. “I shall be proud and delighted. I didn’t know Uncle Jack was a dancer.”

“Oh yes, he is! He’s going to dance ‘We Won’t Go Home till Morning’ with me.”

“You shall have ‘Butterfly’ with him, Jandy,” Joan remarked. “I met him at a dancing-school, you know.” And she smiled at the memory of those days.

“What’s that?” Littlejan looked up curiously.

“What bell’s that?” Elizabeth and Margaret and Jansy burst into the room in a state of wild excitement and curiosity.

“We never heard it before! Where is it?” Margaret shouted.

An eager look passed from Joan to Janice.

“She has a lovely contralto voice, like Maid’s! Oh, I am so glad!” Joan murmured.

“Joan, how beautiful! How you’ll enjoy hearing her!” Janice cried.

“Who is she? Where is she?” Jansy demanded.

“What is she? Sounds like a church bell,” Elizabeth argued. “We haven’t any church in our garden! Where’s it coming from?”

“From the Abbey. Her name’s Cecilia, and she’s the Abbey bell. We found her in the barn, last night, and Mr. Edwards has hung her on the wall of the refectory for us,” Joan explained. “You’ll hear her often; just a note or two, when people come to see the Abbey. To-night we’re ringing her for the party. She’s calling you to come and dance. Run along to the garth and have a look at her.”

Lindy, in a pale blue dance frock, appeared at the door, looking startled. “What is it?” she asked.

“We’ll tell you! Come and see!” The twins seized her hands. “On the garth—the Abbey bell—it’s new! It’s got a name—Cicely—no, Cecilia! Got your shoes and your coat? Come on then, Miss Belinda!” and they dragged her away, with Jansy and Littlejan escorting her also, in a whirl of red heads and green frocks.

“Those four really ought to have a dance together to-night,” Janice exclaimed. “I haven’t thanked you for Littlejan’s charming frock. She’s thrilled to the limit by it.”

“They shall make a set for ‘Rufty’,” Joan promised. “And I’ll go into another set with Miss Belinda and the Edwards children from the farm and see them safely through.”

At the Manor Jen was entertaining the first Queen of the Hamlet Club, Miriam, and the one and only President, Cicely, when the clear voice of the Abbey bell reached them across the park and gardens.

Jen raised her head eagerly to listen. “Oh, *nice!*” she said. “Good old Ambrose! He tucked her away in a corner and I was the first of us to see her! I’ve been waiting to hear her voice. She’s the Abbey bell, Miriam; Joan has often wished she had it. We found her last night, in the barn. Come and have a look at her; it’s on our way. Her name’s Cecilia—like yours, Madam President! She has verses written round her; I’ll recite them as we go through the garden. Come, boys, and Mirry and Cis! Time to go and dance! The good old bell’s calling to us!”

As they reached the Abbey, there came a shout from the entrance door, which Mrs. Watson had just opened in response to eager clamour from without, and Rosamund and Maidlin came hurrying across the garth.

“Jen! This is something new! We heard the bell, as we left the car,” Rosamund cried, watching John Edwards with fascinated eyes, as he pulled rhythmically on Cecilia’s rope. “Is it to welcome us? What a marvellous idea!”

“It’s the invitation to the dance,” Jen said, and looked at Maidlin. “She’s a sweet mellow contralto, like you, Maid. Oh, my dear girls, we haven’t told you yet! She’s the Abbey bell, the real original Abbey bell—one of them; there were two. Her name’s Cecilia; it’s written all round her. The other one was Michael—Michael and Cecily! Perhaps Michael will turn up some day too.”

“Oh—Jen! Really?” Maidlin’s voice dropped to an awed whisper. “The real Abbey bell? You’ve found it, after all these years? Oh, how pleased Joan must be!”

“But how? When? And where?” Rosamund demanded. “How long have you kept this from us?”

“Only since last night. We found her—not it, Maid; bells are ladies. We found her in the barn. Come and dance! That’s what she’s saying. I’ll tell you her story as we go. We’ll ring her for your wedding, Maid.”

“She’s beautiful; so sweet, and clear, and not at all shrill,” Maidlin said happily. “We must go and congratulate Joan. How wonderful that it all happened when she was here!”

“We can hardly say—‘Because she was here,’ I suppose,” Jen admitted. “Yes, it’s marvellous to have good old Joan at home and finding things again; quite like old times!”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

# THE VOICE OF THE ABBEY

The first party in the tithe-barn was long remembered as one of the jolliest the Hamlet Club had known. Invited and rung in by Cecilia, the dancers came from every quarter and crowded on the floor, eagerly making long lines, or rounds, or squares, as the choice of dance demanded. Violinists were there who gave music that was perfect in lilt and rhythm, for they had played for the Club for years; Margia, the musician of the very early days, took turns with Maribel, young Mrs. Marchwood, who had come from town to help. Red-haired Cecily Perowne was in Switzerland with her invalid mother, or she would have been there to do her share also.

Jen, in her blue dancing frock, claimed one after another of her friends as a partner, and then took up her little pipe, mounted the ladder to the musicians' gallery, and whistled a gay "Newcastle" for the family set, while the crowd drew back to the walls to look on. Janice and Littlejan and the twins were closely watched by the other four and came through without mishap, though a grin went round the barn as Margaret was firmly seized and pulled into her line by Rosamund, when if left to herself she would have dashed across and made five on one side and three on the other. The onlookers clearly heard Elizabeth's—"Oh, Twin, you *silly* girl!"—above the thin silver notes of the pipe; then the dance was safely over, and Margaret was explaining loudly that she never could remember where to go in the first line—"The second's easy. I always know where I am in that one, Twin," she pleaded.

"The lines looked marvellous, Joan," Jen called from her perch. "Your grey and blue, and gold and lemon, between all the greens, made a perfect picture. Couldn't you do it again? I loved playing for you—you all looked so pretty!"

"Come down and dance yourself, Jenny-Wren," Rosamund cried. "You're blue too. Come and take my partner!"

"No, I'd rather be the music for this. You've no idea how nice you looked," Jen mocked.

"Oh, we can guess," Joan said, laughing. "Pipe again for everybody, Jenny-Wren; we won't take the whole floor any longer. 'Newcastle' for everybody, people!" and the floor filled in a moment with eager couples. The family set was broken up, as Margaret dashed to seize Jen's eight-year-old Andrew as her partner; Maidlin, forsaken, held out her hand to Lindy Bellanne—"I'll take care of you, Belinda!"—Rosamund turned to Janice with an invitation, and Elizabeth seized Joan-Two's hand—"I'll be man. I don't mind which I am. I won't get lost; I'm not Margaret-Twin! But our colours will be all messed up."

"You didn't look nearly as nice that time," Jen jeered, as she came down the ladder and left the music to the violins again. "One more 'Newcastle' for me, please. I must have it with Joan."

From a corner John Edwards watched his small daughters finding their way safely through several easy dances, though, as it was their first party, they looked harassed and a little nervous, as well as very proud, for a time, until they gained confidence, when they found that no one was troubled by their mistakes.

Watching with the farmer were Lord Kentisbury and Dr. John Robertson, Maidlin's "Jock," who had not yet been persuaded to take part himself but who came to watch Maidlin whenever she danced, finding great delight in her beautiful musical movement.

"I like this. I've seen it before," he exclaimed, as at a chord from the violins, the many-coloured crowd began to sort itself into rings, one inside the other. The outer ring reached to the walls of the barn; the innermost was the "family eight" who had danced "Newcastle," with Jen and Lindy, Jen's two boys, Andrew and Tony, Joan's elder son John, and the reigning little queen, Mirry.

"It's 'Sellenger's Round.' I'm afraid it means the end of a jolly evening," said Lord Kentisbury.

"There'll be another very soon," Joan assured him, as she hurried to her place. "We can always find an excuse to dance. We've properly introduced the Hamlet Club to the barn tonight, and it won't be long before Cecilia calls us together again. We shall have to welcome Joy home next month. But we mustn't wear out our little dancers, green or otherwise; it's late for our younger members. So after 'Sellenger's Round' we'll send them all home to bed. Ready, thank you, Margia and Maribel!"

"Three cheers for the tithe-barn and Cecilia, the Abbey bell!" Jen shouted, and the cheers filled the barn.

"Now I feel I really belong, because I've danced at one of your parties!" Littlejan's exultant voice rang out.

Joan heard and smiled at her. "In our barn, which you helped to find. Of course you belong; haven't you been part of 'Newcastle,' in a family set?"

"I hope I'll dance lots more with you!"

"I'm quite sure you will," Joan laughed, and went to say good-bye to the President and the first and last queens, who were going home together.

Jock Robertson whispered a word to Maidlin, who nodded, with eager eyes. He spoke to John Edwards, who slipped out of the barn.

As the cars rolled away and the cycles were wheeled out, the musical note of Cecilia floated over the meadow from the Abbey.

"Ringing us out! Oh, that's splendid!" Joan exclaimed. "Who thought of it?"

"Jock." Maidlin smiled. "He asked me if you'd like it, and we begged Mr. Edwards to ring Cecilia. She's saying good-night to the party."

"A happy thought, Maidie and Jock." Joan went with them to the Kentisbury car.

"Oh, *isn't* it nice to have our own place to dance in?" Jen sighed happily, as, with Joan and Janice, she walked back to the Abbey, following the children who had gone with Lindy in a noisy crowd. "Our own hall; no need to go all the way to Darley's End to find a barn!"

"I've a great affection for Darley's Barn," Joan said. "It was where I first saw country-dancing. How kind Cicely was to Joy and me at that time! But I'm glad we have our own barn now. Since Dorothy Darley married and went abroad, there was really no reason for us to go to Darley's End."

"And the Abbey has given five queens to the Club already," Jen added. "Darley's never had any queens!"

"Already? Are you expecting more?" Janice asked.

"You never know. I shouldn't wonder if Joan's young Jansy became Queen Janice some day."

"To say nothing of Twin Queens!" Joan laughed. "But that's looking rather far ahead. Yes, I'm glad we have our own barn; we like to entertain the Club, and we've had wonderful parties on the lawn, but there was always the fear of rain or drizzle. Joy has so often had to take the crowd indoors and make them dance one or two sets at a time."

“And move the furniture and get all kicked and bruised, when we bumped into one another! That will never happen again,” Jen exulted. “I *meant* those three cheers for the barn!”

“And Cecilia,” Joan agreed. “We’re rich to-day, Jenny-Wren. Perhaps Jandy Mac and Littlejan have brought us luck.”

“More likely to be yourself that brought the luck, by coming home to the Abbey again,” Janice said. “I want to tell you something my young Joan said to me during the dancing. While you clever people were doing ‘Picking Up Sticks,’ she cuddled close to me, in a way she doesn’t often do now, though she used to do it as a baby. It always means she wants to say something but she’s feeling a little shy. And she whispered—‘Mother, I’ve been thinking. You know I said the Abbey was a welcoming sort of place? I said it as soon as I came here.’”

“Did she, indeed?” Joan commented. “Clever girl! But it was you who put it into her head.”

“No, she felt it for herself; she says you’re all so good to people here. She has a theory that the monks have left their ghosts in the Abbey and you try to live up to the spirit of the ghosts. It’s her own original idea; she thought of it in the gate-house, she says.”

“That’s charming of Littlejan. We shall have to live up to her good idea of us,” Joan said soberly.

“You won’t find it hard to satisfy her. I agreed with her that the Abbey was a welcoming sort of place, and she went on—‘Well, that lovely bell—Cecilia or Cecily; it’s been welcoming all these people to-night. It’s like the Abbey finding a voice, isn’t it?’ And I said I thought it was.”

“The voice of the Abbey!” Jen exclaimed. “And raised in welcome to our dancers! Oh, Jandy Mac, that’s a marvellous idea! Good for Joan-Two!”

Joan’s eyes were bright. “Littlejan has put into words what we’ve all been feeling after—the right use for our Cecilia. She shall be the welcoming voice of the Abbey—for Joy when she comes home—for me when I come—for Maidie’s wedding—for our dancers—and for our tourist-guests. That shall be Cecilia’s work; the Abbey has found a voice. And we’re all going to love your Littlejan for you, when you have to leave her with us, Jandy Mac!”

“That will make me very happy in saying good-bye to her,” Janice said quietly.

[The end of *Two Joans at the Abbey* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]