

DOWNWAYS  
IN THE  
ABBAY

E. J.  
Kernham



COLLINS

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# STOWAWAYS IN THE ABBEY



S.A.

*Sir Keith looked at her steadily, his tired dark eyes keen and piercing.*

*(See page 128)*

# STOWAWAYS IN THE ABBEY

*by*  
ELSIE J. OXENHAM



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TO  
MY FATHER  
**JOHN OXENHAM**  
WITH LOVE AND THANKS  
FOR SYMPATHY AND ENCOURAGEMENT

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## CHAPTER I

### A BLOW FOR JEN

Jen Robins sat up in bed with a jerk.

"I'll go and tell Joan now—this minute! It's seven o'clock; she's sure to be awake. Gosh! I am in a mess! I must have been pitching about in my sleep. I don't remember dreaming anything very dreadful!"

She regarded her dishevelled condition severely. Her thick pigtail was loosened and she was shrouded in long yellow locks. She chuckled and began to plait it hurriedly. "Can't go to call on Joan looking like that! I am a sight! Jack would call me Rapunzel again. That's better; I look more civilised now." She flung back the heavy plait and reached for her blue dressing-gown and slippers.

She was spending the week-end at the Hall, with the Shirleys, the red-haired cousins who had been her first friends at school. Though Jen—Jenny-Wren to her chums,—was only fourteen and Joan and Joy Shirley were seventeen, the friendship was real and deep, and Jen, who was a boarder at school, had already paid many visits to the Hall. She was also maid-of-honour to Joan, last year's May Queen, and she was burning with eagerness to share with Joan the great thought which had seized her mind while she was still only half awake.

"It's the idea of the century," she murmured, her blue eyes dancing. "I couldn't even dress, let alone eat any breakfast, till I've talked to Joan. I hope her headache's better; she felt rotten last night."

She crept along the corridor to the door of Joan's room. To her dismay, it opened as she reached it, and Mrs. Shirley came out.

"Oh, Auntie Shirley! How you made me jump!" Jen cried. The relationship was one of adoption only, but her affection for Joan's mother was unbounded. "I want to speak to Joan," Jen hurried on. "Is she all right this morning?"

"I'm afraid not. No, don't go in, Jen." Mrs. Shirley looked worried. "Joan's head is still bad and she doesn't want to talk. Don't go to Joy either, for a little while. I shall send for the doctor and ask him to look at them both."

Jen's face fell. "Oh, what hard luck! They'll be all right by this afternoon, when Jack comes, won't they? You won't have to put her off?"

"We couldn't let Jack come unless the girls are better. We'll hope for the best. I'd be sorry to disappoint you and Jack."

"Is Joy's cold still bad? She thought perhaps going to bed early would stop it," Jen said anxiously. "It was dreadful at tea-time, wasn't it?"

Mrs. Shirley agreed, her troubled look deepening. "I hoped we should be able to check it, but she is quite ill this morning. Joy isn't strong, in herself, though she's much better than she was in London. It was on her account we came to live in the country, and I'm always worried when she has any illness. This time I'm afraid—but we can't be sure till the doctor has been. I may be wrong; I hope I am."

"Afraid of what?" Jen exclaimed. "Joy isn't going to be really ill, is she? It's not pneumonia, or anything like that? Poor old Joy!"

"It's not as bad as that," Mrs. Shirley said hastily. "Go and dress, Jen. I'll tell you more when the doctor has been. But don't go to either of the girls just now."

"Give Joan my love; and Joy, too, of course," Jen added. "Odd that they should both be ill at once! Horribly bad luck on us all! I'll do anything I can to help, Auntie Shirley. We'll have to put Jack off; it's rotten, but you can't have an extra visitor just now. Will you want me to go back to school?"

Mrs. Shirley smiled at the anxious little face. "I can't tell you yet, Jen dear. I'll phone for the doctor; then we shall know."

Jen went soberly back to her room. "What a blow! And Jacky-boy invited for the week-end, for a special celebration for her birthday! I can't help wishing Joan and Joy had chosen another time to have colds."

She dressed, and brushed her long hair, plaiting it in two smooth tails, then flung them back and stood gazing out at the lawn and the glimpse of the Abbey ruins above the trees. "Such a gorgeous day! If Jack hadn't had to go to school for games club committee this morning, she'd have come with me last night. If she'd been here they might not have sent her home, but as she isn't here I don't believe they'll let her come, if the girls are really ill. They may send me away too. How—how grim! It was to be such a marvellous week-end, with Jack and me, and Joan and Joy! I had such topping plans. As for my new idea, it will have to wait, that's all."

Feeling very lonely, she went down to breakfast to join Mrs. Shirley, who was too burdened and anxious to talk much.

"Go into the garden, Jen dear, or into the Abbey," Mrs. Shirley said, as she rose. "The doctor will be here in an hour, and after he has gone we shall be able to make plans."

"Are the girls any better? Has Joan had any brekker?" Jen asked, full of sympathy.

"Just a cup of tea. Joy doesn't want even that."

"They must be feeling rotten!"

"I'm afraid they are," Mrs. Shirley smiled slightly. She was becoming more certain what was the matter with every visit to the girls, but there was no use in breaking the news to Jen till her fears were confirmed.

Jen fetched her jersey and went bare-headed across the lawn, her face grave. Jack's visit was sure to be cancelled; would her own share the same fate? Would a few hours see her back at school?

She went down a path between rhododendron bushes and unlocked an ancient gate. It led her into a tiny garden, filled with blue pansies and yellow snapdragons and low red roses. Looking down on these were wonderful old windows, set in a high wall, and below the windows a doorway, leading to a dark stone passage.

Jen went soberly through the garden and the tunnel and came out on the sunny green lawn in the midst of the Abbey ruins, which Joan called the cloister garth. On her right was the beautiful doorway of the chapter-house, through which she glanced to the fields beyond, as the back wall was broken half away and covered with moss. On her left were the entrance gate and the remains of the cloisters; above the tunnel by which she had come stood the great refectory, with high Perpendicular windows looking over the garth.

Jen crossed the grass to the sunny wall opposite, which screened the site of the vanished church. A scrap of stone-carving marked the place where the Abbot's seat had been, in the days when the cloisters had gone right round the garth. Just under the seat, in the grass, lay a round furry heap, soft and warm in the sunshine.

Jen flung herself down and put her head on the big cat. "Oh, Mummy! Mother Superior, isn't it ghastly? Your missus can't come to see you—Joan's ill! And I'm afraid they'll send me back to school! Oh, dear old thing, I could weep, if I was that sort of creature!"

The Mother Superior looked at her and gave a questioning "P-r-r?" A shaggy grey kitten of eighteen months old pranced up, shaking his long fur, and began to play with the yellow plaits that lay on the grass.

Jen whisked them away indignantly. "Timmy, I've just done my hair! You think I have these for your benefit, don't you? My child, I only keep them to please Daddy; he says that after having so many boys, as he's had a girl at last he wants her to look like a girl. If I had my choice, I'd be as bobbed as Jack. I wonder if perhaps in four years Daddy won't mind so much? When it comes to putting it in a bun and being a stodgy grown-up, I should think he'd be glad for me to cut it off. I'm the youngest; they'll feel terribly elderly! I believe it would be curly if I cut it; Daddy might like to have me looking like a little girl. That's something to hope for! Oh, Timmy, have you heard the awful news?"

She sat up, gazing across the garth with anxious eyes. The Mother Superior looked at her sleepily, then rose and stretched, stepped daintily into the inviting lap, and curled down to sleep again.

Jen laughed, in spite of her troubles. "I'm anchored! You silly old lady, how can I stay here without even a book? You are trusting, aren't you? Oh, well, I shall just have to sit and think!"

Her mind went back to the idea which had come to her as she woke, and she sighed. "It will have to wait. I was all thrilled about it! But if they send me back to school there'll be no hope. I wonder how soon we'll know?"

## CHAPTER II IN QUARANTINE

A maid appeared at the door of the passage, calling her. "Miss Jen! The doctor wants to see you."

"See *me*? There's nothing the matter with *me*!" Jen protested. She laid the Mother Superior gently on the grass, chased Timmy away, and went racing to the house.

The doctor and Mrs. Shirley were waiting on the terrace. "The doctor wants to speak to you, Jen dear," Mrs. Shirley explained.

"I'm all right." Jen looked up at Dr. Brown in an injured way. "*I* haven't got a cold or a headache."

"Good!" he smiled. "Nor a sore throat? Nor any aches and pains anywhere?"

"Not one. I'm as right as can be."

"And what about that ankle I was called to see, a few weeks ago?"

"I'd forgotten it. It doesn't hurt. I've been dancing, and I took five wickets last Wednesday in a match."

"Congratulations! Then we may say the ankle is cured." He turned to Mrs. Shirley. "She's all right. I'll be in again to-morrow, and I'll send the nurse at once."

"Nurse!" Jen gasped. "Are Joan and Joy so terribly ill? Oh, please tell me!"

"Not at all," he said hastily. "Joan will be almost well again in a day or two; not much the matter with her—quite a slight case. But you mustn't see her, of course. Joy will take longer. We can't allow Mrs. Shirley to do nursing, you know; she'd be our next patient."

"Oh! I'm sorry; I didn't think. Of course, she mustn't make herself ill," Jen cried.

Mrs. Shirley smiled and sighed. "I'd like to do it, but no one will hear of it. Joan is sure that in a day or two she'll be able to help, but just at present I'm afraid we must have somebody."

"I suppose I couldn't do anything?" Jen asked wistfully.

"I expect we shall find you can do a great deal," and Mrs. Shirley turned to say good-bye to the doctor as he hurried to his car.

Jen stood on the terrace, her face aglow with hope. "Then—oh, Auntie Shirley, you aren't going to send me back to school before Monday? Oh, let me stay and help you!"

Mrs. Shirley was small and frail, her dark hair turning white; Joan, tall and strong and with vivid bronze hair, was like her father, and in every way she tried to take care of her mother. Jen could readily believe that even a strange nurse in the house would seem better to Joan than the thought of her mother burdened with extra work.

Mrs. Shirley put her arm round her would-be assistant. "Jen, dear, I have something to tell you. The doctor confirmed what I suspected. The girls have measles, Joan slightly, Joy rather badly——"

"Measles!" Jen said slowly. "Measles! Oh—hard lines! Where did they catch it? Nobody's had it at school."

"Dr. Brown says there have been several cases in the town, and there are a number of fresh ones yesterday and this morning. He wasn't surprised. But don't you see what it means, Jen? You were with the girls last night; you and Joan were sitting in the Abbey, and you were with Joy at tea before she went to bed."

Jen looked at her round-eyed. "You mean—I may have taken it from Joan and I'll begin presently? Could she give it to me last night, before you knew? Then"—her mind leapt to the consequences—"I can't go back to school! They won't have me, will they? Won't I be in quarantine?" her eyes blazed.

"Jen, you're a naughty girl," Mrs. Shirley scolded, but laughed in spite of herself. "I believe you're pleased!"

"Pleased! It's marvellous!" Jen shouted. "I can stay here and help you. There'll be heaps I can do without going into the—the infected quarters of the house! You'll keep me, won't you? There isn't anywhere else I could go, if they won't have me at school!"

"I'm sure Miss Macey won't want you. It would mean keeping you apart from the rest of the girls until the danger is past. Of course you must stay here. It's our fault that you've been in contact with the infection, though we couldn't know what was going to happen."

"It was simply sweet of you to infect me!" Jen cried exuberantly. "I never was so glad about anything before! Right in the middle of the summer term—oh, marvellous!"

"Jen, you're really very naughty," Mrs. Shirley said laughing. "I sincerely hope we haven't infected you, and that in a fortnight Dr. Brown will send you back to school."

"Yes, but a fortnight's holiday, in the summer—oh, Auntie Shirley, I know I'm bad, but would you mind if I danced a jig? I think perhaps a morris, with some very high capers, might work off my joy a little."

Mrs. Shirley shook her head at her. "And what about your place in class?"

"I don't care two hoots. I'm not taking any exam., and if I'm bottom I shall have a good excuse. I'll be able to say I missed a fortnight; nobody could expect me to be anything but bottom."

"And what about cricket?"

"I'm sorry, of course," Jen admitted. "I shall have to let Jack down again. She'll be sorry she put me in the team; I haven't been much use to her. First my ankle, and now the Abbey measles! But Jack will know it can't be helped. She wouldn't like me to give the whole team measles! I've played for her in three big matches anyway. What can I do to help you first, Auntie Shirley?"

"I must go up to the girls again. You might phone to your friend and tell her what has happened. You know how to do it, don't you?"

"Rather! Yes, I'd like to tell Jack. If I do it at once I may catch her before she goes to her committee. She mustn't come here, of course."

"I'm afraid you'll have a dull time and be very lonely, Jenny-Wren. We can't have friends here for you, and we can't let you be with Joan or Joy."

Jen made a grimace. "I like to be with people! I'm a person who likes company."

"Naturally sociable." Mrs. Shirley smiled. "You certainly are. What will you do with yourself? You'll have to keep away from everybody, you know."

"I may go in the Abbey and talk to the cats, mayn't I?"

"Oh, surely! But don't wander underground and lose yourself."

"I won't," Jen promised earnestly. "I love the Abbey, every bit of it, but somehow I feel I can be satisfied with the upstairs parts of it just now."

"Your experiences in the vaults are still too fresh in your memory," Mrs. Shirley assented. "That's a promise, then. You won't go wandering alone in the passages."

"No, Auntie Shirley, I won't. I don't want to see those tunnels again for a long while."

"Then I shall feel safe about you. Go and talk to Jack; presently I shall ring up Miss Macey and ask her to send some things for you."

"Yes, I'll need more clothes. I came for a week-end, and I seem likely to stay for quite a long time." In spite of herself Jen could not keep the exultation out of her voice.

"Joan will be shocked when she hears you are pleased, Jen."

"Oh, no, she won't! She'll understand and she'll laugh. Auntie Shirley, I bet you sixpence Joan laughs! Give her my love, and say I'm terribly sorry she's ill, but I think it's frightfully nice of her to have something infectious," Jen pleaded.

Mrs. Shirley laughed and shook her head again as she went indoors.



### CHAPTER III

#### TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

"Can I speak to Miss Jacqueline, please?" Jen had found Dr. Wilmot's number and spoke with great politeness.

"Jacqueline speaking," Jack's voice answered. "Who wants me?"

"Oh, Jacky-boy! It's the wife of your heart—Jenny-Wren. Oh, Jack  
\_\_\_\_\_"

"Jen, you blighter! Why address me like a maiden aunt? I had all sorts of spasms down my spine."

"I'm frightfully sorry. I thought I ought to ask for Miss Jacqueline. Jack, the most ghastly thing has happened!"

"I know," Jack said gloomily. "That's why I'm not at the committee. But how do you know? Who told you? Oh, do you mean—Jen, what do you mean? You couldn't know about us! Has something gone wrong with you too? Tell me quickly!"

"No, you tell first," Jen said firmly. "What's up?"

"Mary—our housemaid—is down with measles. Dad has packed her off to the isolation hospital, of course; he couldn't have a case of infection in a doctor's house! But I was with her all yesterday evening; Dad and Mummy were out to dinner, so I scurried through my prep. and went into the kitchen and helped Mary with some ironing—I like ironing. She had a bad cold, but Daddy didn't know; he's wild with me for not guessing, but how could I? Most bad colds aren't the beginning of measles! He doesn't want half the school down with it, so I'm not to go back till we see if I've taken it. What's the matter, you rotter? It's not funny! Think of the junior team!"

Jen's chuckles subsided. "It's vile," she admitted. "They'll be like sheep without a shepherd. Who's vice-captain? It's a chance for her. They'll have to manage without you. But it *is* funny, Jacky-boy! You don't know yet!"

"You might tell me, then! I suppose you see that I can't come to the Hall, and our week-end has gone to bits?"

"Oh, I knew that! That's what I rang up to tell you."

"If I could get hold of you I'd shake you!" Jack shouted.

"You'd better try. I'm a lot bigger than you. I'll tell you, Jacky-boy; you'll see why it's funny. Joan and Joy have begun it. The doctor's just been; I wish they had your dad, but they used to have Dr. Brown before they came to school, so they didn't know Dr. Wilmot."

"Measles, do you mean?" Jack interrupted. "Jen, truly? But they were at school—oh, no, not yesterday! They weren't there, were they?"

"They both felt seedy in the morning, so Mrs. Shirley kept them at home. But nobody dreamt it was serious; Joan had a touch of headache, and Joy had a little cold. That was all, so they didn't put me off. They expected to be quite fit to-day. But they were worse by night, and this morning Mrs. Shirley wouldn't let me see them, and now the doctor's been, and I can't go back to school."

"Gosh, no, of course you can't! It's the same for you as for me! We're both in quarantine."

"If the Abbey girls had waited one more day before coming out in spots, you'd have been here, and you'd have had to stay," Jen said wistfully. "We'd have been company for one another."

"Daddy wouldn't have wanted me at home," Jack agreed. "It would have been marvellous! Our week-end would have lasted a whole fortnight. But we couldn't have expected Mrs. Shirley to keep me."

"She seems quite willing to keep *me*. But that's only natural," Jen jeered. "You're quite another matter."

"You're almost one of the family. Mackums would hate to have you back at school. You'll be all right, but it's fearfully stale for me, stuck here in town."

"I suppose we couldn't—no, of course we couldn't."

"Of course not. Out of the question. What are you talking about, anyway?" Jack asked sarcastically.

Jen laughed. "We couldn't ask Auntie Shirley to invite you here to cheer me up, could we?"

"My hat, no! There's no reason why we shouldn't be together; we're both under suspicion! But Daddy wouldn't want two cases in the house, so you can't come here; and we couldn't suggest it to Mrs. Shirley."

"But if she happened to think of it——!" Jen began. "What a marvellous time we'd have!"

Jack sighed into the telephone. "No such luck! She'd be too good to be true."

"We can ring up and talk every day. I'd better go now; I'm sure I've had my full time of this thing. Cheerio, husband! It's worse for you than for me. Sorry!"

"I'm glad you're parked in such a jolly place," Jack responded, dolefully but with much generosity.

"Poor old chap!" Jen said to herself. "I shall go into the Abbey and write to Joan, and tell her about Jacky-boy. They can't write to me, without

masses of disinfecting, I know; but they may like to have letters. I can do that for them anyway.”

She went back to her place beside the sunny wall, but was greatly hampered in her writing by the Mother Superior, who insisted on creeping into her lap, so that she had nowhere to rest her pad, and by Grey Timmy, who was anxious for a game with her pencil. Jen gave up the attempt at last, and sat thinking over the new situation.

“If Jack had been here I could have told her my idea. Perhaps Joan wouldn’t quite have approved! She’d have understood all right, but she might have said it wasn’t the thing to do.”

She pondered this thought. “Jack wouldn’t have any awkward scruples. If only she could have been here! It’s rotten for us, in separate places and both quarantined! We seem to have managed things horribly badly this time. Down you go, old lady! I want to write to Joan.”

She removed the disappointed Mother Superior and retreated with her pad to the cloisters, to finish her letter there.

At the midday meal Mrs. Shirley took it and promised to give it to Joan. “She’s better already. Nurse agrees with Dr. Brown that it is a slight attack in Joan’s case, but that Joy will need to be watched carefully. Would you be too lonely if I left you to have tea by yourself, Jen? Although I’m not in charge I’d like to be with the girls, and I have to disinfect if I come back to you.”

“It must be a fearful nuisance! Oh, please don’t bother to do all that just for me! I’ll be all right,” Jen exclaimed. “I’ll take my tea out on to the lawn.”

By tea-time she was beginning to feel bored, however, and the prospect of a fortnight of lonely days and solitary meals filled her with foreboding.

“If only Jacky-boy could have been here!” she groaned, as she sat on a rug below the terrace, with a tray beside her. “I shall go off my head in about three days, and they’ll have to shut me up in another part of the house. I wish I could produce just one measles! Then they’d let me be with Joan. But I haven’t even a headache.”

“Jen!” Mrs. Shirley came out to the terrace an hour later. “Nurse insists that I must have a walk, even if it’s only in the garden. Suppose you come too? I want to talk to you. Have you been feeling desolate?”

“Well, a little quiet,” Jen said tactfully.

Her hostess smiled. “That’s kind of you! You don’t want me to feel I’ve been neglecting you, do you?”

“You can’t help it just now. How are they?”

“Joan has slept a good deal and feels much better. Joy’s temperature is high and she is rather uncomfortable. But we all like the nurse, who is being very kind.”

"That's important, isn't it? It would be dreadful to have to put up with a nurse you didn't like."

"It's very important indeed," Mrs. Shirley agreed. "Now, Jen, about your letter to Joan. She was delighted to have it and she sends you many thanks."

"I'm glad. I'll write every day—twice a day, if I can think of anything to say. She'd like to hear about the cats, wouldn't she?"

"We're sorry to hear of Jack's trouble," Mrs. Shirley went on. "Joan made a suggestion, which seems to me an excellent one."

Jen stood in the middle of the lawn and gazed at her. "What did Joan say?" she asked breathlessly.

"That Jack ought to come here to keep you company. It wouldn't make matters any worse for either of you."

With a wild whoop, Jen turned head over heels on the grass. "Too good to be true! I said it! Oh, Auntie Shirley, you couldn't be so frightfully kind!"

"It would make things much easier for me," Mrs. Shirley said, laughing and gazing down at the dishevelled person at her feet.

Jen shook back her long plaits. "How? Why? Would it really?" Her words fairly tumbled out. "Oh, you mean because you wouldn't have to think about me, at meals or anything? If I had Jack, you could stay upstairs and not bother with disinfecting?"

"That's what I mean. It would be easier to have two, who would entertain one another, than one lonely girl."

Jen gave another whoop. "Oh, marvellous! We wouldn't be a scrap of bother to you! Jack could sleep in my room, as she did last year. We talked about it, but we said you'd be too good to be true, if you thought of it."

"The idea had occurred to you, then?"

"I thought of it, but we both knew we couldn't ask you to do it. May I phone to Jack at once?"

"I hardly think Mrs. Wilmot would be satisfied with an invitation by phone. I'll write to her."

"But they won't get a letter till Monday!" Jen protested.

Mrs. Shirley smiled. "Dr. Wilmot won't let Jack come until he is sure she is safe from measles for a fortnight, and Dr. Brown won't feel certain about you for a day or two, though there doesn't seem to be much the matter with you! You'll have to wait, Jen dear; but you may tell Jack and say I am writing to her mother, and I'll consult Dr. Brown to-morrow."

"Oh, whoops!" Jen shouted. "May I tell her *now*? We'll look forward to it all the week-end!"

Mrs. Shirley nodded, and Jen dashed into the house and seized the telephone.

## CHAPTER IV

### JEN GOES TO CHURCH

“What’s the matter? You’re panting like a dog that’s chased a rabbit,” Jack remonstrated.

“I am a bit breathless,” Jen admitted. “Oh, Jack, it’s happened! She is too good to be true; they all are! Joan thought of it first, when she heard about you—I wrote her a letter. But Auntie Shirley likes the idea awfully much——”

“What idea?” Jack demanded impatiently. “You’ve begun at the end.”

“No, in the middle. The end is that Auntie Shirley’s writing to your mother, to ask if you may come here to keep me company and take me off her hands.”

“Oh, glory!” Jack gasped. “Jen, you aren’t rotting?”

“Dear chap, no, I’m not. It can’t happen at once, so don’t go all thrilled. There are heaps of formalities to be gone through.”

Jack snorted. “Drop the grown-up stunt, you ass! What do you mean? Disinfecting?”

“There’s nothing to disinfect in me—or in you, I hope! I may have taken measles from Joan, of course, and you may have taken it from your Mary, but that won’t show for a fortnight. All that matters is whether either of us is going to start it now. We’ll have to wait till they’re sure about that. Your dad has to be consulted, and our Dr. Brown. It will take a day or two, I’m afraid. But if you keep all right till Dr. Wilmot’s certain you aren’t going to start it too, and if I keep all right till they’re sure I’m not, then—whoops! I believe they’ll let you come. What a time we’ll have, husband!”

“Mother will let me come,” Jack said with conviction. “She said this morning that she wished she could send me to the seaside or the country for a week, so that if I’ve caught the thing from Mary, I’ll be in a better condition to stand it when it starts.”

“We’ll get you into good condition!” Jen chuckled. “Live out of doors, my dear; woods and hills as much as you want! Perhaps they’d let us sleep out; I’ve always wanted to try. Cheerio, Jacky-boy! Something to look forward to next week, after all.” And she put down the receiver and danced away into the Abbey to tell the good news to Grey Timmy and his mother.

“What will you do this morning, Jen?” Mrs. Shirley came down to breakfast on Sunday, explaining that she would go to Joan and Joy presently, but that she must see her visitor occasionally.

"Oh, *please* don't bother about me! How are they to-day?"

"Much the same. Joan has slept well and seems better, but Joy still has a high temperature. I am going to relieve Nurse while she sleeps; Joan is sure that in a day or two she will be ready to relieve *me*."

"She'll want to help as soon as she can be out of bed. I wish you'd let me do something!"

Mrs. Shirley smiled. "That would only make more trouble for everybody. I'm afraid you can't go to church, dear."

Jen looked up. "Oh, but I can! I'm going to the old church in the Abbey, all by myself."

"In the crypt? Do you think that will feel like going to church?"

"It was a church for hundreds of years, and the first Abbot's tomb is down there, and the holy well. It ought to feel like a church," Jen said sturdily.

"The right atmosphere," Mrs. Shirley agreed. "It's a fine idea."

Jen looked suddenly troubled. "I say, Auntie Shirley! I'm afraid it isn't a fine idea, in the way you mean. I won't pretend I'm going because it's a church. It's Ambrose I'm thinking about."

"More romantic than holy, in fact!"

"That sounded just like Joan!" Jen exclaimed. "It's what she would have said. Yes, that's what I mean exactly."

"But what about Ambrose, Jen dear?" Mrs. Shirley's eyes filled with amusement. "I thought you knew all his story now?"

"I want to think about him in the place where he used to be. We had something in history that reminded me of him; about the priests being hunted in Elizabeth's reign. Perhaps Ambrose escaped by hiding in the old church," Jen explained.

"Quite likely. Will you promise two things before you go?"

"Three, if you like; or as many more as you want," Jen said seriously.

Mrs. Shirley smiled again. "Wear your coat and take a cushion to sit on. Although the sun is so hot, it will be cold in the crypt."

Jen nodded. "It's always cold underground. Is that one thing or two?"

"That's one. The other is to promise not to open the door that leads to the cellar with the chest. That must have been where Ambrose lived; don't think about him so hard that you're tempted to go through the tunnel again."

"Oh, I won't! That's the place I'm—not scared of, but not very fond of, you know! But the church is all right. I won't open that door; I promise faithfully."

"I know you'll keep your word. Run along then, and spend an hour with Ambrose."

"I broke my word once," Jen mused, as she fetched her coat. "But it was because I simply had to do it. That isn't likely to happen again!"

By way of an ancient door behind the chapter-house and a flight of steps, and then several more steps, she came, torch in hand, to the beautiful little crypt which was the oldest part of the Abbey. There had been a church here before the great Abbey church had been built, and when the "new church" had been destroyed by Henry the Eighth, the old one had remained underground, buried and forgotten, until its discovery by two inquisitive small boys had restored it to the Abbey.

The roof was low and the pillars were short and round, with Saxon carving. In one corner was the well, which was older still, for it was round the hermit's well that the whole Abbey had been built. In another corner was the low door by which the old monk, Ambrose, had come to the church, from his refuge in the gate-house; the door Jen had promised not to open, because it led to tunnels and cellars in which she must not wander alone.

"Not that I want to go along there!" she said to herself, arranging her cushions on the steps of the Abbot Michael's tomb, which had a carved stone canopy supported by four pillars. Jen put on her coat and sat down, her back against the tomb, and nursed her knees.

"I might have brought the Mother Superior for a hot-water bottle! But Timmy would have had to come too; he won't be left out of anything. Nobody could think with Timmy about!"

Her thoughts went to her old friend, Ambrose, the lay brother, who had lived in the gate-house beside the ruins for fifty years. How had he escaped the persecution of the priests under Elizabeth?

"I wish she hadn't done it," Jen thought. "I always liked Elizabeth. It's the one horrid thing about her. I know in those days they thought they had to burn and behead people who didn't agree with them, but I wish Elizabeth hadn't done it too. Perhaps Joy's ancestors protected Ambrose; they knew all about his living here. We don't know much about the family; only that they were at the Hall in those days, and the Marchwoods were at the Manor. Somebody took care of Ambrose, I suppose."

She sat dreaming of olden times; of beautiful Jehane, who had loved Ambrose; of their meetings in the Abbey and in London, and of her death from smallpox; of Ambrose, wandering lonely to France and at last back to the Abbey again, because it was where he had known Jehane; of his long life in the gate-house, a kindly gentle saint, loved by all the countryside, helping every one with advice and sympathy. She twisted the plain gold ring on her finger, the ring Ambrose himself had made, which Jehane had bidden him wear for her sake; and she whispered the words he had written after her death—"Now I have her in my heart and she is mine for ever."

“I’d like to know more about Peregrine Abinger, Joy’s ancestor, who was so kind to Ambrose and buried him so nicely, with his book and my ring,” Jen said to herself. “It’s a pity Joy hasn’t any family records; she says there aren’t any. Peregrine! Ambrose called him ‘my falcon.’ There’s no portrait of him at the Hall, among the other old people. They’re all later—Charles the Second’s time and after that. I’d have liked a portrait of Ambrose’s ‘falcon’! I wonder what he looked like?”

Her thoughts jumped to the plan which had been in her mind before she heard about the measles. “I shall tell Jack. But it won’t be any help about Peregrine. Still, it will be something to do——What was that?”

She stiffened into attention. “I heard something! It sounded like something moving. There couldn’t be rats, I suppose?” Her light swept hurriedly round the crypt. In the past she had joked about rats in the tunnels. Her own words came back upon her now and she shivered.

“Where was it? There’s nothing here. I mean, I can’t *see* anything, but—there it is again! Something did move somewhere.” She started up, her eyes wide and startled. “There—it’s behind the old door—on the stair! Something’s going down the steps! Gosh! What a fright I had! I wonder what it was? It can’t come through the door, and I wouldn’t open it for worlds. Besides, I promised I wouldn’t. Must have been a rat! It was only a tiny sound. All the same, I think I’ll go up to the garth. I’ve been here long enough all alone.”

She picked up her cushions and ran by the steps back to the sunshine. There, with everything looking just as usual and the cats sleeping in the sun, she wondered if it had been all a mistake.

“Perhaps I’d been there too long and I was imagining things,” she said, as she lay on the grass and stroked Grey Timmy’s long hair. She fetched an old brush and comb from Joan’s little room and began to groom him, and he stretched and yawned and showed a wide grin, and rolled over to display his soft underneath to her admiring gaze.

“It must have been my imagination,” Jen decided. “I don’t see how even rats could have been there. We’ve been through those tunnels often enough and never seen a speck of rat. I shan’t tell anybody I was scared. They’d laugh. There wasn’t anything there. I’m an ass!”



## CHAPTER V

### JEN'S GREAT IDEA

Jen put down the brush and sprang up. "I'd better go back to the old church and show myself that I'm not scared. I'm positive certain I shan't hear anything. If I don't go I shall keep on thinking about it. Better have it over!"

She plunged down the steps to the crypt again and stood listening intently, keeping close to the entrance. There was not a sound. The old church had all the usual silence of underground.

"Idiot!" Jen shook herself. "You made it up. What are you sticking close to the steps for? There's nothing here. Do you think it was the ghost of Ambrose? Or Jehane? That's what comes of feeling romantic in the dark all alone!"

Deliberately she walked round the crypt and stood beside the tunnel door, whistling—"We Won't Go Home Till Morning," under her breath.

"Nothing there!" she said cheerfully. "I'm an idiot! I shall never tell anybody what an ass I was. I could stay down here all night, and not be frightened. I *say*! What a marvellous idea!"

On fire with eagerness, she ran up to the garth again, dived into the little room which Joan had furnished for her own use, and came out with pad and pencil, to write her daily letter to the invalids. But to-day she had more to say than mere gossip about the cats.

"DEAR JOAN—DEAREST DARLING JOAN,—Yes, of course, I'm putting it that way because I want something. You've often promised I should spend a night in the Abbey, but I've never done it yet. Couldn't it be now, to-night or to-morrow, before Jack comes, when I'll be alone anyway? It seems such a sensible idea. Do please say yes! It's lovely weather and there's a moon. Last night I quite wished I was a cat, so that I could prowl about all night, as the Curate and the others do. I won't prowl much, of course. I'll go to bed in your little room as good as anything. But I might wander round the garth once or twice to see how it looks by moonlight. You know I'd be all right. You slept there last summer when the house was so full and Jandy Mac asked if she might come; and nothing happened to you! I'll have the cats for

company. I must tell you about Timmy! But I may sleep in the Abbey, mayn't I, Joan?"

She added some stories of the cats, then closed the letter and hurried back to the house, to lie in wait for Mrs. Shirley or the nurse.

It was the nurse she met first.

"Will you please be so kind as to give this to Joan?"

The nurse looked down at her. "You're the little suspect case, are you?"

"What a horrid thing to call me!" Jen cried. "I'm perfectly well. There's not a single measles about me!"

"Nor any cold, nor a sore throat, nor a headache? Good! See that you keep well. We might have to shave off all that hair, if you were very ill."

"I shouldn't mind. It's only to please Daddy. He'd be upset, of course. Oh, I say! You haven't cut off Joan's hair, have you?" Jen cried in alarm.

"Certainly not. She's not very ill; she's much better. The other one is worse, but we'll try not to sacrifice her hair. It's beautiful hair; it would be a pity to shave it off."

"Oh, you mustn't cut Joy's hair either," Jen cried earnestly. "That would spoil the Abbey Girls. They've always been as alike as twins; their fathers were twins. It's the joke of the school, when they dress up as May Queens. Strangers think they're seeing double and rub their eyes and ask if there are really two. You mustn't cut the hair off one of them!"

The nurse laughed. "Then Joy must bring her temperature down. We can't run risks for the sake of her hair; she'd be much cooler without it. But we won't cut it unless we really have to."

"Please don't!" Jen begged. "Everybody would be fearfully sorry, except perhaps Joy herself. I don't believe she'd mind; but Mrs. Shirley would."

"We won't do it unless it's necessary," the nurse promised, and took the letter to Joan's room.

Jen awaited the answer eagerly, but it did not come until the evening, when Mrs. Shirley again came into the garden for a walk.

Jen raced to meet her. "Oh, Auntie Shirley, what does Joan say? And how are they?"

"Much the same. We're a little worried about Joy. Joan is almost herself again."

"You won't let that nurse cut off Joy's hair, will you? She isn't bad enough for that, is she?" Jen pleaded.

"I hope we shan't have to do that. But we must do anything that will help to make her better. Joan read your letter and she says—wouldn't you rather wait till you could have Jack's company?"

"No, I wouldn't," Jen said decisively. "If Joan thinks for two minutes she'll know why."

Mrs. Shirley laughed. "She did think, and she said she believed you'd rather be alone. Why is it, Jen? You're fond of Jack, aren't you?"

"Fearfully. She's my husband-chum. But she doesn't care about the Abbey in the way Joan and I do, and she thinks I'm soft about Ambrose and Jehane."

"Joan also said I should ask whether you wouldn't like to wait till she could keep you company in the Abbey?"

Jen grew scarlet, and looked across the lawn. She glanced at Mrs. Shirley, then looked away again.

"I wouldn't like to hurt Joan's feelings. I'd far rather have her than anybody else, if—if I had to have somebody. But——" She faltered and came to a stop.

"But you'd really prefer to be alone?"

"I'd rather not have anybody at all," Jen admitted. "Do you think Joan will mind? Don't tell her, if she'll be upset or disappointed! I'll wait till she's better."

"Joan understands," Mrs. Shirley said quickly, to relieve her mind. "She told me to ask you, but she said she believed you'd want to be by yourself. Don't be worried, Jen; Joan feels just the same about the Abbey. She likes to be there alone. As she can't have it just now, she's glad that you should enjoy it. She suggests to-morrow night, as Jack won't be here before Tuesday or Wednesday; we haven't heard what her mother thinks of the plan yet. Suppose you have to-morrow night for your visit to the Abbey? That will give you all to-morrow to think about it."

"To look forward to it and make my preparations!" Jen gave a skip of delight. "*Much* better than to-night! The cats will have time to get used to the idea too; I must go and tell them! They expect to have that bed all to themselves. They'll be surprised to find me in it."

"You must promise to go to bed properly," Mrs. Shirley said, laughing at the thought of the matter being explained to Timmy and his mother. "Don't go wandering about the ruins all night!"

"Oh, I'll go to bed nicely! But I might have one little prowl in the moonlight, and perhaps eat an apple on the garth at midnight, just to feel it's a picnic. I'll ask Mrs. Watson to buy me a packet of chocolate in the village. And to think I ought to be going back to school to-morrow morning!"

Mrs. Shirley laughed again. "Your attitude to school and lessons is deplorable, Jenny-Wren."

"I'm sure it's quite natural," Jen protested. "I don't see how anybody could ask a girl to be sorry about having a simply marvellous extra holiday."

And she ran off to tell the cats that she would share their bed on the following night.

All through what might otherwise have been a rather dreary Monday, Jen went about with shining eyes which were full of secrets. She consulted Mrs. Watson, the caretaker in the Abbey, and entrusted her with commissions to be done in the village, during the hours when the ruins were not open to the public; but she would not reveal her plans to any one else.

Joan, lying in bed, laughed when her mother reported Jen's mysterious air.

"A midnight picnic in the Abbey, all on her own! Isn't it queer how mixed people are, Mother? There couldn't be anybody more fond of a crowd than Jenny-Wren; she's always happiest at a dance-party or in a cricket team. And yet she's revelling in having the Abbey all to herself for a night. I wonder if she's going to be Jehane, going to meet her lover? Or Ambrose, looking for her?"

"It doesn't seem like Jen," her mother said. "I should have thought she'd want you or Jack."

"It's her love for the Abbey," Joan said. "She feels any other person would come between her and her visions. We shall hear all about it afterwards."

Monday brought a phone call from Jack, full of gratitude for Mrs. Shirley's letter to her mother and eager for Tuesday, when she was to come to the Hall. Jen's spirits leapt even higher as she thought of all she would have to tell.

"Jacky-boy will be green with envy when she hears about my night alone in the Abbey! Now I'd better go and pack."

"What are you doing, Jen?" Mrs. Shirley paused to look into the bedroom. "Preparing for Jack?"

"No, packing for the Abbey." Jen's tone was full of importance.

Mrs. Shirley came into the room and sat on the bed and laughed. "Jen dear! Are you going to take all your possessions, just for one night?"

Jen balanced on her heels, between a large suitcase and a small one, and laughed back at her. "Not everything, Auntie Shirley! But it seems so much more important if I make a bit of fuss. I might want extra things, mightn't I? Another pair of stockings, in case I had a hole in my heel or a ladder; and my dressing-gown, of course, and night things; and a book or two, for fear I can't sleep in Joan's bed; and my torch and a spare battery; and a few other odds and ends. I'll have enough to fill my wee case, that I brought for the week-end; I won't take the big one Miss Macey sent this morning. The little one will feel like luggage, and I shall think I'm really going away for the night."

“What about this midnight picnic? Joan is quite sure you’re going to have a quiet feast all by yourself.”

Jen’s eyes danced. “I’ve arranged that with Mrs. Watson. She’s been a dear; she quite understands.”

“And we’re not to know anything about it?”

“Not till to-morrow. I’ll tell you to-morrow; and I’ll write a lovely letter to Joan. You don’t mind, do you?”

“Not at all. But don’t catch cold! We’ve enough illness without that. If you were ill we should have to send Jack home.”

“I’ll be careful,” Jen promised. “I’m enjoying myself too much to catch cold! How is Joy now?”

“A little better. Joan will be up to-morrow.”

“Oh, cheers! She’ll be able to help and you can send away the nurse. Joan will be pleased!”

“We’ll keep the nurse for a few days,” Mrs. Shirley said. “Joan mustn’t do too much at first. She asked me to tell you she envied you, having your first night in the Abbey.”

Jen nodded. “I know. I’d quite have liked to have her with me, but as she can’t possibly come I shall be all right alone.”

“Joan understands how you feel,” Mrs. Shirley assured her. “She knows you want to be alone with your monks and ladies.”

“Only one lady!” Jen protested. “Only Jehane!”

“Joan sends her best wishes and hopes you’ll have a happy time.”

“Oh, I know I shall! Give her my love, Auntie Shirley, and say I shall think about her. I can’t help doing that, because it’s her Abbey.”

## CHAPTER VI

### ALONE IN THE ABBEY

Jen's face was alight with joyful anticipation as she carried her little case through the garden, down the tunnel, and into the Abbey. She had had her supper as usual, but she was to have breakfast with Ann Watson in her rooms within the Abbey walls—the rooms which had once been the quarters of the lay brothers, who were not proper monks, and in which Joan and Joy and Mrs. Shirley had lived, before the death of Joy's grandfather, Sir Antony Abinger, had given the Abbey to Joan and the Hall to Joy.

"It really does feel like being alone in the Abbey," Jen said to herself, as she lit a candle and unpacked her case in the little room. "Mrs. Watson's on the other side of this wall, I suppose, but there's no way through to her place. I'd have to go out to the cloisters and along to her door, if I wanted her. This wee room is quite on its own, shut off from all the rest. It *is* an adventure! Jack will be jealous!"

The Mother Superior was curled up on the bed, with her adopted child, Grey Timmy, tucked into her on one side, and her tall slim son, the black Curate with the white collar under his chin, keeping her back warm on the other.

Jen shook her head at them. "The whole family! Not much room for me in that bed! I'm not ready for my share yet, children, but when I want to come in somebody will have to move. I won't shift you for a little while. I'm going to wander round by moonlight; and then I must have my picnic."

She arranged her possessions with as much care as if she had come to stay for a fortnight. Waiting on the table were the goods Mrs. Watson had brought from the village; a packet of chocolate and one of biscuits, a small piece of cheese, two apples, a pot of honey, a plate of ripe yellow gooseberries, and some slices of bread and butter. Ann had added a jug of milk and a plate and glass, and Jen nodded gratefully.

"Old sport! How jolly decent of her! I'm glad she's given me a glass; I don't like milk out of a cup—it never seems quite right. This will be a marvellous feast! But I'm not ready for it yet. There's something missing—I know!"

An empty vase and two little dishes stood on a shelf. Jen went to ask for a jug of water from Mrs. Watson, then called a cheery good-night, and ran to the Abbot's garden. She brought blue pansies for the small dishes and yellow roses for the vase, and arranged them by the light of the candle.

“I ought to have thought of them before. Joan likes to keep flowers in here; I shall see that there are always some now. She’ll be pleased, when she comes back. That looks better!” and she surveyed the effect of her decorations against the old grey wall.

Regretfully she put the chocolate and biscuits into her case. “Those are for to-morrow, unless I’m really fearfully hungry. I’m sure Ambrose and Jehane didn’t have chocolate, and if they had biscuits I expect they were different from these. But the rest of the stuff is all right. The monks must have had bread and butter and cheese; and they kept bees, so they’d have honey; and apples and gooseberries are safe, I think. Just for to-night I want to have only things they could have had. Good thing dear old Ann gave me milk, not ginger-beer! I suppose the monks had ale, but that doesn’t appeal to me!”

Her meal, when she had spread everything on small plates on the step of the cloisters, was certainly such as the monks might have enjoyed, and she looked at her choice with much satisfaction.

“I can easily think I’m a lay-brother, eating bread and honey, and cheese and apples, and drinking milk! I shall have my picnic on the stroke of midnight. I wonder if the Abbey had a bell, that was heard all over the woods and hills? I expect it had a lovely deep sound. Joan says Cistercians were allowed one bell on their churches, but they mustn’t have more than one. Now I’ll go for my moonlight prow! It might be sensible to put the milk on the shelf, just in case Timmy goes for a walk too.”

She lifted the jug into safety and covered the bread and butter and the cheese. Then, taking her torch, she set out on the expedition to which she had been looking forward, wandering through the ruins to see them from every point in the strange white light.

The refectory threw a black shadow across the garth. Jen climbed the stone stair to the great hall and found it lit up in brilliant radiance, as the moon streamed through the southern windows. Entranced, she gazed and wandered round; then went cautiously down the dark steps, which always seemed more difficult to go down than to go up, and crossed the garth to the dormitory stair.

This was dark also and rather risky, as the steps were winding and worn away. But Jen used her torch and went carefully, and felt repaid when she stood in a window niche and gazed down at the garth in its flood of silver light.

“I never saw it look so lovely before. I suppose Joan has seen it often like this. How marvellous the cloisters are by moonlight! But it’s all marvellous to-night. My supper looks silly, spread on the steps!” She laughed, and went to the end of the dormitory—very warily, because here

the window and the skew-door were unprotected—to look across the site of the great church to the wooded hills beyond, and then came back to glance into the monks' day-room, into which the moon was shining, before returning to the garth.

At last, satisfied that she had visited every corner above-ground, and not at the moment interested in tunnels and passages, she brought cushions and settled down to her midnight supper.

“My frugal monkish meal! Not so frugal, either. I'm going to do jolly well, with cheese and honey and fruit and milk!”

She shared the milk with the Curate, who was setting out on his nightly pilgrimage to the village; and then had to give some to Timmy and his mother, who heard the Curate lapping and came to say they were hungry too.

“Share and share alike!” Jen said gravely. “But the most for me, children, because I really am much bigger than you all put together. Good-night, Curate! Good luck!”

The Curate stalked across the garth and into the shadows. Jen, suddenly possessed by a great desire, sprang up, laid two sticks on the garth in the moonlight, in the form of a cross, slipped rings of bells on her ankles, and began to dance “Bacca Pipes,” heel and toe placed neatly in the angles. Laughing at herself and at the puzzled face of the mother cat, she put the sticks away and brought two handkerchiefs from her suitcase, and danced across the grass, with arms waving in circles above her head, in “Old Mother Oxford,” and finished with “Jockie to the Fair.”

“Wish I had some music! How weird the bells sound! There! I had to have a few jigs, just to work off my feelings! Joan would understand; I'm sure she's done it herself. Now I'll tidy up, and then I'll be ready for bed.”

When everything was neat she carried the cats into the little room and settled them at the foot of the bed, both purring in bliss as they realised that to-night they were to have company.

“Oh, yes, I'm coming too. Joan always says you're like two hot-water bottles. Just a moment longer, my dears!”

In pyjamas and dressing-gown she stood in the doorway and took a long last look at the quiet Abbey, all lit up and shining. Then she crept into bed and lay listening to the ecstatic purring of her companions.

It was very quiet. The Abbey seemed so empty, save for herself. She did not feel ready for sleep, so she lay thinking of the old monks, and of Ambrose and Jehane; of Joan and Joy, living in the Abbey—this little room had been Joy's bedroom in those days.

“It's gorgeous to think I'm having it all to myself,” she said drowsily, half aloud. “Mrs. Watson doesn't count. There's only me in the whole



Abbey, and all those old people who used to be here—*what was that?*”

A human sneeze from the cloisters; no ghost.

Jen, with frightened eyes, sat up and stared wildly at the door.

## CHAPTER VII

### INTRUDERS IN THE ABBEY

A sneeze; and whispering. Somebody was in the Abbey—in the cloisters—just outside the door.

Jen dived under the bedclothes. Then she flung back the blankets and sat up.

“Idiot! That’s no use! I must fetch Mrs. Watson. Who on earth can it be? Well!” she said valiantly. “It’s not a ghost, for it can sneeze and whisper. Gosh! It’s coming in here!”

Someone was cautiously trying the handle of the door. Jen, petrified with astonishment and fear, gasped, “Who is it? Go away! What do you mean by it?”

The door opened, and a small face appeared, and frightened eyes stared at her, as much astonished as her own. Then the apparition fled, with a cry of terror.

Jen came to herself. This ghost was small enough for her to tackle. She leapt out of bed, thrust her feet into shoes and flung on her coat, caught up her torch, and ran out.

“Trespassing, that’s what you are, ghostie! Now, who are you? And what are you playing at?”

The ghost, with a despairing cry, tripped and fell down the two steps of the cloisters. Someone ran to help her—Jen could see that it was a girl, and that the second intruder was a man or boy.

Before he could jerk the girl to her feet, Jen was upon them. “Who are you? What are you doing here?”

Her torch flashed on their faces. A tall thin boy, who looked ill and frightened; a girl of fifteen, who clung to him and hid her face.

The boy collapsed helplessly on the cloister steps and dropped his head in his hands. The girl cowered beside him, keeping her face hidden.

“Who are you?” Jen demanded again. “What’s the matter? Why are you in the Abbey? Come on, you’ll have to tell me now.”

The boy flung his arm round his companion and looked up, brave but despairing. “She helped me. You mustn’t hurt her. She stood by me. She’s the only one——”

His voice broke, and he dropped his head again.

“He’s hungry,” the girl gasped. “I brought some bread, but I couldn’t get much——”

“Hungry!” Jen knew it was true; that was what the look in the boy’s eyes had meant. “I say, wait just two secs! I’ve biscuits and an apple and simply piles of chocolate. It’s in here; don’t run away! I’ll fetch you some eats, and then I’ll put some clothes on.”

She dashed into the bedroom and was back in a moment, her hands full. “There! Tuck into that and you’ll feel better. Good thing I saved it. Wait for me; I won’t be a second.”

Her captives were far too stunned to run away. The boy seized the chocolate and began to eat hungrily. The girl sat beside him, her head still bent, her shoulders heaving.

Jen dressed at lightning speed. She was beginning to enjoy herself.

“What a night! I know that girl’s voice, though she only said about two words. She expected me to know her; she wouldn’t look at me. Who is she? And how did they come into the Abbey? I must get to the bottom of this!”

The thought of fetching Mrs. Watson never occurred to her. It was obvious that the intruders were hiding. She must know what it all meant, but she could not betray them to the caretaker. Joan would have to know in the morning, of course.

She pulled on stockings, and a warm jumper over her tunic. Then putting on her coat again, she ran out to question her prisoners. Although they were two to one, and the boy was at least three years older than herself, she knew she was more than a match for them; their broken attitude as they sat on the steps had shown her that.

“Now tell me what this means!” She spoke with gentle firmness. “You haven’t any right to be here at this time. What are you frightened of? Why are you hiding? Who are you, anyway?”

The girl looked up in despair, pushing back short brown hair. “Miss Jen, I took the keys——”

“Susan! I thought I knew your voice! You stole the Abbey keys, when Joan was ill and nobody was thinking about them?” Jen asked sternly.

The girl, an orphan who had been left destitute by the death of her aunt, had been taken into the house by Mrs. Shirley, for training under the cook. Jen had seen her picking gooseberries in the garden, but had only once heard her speak.

Susan shook with desperate sobbing. “He was here. He hadn’t nothing to eat. I’d a-plenty. I had to come.”

“He was hiding in the Abbey? He’s your brother?” Jen grasped the situation. “So you took the keys and brought him grub at night? Awfully sporting of you, but you oughtn’t to have stolen the keys, you know. Mrs. Shirley would have helped you. Why is it?” She looked at the boy. “What are you hiding for?”

"He never done it!" the girl cried fiercely. "He never done nothing wrong!"

"Chuck it, Susie," the boy reddened. "I didn't do what they said, but —'twasn't anything so very bad," he said defiantly.

Jen looked at him thoughtfully. "Then you did do something? You'd better tell me all about it. What's your name?"

"Timothy. Timothy Spindle, miss."

"Timothy Spindle! What a gorgeous name!" Jen's eyes danced. "Sure you didn't make it up? Oh, is Susan's name Spindle too?"

"She's Susie." The owner of the name stared blankly.

"Of course, you're used to being Timothy Spindle," Jen conceded. "It won't seem gorgeous to you. I call it a simply marvellous name. Do they call you Tim? Our kitten's called Timmy. Or are you always called Timothy?"

"Yes, miss!" Timothy was still staring at her.

Jen laughed under her breath. "He thinks I'm batty. Now, Timothy!" she spoke aloud, with a return of her stern manner. "Why are you hiding in the Abbey? Why does Susie need to steal food for you? What are you so frightened about?"

"They said I took things from Mr. Kenneth's room," Timothy's voice rose stormily. "I never! I never touched Mr. Kenneth's things. But—but I wanted to go to the pictures with some other chaps, and I—I took some money—only a shilling or two—nothing to matter——"

"Stealing's stealing, even if it's only a shilling," Jen said judicially. "I'm all in a fog. Who is Mr. Kenneth? Where does he live? Did you work in his house?"

"Boots and knives, and odds and ends. He's Mr. Kenneth Marchwood."

Jen began to see light, but still only dimly. "Mr. Marchwood! But Marchwood Manor is shut up and has been for ages. Oh, do you mean the town house? Were you in service with them in London?"

"Sir Keith and Lady Marchwood gave me a job. Our father was gardener at the Manor. He died, and Susie went to Aunt Emily in the village. Lady Marchwood said they'd have me at their London place."

"I see. And you made friends with some boys and wanted to go out with them, and so you took some money?"

"'Twas only two shillings," Timothy said sulkily.

"He never touched nothing else! He never went near Mr. Kenneth's things!" Susie cried passionately.

"Mr. Kenneth—he's Sir Keith's brother, isn't he? Did he say you'd taken his things? How beastly of him!"

"Mr. Simmonds, he's the butler, he said it. Mr. Kenneth's gone to Africa," Timothy explained.

"Can't blame him, then! So you ran away and came home to the village. Then Susie took the Abbey keys and you hid—where have you been hiding? How long have you been here? Why has nobody seen you? Does Mrs. Watson know?" Jen's questions poured out, as she grasped the situation.

"She don't know," Timothy said hastily. "I was in the cellar where the big chest is. Susie brought a blanket from her bed, the first night, and she said nobody goes down there."

"Not just now. That's true," Jen admitted. "We've only just found out about that cellar, and we're waiting for a man to come from London to look at it. He doesn't want it touched till he's examined it thoroughly. He may come any day; he might have come and found you there! But we don't expect him for a week or two now, because of the illness at the Hall. He'll wait till the girls are better, so that they can go with him through the tunnels."

She looked at Timothy thoughtfully. "It's a safe place at present. It was clever of Susie to think of it. Of course, as you've taken refuge in the Abbey we can't give you up to your enemies. Anybody who came to the Abbey had to be protected. It was a sanctuary, or a safe place, for people who ran away. But I don't see quite how it's to be managed. You can't stay in that cellar for ever."

The brother and sister stared at her. This doctrine of sanctuary was a mystery to them. Timothy had taken refuge in the ruins because they seemed the only possible hiding-place.

"I thought," he said dully, "that if I could get help from Susie, and a little money, I could get to the sea and go on a ship, maybe."

"As a stowaway, do you mean? Was Susie to steal the money?" Jen looked grave. "That's no use. It would be a very bad start! And I don't suppose you'd like being on a ship, even if they'd take you. You couldn't go on being a stowaway, you know; they'd find you, and they might not be nice about it. You're a sort of stowaway here in the Abbey, aren't you? Joan may have a better idea than stowing away on a ship."

"You won't tell them at the house?" Susan cried in panic.

"Of course I shall. Don't be silly! Timothy has come to Joan's Abbey for refuge; she'll keep him safe, but she must know he's here. Don't cry like that, Susie! I'll ask them not to scold you too much. You did it for Timothy; we understand that."

"They'll say I hadn't ought to have taken them keys," Susie sobbed.

"Well, you knew that yourself. You ought not to have touched the keys, even for Timothy's sake. But Joan will understand. Now you'd better go back to bed, if you can crawl into the house without being caught."

"I done it two nights," Susie muttered.

"You won't do it any more. Joan will tell us what to do, but I know she won't want you creeping about at night like a burglar. Timothy, are you comfortable in that cellar?"

"Well enough, miss. But it's so quiet down there. I don't like it."

Jen nodded. "I know. I had an hour or two all alone in those tunnels, about a month ago, and I haven't forgotten it. It was horribly eerie, and I thought of ghosts and rats."

"Yes, miss," said Timothy gloomily.

"You thought of them too, did you? But there aren't any, so you needn't worry. Oh, I say! Was it you I heard in the passage on Sunday morning? I was sure something moved behind that door. Did you go for a walk, and go up the steps to the door that leads into the old church?"

Timothy looked at her wide-eyed. "Yes, miss. I was tired doing nothing. I thought I heard somebody speak, so I went away."

"I expect I talked to myself. I was terrified," Jen assured him. "I thought you were a ghost, just for a second. I'm glad to know who it was. I thought I'd begun imagining noises! I never guessed there was a stowaway in the Abbey! I'm afraid you'll have to put up with the ghastly silence of the cellar for a little while longer. I can't stay and hold your hand, and Susie must go back to bed. You'd better try to go to sleep. Are you still hungry?"

"Not so bad now, miss, thank you very kindly."

"I haven't another crumb to give you, and I'd rather not raid Mrs. Watson's larder," Jen said thoughtfully. "Can you hold out till the morning?"

"Easy, miss. I'll go to sleep."

"Right! Good-night! Now, Susie, hop it! Through the tresaunt and the garden—that's your best way. I'll come with you to the gate, because the passage is so dark. But with this moon you can see your way through the garden easily. Come on!"

She drove Susie before her through the tunnel under the refectory and by way of the Abbot's garden to the gate which led to the Hall.

"There! Now you'll be all right. Rush home and jump into bed. And don't cry, Susie! It was sporting of you to stand by Timothy; you had to do it when he turned up and asked you, of course; but we'll see to him now. He'll be all right; the Abbey must protect him, you know."

## CHAPTER VIII

### JEN'S STOWAWAY

Even the excitement of dealing with intruders at midnight could not keep Jen from falling asleep almost at once. She threw off her clothes and snuggled down under her blankets again.

"I hope Timothy's really warm enough in that cellar. Timothy Spindle! I've seen Spindle over the forge in the village often enough, but it never struck me as funny before. I love spindle berries in the autumn. The Spindles! It *is* a weird name! Fancy our Susan being really Susie Spindle! I shall never call her anything else, and I'm sure Joy never will. What a good thing Timothy came to the Abbey, where he'll be safe! I don't think he knew about its being a sanctuary; he looked worried when I said it. He came because of Susie. But as he's come here he'll have to be protected. I don't know how Joan will do it, but she'll have to take care of him somehow. It's her Abbey!" And thinking over this problem for Joan, Jen fell asleep.

"Did you hear anything in the night?" she asked Mrs. Watson next morning, her eyes bright with secrets.

The caretaker set a plate of porridge before her. "Never a thing, Miss Jen. Was you running about the garth at midnight?"

"Something like that," Jen admitted. "I danced a few jigs by moonlight. But I didn't make any noise, except for my bells. I didn't think you'd hear them."

"Much better ha' bin in your bed," said Mrs. Watson.

Jen laughed and turned to her breakfast. "I'll not say anything to good old Ann yet. Joan must be the first to hear. Bother the measles! It won't seem half as thrilling in a letter. I shall tell Jack when she comes. She'll wish she'd been here."

She went racing through the garden, fired by a sudden idea. "Auntie Shirley! I've something marvellous to tell Joan. I can't write it all down. Couldn't you come—where are you, Auntie Shirley?"

She ran in search of Mrs. Shirley and poured out a breathless request. "Something happened in the night. I want Joan to hear all about it. Couldn't you come out to the terrace? Her window's wide open and her bed's close to it; if I told you quite loudly, I believe she'd hear."

"Jen dear, what is the matter?" Mrs. Shirley remonstrated. "What are you so excited about? Have you had your breakfast?"

“A little. I hadn’t time for much. I was in such a hurry to tell Joan about the adventure I had in the middle of the night.”

“Jen, what did you do?” Mrs. Shirley looked anxious. “You promised to go to bed.”

“Oh, I went to bed all right! But something came and looked in at me. I must tell Joan! Is she all right this morning?”

“She seems almost herself again and Joy is better. But, Jen——”

“Then if you could come and stand under her window, she’d hear all about my discovery in the Abbey. It really is important! I know she’ll be thrilled.”

Mrs. Shirley looked at her keenly. Discoveries in the Abbey were not unusual; since the ruins had come into Joan’s possession a great deal had been discovered of which Joy’s grandfather had never dreamed. If Jen had stumbled on something new, Joan would certainly be much more than interested.

“Something came and looked at you, Jen?”

“Something real. Something thrilling.”

Mrs. Shirley left her breakfast and went out to the terrace. “Then Joan had better have the story. If you shout as you often do, I’ve no doubt she’ll hear every word.”

“She will, because I mean her to hear.” Jen dashed ahead and stood below Joan’s window. “Nurse! Nurse! Please open the window wider. I’m going to talk to the patient. Joan, can you hear? Something’s happened in the Abbey. I want to tell you about it.”

The nurse leaned out of the window. “There’s no need to shout, little Suspect Case. We can hear you easily.”

“Oh, good! You’d better stop suspecting me; I’m far too busy to be ill! Well then, Joan, the most marvellous thing has happened! We’ve a stowaway in the Abbey; a fugitive from justice! There! Isn’t that a thrill?” Jen cried in triumph. “A runaway, to be protected from his enemies. What shall you do about it? I’ll carry on for you till you’re better, if you’ll tell me what to do. I’ve no idea how to start protecting stowaways.”

“Jen dear, what are you talking about?” Mrs. Shirley exclaimed. “Did you make all this up?”

“My hat, no! He came and looked at me—or rather she did—when I was in bed. He was hungry, and I gave him chocolate and apples and biscuits, but I don’t know what to do next. He must be protected, of course. They mustn’t catch him. He’s fled to the Abbey, and he must be kept safe.”

“But if you mean all this, who or what is he, Jen dear?”

“Timothy Spindle!” Jen proclaimed with a shout of laughter. “Isn’t it a gorgeous name?”



A hurried argument had been going on in the upper room. Now the lattice window was thrust wide, and Joan herself leaned out, well wrapped up in a warm green dressing-gown, with her dark red hair hanging in two thick plaits on her shoulders. The nurse, looking indignant, threw a big shawl over her head and round her neck.

"I'm all right, Nurse. The sun's lovely and hot. Jenny-Wren, what are you talking about? Is it a fairy tale, or a nightmare?"

Jen turned a somersault of joy. "Joan! It's you yourself! I haven't seen you since Friday! Where are your spots? You look just as usual!"

"I hardly had any spots. I'm better; I'm going to help mother with Joy. Now, Jen, what's all this about?"

"You look much more fit than you did on Friday night," Jen agreed. "Put that white thing round your head like a Spanish lady's mantilla. Arrange it for her nicely, please, Nurse. That's right! It looks top-hole, Joan; just like a wedding-veil."

"Jenny-Wren, stop fooling and come to business!" Joan commanded, laughing. "What do you mean by startling us all like this?"

"But it's true!" Jen protested. "You're going to take care of Timothy Spindle."

"Timothy?"

"Spindle. That's his name; the fugitive from justice—my stowaway. He's taken refuge in the Abbey, and it's sanctuary, so he must be protected."

"I don't know about that; not in these days," Joan said grimly. "You'd better begin at the beginning, instead of giving us the end first. Is there really somebody hiding in the Abbey?"

"In Ambrose's cellar, under the gate-house. I was in bed, quite good and quiet, but not asleep, about midnight, Joan. I'd danced 'Bacca Pipes' and 'Jockie' on the garth in the moonlight." She looked up at Joan, who nodded, as if it was what she had expected.

"I was half asleep when I heard a sneeze," Jen said dramatically.

"A sneeze? Was there somebody in the cloisters?"

"Yes; I heard them whisper, and then my door opened quietly, and a face looked in. I was terrified!" Jen stared up at Joan.

"I'm sure you were. I should have been frightened myself. I'm sorry you didn't wait till I, or even Jack, could be with you."

"I was only scared for a minute. I saw the ghost was quite little, so I flung on some clothes and skipped out. And there they were—Timothy Spindle and his sister Susie. She's your Susan, you know."

"I knew that Susan's name was Spindle, of course. Do you mean to say Susan was in the Abbey at midnight?"

“Yes, with Timothy. He’s her brother; he’s older, about as old as you. He’s the boot-boy at Sir Keith Marchwood’s house in town, and they said he’d stolen things belonging to Mr. Kenneth—that’s Sir Keith’s younger brother, but he’s away in Africa. Timothy Spindle hadn’t touched anything of Mr. Kenneth’s, though the butler said he had; but he did take two shillings, that he saw lying in the kitchen, because he wanted to go to the pictures with some other chaps. So when the butler accused him falsely he was frightened, and he ran away and came back to the village. But he hasn’t any home here now, so he met Susie on her day out, and she hid him in the Abbey; and she’s been taking food and things to him, in Ambrose’s cellar under the gate-house. It was simply awfully sporting of her,” Jen ended defiantly.

“But how did Susan take him into the Abbey?” Joan asked, frowning.

“I hoped you wouldn’t think of that! She took your keys. I’m sorry she did it, but it was to help him. She didn’t know what else to do.”

Joan sat on the window-sill and stared down at her, saying nothing.

“It was very wrong of Susan,” Mrs. Shirley exclaimed.

“I know. But she had to do something,” Jen pleaded. “It must be frightful to know your brother’s a starving stowaway.”

“You’d better speak to her, Mother,” Joan said, knowing well that her mother’s gentle scolding would not be too hard on the culprit. “It’s something else that is bothering me. What do you expect us to do about this boy, Jenny-Wren?”

Jen looked up, complete trust in her face. “Protect him from his enemies, of course. The Abbey is sanctuary, and he’s taken refuge there. He must be kept safe. Runaway people were always protected at the Abbey.”

“Jen dear, don’t be so absurd,” Mrs. Shirley said. “That was in the old days. We can’t do that sort of thing now.”

“Auntie Shirley!” Jen turned to her in quick, hurt dismay. “Joan couldn’t let the Abbey down!”

“We must write to Sir Keith Marchwood at once and tell him the boy is here. They will be searching for him.”

“You couldn’t!” Jen cried. “He’s taken refuge! It’s sanctuary! You couldn’t give him up to his enemies!”

“Oh, Jen, don’t be silly! All that is past long ago!”

“Joan, you wouldn’t do it?” Jen whirled round and gazed up at the window in entreaty. “Joan, you couldn’t—you wouldn’t——”

Joan saw it all clearly. Jen’s intense faith in the Abbey and in herself was tottering. If it crashed, Jen would be heartbroken and her love would never be the same again. The problem, as Joan had seen at once, was not how to deal with Timothy Spindle, but how to avoid wrecking Jen’s trust.

“We’ll do something, Jen. I must have time to think. But—yes, we must help Timothy somehow.”

Jen’s face grew radiant. “I knew you would! That’s all right! You decide and tell me what to do.”

“First, you’d better take your fugitive some breakfast. Isn’t he hungry?”

“I’d saved chocolate and biscuits and an apple from my midnight feast. He felt better when he’d had those.”

“I’m sure he did. Did you tell Ann Watson about him?”

“Not a word, and she didn’t hear anything in the night. I didn’t want her to know till I’d heard what you thought about it.”

“That was a good idea,” Joan agreed. “But she’d better know now, for he must come up out of the cellar. He can have your bed, when you’ve fetched away your things, and Ann can give him meals. Tell her to find him jobs to do; there may be some digging——”

“He’s used to cleaning knives and boots,” Jen said eagerly. “Couldn’t he come here and do ours?”

“Not yet,” Joan said decisively. “He must stay in the Abbey till we decide what to do. We have to be fair to the Marchwoods as well as to Timothy Spindle.”

“But you won’t betray him to Sir Keith and the butler, will you?” Jen asked anxiously. “He came here to take refuge, Joan.”

“I’ll do nothing without consulting you first. He’s your fugitive,” Joan promised.

“My stowaway,” Jen pleaded. “It’s a much nicer word than fugitive.”

“But it isn’t right,” Joan smiled down at her. “A stowaway ought to be on a ship.”

“Timothy was planning to find a ship and go away; that’s why I call him a stowaway. I told him he wouldn’t like it,” Jen added.

“Oh, I see! No, I don’t suppose he would. Well, I won’t do anything about your stowaway without consulting you.”

“Thanks frightfully much!”

“But, Joan——!” Mrs. Shirley began.

“Mother dear, if you wouldn’t mind coming up here we’ll talk about it. I’m not cold, but I do think I ought to go back to bed. Jenny-Wren, your job is to explain to Ann and then fetch your stowaway out of that cellar. Don’t tell Ann too much, but make her understand he’s to be looked after. We’ll have another chat later on, when I’ve dressed.”

“Keep that shawl-thing round your face! You look just like a bride.” Jen waved her hand and ran off to speak to Ann Watson.

“Oh, Mother dear, do come and talk about all this!” Joan pleaded with a tired laugh, and turned to go back to bed.

## CHAPTER IX

### RESTORING THE ANCIENT RIGHTS

“Joan, why did you give in to Jen?” Mrs. Shirley sat beside the bed, looking troubled. “You know we can’t conceal this lad in the Abbey. But Jen will expect it, after what you said.”

Joan lay, tired out with the excitement of the talk. “I’m not as fit as I thought! I shan’t be much help to you for a day or two, Mother dear.”

“You’ll have to be patient and go slowly,” the nurse remarked. “You had a temperature for a couple of days. Don’t worry about your little friend and her troubles just yet.”

“Temp. or not, we must do something about this boy, and yet we can’t let Jenny-Wren down.” Joan lay resting, but spoke with her old energy. “Mother, it would break Jen’s heart, if we betrayed her fugitive—her stowaway! She’d never trust us again. And it would ruin her feeling for the Abbey. I just can’t do it. There must be some other way.”

“But the lad can’t stay in the Abbey, as Jen seems to expect,” Mrs. Shirley remonstrated.

Joan laughed wearily. “Poor kid! It hasn’t occurred to her that times have changed. She thinks the Abbey sanctuary would still be respected. I shall have to talk to her. She’s tremendously sensible when things are explained to her.”

“But about this boy, Timothy, Joan?”

“Timothy Spindle! Yes, we’ll have to do something. Is Joy well enough to hear the story? Ask her what she thinks, Mother! By the time you come back I may have thought of a plan.”

“Joy says the Spindles are a jolly family and the blacksmith was an old dear,” Mrs. Shirley said, when she returned presently. “She hopes you’ll find a way to help without handing the boy over to the police, but she can’t see quite what you can do. He can’t go on hiding in the Abbey. She says Jenny-Wren is a brick, and it’s a marvellous idea to call him a stowaway!”

“She is a brick,” Joan agreed. “Sit down, Mother dear, and tell me if this idea’s any good. I can see just one thing to do. We must—you must! I can’t do it at present—write to the Marchwoods and say the boy is here and that we are sure of his innocence, except about the two shillings, and that he is very sorry about that. We’ll make up the letter together, but I’m afraid you’ll have to write it. Sir Keith wouldn’t like it smelling of disinfectant! We must

plead for Timothy to be given another chance and convince them somehow that he isn't really a thief."

"But will that satisfy Jen?"

"I've felt all the time that Jen was more of a problem than Timothy Spindle. We can't send the letter without consulting her; I promised that. I must try to make her see the difference between helping Timothy to start again and merely hiding him from the people she calls his enemies. We'll try to do the one thing; we can't possibly do the other."

"Jen had better write the letter to the Marchwoods," Mrs. Shirley suggested. "I should write a much shorter and simpler letter, if it were left to me."

Joan's eyes gleamed. "Good idea! Oh, a topping idea, Mother! It will give her something to do; and she'll feel she's being the one to save Timothy. Jacky-boy can help her to make it up. Oh, yes! Jen must write to Sir Keith. But you'd better see the letter before it goes, and I'd like to hear it! I shall insist on her reading it to me through the window. I must talk to her before she writes it, though. What about Susan Spindle? Don't be too hard on her, will you? As Jen says, she had to do something, when her brother turned up in such dreadful trouble. It was rough on the kid."

"I'll have a talk with her. She had no right to take the keys."

"Of course not. Perhaps you'd better keep them in your room till I'm about again. We may have anything hiding in the Abbey, if the keys can be taken so easily!"

"I'll keep them for you," Mrs. Shirley promised.

It was some hours before the nurse would sanction any more excitement for her patient. But she saw that Joan would be restless until she had talked to Jen again, so when the afternoon sun was blazing into the room she settled Joan on the window-sill, wrapped in her shawl and dressing-gown as before, and called Jen to a conference.

Jen came dashing up the terrace steps from the garden. "Hullo, bride! Where are your bridesmaids?"

"You're the only one; aren't you my maid-of-honour?"

"Rather! When you have a real wedding, I may be your bridesmaid, as well as Joy, mayn't I?"

"You may," Joan assured her gravely. "I haven't made any other arrangements for the wedding yet, but we'll consider that decided."

"I won't let you forget. Are you better?"

"Ever so much better. How is Timothy?"

"He's all right, but he's rather gloomy."

"Oh? What's the matter with him?"

"He thinks you're going to hand him over to Mr. Simmonds; that's the butler. Timothy Spindle's afraid of him. I've told him you couldn't possibly do it, and that any one who comes to the Abbey is safe, but he doesn't believe me."

"I'm afraid Timothy Spindle is more up-to-date than you are, Jenny-Wren."

"What d'you mean?" Jen asked indignantly. "You know that anybody who took refuge in the Abbey had to be protected!"

"But that was because of the church. It was the altar that would be the sanctuary," Joan said mildly.

Jen's face fell. "Oh—Joan! Not the whole Abbey?"

"All that we have left are the conventual buildings, in which the monks lived and worked," Joan quoted a sentence she had often uttered to tourists in the Abbey. "They weren't holy, you know. If they had been, we couldn't dance morris jigs on the garth by moonlight."

Jen shot a look up at her. "You've done it, haven't you? I knew you had."

"Oh, yes, often. You do see that we can't claim dormitories and workrooms and kitchens and the refectory as holy ground, don't you?"

"What about the chapter-house?" Jen demanded.

"It wasn't as holy as the church."

"Well, there's the old church, and the holy well. It felt quite like being in church when I was down there on Sunday morning."

"I'm sure it did. But I'm afraid we'll have to face the fact that people like the police, and Sir Keith and Lady Marchwood, wouldn't recognise the right of sanctuary in the Abbey ruins."

"You mean, it isn't holy nowadays?" Jen looked downcast, and Joan saw again that hurt dismay in her face.

"I don't know how to put into words what I mean. As regards other people, I'm afraid it isn't holy, and the old rights have gone. If a criminal takes refuge in the Abbey, the police will certainly insist on having him given up to them, and nobody would agree with us if we tried to resist them. We should only get into trouble ourselves and make matters worse for the criminal. Times have changed, and we can't shut our eyes to it. It's only if people recognise the holiness of the Abbey that it could be a sanctuary. And they wouldn't, you know. They'd just laugh at us."

"Then you'll have to send Timothy back to the butler?" Jen's tone was flat and she did not look up.

Joan looked down at her, her face gentle. "But as regards ourselves, if we feel the Abbey is holy, that makes it holy to us, and we must do something about it. Don't you think so?"

Jen threw back her head and gazed up, her face suddenly radiant. “Joan! Oh, marvellous! Of course, it’s holy to us—it always has been. Nothing can alter that; other people don’t matter. Oh, do you mean that you’ll protect Timothy, after all?”

“Couldn’t you say ‘help’ instead of ‘protect’? It seems so much more worth while. Just to protect him, by hiding him from his enemies, isn’t much use; it won’t take him anywhere. He couldn’t hide in the Abbey for ever, could he? But if we could help him out of this mess and send him back to his job, and see that he makes a fresh start, that would be worth doing.”

“I see!” Jen’s face lit up. “Because he came to the Abbey, you’ll take care of him and help him out of his mess? It is because of the Abbey, isn’t it?”

“Of course it is. To you and me, the Abbey is still a holy place, and though we can’t break the law by sheltering criminals, we’ll help anybody who comes to the Abbey in trouble, if we can.”

“We’ll go on in the old way, even if other people don’t.” Jen’s tone was full of deep content.

“Keeping the old rights alive, so far as we can.”

“That’s what I wanted to say, but I didn’t know how to put it. Keeping the old rights alive—oh, marvellous! You and I, and anybody else who loves the Abbey. I say, Joan, thank you for letting me into it!”

“You’re very much in it,” Joan said, laughing. “Much more deeply than you think. You’re going to write the letter to Sir Keith Marchwood.”

“I? What d’you mean?” Jen cried.

“I can’t, can I? It would have to be disinfected. It isn’t Mother’s job; she’s attending to Susan Spindle. The way to help Timothy is to write to Sir Keith, and you’re the one who’ll have to do it.”

“I—write to a baronet? But I don’t know how!” Jen gasped.

“You and Jack can make up the letter, and then you’ll come and read it to me and Mother. A baronet’s just the same as anybody else.”

“But what shall I say? Oh, Joan, I can’t!”

“You want to help Timothy, don’t you?”

“Yes, but—oh, Joan, you tell me what to say, and I’ll write it down!”

“If your letter isn’t good enough, I’ll tell you how to alter it. Scribble it in pencil, and we’ll consider it together. Tell Sir Keith all about it and beg him to give Timothy another chance. I say, Jenny-Wren! It’s awfully odd how quickly I get tired!”

Jen gave her a startled look. “Have I been too much for you? I’m terribly sorry. I’ll go away. You go back to bed and rest.”

“Nurse wants me to; she’s looking cross. You do understand about the Abbey, don’t you?”

“Now that you’ve explained, I do. I want to think about it, though. You and I, bringing back the old rights—it’s like Sir Antony making the ruins into an Abbey again, after all those centuries when they were farm buildings, isn’t it?”

Joan’s face lit up. “Just like that, Jenny-Wren. I knew you’d understand, but you’ve taken my idea and turned it into something bigger and quite beautiful. We’ll restore the ancient rights by helping any one in trouble who comes to the Abbey, just as Sir Antony restored the Abbey when it was a heap of ruins.”

“You’ve begun doing it already, by adopting people. We decided that last summer.”

“And even the Mother Superior had to adopt Grey Timmy!” Joan said, laughing. “You’d better make a rough draft of your letter. Then you can show it to Jack, when she comes after tea.”



## CHAPTER X

### NO LONGER ALONE

"I wish Joan hadn't given me such an awful job!" Jen sat gazing despairingly at her writing-pad. "How do I start? 'Dear Sir'? You'd say that to anybody. 'Dear Sir Keith Marchwood'? That looks more like the proper thing; Joan will tell me if it's right. What ought I to say? 'Your boot-boy's a stowaway in our Abbey, and we want you to be nice to him'? It doesn't sound right, somehow."

She sat dreaming and staring across the lawn.

"I'm sorry about the Abbey not being a sanctuary any more, but I do see what Joan means. It would be the great church that fugitives would go to for refuge, not the garth or the dormitory or even the refectory. I suppose the great church took the place of the little old one, and took its rights and its holiness too, perhaps; and we've only a few stones of it left."

She pictured the site of the great church, where white violets grew among the grass-covered stones and the bases of the pillars which had once held up the roof, and sighed, as she had often done, because not even a picture of it was left.

"If only we knew what it looked like! I'd give a million pounds for a picture of the church, and Joan would give more than that!" Her mind went back to her present problem. "I must hurry on with saving Timothy Spindle. I do like Joan's idea that we can bring back the old times by keeping the right feeling in the Abbey. I'll help whenever I have a chance."

She scribbled, and crossed out, and rewrote. Then, with an exasperated sigh, she flung her pad aside. "I'll ask Jack if that will do. If not, Joan will have to help. I wish—my aunt! Who's this? That's not the doctor's car. Who doesn't know about our quarantine? I'd better vanish—oh, glory! It's Jacky-boy!"

She went leaping across the terrace to meet the car.

"Jack! You're not expected till this evening. How dare you come too soon? Oh, husband, it's marvellous to have you here!"

"Don't throttle me," Jack grumbled. "And I am expected. Mother phoned to ask if you'd have me before tea, as Daddy needs the car this evening. Mrs. Shirley said it would be all right but she wouldn't tell you, as it would be a nice surprise for you. Wife of my heart, have you found any spots anywhere?"

"Not one, nor an ache or pain. Nurse keeps on asking me. She says if I have it she'll shave my head. There won't be much to shave off you, husband."

Jack's black hair was closely cropped. She was smaller than Jen, and thin and slight, very boyish in her looks and movements. She had been Jen's chum and adopted partner since Jen's first day at school.

"You'll see Auntie Shirley later. She's with the girls just now. We'll take your case upstairs, and then I've the most thrilling things to tell you," Jen said exuberantly.

Jack waved good-bye to the car, and looked round in deep content at the lawn and trees and beautiful old house. "It's marvellous to be here! Town's very stuffy, and Dad won't let me go where I'll meet people; library or baths or anything decent. I've been pining away the whole week-end. It's frightfully kind of Mrs. Shirley to have me."

"It's frightfully kind of her to have kept me. Some people would have hurled me back to school and I'd have been isolated in the San. for a fortnight. Gosh! When I think of all I'd have missed——!" Jen's tone was awed, almost reverent.

"What would you have missed?" Jack demanded.

"I'll tell you while we're having tea. We'll take it out on the lawn." Jen had led the way to the bedroom and a maid had carried up the suitcase.

"How are Joan and Joy?"

"Joan's much better; I've talked to her twice to-day. She sits on the window-sill in the sun, wearing a big shawl like a wedding-veil, and I stand on the terrace and shriek up at her."

"You'll do that all right," Jack chuckled. "Just like Romeo and Juliet!"

"I hadn't thought of that. I shall call her Juliet next time. Joy's been much more ill, but she's better now. Come and lug your tea out into the garden, husband! We'll camp under a beech tree."

The nurse looked out as she gave Joan her tea. "The friend has arrived. They're sitting under the trees, and they look as if they meant to talk for a week."

"I'm sure they do," Joan agreed, laughing. "They're great pals, and they've been separated since Friday. They've a lot of talk to make up!"

Under the giant beech Jen had spread a rug on the soft brown needles, and as she poured out Jack's tea and acted hostess, she also poured out the story of her night in the Abbey and of Timothy and Susan Spindle.

"I'm wondering if you and I ought to adopt Susan, as we did Della last summer. Della needed to be trained in school ways; I'm quite sure Susie needs training too."

"No, you don't," Jack said firmly. "Once is enough. No more adopted daughters for me."

"Don't be a stinge! Here's Auntie Shirley adopting you, and you're jolly glad. You must do something about it."

"I'm not a stinge. You haven't time for adopting people now. It was different when you were new and hadn't things to keep you busy. Now you're in my cricket team, and you're Joan's maid-of-honour, and you just haven't time for anybody else."

"I do loathe people who say sensible, practical things that nobody can possibly argue about," Jen complained.

"Meaning me?" Jack grinned. "I'm glad you see there can't be any argument about it."

"Oh, but I don't! I can adopt Susie for the times I'm here, and I'm here a good deal," Jen said in triumph.

"You can't count on that. Mrs. Shirley may get fed up and say she won't have you any more."

"I can't see why she doesn't," Jen admitted. "I shall have to think about Susie Spindle. There's one thing I mean to do: I'm going to coax people to call her Susie, not Susan. I'm sure she'd like it better; Timothy calls her Susie."

"Does she call him Timmy, like the cat?"

"No, she doesn't. He's always called Timothy, but I think she likes to be Susie."

"If my name was Susan, I'd rather be called by it," Jack remarked, reaching for another bun. "Susie's soft."

"I'll call you Jacqueline, shall I?"

Jack threatened to hurl the bun at her. "This is squashy, so look out. You'd better not! That's different. Jacqueline sounds just terribly soft."

"It's rather stately," Jen considered the matter. "I'll begin using it."

"Then I'll call you Janet."

"Pax!" Jen said hurriedly. "I won't do it, Jack."

Jack laughed. "When can I see Timothy Spindle?"

"After tea; he's in the Abbey."

"Is he going to stay there for ever?"

Jen held out a hand for her cup. "More tea? No, of course not. I've been writing to Sir Keith Marchwood about him."

Jack stared at her. "True? I say, what cheek!"

"'Tisn't cheek. Joan made me do it. She's going to crit. my letter before I send it. I'm to read it to her."

"Good thing! What have you said? I bet you've made a mess of it."

Jen dived into the pocket of her blazer and flung across a folded paper. "See if you think it's all right. I'm going to copy it out in ink, of course."

"I should hope so! It's a grubby mess at present."

"Grubby mess!" Jen said indignantly. "I spent hours over it this afternoon. I didn't want to do it a scrap, but Joan said I must, and of course I do want to help Timothy Spindle. He's my stowaway."

Jack knit her brows over the scribbled words. "You'd better read it aloud."

"No fear; not to you. I'm sure it would sound daft."

"It does," Jack said simply. "Old Sir Keith will shriek with mirth."

"You brute! After all my swotting!"

Jack grunted with joy. "Hooked you that time. I'm going to read it to you; then you'll hear how it sounds. It's a jolly nice letter."

"Oh, do you really mean it?" Jen's face cleared. "Were you just ragging? You are a loathely little object! All right, read it to me! I'll be Sir Keith Marchwood, hearing it for the first time. I don't really know what I've said; I had so many tries."

"It looks like it! The old chap wouldn't know what you meant from this version."

"He's not old, really," Jen remarked. "Lady Marchwood is his mother—his stepmother. He isn't married."

"Bring him home and marry him to Joy, in a year or two. Then the Hall and the Manor would be joined, and she'd be 'my lady.' Or make him marry Joan, and then they'd each have a house, next door to one another."

"That would be marvellous," Jen sighed. "But he's an invalid and he isn't supposed to be going to live long. He's too old for the Abbey Girls—much too old; though he isn't an aged man."

"Who'll be the next baronet? He might have one of the girls."

"His stepbrother, the explorer, Andrew Marchwood. He isn't the sort to marry anybody; he's always careering about in unknown lands. And his brother is Mr. Kenneth, who has a farm in Kenya."

"No hope there! What a useless family of men!" Jack groaned. "Oh, well, perhaps the baronet will be so touched by your letter that he'll remember you in his will! But oughtn't you to write to the old lady? She'd be the one who would see to the servants. Sir Keith won't be bothered with boot-boys and butlers."

"Joan told me to write to Sir Keith Marchwood," Jen said firmly. "Hurry, Jacky-boy, for I've something thrilling to consult you about. Oh, there's Nurse! I'll ask her if I may read the letter to Joan. Then once would do for you both."

She raced across the lawn to make her request. But Nurse flatly refused to allow her patient to come to the window again.

“It must wait till to-morrow. We’ve had quite enough excitement for one day.”

“Oh, well! I suppose Sir Keith Marchwood can wait.” Jen went disconsolately back to Jack. “Help me cart all this stuff to the house, and then we’ll go into the Abbey and you can read the letter to me there.”

“And you’ll tell me the something thrilling?”

“No. That’s to be told at dead of night. It’s a mighty secret. But you shall see Timothy,” Jen said.

## CHAPTER XI

### JEN'S SECRET PLAN

Jack looked critically at the tall pale boy, who was polishing some brass ornaments which were the pride of Mrs. Watson's heart.

"He's dreadfully thin. I should say London doesn't suit him. Does he want to go back?"

"Ask him. Come and talk to us, Timothy!" Jen called.

Timothy obeyed, looking startled. "Yes, miss?"

"It's all right; I won't eat you," Jack said. "I'm quite as nice as she is. I say, do you really like living in town? Do you want to go back to the Marchwood house?"

"Yes, that I do!" Timothy's eyes gleamed. "I like London. There's the pictures——"

"He's a talkie-fan," Jen explained. "Now, Timothy, if you go back you simply must be careful. You mustn't take any more shillings to go to the pictures. If it happened again we couldn't help you next time."

"No, miss." Timothy reddened and his eyes fell. "I won't do it again, miss. I don't like that there Mr. Simmonds," he added.

"We can't ask Sir Keith to send away his butler just to please you. You'll have to put up with Mr. Simmonds."

"He's a beast," the boy muttered.

"Does your sister like to be called Susan or Susie?"

Timothy stared. "Susie, miss. Father he always called her Susie."

"I thought so. Would she feel more at home if we called her Susie?"

"She'd like it. She says Susan feels like school, or being scolded."

"I'll see to that for her," Jen promised.

"Can I see her again, miss?"

"Oh, yes, of course! I'll speak to cook, and we'll send Susie to talk to you. You're to go to bed in there, where I was sleeping when I heard you sneeze; I've taken my things away. I've got a visitor, so I must sleep in the house with her. You won't go wandering in the tunnels again, will you?"

"No, Miss Jen. I don't like them cellars."

"Did you meet any rats?" Jack asked with interest.

"I kept thinking I heard 'em, but I didn't see no rats," Timothy admitted.

"There aren't any, so you'd have been clever, if you had," Jen retorted.

Jack took her arm and dragged her away, with a nod of dismissal to Timothy. "You're going to sleep with your visitor, are you? Then what about

telling me your thrilling secret now?"

"I couldn't possibly," Jen assured her. "It's definitely a subject for darkness and the dead of night. I thought of it in my sleep, last Saturday, before we knew about the measles, and I hurled myself out of bed and went rushing to tell Joan. Auntie Shirley stopped me just in time. I haven't breathed a word to a soul. I'll tell you, husband, but only under cover of darkness."

Jack sighed. "You are a determined little wretch! Why did I marry you? I shall send you home to your mother and find another wife; a much nicer one."

"Do! We'll have that divorce we're always talking about. But until you get it, suppose I bowl to you, for practice? There's a beautiful pitch waiting for us, in a field behind the orchard. The gardener's been getting it ready."

"Whoops! Come on!" Jack shouted.

They were busy with their supper, in a corner of the big hall, some hours later, when Mrs. Shirley came to welcome Jack, and to bring good news of the invalids.

"Now you'll go to bed quickly, won't you, girls? Jen had a broken night, you know. Joan is sure you'll sit up talking half the night."

"Not half the night! I really am sleepy," Jen owned. "But you won't mind a little talking, will you? We haven't seen one another since Friday."

Mrs. Shirley laughed. "And this is Tuesday! You've been talking ever since four o'clock, haven't you?"

"Oh, no, not talking!" Jen's tone was shocked. "We've had no time. I'm teaching Jack to bowl; we've been working terribly hard. She isn't a scrap of use as a bowler, and it's silly, when she's so good in other ways. It's a marvellous chance to reform her. We've had no time to waste."

"I'm worn out," Jack said gravely. "She's a fearful bully, Mrs. Shirley. But I'd like to get the hang of it."

"If you talk too much and are still sleepy in the morning, I shall put you in separate rooms," Mrs. Shirley threatened.

Jen looked sober. "We mustn't be a worry to you, or you might fling us out. We're not a bit anxious to go back to town. All right, Auntie Shirley! Only a few minutes, just to celebrate our being together again."

"Our reunion. That's what you're trying to say," Jack jeered.

She was in bed long before Jen, and sat clasping her ankles, her chin on her knees, and watching her "wife," as she brushed and plaited her shining locks.

"Gets longer and longer, just as your legs do," she commented. "Remember the girls calling you Rapunzel?"

Jen flung back the smooth plaits, switched off the light, and took a flying leap, not into her own bed but into Jack's.

"I always do my hair last of all, or it gets messy again. If I don't have measles and be nicely shaved, I shall cut it off when I'm eighteen and look like a baby again. I'm sure Daddy would rather not have a grown-up daughter. Your head's like nothing but a cricket ball."

"What are you doing here?" Jack protested. "That's your bed! Hop out of this!"

"Just as you like, my girl. But my secret plan has to be told in a whisper."

"Oh, all right! Get on with it! I don't suppose it's anything much," Jack said resignedly.

Jen crept close and spoke under her breath. "Mustn't worry Auntie Shirley. It's about the Manor. Queer how we seem to be tied up with those Marchwoods!"

Jack peered at her in the moonlight. "You're not going to suggest we should burgle Marchwood Manor, are you?"

"That's about it. I'm afraid Joan wouldn't quite approve. That's why I'm so glad to have you."

"Then you can change the subject!" Jack exploded. "I'll do a lot for you, but I won't stand for burglary. I shall—shall exert my authority as your husband. I won't have it."

Jen laughed in the darkness. "It isn't as bad as it sounds. It's not real burglary; I don't want to take anything, but I do want to go into that house. What's more, I mean to do it, and you're going to help me."

"Not if I know it! Mrs. Shirley would fire us both back to school."

"Now listen to me, dear!" Jen coaxed. "It's all perfectly simple and natural and innocent. Nobody would really mind, even if they caught us at it, once we'd explained. But nobody's going to know. We'll go for a walk tomorrow and we'll go up the lane to the hills, and then we'll turn in by the gate into the Marchwood grounds and go along to look at the lake. We've done that before; Joan and Joy have often trespassed as far as the lake. Nobody minds that. But there's another gate, that opens into a sort of orchard, and I'm sure it leads to the house. We'll slip through, and once we're in the orchard nobody will see us."

"Except gardeners or keepers," Jack retorted. "What's the idea? Just to look at the house? I could live without that myself."

"No, there's more in it than that. You remember these old things?" Jen slipped out of bed and fetched a small box from the dressing-table. She also brought her torch, and crouching beside Jack she flashed the light on two



treasures from the case: an old-fashioned gold purse and a locket, also of gold.

Jen touched a spring and opened the locket, to show a yellow curl of baby hair, soft and silky. She pointed at the monogram on both purse and locket.

“K.M.,” Jack agreed. “I know; you found them in the Abbey, at the door of Timothy’s tunnel. You thought a highwayman must have hidden them, centuries ago. Well?”

“Ambrose’s tunnel. I won’t have it given to Timothy Spindle! Dear old Ambrose used it for fifty years. Don’t you see, Jacky-boy? I’ve always said K.M. must stand for Kitty or Kate Marchwood, and that she was robbed as she was crossing the hills on her way home.”

“It might just as well be M.K.,” Jack argued.

“Not with the Marchwoods living so near! I’m sure it belonged to a Marchwood girl, and I want to prove it.”

Jack stared at her. “How are you going to do that?”

“It’s just a chance, of course, but it came to me suddenly that in the house there might be old family portraits, like those of Joy’s ancestors in the hall downstairs; and there might, just possibly, be one of Kitty Marchwood, wearing her locket. Then I’d know for certain.”

Jack gave a hoot of derision. “A million chances against it!”

“I know. But there’s always one chance in a million. You’ll come, won’t you? We won’t do any harm or touch a single thing. I only want to creep into the house and see if there are any portraits.”

“It’s mad,” Jack protested. “Quite mad. And it’s not worth while. You won’t find anything.”

“I might. Now I’ve thought of it I shall never settle down until I’ve tried.”

“No, I don’t suppose you will,” Jack agreed. “You’ll go on burbling about your Kitty Marchwood. Oh, I’ll come! I must look after you; there’s no saying what mad thing you’ll do if I let you go alone. But there’s not the least chance of your finding anything.”

“If I’ve tried, I’ll be able to stop thinking about it.”

“Right-o! We’ll go to ease your mind. The house is empty, you say?”

“A caretaker lives in it, but she often goes to the village. Susie Spindle told me; I talked to her this afternoon, before you came. To-morrow’s the Women’s Institute, and Mrs. Price never misses it.”

“What’s the Institute?”

“That’s what comes of living in a town! Meetings for women, in villages, and everybody goes. I’ve been to ours at home; quite jolly in parts,

and stodgy in others. Mrs. Price will be away from the Manor all afternoon and evening to-morrow.”

“Looks like our chance. O.K., wife; I’ll back you up, though it’s waste of time and you’re quite mad. But that’s your business.”

“That’s jolly decent of you, Jacky-boy!” Jen spoke with fervent gratitude. “To-morrow afternoon, then. Now we’d better close this meeting, before Auntie Shirley comes and takes you off to another room.”

## CHAPTER XII

### JEN WRITES TO A BARONET

"I say, Jen!" Jack sat up in bed.

Jen yawned and pushed back her plaits. She looked at her watch. "Six o'clock! What energy! Can't you go to sleep again? Is it the country air?"

"I've thought of something."

"Well, I hope you have, since you woke me to tell me about it! If you only want to say good-morning, I shall chuck something at you."

"Suppose you find a portrait wearing your locket, with 'Kitty Marchwood' written under it—most unlikely, but suppose you do—what then?"

Jen sat up and stared at her. "Well, then I shall know. And I want to know. It's almost too much to expect, but it's what I'm hoping for. What about it?"

"Then you'll know your precious purse and locket belong to the Marchwoods. Won't you feel you have to give them back?"

Jen gazed at her, her eyes wide with dismay. "I never thought of that!"

"You were allowed to keep the highwayman's booty—supposed to be—because you couldn't possibly hope to find the real owners after a century or so. What's the point of trying to prove who the owners were?"

"Jack, you brute!" Jen wailed. "You've spoiled my plan! Of course I'd have to give them back!"

"You've a terrific conscience—I know you! I should say you'd better not go near the Manor."

Jen lay back and pondered this. "I can't do that, now I've thought of it. I'm sure now that there *is* a picture, and that it will prove that my things belong to the Marchwoods, and that I shall have to give them back. It's too frightful to be haunted by the idea. I shall feel the Manor's reaching out after me, saying, 'Give us back our treasures'! I must go, now, to prove that there *isn't* a portrait, and that the Marchwoods can never claim the things. I shall go in fear and trembling, not in hope; but I'll have to go. I shall never have an easy mind while I'm thinking there may be a picture of Kitty Marchwood wearing my locket. Don't you see? I wanted to go before, but I'll have to go now."

Jack gave a grunt, half amusement, half admiration.

"Just like you! I said you had a conscience. We'd better do it to-day; then your mind will settle down again."

"I shall worry until I've been," Jen said gloomily. "I don't love you one scrap for putting it into my head."

"I wonder you hadn't thought of it for yourself," Jack retorted. "Seems obvious to me."

Jen sighed. "Well, I hadn't. And I wish you hadn't. You are a horrid girl. I wish you hadn't come."

Jack grinned. "You do, don't you? But you can't send me away now, for I won't go."

Jen lay staring at the ceiling. "Perhaps there won't be any family portraits. But I shan't feel safe until I know for certain."

"Better go and find out at once. Shall we?"

"No, dafty. The caretaker-woman would be there."

"I forgot. Then we can't go in the morning. You'll have to bear the anxiety."

"In the morning," Jen said haughtily, "I am writing to Sir Keith Marchwood about Timothy Spindle."

"Gosh, so you are! More Marchwood business! It is odd! I wonder if Joan will like your letter."

"Don't expect so. But she'll tell me how to put it right."

At ten o'clock Jen and Jack were summoned to the terrace under Joan's window. It was another sunny day, and Nurse had agreed that if her patient was well wrapped up she would take no harm from a few minutes out of bed.

"There! Doesn't she look like a bride?" Jen cried. She was less boisterous than usual, however; the letter she clutched in her hand was burdening her.

"Hallo, Jacky-boy!" Joan said cheerfully. "You're still all right?"

"Frightfully fit, thank you, Joan. It's marvellous to be here. Are you better?"

"Ever so much. Now, Jenny-Wren, let's hear your letter. I know it's on your mind."

"It's as bad as reading out an essay at school," Jen protested.

"Let Jack read it for you, then."

"No, she'd make it sound silly."

"It's not as bad as all that." Jack sat on the stone balustrade and swung her legs. "I read it yesterday. It's quite decent, as a matter of fact."

Joan laughed. "Come on, Jenny-Wren! Don't be shy!"

Jen took the plunge desperately.

"DEAR SIR KEITH MARCHWOOD,—Do you know that you've got a very nice boot-boy? But he's frightfully upset, and so he's

run away from you and come to us for protection. I found him hiding in the Abbey, like a stowaway, and I thought he'd have to be kept safe, because the Abbey was a sanctuary. But Joan Shirley (I'm staying with her, but she and Joy have measles. This letter hasn't got any; they haven't touched it)—Joan says it isn't a sanctuary any longer, because the church has gone. But she says we can bring back the old rights by helping anybody who comes to the Abbey in a mess, and Timothy came, and he's in a horrible mess. So we want to help him, and Joan can't write to you because of the measles. That's why I'm doing it. I'm Jen Robins, and I'm fourteen; I never wrote to a baronet before, so I don't know how to do it, but I hope it's all right.

"Please will you forgive Timothy Spindle and let him have a fresh start? He's most frightfully sorry about the two shillings, and he'll never do such a thing again. Some chaps he'd met had laughed at him because he couldn't afford to go to the pictures as often as they could. It's rotten to be laughed at, and he loves the pictures. He saw the two shillings and he was tempted. He won't ever do it again. But he *never* touched anything from Mr. Kenneth's room, and it's a wicked lie, if Mr. Simmonds says he did. He's terrified of Mr. Simmonds. Must you have such a bullying butler? It seems so horrid for everybody.

"Timothy likes being in London, and he'd like to go back. Couldn't you give him another chance? And *please*, couldn't you protect him from Mr. Simmonds?

"If you want to know more about him, I'll be glad to write again. But I don't want to bother you any more just now.—Yours faithfully,

"JEN ROBINS."

As she read, Jen kept glancing anxiously up at Joan. She saw Joan's lips twitch once or twice, and as she finished she added, all in one breath:

"Well, what's wrong with it? If it's as bad as that, tell me what I ought to say!"

"There's nothing wrong with it, Jenny-Wren," Joan said mildly. "It's a little unusual here and there, but it may be all the better for that."

Jen looked at her doubtfully. "It's just exactly what I wanted to say, so I thought I'd better go straight ahead and say it."

"Much the best plan, but people aren't always sensible enough or brave enough to do it. I like your letter very much."

"It would save a jolly lot of trouble, if people did say what they wanted to say," Jack remarked.

"It would," Joan agreed. "I shouldn't alter anything, Jen. Write it out neatly and ask mother to tell you the proper address."

"The butler bully won't be pleased," said Jack.

"That's the only part I was doubtful about. But I should leave it in. The man seems to have been unfair to Timothy; Sir Keith may as well know."

"Ought I to begin 'Sir Keith Marchwood'?" Jen asked anxiously. "That's the part *I* wasn't sure about."

"It isn't right: 'Sir Keith' would be enough. But I like your way better, for you, Jenny-Wren. It fits the rest of the letter; don't change it! He'll know you aren't used to writing to baronets."

"Sure it's all right to leave it?" Jen hesitated. "I don't want it to look silly."

"But you want him to like it, and you want him to know it really is from a girl and not dictated by a grown-up."

"Oh, rather! Yes, I see. Well, if it doesn't look too mad I'll leave it as it is."

"I should. Is the spelling mostly all right?"

"Of course it's all right!" Jen cried wrathfully. "I can spell! I'm not nine!"

Joan laughed. "No, but you're sometimes careless. I apologise!"

"It's O.K., Joan. I've read it," Jack said.

"You!" Jen gave a howl of wrath and turned to fling herself upon her.

Joan disappeared from the window, and, with a laugh across at the nurse, retired to bed.

"Joan's gone!" Jack cried, as she fled, with Jen in close pursuit.

Jen stopped and looked up at the window. She hurled a shout of defiance after Jack. "I'll attend to you later, my girl! You're a rotten speller. You wouldn't know, if every single word was wrong!"

She went back to the terrace and called loudly—"Joan! Can you hear? I'll write my letter very beautifully and then I'll post it. Sir Keith Marchwood will have it to-morrow morning, won't he?"

The nurse looked out. "That's right. Now run away and don't disturb my patient any more."

"Pig! I wasn't. Joan likes being disturbed," Jen said to herself, as she went indoors to set to work. "I shan't bother them this afternoon, at any rate. I've other things to do!" And her eyes gleamed at the thought of her expedition.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE BURGLARS

"We're going for a walk, Auntie Shirley," Jen explained after dinner. "We won't go near people; we'll remember we may have germs inside us. We'll go by the lane to the hills."

"Don't tire yourselves by climbing up to the chalkpit," Mrs. Shirley suggested. "It's too hot for that."

"We won't go all the way to the top," Jen promised.

They set out by the shrubbery path, which led to the hills, looking demure and law-abiding.

"Nobody would think we were burglars," Jack remarked. "I'm sure we don't look it."

"Auntie Shirley's such a dear, that I almost told her all about it. I hate keeping a secret from her."

"She'd have locked you up. You couldn't expect her to approve of burglary."

"It isn't burglary, if we don't take anything. It's breaking into a house. Of course, it is against the law, but I don't suppose the caretaker would send for the police, even if she happened to catch us," Jen said.

"How can she, if she's at her meeting?"

"Might feel ill and come home early."

Jack grunted. "One chance in a million—like your portrait of K.M., wearing her locket! What time does the meeting start?"

"Three o'clock. I asked Susie Spindle. Joan's promised to make everybody call her Susie, so that she'll feel more at home."

"Good business! You're being a bene—what is it?—benefactor to the Spindle family, aren't you? Doing quite a lot of good in the world, in your childish little way."

"Jacqueline Wilmot, I shall really have to ask if you can be sent home to-morrow," Jen said sternly. "I shall have had quite enough of you by then. All I wanted you for was to have your company this afternoon, as I couldn't have Joan."

"Joan! My good woman, Joan wouldn't have come. She'd have squashed you as flat as a cockroach."

"Well, Joy, then. Joy would have loved it. I'm not going to put up with much more from you."

Jack laughed. "What do we do now? Here's the lane."

“Here’s where we begin to trespass. These are the Marchwood grounds.”

Jen opened a gate and led the way by a path through the field to the bank of a small lake. “Joy wishes she had a lake. See the island with the big tree? You get to it by that old punt. Oh, I’ve been across, of course; Joy took me. Even Auntie Shirley says there’s no harm in trespassing as far as this, if we don’t do any damage. But we’ve never gone through that second gate. That’s where you’re going now, husband.”

“This is where the fun begins, then,” Jack agreed, as they slipped through the little gate into the orchard.

“We’ll creep from tree to tree, in case there’s a gardener anywhere,” Jen spoke cautiously. “But we’ll keep close to the path, for it must lead somewhere.”

“Doesn’t seem to be anybody about. Let’s scoot along the path and see where it takes us,” Jack suggested, growing impatient of their careful progress.

“Here’s the end. Oh, look! It’s a tennis lawn. What a shame it isn’t kept in decent condition!”

They stood beside another small gate, gazing at a lawn sunk between green banks. Beyond it stood the house, white and big and spreading—a homely, friendly house, with big windows, which were mostly shuttered on the lower floor.

“So that’s the Manor,” Jen remarked. “Poor old house! It’s too bad to leave it shut up so long. Somebody ought to come and live in it.”

“Who is there, if Sir Keith’s an invalid and his stepmother has to look after him, and one of the brothers is away exploring and the other lives in Africa?”

“He ought to give up the farm in Kenya and come home.”

“Oh, no, that would be silly!” Jack said. “It isn’t ever going to be his; why should he waste time on it? It will belong to the explorer chap when Sir Keith dies. You couldn’t ask the youngest one to stay at home and look after his brother’s property. Suppose Mr. Kenneth Marchwood wanted to get married? He must have a place of his own.”

“They don’t seem to be a marrying family. Three men, and not one of them married!”

“It’s most unsporting,” Jack said solemnly. “How are we poor girls ever going to get husbands?”

“First time I’ve heard you say you wanted one!”

“I don’t. It would cut short my career; I’m going in for medicine. But I’d like to see you safely off my hands,” Jack retorted.

“Thanks awfully! I’m no keener than you are!”



“You’re cut out for getting married and being properly domesticated,” Jack went on. “You’d take care of your husband and house and family beautifully. Of course, you’d boss the lot, but you’d do it quite kindly, and it would be for their good.”

“Ass! I couldn’t be bothered. But I would like to see this old house lived in, with a jolly family, mostly boys, playing in the garden. Perhaps the explorer will settle down, once it belongs to him, and find somebody who’ll marry him and live here with him.”

“In the meantime, how do you propose to get into the house?” Jack demanded. “You didn’t come here just to look at the outside, I suppose?”

Jen eyed the shutters in despair. “Doesn’t it look hopeless? I didn’t think there would be shutters. I meant to push back the catch of a window with my knife, like burglars do.”

Jack snorted. “Know all about the ways of burglars, don’t you?”

“I can guess; and I’ve read about them. Let’s try the shutters. There might be one loose somewhere.”

Unhopefully, Jack went with her, skirting the lawn warily and keeping in the shelter of the trees. They pushed and pulled at one after another of the shutters, but without success.

“It’s being properly looked after,” Jen said. “No—here, Jack! This one’s a bit goggy.”

Jack leapt to her side and they pulled together. The shutter shook and then the unsteady catch gave way and it fell open, so suddenly that they both reeled back.

Jen sprang up, laughing and triumphant. “Where’s my knife? What’s the window like?”

“You’ve done some damage now,” Jack growled, breathless because her taller companion had rolled upon her. “You’ve busted the bolt of that shutter.”

“Must have been going to give way. The woman will know it was nearly gone.” Jen was struggling with the catch of the window, standing on the low sill and sliding in her knife in the approved style.

“There!” she whispered. “It’s gone back quite easily. Now help me to shove the window up.”

In a few moments they were inside, looking eagerly about them. They stood in a passage, and its door was shut.

“I do hope all the doors aren’t locked. That would be mean,” Jen murmured.

Jack tried the door and opened it without hindrance.

“All clear. Be mousey, Jen. There might be somebody about.”

Jen nodded, and they crept out into a wide hall, with many closed doors. The house was quiet and seemed deserted.

"No family portraits here," Jen whispered. "We must find the drawing-room."

"There may be a picture-gallery upstairs. Some big houses have them."

"Try down here first. Are the doors locked?"

Jack tried one cautiously. It opened, and she put in her head and peered round.

"Jolly room—big—all dust-sheets. No portraits; pictures of the sea, and hills, and woods."

Jen glanced at the landscapes. "Quite good, but no use to us. It's the drawing-room. I thought the portraits would be here."

"They haven't any portraits. Or they're all at the town house," Jack jeered.

"We'll try the other rooms." Jen was not sure whether to be relieved or disappointed; Jack's suggestion of the morning was burdening her heavily.

They looked into each room, library, morning-room, dining-room; but found no family portraits.

"I'm beginning to think there aren't any." There was a satisfied note in Jen's voice. "But we'll look upstairs. It's quite safe; there's not a soul about."

The stair led to a long corridor. Jack, running up first, gave a whoop. "The picture-gallery! One to me! Here are your family portraits!"

The corridor was hung with oil-paintings, down its whole length, some large, some small, but all portraits.

"My aunt! There are enough of them!" Jen stood dismayed at the head of the stair.

"Your aunt! Other people's aunts; tribes of aunts! You'd better hurry on with the job; find K.M.'s picture in this crowd and see if she's wearing her locket!" Jack mocked.

"You help," Jen urged. "We shall be here all night. You know what we're looking for; you've seen my locket. And you can read. Their names are underneath. Find Kitty, or Kate Marchwood for me!"

They settled down to a hurried inspection of the portraits, Jack amused and sceptical, Jen distinctly harassed and anxious, neither paying any attention to anything else whatever.

## CHAPTER XIV

### TRAPPED

"It's a very fine collection," Jack murmured.

"No Kates on my side. Heaps of Janes and Marys. Oh, I spoke too soon!" Jen cried. "Here's a Katharine—but she hasn't any locket. Katharine Marchwood—I like that! It's a good name. Have you any Katharines?"

"I say, come here, Jen!"

At something in Jack's quiet tones Jen ran to her side. Jack was kneeling to look at a little old portrait low down near the floor.

"Silly to put it at the bottom!" Jack said. She turned the light of a pocket torch on the picture. "I thought so!"

"The locket!" Jen gasped, turning white.

"A locket. You can't be sure it's yours. It's very small."

"I am sure. It is mine. I know every mark on mine. But—but look at her clothes! My locket isn't as old as that!"

"What d'you mean?" Jack demanded. "How can you tell?"

"That's a Stuart cap and frock; or perhaps Elizabethan. I've seen pictures of Mary, Queen of Scots, in a thing like that. My locket comes from highwayman times; a hundred or two hundred years ago. But it *is* my locket, Jack!"

"Kitty Marchwood may have been wearing an old family heirloom, handed down for centuries."

"I never thought of that. The locket may be much older than the highwayman. Joan said it was old, when she saw it, but I thought she meant George I., or something like that—not Elizabeth or James." Jen knelt and peered at the picture. "I can't make out the K.M., but there are letters. Look, Jack! You can see the monogram."

"Might be just scratches. But it's in the right place for the letters," Jack admitted.

"It's the letters all right. That's my locket." Jen sat on her heels, her face serious. "She hasn't any name, as the others have. I wonder who she was?"

"She was Katharine Marchwood," Jack said at once. "The girl who met the highwayman may have been called anything; she was only wearing the heirloom."

Jen nodded. "I'm used to thinking of her as Kitty Marchwood, but Kitty was the ancestor, of course."

"More likely she was Katharine."

Jen agreed. "I wish we knew more about her. It's a very old picture. I wonder why——"

"What's that?" Jack raised her head.

"What's what? Oh, gosh!" Jen sprang to her feet. "A car—that was the horn—somebody's coming! Jack, come on!"

She dashed to the stair, then stepped back hurriedly, flinging out her arm to bar Jack's passage.

Jack looked at her, too startled to speak.

Jen pointed down to the hall, and silently drew back into the shadows of the upper corridor.

Jack looked, and withdrew also and in equal silence. A woman hurried to the big front door and threw it open.

"The caretaker," Jack whispered. "She's been there all the time. She might have heard us long ago. She's missed her meeting."

"She was expecting somebody. She didn't unbolt the door. It was unlocked and waiting," Jen murmured.

She crept to the head of the stair and lay flat on her chest, peering down. Jack joined her, lying flat also.

"Come away in, master," Mrs. Price was saying, holding the door wide open. "All's ready for you, and I'll make you a good strong pot of tea, after your journey."

The burglars looked at one another. "Sir Keith Marchwood himself," Jack muttered.

"My hat!" Jen gasped. "But I only posted my letter an hour ago!"

Jack smothered a derisive chuckle. "He hasn't come to see you, ass. He doesn't know about the letter."

"Has he come after Timothy Spindle?"

"There he is," Jack said cautiously. "Looks bad, doesn't he? He couldn't catch us, if it came to bolting."

"The man could, though," Jen said gloomily.

Sir Keith came heavily up the steps, on the arm of a man-servant. He was tall, but badly bent with rheumatism, so that he did not look his height, and dark, and he walked with difficulty.

"They're a dark family," Jen whispered. "He's like some of the portraits. They mostly have dark hair."

"He can hardly walk, poor chap. He needs that cup of tea," Jack said.

"In the library, Jenks," the invalid spoke wearily.

Mrs. Price threw open a door, and he was helped into the room.

"Shall we scoot now?" Jack asked.

"No—too many people about. We'll have to wait. Here comes the caretaker again."

As Jen spoke, Mrs. Price came bustling out to go to the kitchen. The girls drew back into the shadows.

"We're trapped," Jen said dramatically. "But there's plenty of time. He won't stay long."

"You think he'll go back to town to-night?" Jack asked, startled.

"Well, don't you? There's no bedroom ready for him. Any one can see this corridor hasn't been dusted to-day. If he was going to sleep here, she'd have had it all polished and shining, and the dining-room would have been ready, and the shutters would have been open."

"That's true," Jack admitted. "I didn't think. Wonder what he's come for?"

"Whatever it is, it's only a flying visit. I expect he can't be out of his own bed at night. He'd be afraid this house would be damp. He's come to fetch something, or to see somebody, or to make some arrangements—something that couldn't be done by writing. He'll stay an hour or two and then go back to town."

"Sounds likely enough. Then we must stick here till he goes, that's all."

"If they don't come upstairs for anything," Jen said darkly. "He might send the man. And we'll be late for tea. We'll have to make an excuse to Auntie Shirley."

Escape by the hall seemed impossible. The woman came bringing a tray of tea; the man went out to the car and returned with an attaché case.

"Too much traffic down there," Jack remarked.

Then she caught Jen's arm and pointed. "The man's going to the kitchen for his tea. They've closed the swing door. Our window's just across the hall. Sir Keith can't run; it's all he can do to walk. Shall we risk it?"

Jen hesitated. "What d'you think?"

"No saying how long we'll be stuck here. May be two hours. It will get frightfully stale, and Mrs. Shirley will be worrying. I'm sure we could do it."

"Right!" Jen rose carefully. "Creep down the stair and then bolt for the window."

Like mice they made their way to the lower hall. Then a swift, almost noiseless rush took them to the passage with the open window.

Not quite noiseless, however. A bell pealed in the library, and a stern voice called, "Who is there? Jenks!"

"Oh, quick!" Jen gasped.

They tumbled through the window and shot off to the shelter of the trees.

A shout warned them that they had been seen, and Jack panted, "The man's coming! Take that short cut we saw!"

They dashed down a narrow path, which cut off a big loop, reached the swing gate, fled across the field past the lake, and were in the shelter of the lane before the man appeared at the edge of the orchard.

“Bully for us!” Jack murmured, as they lay in hiding and watched him looking around. “They can’t have seen much of us. We didn’t drop anything they could recognise us by. We’re lucky to be out of that so easily.”

“Come into the garden,” said Jen, and pushed open the gate which led to the grounds of the Hall.

“Sit down and breathe,” she commanded. “I want to think.”

During the flight Jack had been the leader, but now Jen’s panic was over and reason was asserting itself. She sat, looking unhappy, on a big tree-trunk, her chin on her clenched fists and her plaits drooping on the ruddy beech needles.

Jack glanced at her curiously. “What’s up? We came out of that jolly well, and you’ve found what you wanted. You’ve seen your locket—oh, gosh! Is that what’s on your mind?”

“Yes!” Jen flung back her plaits and sat up. “It isn’t my locket any longer. We know now where it belongs. We couldn’t find the owner before; now we’ve found him, and he’s there in the house. It’s what you said, in bed this morning. I can’t keep the thing.” She looked up at Jack with tragic eyes.

Knowing her, Jack realised that argument was useless. She made an attempt, however.

“Nobody knows you’ve found out. If you just lie low——”

“Can’t. I’d never be able to wear it without feeling bad.”

“Couldn’t you ask Joan if you can keep it?”

“What’s the good? I know what she’ll say.”

“But, look here, Jen! If you give it back you’ll have to say how you found out. That means giving away that we’ve been in the house.”

“Can’t help that,” Jen retorted. “I can’t keep the locket now; it would be as bad as stealing it. The sooner the better; I’ll tell Joan later. You wait here!” And she was gone, racing towards the Hall, before Jack had guessed what she was going to do.

“I say, Jen!” Jack shouted in alarm.

Jen waved her hand, but rushed on. She was back in five minutes, the gold purse and the locket in her hand.

“I didn’t meet anybody. Auntie Shirley’s having tea with Joan. I’d rather get it over. Don’t come, Jack; there isn’t a scrap of need. I don’t suppose they saw there were two of us.”

“Ass!” Jack said indignantly. “Look here, Jen! If you take those things to him now, you’ll have to say you were in the house!”

“I know. But I’ll have to say it anyway, for I must explain how I’ve suddenly found out. I’d have to send the things by post and write a letter. It’s much easier to give them to him.”

“Aren’t you scared of him?” Jack cried. “*I am!*”

“Terrified,” Jen said grimly. “But I’m sure I can explain better by talking than in a letter. Don’t come, Jacky-boy! It’s rotten for you, and it’s all my doing.”

“I’m going, if you go, but I don’t like it one scrap.”

“You are a sport! I hated the thought of going alone. Will you really come?” Jen cried.

“I’m certain that man saw us both. If you refused to reveal the name of your companion, they might shut you up in a dungeon and put you on the rack.”

Jen laughed. “If you think that’s the way I’m likely to be received, you’d better stay here and be able to tell Joan where I’ve gone. You could organise a rescue party.”

“No, I’m coming to hold your hand. Sure you’ve really got to go?”

“’Fraid I must. He won’t eat us when he sees the locket. Let’s get it over!” Jen said valiantly.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE MARCHWOOD LOCKET

Jen led the way back to the Manor, her face set. "We won't go in by the window. We want to see Sir Keith Marchwood, so we'll ask for him properly."

"I hope that man won't know us again, but I'm very much afraid he will. If he does, he won't be exactly friendly," Jack urged.

"We ought to have disguised ourselves with different hats and black glasses and—and beards," Jen murmured as they reached the tennis lawn. "Shall we be humble and go to the back door? It's much nearer than the front."

"We'll meet the caretaker," Jack warned her.

Jen was going towards the door when it was thrown open, and the manservant and Mrs. Price rushed out.

"I'd like to know the meaning of this, *if* you please," the woman caught Jen by the arm. "You tell me what you was doing in the house just now, you wicked girl!"

"And why you have returned," the man added, his voice hard and formal. "Sir Keith presents his compliments and he wishes to speak to the young ladies."

"He did see us, then," Jen commented. "We want to speak to him too. That's why we've come back. We'd like to explain, and to apologise to him."

"Ho, yes! Apologise! I hope you'll speak up as bold as that when you see the master."

"I hopes as how Sir Keith will send for the police," Mrs. Price said shrilly. "Breaking into the house like burglars!"

"I don't think he will," Jen said sturdily, though her eyes were frightened. "Come on, Jack! I'll do the talking. I'm sure Sir Keith will understand!"

"Hope so, but I doubt it," Jack muttered, under her breath.

"You needn't hold on to me like that," Jen said with dignity, looking up at Jenks. "I'm not going to run away. We're most anxious to see Sir Keith. We've come here on purpose to speak to him."

She heard Jack's stifled grunt and gave her a withering look. "I despise you, Jacqueline," she murmured bitterly.

"A case for the police, that's what this is," Mrs. Price assured her.



"I don't think so," Jen said haughtily. "I'm sure I can make Sir Keith understand."

"You can, if anybody can," Jack agreed dejectedly, all her courage gone. "First-class at talking, you are!"

"In you go!" The man had led them to the back door. "And don't you make a bolt through that window again. You'd better have the shutter seen to, missus. It's been broken by these here burglars."

Jen, holding her head high, scorned to reply. Jack grew crimson and bit her lip to keep down her rising anger.

"Here they are, Sir Keith. Here's the burglars," Jenks ushered them to the library door.

The baronet was seated at a large desk, which stood open and showed many pigeon-holes, filled with papers.

"Leave the children with me. Now, young ladies, perhaps you will kindly tell me what has happened."

Jack shrank and stood just inside the door, but Jen went forward, the locket and purse clasped in her hands and held behind her back.

"We've come to apologise. We're very sorry. We were upstairs, looking at your family portraits, when you arrived," she faced him and spoke frankly. "We didn't want you to be bothered, and we felt a bit bad about having come without being invited, so we tried to get away without disturbing anybody. But we aren't burglars and we haven't done any harm, except the bolt on one shutter, and honestly, it must have been loose, for it came open at once when we pulled it."

Sir Keith looked at her steadily, his tired dark eyes keen and piercing. "Say that again. I'm afraid I haven't quite grasped it."

A half-hysterical sound came from Jack in the background. Jen's colour rose. "Don't mind her. She's only rather excited. Do you really want me to say it all again?"

"If you please," he said courteously.

Jen took a long breath and repeated her apology as exactly as she could. "I think that's what I said," she ended.

"Thank you. I shall have the shutter mended. Am I to understand that you had a craving to see my portraits?"

"It must seem odd, I know," Jen agreed. "But I wanted so fearfully badly to see if there was a picture of Kitty Marchwood, and if she was wearing her locket. It was sheer bad luck that we chose to-day and that you came while we were here."

"Have you been in the house before?" he asked sharply.

"Oh, no, never! And we'll never come again. We've found her, and now we know the worst. I suppose I'll have to give the locket back to you? It's

my second dearest possession,” Jen said wistfully, still standing with her hands clasped behind her back.

“Locket?” He stared at her from under dark brows. “You don’t mean—what locket are you talking about?”

“Kitty—or perhaps she was Katharine—Marchwood’s gold locket, with her initials on it and a baby’s curl inside.”

“You say you have found this locket?” He was gazing at her incredulously.

“Yes, in the Abbey. I’m staying with Joan and Joy Shirley at the Hall, but they’re having measles so I’m in quarantine. I say, you don’t mind, do you?” Jen cried in startled dismay. “I forgot about the quarantine! But it’s silly, for I’m perfectly well. I can’t give you measles when I haven’t got it myself.”

“I’m rather old for measles,” he said grimly. “And you don’t appear to be sickening for it at the moment. Where do you say you found this locket?”

“In the Abbey, a month ago. We dug up an old wallet, and we think it had belonged to a highwayman, who hid it there when the Abbey was a heap of ruins, before Joy’s grandfather——”

“I know about the restoration by Sir Antony Abinger,” he said impatiently. “But this locket—it has been lost for a hundred and fifty years. You say you were looking for a picture which showed it?”

“We found it, low down near the floor; a very old portrait of a girl.”

He nodded. “She was the first Katharine Marchwood. She married, and the locket was sent back, after her death, and was handed down to a Katharine in each generation. Then it disappeared—stolen by robbers, as you have guessed. And you say you have found it!” He sat staring at her and drumming with his fingers on the desk.

Jen looked up at him anxiously. “You’ll want it back, of course. It serves me right. I was an ass to come; Jack said it was silly, for if I did prove it had belonged to you I’d have to give it back.”

“I said you’d feel you had to, because you’ve such a hefty conscience,” Jack said from the background.

“That’s Jack—Jacqueline, you know. She was quite right,” Jen admitted. “As long as I wasn’t sure, I could keep the locket. I’ve been frightfully bucked to have it and terrifically proud of it. But now that I know it’s yours, I can’t keep it, of course. I wish I hadn’t come to look! But once the idea had come into my head, I had to make sure.”

“You came to-day to see if any of our portraits showed the locket?” Sir Keith asked, patiently trying to understand. “That was your only reason for coming into the house?”

“Definitely the only reason,” Jen assured him earnestly. “We only looked for the pictures, and then we looked *at* them. We didn’t touch a single thing.”

“Then we’ll say no more about breaking and entering the house, or about burglars. It won’t be necessary to send for the police.”

“Thank you very much,” Jen said humbly. “I didn’t really think you would. I’m sorry we did it, and I apologise again. Here’s the locket, and Kitty Marchwood’s purse,” and she laid her treasures on the desk. “They were my share of the booty, when we divided the highwayman spoils.”

Sir Keith was not listening. He had picked up the locket and was examining it curiously.

“I’ve been very careful of it,” Jen urged. “I’ve only had it for a month. It is the right one, isn’t it?”

“Oh, yes! It is certainly the missing locket. How does it open?”

Jen touched the spring. “We didn’t find it at first. There! A Marchwood baby’s little yellow curl. Why is it yellow? You all have dark hair, don’t you?”

“Not all,” he said absently, picking up the purse and looking at it. “One of my young brothers is as fair as you. We have had some fair ancestors. Yes, these are certainly mine.”

“I know,” Jen said sadly. “That’s why I went to fetch them. I couldn’t possibly have kept them, once I knew they were yours.”

“You mean, you couldn’t keep them now that I’ve discovered you have them. What would you have done if I hadn’t happened to come to-day?”

“Sent them to you. And I don’t mean that!” Jen cried indignantly. “It’s nothing to do with you. I brought the locket back to you! You’d never have known anything about it. It’s what I said: it’s because I know it’s yours. I’m not a highwayman robber! It’s your property and I must give it back. You aren’t taking it from me! I’m giving it to you, because I know now that it’s yours.”

“I beg your pardon,” Sir Keith said hastily. “Your version is undoubtedly correct. But wait a moment! What am I to do with a girl’s locket? There is no Katharine in our family now. What is your name, by the way?”

“Jen Robins. I live in Yorkshire, but I go to school in Wycombe.”

“She’s Janet really,” Jack came forward. “But she doesn’t like Janet.”

Jen turned on her wrathfully. “What d’you need to come barging in for? You’ve kept out of this, because you were terrified of him. Just go on keeping out of it! Don’t come messing things up!”

Sir Keith waved “Janet” and Jack aside. “Little Miss Jen, it is very surprising that our old locket should be recovered after so many years. But I can’t see that any one who is alive now has any desire for it. My young

brothers are unmarried and are out of the country; they have boy cousins, but there are no Marchwood girls. The locket will only be locked up, if you return it to me. Let me think!” and he sat drumming on the desk again.

Jen eyed him breathlessly. She shot a glance at Jack, asking a wordless question; Jack raised her eyebrows, but did not venture to speak.

## CHAPTER XVI

### JEN MAKES HER WILL

"Yes, that would do," Sir Keith said at last. "Suppose you wear the locket for us, for a time? But when you have done with it, it should be returned to us. Perhaps by then one of our boys may have married, and there may be a Marchwood girl who would like to wear it."

"In my will, do you mean?" Jen cried in delight. "I'd love to make my will! I never thought I'd have anything precious enough to leave to anybody! Oh, couldn't I do it now? Then you'd be sure it was what you want. You and Jack could be witnesses; you need two, don't you?"

Sir Keith's eyes gleamed in amusement. "If you will make your will, here and now, I will give you the locket for your lifetime."

"Oh, glory! Of course I will! Tell me how to do it!" Jen cried eagerly. "Have you a pen? It should be written in ink. Then you could keep it in return for the locket, couldn't you?"

Sir Keith grimly handed over a pen and some sheets of paper.

"That seems an excellent plan. But any later will you may make would cancel this one, you know, so you must be careful to remember always to mention the locket."

"Every time I make my will. Yes, I see," Jen nodded, settling herself at the big table. "This is a thrill! I never thought, when I set out to-day, that I should make my will before I went home!"

"What are you going to say?" Jack hung over Jen's shoulder.

"Go away! You'll make me nervous. We'll tell you to come when we want you," Jen retorted.

"We shall summon you when the document is ready for your signature," Sir Keith said stiffly.

Jen chuckled as Jack retreated hastily. "How beautifully you put it! The document! I don't know what to say," she pleaded. "Won't you tell me, please?"

"Put it in your own words, my dear."

Jen sighed. "Has anybody a pencil? I shall need to start several times, I'm quite sure."

Jack supplied a pencil, and Jen began to scribble. Sir Keith glanced at her, and then, with amused eyes, turned to his desk again.

"Will this do?" Jen looked up at last. "'I, Janet Robins'—I suppose I must say Janet, as it's a document!—'wish that after my death the

Marchwood locket and purse shall be given back to the Marchwood family, if possible to a girl called Katharine Marchwood, and if there is more than one Katharine by that time, to the eldest one. If there is no Katharine, then some other girl must have it, and she must call her daughter Katharine and give it to her. This is NOT to be cancelled by any later will, even if I forget to mention it.' How would that do? I'd like a Katharine to have the locket again."

Sir Keith assented gravely. "It will do excellently. Sign it with your full name. Your friend and I will witness your signature."

"I'll copy it out neatly," Jen said. "May I take the pencil scribble away to show to Joan?"

"Certainly. Tell us when you are ready."

"I'm going to sign it now." Jen's tone was full of importance. "Jack, come and be a witness."

Jack stood staring at the pen. "I saw you do it. I watched every stroke. It's jolly badly written, but I suppose you were nervous. Where do I sign?"

"It's enough to make anybody nervous, to have you glowering at one like that," Jen retorted.

"Sign there," said Sir Keith; and added his own signature.

"Nothing to do with me, of course," Jack said cheerfully. "But if there are lots of girls and none of them's called Katharine, there's going to be a jolly old row over that locket. They'll all fight for it. Why didn't you say it must go to the eldest girl in the family, if there wasn't a Katharine?"

Jen looked at Sir Keith. "Do you think it matters?"

"There will be a Katharine, if there are any girls at all. It is one of our family names. But there may be no girls; my young stepbrothers may not marry. Andrew is a wanderer, and Kenneth's heart seems to be in Africa. You had better insert a line saying that if our family has died out, the locket is to go to your children."

"My children!" Jen grinned. "My daughters, I suppose. Wonder if I'll ever have any? I'd like to put that in. Thank you very much, Sir Keith."

Sir Keith put the document into a pigeon-hole in the desk. "I shall instruct my solicitors as to its whereabouts," he said.

"Whom did Katharine marry? The first one who was painted wearing the locket?" Jen asked. "I'd like to know more about her."

"She was born in 1585," he said. "Fifteen years later she married young Peregrine Abinger, of the Hall——"

"At fifteen?" cried Jack.

Jen's shriek of excitement drowned the words. "Peregrine? The 'falcon'? Joy's ancestor? Oh, you don't really mean that Peregrine married my Katharine Marchwood?"

Sir Keith and Jack were both staring at her.

“Why shouldn’t he—or she? Have you gone batty?” Jack asked.

“Oh, you don’t understand——”

“What do you know about Peregrine Abinger?” the puzzled baronet demanded. “Why does it excite you so much that he should have married the lady of your locket?”

“Because it makes her related to us! Joy will be thrilled to the limit; she wants fearfully much to know more about Peregrine. Then my Katharine Marchwood was Joy’s ancestor? She was really Katharine Abinger?”

“After her marriage—yes. The picture you found was painted before she left home. But I don’t understand why it matters so much?”

“No, you couldn’t,” Jen admitted. “We found an old book, written by Ambrose, the monk who lived in the Abbey ruins for fifty years, and it spoke about his adopted son, Peregrine, who was so good to him; Ambrose called him his ‘falcon.’ After he died Peregrine buried him in the Abbey, under the gate-house, and put the book and his ring beside him, and wrote a message saying he’d done it and signed it ‘P.A.’ Joy was thrilled to have her ancestor’s writing, and we love Peregrine because he loved Ambrose and called him his ‘father,’ and was good to him when he was old. It’s marvellous to know that he married my Katharine Marchwood! How pleased Joy will be!”

Sir Keith looked at her under drawn brows. “When you were searching for the portraits, how much of the house did you—er—visit?”

“Explore?” Jen reddened, startled by the change of subject. “We didn’t do any harm, really we didn’t. We just peeped into the rooms down here and saw there weren’t any paintings of people—only scenes of woods and the sea, and so on. Jack thought there might be a picture-gallery upstairs, so we rushed up, and there were the family portraits. You said we wouldn’t say any more about the burgling!”

“I only wished to know how much you had seen,” he said. “If you look in the small drawing-room—the second door on the other side of the hall—you will find a picture that may interest you.”

Jen stared at him. “Oh, what is it? May we go and look? It’s not a picture of Peregrine, is it?”

“There weren’t any portraits,” Jack began.

“Not of Peregrine. See if you can find the picture I mean.”

“The second door?” Jen shot off, with Jack at her heels.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE ABBEY CHURCH AT LAST

Very carefully Jen and Jack went round the small room, scanning each picture in turn.

“Oh, look! I like this one!” Jen exclaimed, standing before a painting of the interior of a great church, with beautiful windows, strong simple pillars, and a brilliant shaft of sunlight striking across the arches of the choir.

“D’you think this is the same place—the outside of it?” Jack asked. She, too, was gazing at a church, with a wonderful doorway, a low bell-tower, and high arched windows.

“How odd! They’re both lovely. I wonder why the Marchwoods—and why he said, ‘not Peregrine’—and why Peregrine made him think of these, as if there might be some connection? It couldn’t possibly——” An astounding idea seized Jen. “Oh, come and ask him! Come on, Jack! It couldn’t be——!”

“Couldn’t be what? Where do you think it is?” Jack asked, bewildered.

Jen had gone flying to the door. She ran back for a quick careful look at Jack’s picture.

“It *is*! Don’t you *see*? Oh, come and ask him, Jack!”

She sped to the library in a whirl of excitement.

“Sir Keith, is it the Abbey church? The great church that was pulled down? There’s something in the corner of one of the pictures that might be the end of the gate-house. *Is* it our church, Sir Keith?”

He laid down his papers. “Yes, my dear. Those are pictures of the Abbey church, painted more than sixty years after it had been destroyed.”

“Oh! But how? Who could do it, if he hadn’t seen it? And why have you got them? They ought to be in the Abbey, so that every one can see what the church was like.”

“What cheek!” Jack protested.

“I agree with Miss Jen. I have often thought it would be a better place for them than buried here. But, my dear children, they were at least safe here. The Abbey was in a ruined condition until Sir Antony Abinger undertook the restoration of the buildings that were left.”

“That’s true,” Jen nodded. “You’ve kept the pictures safe, anyway.” She looked up at the baronet with awe in her face. “It’s the thing we’ve wanted most of all—to know what that lovely church was like. I’ve often heard Joan say, ‘If only we had a picture of the great church!’ And you have two



pictures; and they've been here, next door, all the time! I suppose you couldn't——?" She looked at him longingly.

He laughed grimly. "Restore them to the Abbey, I suppose! Sir Antony would have had them long ago, if he had been a pleasant neighbour. But he was not a good neighbour, and both my father and I found it best to have as little to do with him as we could. He never knew we had those pictures."

"He had a frightful temper, hadn't he? I've heard how he hated everybody and nobody liked him," Jen assented. "Joy talks about her 'Sir Antony temper,' but she doesn't go off into rages very often. Of course, you wouldn't dream of giving anything to him if he was as bad as all that. But now——!" and she eyed Sir Keith wistfully again.

"I liked the boy, Tony, his son, who died abroad. If he had succeeded his father, the two families might have been friendly. As it was, I went to live in town, and the pictures remained here and were forgotten."

"But how could anybody paint them who hadn't seen the church?" Jack leaned on the desk and spoke eagerly, all her fear forgotten.

"Yes, I wanted to ask that," Jen agreed. "Do you know who did the pictures? And how he managed it?"

Sir Keith's eyes gleamed. "The explanation will appeal to you. Katharine of the locket, the wife of Peregrine, knew your old monk and loved him, as her husband did. They were a very young couple; he was eighteen and she fifteen at the time of the marriage. It was the custom in those days."

"Then Peregrine was twenty when he wrote his name at the end of Ambrose's story," Jen murmured, her eyes fascinated and eager. "We've often wondered. Did Ambrose describe the church to them? Of course, he'd been in it often. *Oh!* Ambrose didn't paint the pictures, did he? We know he was an artist, working with gold and jewels!"

"But not a painter. No, he only told them about it. But he probably had an artist's eye for detail, and his description would be accurate and complete. Katharine sent for a famous Dutch painter who was visiting London, and he came to stay at the Hall and questioned the old monk and made sketches. I believe Ambrose saw the paintings before he died and approved of them."

"Then we owe them to him, the old dear!" Jen exclaimed.

"I expect he was pleased to think the church wouldn't be forgotten," Jack added.

"The paintings were sent to us after the death of Katharine and Peregrine. Their only son had died before them, and his son was a careless youth, wanting only to be at Court under Charles II. Old family treasures did not appeal to him, so he carried out his grandmother's last wish and sent back the paintings and the locket, both of which she had treasured. The

locket was lost a hundred years later, stolen from another Katharine when she was crossing the hills.”

“We guessed that, but it’s marvellous to *know*,” Jen cried.

“Odd, to find the whole story like this, just by chance,” Jack remarked.

“I’m jolly glad I brought the locket and purse back, instead of sending them by post,” Jen exclaimed. “You might never have remembered about the pictures, and we’d never have seen them.”

“I don’t agree that it was by chance,” Sir Keith said. “If Miss Jen had not had so much courage and honesty, I should never have been sufficiently interested in her and her friend Katharine to think of those old pictures.”

Jen grew scarlet. “That’s terribly nice of you,” she said earnestly. “I didn’t want to come, but I’m jolly glad I did.”

“You will go home now,” Sir Keith said, “and you will tell the new owner of the Abbey about the pictures. If she would like to hang them in the Abbey, and if she will guarantee their safety, I will hand them over to her.”

“They’ll be perfectly safe in the refectory,” Jen said, her eyes shining. “The precious Abbey books and manuscripts are there, and some of Lady Jehane’s jewels. How frightfully bucked Joan will be! May we go and tell her at once? I feel I can’t wait a second!”

Sir Keith glanced at his watch. “Yes, it would be as well. I have work to do and I must not be too late. It is obvious that I shall not do the work while you are here.”

Jen coloured again. “We’ve been dreadfully interrupting, I’m afraid. Have we spoiled your afternoon?”

“I have not yet found the papers I came to fetch. But the afternoon has not been without interest,” he admitted. “Ask the caretaker to give you tea before you go.”

“If you don’t mind, we’d rather go home for tea. We’re late already,” Jen explained. “May we have one more look at the pictures, now that we know they really are the Abbey church?”

“By all means.” He had turned back to the desk and was examining papers once more. “Good-day, for the present. Perhaps we shall meet again.”

“Good-bye! And thanks, just terribly much,” Jen said fervently.

She stood beside Jack, gazing at the picture of the outside of the church. “It had a bell-tower. I was wondering if there’d been a bell, when I was in the Abbey the other day, just before—I say! I never said a word about Timothy Spindle! When he gets my letter he’ll think me quite batty!”

“Don’t interrupt him!” Jack cried. “He’ll never find his papers if you start off again! He’ll hate you like anything!”

But Jen was already at the library door. She opened it a few inches and put in her head. “Sorry! But there’s something else. I wrote a letter to you

this morning. It's in the post; you'll get it to-morrow. You'd think it so odd, if I didn't say anything about it."

Sir Keith looked up, the papers he was seeking in his hand, annoyance in his eyes. The frown vanished at sight of the small face framed in yellow plaits, peering at him from the door. "You wrote to me? But you didn't know me."

"No, I wouldn't have been so scared about doing it if I had. I felt terribly bad, but they all said I must do it. It was about Timothy Spindle."

Sir Keith laid down the papers, satisfied that his work was done. "Come here, little Miss Jen. Who is this Timothy—what did you say?"

"Spindle. One of the Spindle family from the village; the blacksmith, you know." Jen came and stood by the desk, her eyes full of reproach. "Timothy works in your house in town; he's your boot-boy. Don't you know him?"

The baronet's lips twitched at the surprise in her tone. "I leave the servants to my stepmother. No, I can't say I know Timothy, but it is evident that you do. How has that come about?"

Jen drew a long breath. "He ran away, and he came here and took refuge in the Abbey. His sister works for Mrs. Shirley. I found them in the Abbey, and I thought we'd have to protect them, because of its being a sanctuary. But Joan said you and the police and other people wouldn't care about that now, and that we must give him up to you; but that we must try to help him to make a fresh start, and that the only way we could bring back the old rights of the Abbey was by helping anybody who came there in trouble, even if we couldn't protect them. So I wrote to you, to ask you to give Timothy Spindle another chance. He only took two shillings, and he's fearfully sorry. He'll never do it again."

Sir Keith grasped one point in the breathless story. "You say this Timothy ran away from my house?"

"He was frightened of Mr. Simmonds. You know him, I suppose?"

"Simmonds!" There was no mistaking the anger in Sir Keith's voice. "I have had to dismiss Simmonds for dishonesty. He left me yesterday."

"Oh, cheers!" Jen did a wild war-dance before his astonished eyes, ending with a somersault in the middle of the floor. She looked up, flushed and dishevelled, but bright-eyed. "Do you mind? I only do that when things are too marvellous for words."

"Jen, you are awful!" Jack was watching in horror from the doorway.

"I am glad to hear you don't do it continually," the baronet remarked. "May I ask what it is that is so marvellous that you have been driven to express your feelings in this extraordinary way?"

Jen sprang up and came to his side again. "That Mr. Simmonds has gone, of course. Timothy was so frightened of him. Now it will be all right. I expect it was Simmonds who had been taking Mr. Kenneth's things. It wasn't Timothy."

"Was Timothy accused of stealing my brother's goods?"

"Mr. Simmonds said he did, but he didn't do it, you know. He took two shillings, because he saw them lying about and he wanted to go to the pictures, but he's sorry and he'll never do such a thing again."

"And you want us to give him another chance?"

"You will, won't you? If that man's gone, Timothy will get on all right."

"Very well. Because of your interest in this boy, I will give him another chance. Tell him to come back, and to come to see me on his return. Now I beg you not to have another attack of delirious excitement."

Jen choked down her shout of joy, but could not quite keep back a chuckle of delight. "I won't do it again. Thank you so much! It's really frightfully decent of you. I think you're just terribly kind. I'll tell Timothy, and I know he and Susie will love you for ever; Susie's his little sister. As for Joan and Joy, I don't know what they'll say! You're giving Joan her church; she's always longed to have a picture of it. You're giving Joy a new ancestor—my Katharine Marchwood. And you've given me my locket, and all the story about it. Aren't you glad you came here to-day?"

Sir Keith smiled grimly. "You mean, you are glad, don't you?"

"Oh, of course we are! We're all tremendously glad and thrilled. But it's marvellous for you too, to have made everybody so terribly glad you came. Now Jack and I must simply fly home. I'll send Timothy back to you. Thank you so very much!" and Jen fled, leaving Sir Keith a little breathless.

"Not by any means a wasted afternoon!" he said to himself, as he rang for Jenks to help him to the car.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE FOOLISHNESS OF JOY

"Now we're going to tell everybody!" Jen shouted exultantly, as she raced homewards with Jack. "Joan and the pictures—Joy and her ancestors—Timothy and Mr. Simmonds—and me and my locket! Oh, what a day! Aren't you glad we went back, Jacky-boy? Suppose we'd run away and that had been the end of it?"

"I thought you were mad, but I suppose you weren't," Jack admitted. "I say, there's Joan looking for us! Hope they haven't sent out search parties!"

Jen gave a whoop. "It's not Joan—it's Joy! That's not Joan's room. Joy must be heaps better! Come and tell her about her ancestors!"

They ran across the lawn and up on to the terrace. Joy was leaning out of her window, wrapped in a big coat; she shouted and waved to them.

"Such a joke! Nursy thinks I'm safe in bed. But if Joan can talk through the window, why shouldn't I? Glad to see you, Jacky-boy! Nice of you to keep Jen company. Must have been frightfully stale for her. Have you been having a picnic on the hills? Wish I'd been with you!"

She was flushed and excited by this change in the routine of her illness, and she pushed back the loosened red hair from her hot forehead.

"Joy, ought you to have the window open like that?" Jack asked anxiously. "You have to be so careful after measles. I've heard Daddy say so."

"Joy! Joy, what do you think? We've found such a marvellous story!" Jen shouted. "Who was Peregrine's wife? Ambrose's 'falcon,' you know. Guess, Joy!"

"Gosh!" said Joy. "Have you been unearthing things without me and Joan? Well, who? And how did you find out? Buck up! Nurse may come and catch me any second, and she'll raise the roof. Told me not to stir out of bed."

"I should say you'd better go back jolly fast," Jack said bluntly. "The sun's off that window, and there's a good bit of wind. Jen, don't talk to her. She shouldn't be there. It's frightfully risky."

"Joy, do go back to bed!" Jen took alarm at Jack's tone. "You were much worse than Joan, weren't you?"

"My dear kids, I'm boiling! I shan't catch cold. Where did you find out about Peregrine? And who was his wife? I didn't know he had one!"

“Katharine Marchwood, the girl who wore my locket. We’ve been at the Manor. There’s a picture of her. Please go back to bed, Joy!”

“Oh, that’s rot!” Joy exclaimed. “The highwayman stole the locket a hundred years ago. Peregrine lived before Cromwell.”

“I know. It’s all right. It was handed down in the Marchwood family as an heirloom, but it belonged first to your new ancestress, Peregrine’s wife, Katharine. They were married in 1600; she was only fifteen. I’m to keep the locket for my lifetime, and then it’s to go back to the Marchwoods. I’ve been making my will!” Jen cried in triumph.

“But, I say——”

Jack caught Jen by the arm. “Come on! She can’t talk to you, if you aren’t there. I’m sure it’s dangerous. You’ve told her all that matters; now she can think about it in bed. Come into the house, Jen! It’s the only way to stop her talking.”

Jen surrendered and went indoors with her. “Do you really think it’s risky? It would be awful if she made herself worse.”

“Frightfully risky,” Jack said firmly. “There’s a wind, and I’m sure she’s still feverish. She’s a perfect idiot.”

“Oh, I say!” Jen looked anxious. “I wish she hadn’t done it. Good thing we didn’t stay any longer!”

“I hope we didn’t stay too long. The nurse ought to know; she might be able to do something to drive out a chill, if Joy took any cold.”

“We couldn’t give Joy away,” Jen began. “They’d row her dreadfully for getting out of bed.”

But Jack was a doctor’s daughter and had heard many things. She looked up defiantly. “Well, I’m going to do it, sneaking or not. Even if you all hate me for ever, I’m going to tell the nurse. It’s not right to lie low about it; it wouldn’t be fair to her. She’s responsible, and she’ll be blamed. I’m going to tell her at once.”

“Jack, are you sure?” Jen hesitated. “Joy will be terribly upset.”

“And I’m a visitor, and they’ve been awfully decent to me.” Jack bit her lip and went towards the staircase. “I hate to make trouble. But I simply must do it, for Joy’s sake. Just because they’ve been so nice to me, I can’t let Joy run a risk and not warn somebody.”

She sped up the stair, looked along the corridor, and then went to the door of Joan’s room. “Nurse, are you there?”

The nurse came out, much astonished. “What are you doing here? You aren’t supposed——”

“I’m sorry,” Jack interrupted nervously. “But Joy’s been hanging out of her window, talking to us—we couldn’t stop her—and there’s a wind, and

she was all hot and red. I'm sure it was dangerous. I thought you ought to know."

With an exclamation the nurse closed the door and went along to Joy's room. "Go downstairs. Don't frighten Mrs. Shirley. I'm glad you told me. Why did you let her talk?"

Jack went soberly back to Jen. "She's upset. I thought she would be. Joy is an ass!"

"You don't think she'll be ill again, do you?" Jen exclaimed.

"If she is, she'll be a lot worse than she was last time. Perhaps my telling the nurse will be some use. Let's forage for supper, as we've missed tea! Then we could go and bowl at a stump, and we'd be out of the way."

"I don't feel like cricket," Jen said unhappily, when they had wheedled an early supper from cook. "It would be so awful if Joy was ill again. You've made me feel bad about her."

"It wasn't our fault," Jack urged. "She was hanging out of the window before we were near the house. She must have been looking to see if we were anywhere in sight. We sent her in again as quickly as we could."

"I know. I'm glad now you told Nurse. But I'm worried. Auntie Shirley told me that Joy used to be delicate," Jen explained. "She was bothered about her from the first."

"I hope it's not her chest. People get pneumonia after measles, and it's a beastly thing," Jack said gloomily.

"Well, I can't play cricket until we know. I couldn't bowl straight. You put up a stump and have some shots at it; I'm going into the Abbey. Now that I know what the church looked like, I shall always see it when I go to that corner of the garth. I can't tell Joan till to-morrow."

"You could send a letter," Jack suggested.

"No, I want to tell her. It's too thrilling to be wasted in a letter." Jen took up her jersey and set out for the Abbey.

"I'll come," Jack said. "It's no sport bowling on one's own, and I don't want to think about Joy."

They were both burdened as they crossed the lawn. But on the garth Jen put her troubled thoughts aside.

"It wasn't our fault, and you've done all you could to help. Now about the great church!" She went towards the gap which led to the site where the church had stood, then pulled herself up sharply. "That's silly! The church was here, looking down on the garth. That wall is only put there to make it look as it used to do, an enclosed square place. That side of the garth would be the church, with those lovely windows looking down on it, over the cloister roof. The cloisters went all the way round, in those days. It's up

there, above this wall, we have to imagine the church, not through that gap. If you go through into the field you're inside the church."

"Weird! But that's so, of course," Jack agreed.

"There are bits of the old pillars, and the altar. The field is the inside of the church, though I never had quite that idea before," Jen confessed. "The door of the sacristy led right into the church; it's the vestry, you know. And the dormitory door and window opened into the church too. All that *was* the church; it didn't just stand over there somewhere. It will make the garth different for ever, to feel those big windows are looking down at it, opposite the refectory windows."

Jack looked round and nodded. "It must have looked quite different. Jolly of your friend Katharine to have the pictures done for us!"

"It will be marvellous to have them hanging in the refectory," Jen said wistfully. "Then the tourists will be able to imagine the church too. Sir Keith's an old dear. And I was so scared of him! I say, Jack! There's one thing we ought to do."

"What's that?" Jack demanded.

"Find Timothy Spindle!" Jen gave a shout of triumph. "To tell him about Mr. Simmonds!"

"Sure thing! And to give him Sir Keith's message. He'll be fearfully bucked."

"Come on!" Jen whirled away towards Mrs. Watson's rooms. "Timothy ought to know at once! Mrs. Watson! Timothy! Where are you?"

"He's gone out, Miss Jen," Ann Watson appeared at her door. "I sent him down t'village on an errand."

Jen's face fell. "Oh, what a blow! I want to speak to him terribly badly. We'll wait for a few minutes, in case he comes back."

"Does Mrs. Watson come from near where you live at home?" Jack asked, as they wandered on the garth. "Sometimes she talks quite like you did when you first came; not just the same, but here and there she sounds like you."

"I know. But it's not Yorkshire. She comes from farther away; Joan told me about her—Cumberland, she said. But Mrs. Watson's lived in London, so her accent isn't there all the time. Sometimes you hear it and sometimes you don't."

"That's like you, too," Jack remarked. "I hope that boy will come soon."

"There's Grace, from the house!" Jen exclaimed, as a maid appeared at the end of the passage. "She's looking for us. I hope there's nothing wrong!"

She raced to meet the girl, remembering the morning when she had been sent for to see the doctor and to hear that the Abbey Girls had measles.

"I hope—it couldn't be—Grace, do you want us?" she cried.



“Mrs. Shirley wants you to come at once, Miss Jen. You’re needed at the house.”

“Needed! Come on, Jack!” and Jen dashed off down the tresaunt, leaving Grace far behind.

## CHAPTER XIX

### AN ANXIOUS NIGHT

Jen caught Jack's arm, as they reached the lawn. "That's the doctor's car. Nurse has rung him up. Oh, Jack! What if Joy's really ill?"

"She may only want him to look at Joy, just to be on the safe side," Jack said stoutly. "Very sensible of her."

"If Joy's ill again, just when we thought it was all over——!" Jen wailed. "What do they need us for?"

As they reached the terrace Mrs. Shirley came to the door. "Come here, Jen. The doctor wants to speak to you."

"To me? But why? What can I do? Oh, Auntie Shirley, you do look worried! Joy isn't really ill, is she?"

"Now, my dear, I want to know all about this." The doctor spoke with kindly firmness. "What has Joy been doing?"

Jen quailed before his stern look. "She talked to us at the window. She said—if Joan could do it, why shouldn't she? Oh, please tell us! She didn't catch cold, did she?"

"Impossible to say yet. She isn't at all well; her temperature has risen in an alarming way. How long was she at the window?"

Jen's eyes fell and she stared at her shoes.

Jack came and stood beside her. "Don't be an ass! We must tell him." She looked up at Dr. Brown. "Joy only talked to us for two minutes, because we wouldn't stay. We came inside and left her. But she was hanging out of the window, looking for us, when we came into the garden. We can't possibly say how long she'd been there. We said just enough to satisfy her, so that she'd go back to bed, and then we came away. That's all we can tell you about it."

"Thank you. You are——?"

"Jacqueline Wilmot. My father is Dr. Wilmot. I know one must help doctors by telling them everything."

He nodded. "It was you who told the nurse? Very wise and right!" He turned to Mrs. Shirley. "I shall send in the second nurse, and she can ring me up at any time. That girl must be watched to-night. Send for me, if you want me; I can't do more than the nurse can, but I'll come if it will be any comfort to you."

"You are very kind," Mrs. Shirley said with trembling lips.

The girls looked at one another and stood as if turned to stone, till he had gone. Then, with a low wail, Jen ran into Mrs. Shirley's arms.

"Another nurse? Then Joy is worse. Oh, is it going to be pneumonia? Oh, why did she do it?"

"Because she's Joy, and a silly ass," Jack muttered.

Mrs. Shirley sat wearily on a big settle. "Jen dear, we must be brave. It hasn't happened yet. The doctor is a little anxious, but he hopes Joy will be better by the morning."

"But—two nurses, Auntie Shirley?"

"That doesn't mean much. Nurse Parker has been on duty all day; she can't sit up all night too, and Dr. Brown wants somebody to be with Joy, to watch her. He won't hear of my doing it, and Joan isn't strong enough yet, so we must have more help. That's all it means, Jen."

"Very sensible," Jack said. "Buck up, silly! It may be only for one night."

"I see that," Jen agreed unsteadily. "I had a fright. Perhaps it will be all right to-morrow. Two nurses sounded so awfully serious. Oh, I wish we could be some use!"

"You'll help us most by giving no trouble to anybody," Mrs. Shirley explained.

"I know. Nobody has any time to think about us. If we went to bed, that would help, wouldn't it?" Jen sounded forlorn.

Mrs. Shirley smiled. "That's brave, Jenny-Wren. It is bedtime, isn't it? I hear you had an early supper. Take milk and biscuits up to your room and have a little feast. What about fruit?"

"I'll see she does all that," Jack promised. "How is Joan? Does she know about Joy?"

"We had to tell her. Dr. Brown insisted on looking at her also, and Joan had to know why he had come a second time. She is going on well, but she's troubled about Joy, of course."

"I hope it won't make her ill, too," Jack said gloomily. "Twins are often odd that way. I know Joan and Joy aren't twins, but they're next thing to it."

"They mean a great deal to one another," Mrs. Shirley assented.

"Joan's too sensible to be ill just because Joy is!" Jen said indignantly.

"I don't mean that," Jack retorted. "Joan isn't well. She might not be able to stand a shock, and it would be a shock if Joy had—oh, come and fetch that grub! It's silly to talk about things that may not happen!"

Jen hugged Mrs. Shirley. "Couldn't we stay with you? You won't go to bed! We'd be somebody to talk to!"

"No, dear. If Joan doesn't sleep I shall sit with her."

"It's rotten for you. Why didn't Joy think?" Jen groaned. "All right; we'll go to bed. It's the only thing we can do to help."

She turned to the door, but came racing back to whisper a last word. "Auntie Shirley, I'll put a special bit in my prayers about Joy. That's the right thing to do, isn't it?"

Mrs. Shirley kissed her. "Yes, Jen, it will help to know that. Now, good-night, dear."

"What did you go back to say?" Jack asked, as they waited for cook to bring the milk.

"I should think you could guess," Jen said. Then, quickly, she told the promise she had made. "You'd better do it too. Two's sure to be better than one."

"Right-o! I won't forget," Jack said soberly.

When they reached their room Jen drew back the curtains and spread the feast on the window-seat, so that they could look out at the moonlit trees and lawn.

"I don't care much about talking, but the garden will be company," she said.

"I thought perhaps you'd tell Mrs. Shirley about the pictures, so that she could tell Joan," Jack remarked.

Jen shook her head. "They wouldn't care just now."

"It would give them something new to talk about."

"No!" Jen said. "The pictures will be an enormous thrill to Joan. She couldn't care just now. I'm not going to spoil it for her by telling her at a bad time. I shan't say anything till Joy's better."

"That's silly. Joan would be glad to have them to think about."

"Not while she's miserable. It wouldn't be fair."

Jack shrugged her shoulders. "I think you're soft. Joan would like to know. I've a good mind to write to her and tell her all about it."

"If you do I shall never speak to you again," Jen said simply. "Don't be an ass, Jacky-boy! You couldn't pinch my story. It *is* my story! I know Sir Keith would say so."

"Because of your courage and honesty, I suppose?" Jack jeered.

"Idiot!" Jen said, and stared out at the trees.

Jack glanced at her and was silent for a while. "It's been a queer day," she ventured at last.

"That's just what I was thinking. It's been the sort of day we'd never want to forget; Sir Keith—and all his stories of old things and old times—and the pictures and my locket—and Timothy and Mr. Simmonds. It's been a marvellous day. And Joy's spoilt it all—for it was her own fault, Jack."

“Oh, definitely—absolutely. It wasn’t anything to do with us. I’m glad Dr. Brown saw that.”

“Let’s go to bed,” Jen said heavily. “It’s no use talking. Nobody will tell us any more till the morning.”

But to sleep was impossible. Each knew that the other was awake and listening. Doors were opened and closed gently; steps passed along the corridor; someone went to the bathroom. Everything was quiet for a time, then the subdued stir began again. Somebody went downstairs.

Jen slipped out of bed and crept across the room, while Jack sat up and watched her dim figure. She opened the door softly and stood, holding her breath.

With almost a sob she closed the door and tiptoed back to bed.

“Well?” Jack jerked.

“Somebody telephoned. They’ve sent for the doctor. Jack!” Jen said desperately. “I’m coming into your bed.”

“Come on. We’ll stick together.” Jack’s tone was muffled.

“We can’t go and ask. It would worry people. We’ve got to bear it and keep out of the way,” Jen gasped. “It means Joy’s worse, of course.” She buried her head in Jack’s pillow.

“Might not,” Jack struggled to cheer her. “Might be something else.”

“If it’s pneumonia, will Joy die?” Jen was trembling. “A farmer near us at home had it, and he died in two days. Tell me, Jack! You know more than I do.”

“I don’t know much. Pneumonia’s sometimes like that, a matter of two or three days. But it might not be with Joy. She’s just a kid; she ought to be able to stand it.”

“She isn’t strong, and she’s got measles already,” Jen whispered.

“I know. It’s beastly.”

“It couldn’t be much worse, it seems to me,” Jen choked. “And it was because she wanted to speak to us. I know we couldn’t help it, but it was that.”

“It wasn’t,” Jack contradicted. “She doesn’t care that much about us. It was because she knew Joan had done it and she wanted to do it too. She said it; she said, ‘If Joan can, why shouldn’t I?’ Now that *was* like Joy; what you said wasn’t like her at all.”

“Oh, I wish she hadn’t!” Jen wailed.

## CHAPTER XX

### A TERRIBLE DAY

"There's the car. They did phone for the doctor." Jen raised her head.

"That's a good thing. Something to be thankful for," Jack said firmly. "It's all right now he's here. He'll take charge; she'll be safe now."

"You are comforting, Jacky-boy!" Jen whispered.

They lay listening, but it seemed a long while before the car drove away.

"Oh, I wonder how she is!" Jen almost sobbed.

Jack was very drowsy. "She's all right, or he wouldn't have gone. We'll hear in the morning. Go to sleep; make to-morrow come sooner. It's almost light. There's the first bird waking up." Her voice died away and she slept.

Jen quivered, but struggled to keep still for her companion's sake; she could not bear to leave Jack and lie alone in her own bed. Far away in the orchard, in the dim light, she could hear the early blackbird beginning his waking song; another answered, and the thrushes in the garden joined in the chorus. A noisy chirping of sparrows and calling of starlings began.

Jen sat up, rubbing her eyes. "Why am I in your bed, Jacky-boy? Oh!" as she remembered. "Oh, poor old Joy! We were awake for hours, listening; but we must have gone to sleep. Jack's not awake yet."

She looked down at Jack's smooth round head. "Dear old cricket ball! There's a lot of sense in it. She's sound asleep. I wonder if I could crawl out without waking her?"

She drew herself away carefully and slipped to the floor. Jack muttered impatiently, then snuggled down and slept again.

Jen crept to her own bed and pulled on stockings and soft slippers and a dressing-gown. Pushing back her loosened plaits she stole to the door, opened it quietly and tiptoed down the corridor.

The house was still and silent. She was more than anxious not to disturb any one, so she hesitated and wandered wistfully up and down, looking with desperate longing at the closed doors which held so great a secret.

A faint sound, the clink of china, sent her flying down the stairs and into the morning-room.

"Oh! Oh, what marvellous luck!" she gasped. "Oh, please tell me! How is Joy?"

The day-nurse looked up from her breakfast. She had been roused in the middle of the night from her much-needed rest, but had slept again for two hours and was almost ready to go on duty.

The appeal and fear in Jen's eyes were so acute that her frown vanished and she spoke gently. "My dear, you mustn't run about undressed. We can't have any one else ill on our hands. Joy is very ill, but we are doing everything we can, and she is holding her own. Dr. Brown will be here presently. Now go and dress yourself."

Jen came to her side and leant on the table. "He was here in the night, wasn't he? We were awake and we heard the car. We didn't come to ask, but ——" Her voice shook.

Nurse Parker had imagination and she understood.

"Don't be so frightened. It wasn't for Joy we sent for him, though we were glad that he should have a look at her. I'm sorry to say——"

"Joan?" Jen gasped. "Oh, please! Joan isn't ill too, is she?"

"Joan is the strongest of them all. You needn't be nervous about her. Mrs. Shirley collapsed with the strain and anxiety, and I had to go to help. We thought Dr. Brown should see her. She is in bed and is pulling round, but we were troubled about her for a while."

Jen clung to the high back of a chair and hid her face against it. "Oh, hard lines!" she sobbed. "It's been too much for her. She isn't strong. Oh, if only Joy——!"

"Exactly," the nurse said grimly. "Mrs. Shirley was bearing the strain of the two girls' illness well, but it told on her, and she was not fit for this new blow. Joy's temperature was high during the night and she was lightheaded, of course; and it was too much for Mrs. Shirley, who has almost no reserve strength. We hoped—Joan talked to me about her mother and asked me to watch her—to pull her through this period without a breakdown; but this second illness has been too much for her."

"Isn't there any way we can help?" Jen asked desperately. "Could I sit with her and fetch you if she needed you? Then you could stay with Joy. Couldn't you use us somehow?"

Nurse Parker looked thoughtful. To tell the younger girls that they could help best by keeping out of the way would have been sheer cruelty.

"I believe you could be useful," she said. "Every one will be busy, and we are making a lot of extra work for the maids. If you took on some of their jobs, like washing-up and preparing trays for upstairs, it would relieve them."

Jen's face lit up. "And we'd be here on the spot, and we'd have the latest news. I was terrified that you'd say we must go out for the day, to keep the house quiet. We'll be like mice, if only we can have useful jobs to do!"

"I'll speak to Grace," said the nurse, who would much have preferred that they should go out for the day. "Run away and dress, and then come

down and fetch your own breakfast from cook. If you don't need to be waited on, that will help."

"We'll wash our dishes afterwards, and we'll do our bedroom, and then we'll dust the rooms down here," Jen said eagerly. "That will be marvellous! Thanks just terribly much!" and she rushed off upstairs to tell Jack, closing her door with great care.

The nurse laughed. "Poor children! It's a bad time for them too. I'll ask the maids to find work for them. It will help them more than anything."

Jack woke to find Jen brushing out her hair.

"Hallo, Rapunzel! Oh, I say! I'd forgotten about Joy. Do you know how she is?" and she sat up anxiously.

Jen parted her long yellow locks and peered at her.

"Bad. I've been downstairs, talking to Nurse. Joy was off her head in the night. And there's worse news. Auntie Shirley had a heart attack; it was for her they wanted the doctor. Nurse didn't say it was her heart; she said she collapsed, but I suppose that means a heart attack. They were frightened and sent for Dr. Brown."

"That's bad," Jack groaned. "Is she getting over it?"

"I think so. Nurse says she's pulling round; but she's in bed, of course. Jack, we're going to help. Everybody will be busy, with all the extra work. We're going to do jobs like dusting, and washing-up, and peeling potatoes. You'll help, won't you?"

Jack sprang out of bed. "Rather! Any old thing they'll let us do. We'll be charladies, fetched in to help in the emergency."

"There's one thing I could do," Jen said, her fingers plaiting busily. "If they'd like Mrs. Watson to come here and help, I could show visitors the Abbey. Joan's often said I know it as well as she does. I wonder if they'd trust me to look after the tourists?"

"I don't believe they would. You may know it all, but you don't look as if you did. You're too much of a kid."

Jen sighed, as she flung back her plaits and went to turn down her bed. "That's silly. I know all the dates and stories."

"I bet you do! But the tourists wouldn't believe it. They'd think you were making it up."

"I shall ask Nurse to tell Joan I'd like to do it," Jen said.

Prompted by Nurse and by their sympathy for the younger girls, Cook and Grace kept finding jobs in which they needed help. Clad in big overalls, they swept and dusted the hall and dining-room, peeled potatoes and shelled peas, laid the table and prepared trays. No one spoke of Joy; it was too bad to talk about. The only way to bear the difficult day was to keep on working and not to think.



The doctor came early and was upstairs for what seemed a long time. When he came down with Nurse Parker, Jen came flying from the kitchen, her overall caught up in her hand.

“Doctor! Please tell us!”

He paused. “Do you want the truth, my dear? Well then, Joy is seriously ill. But I hope we shall pull her through; she’s having every care, and it is a matter of careful nursing. She’s in the best possible hands. Mrs. Shirley is better, but I want her to stay in bed to-day. Joan is nearly well, and I have given her leave to sit with her mother. She’ll worry less than if she’s alone in her room. Keep the house quiet, and don’t do anything that would cause more trouble for our good friends who are watching Joy.”

“Oh, we won’t!” Jen promised, her lips trembling. “I am glad about Joan! She’ll feel much better if she can be with Auntie Shirley.”

“We think so. You and your friend are all right?”

“No measles,” Jack said, in the background. “But we’re feeling rotten about everything.”

“I hope the rotten feeling will soon pass off,” and Dr. Brown hurried away.

“How tophole for you to hear him say that about—‘the best possible hands,’ Nurse!” Jack looked at the nurse enviously.

“I have worked with Dr. Brown for years.” And Nurse Parker went back to her patients.

Jen, carrying a tray as far as the top of the stair, to save Grace a journey, stood in frozen horror, for Joy’s door was ajar and she could hear Joy’s voice, talking excitedly, on and on. The door was closed from within the room, and Jen fled back to the kitchen.

“What’s up?” Jack glanced at her over her bowl of peas.

“Joy,” Jen’s voice shook. “The door was open; I heard her. She’s talking, but I’m sure she doesn’t know what she’s saying—it wasn’t her real voice —”

“Delirious,” Jack’s lips pinched. “Don’t howl, Jen. It won’t help her. She’ll be all right when her temp. goes down.”

Jen bit her lips fiercely. “Will she? Sure? I read somewhere, in some story, that it was dangerous then.”

“There’s a fear of collapse,” Jack admitted. “I hoped you didn’t know. I wasn’t going to say anything.”

“Marvellous of you,” Jen said unsteadily. “No, it’s all right, I won’t howl. But—if only this ghastly day would come to an end!”

“It will, sooner or later. But sometimes days can seem weeks long. Mother was ill once, and I thought we’d never live through the days.”

“This day’s going on for a month, I think,” Jen groaned.

## CHAPTER XXI

### TELLING TIMOTHY

"We are two little pigs!" The terrible day had come to an end at last, and Jen, preparing for bed, turned to Jack, her face full of distress.

"Are we? I rather thought we'd been jolly decently useful," Jack grunted.

"That's all right. But what about Timothy Spindle? We've forgotten him. He ought to know about Sir Keith and Mr. Simmonds."

"You'll have to tell him to-morrow. You're not going to the Abbey to-night," Jack said firmly.

"I know. Timothy hardly seems to matter just now. But I wish we'd told him."

"He'll live through it." Jack jumped into bed.

Once more Nurse Parker's early breakfast was interrupted by Jen, who crept down to hear the latest news.

The nurse looked grave. "Mrs. Shirley is doing well, but is still very tired. Joan seems no worse for being with her yesterday, so she will get up after breakfast and will be company for her mother, who will be better in bed for a day or two. Joy—we can't tell yet."

Jen grew white. "Is she still talking, like she did yesterday?"

Nurse Parker shot a quick look at her. "No; she is quiet now. But she is very weak; the high fever has worn her out. Don't be too unhappy; we hope she will pull through. Are you and Jack going to help us again to-day?"

Jen choked down a sob. "Yes, we'd like to. Please let us help!"

"Here comes the postman. You can give me any letters for Mrs. Shirley or Joan, or for either of us."

Jen sorted the letters quickly. "That's your lot. There's one for Joy; Joan will keep it for her." Her voice was not steady for a moment. "One for Jack, from her mother. They know about Joy and Mrs. Shirley; Jack talked to them by phone yesterday. One for me—from London. How odd! I don't know anybody in London!"

"Yes, you do," Jack had followed her. She took her own letter, as the nurse disappeared upstairs. "You know baronets and people. I expect Sir Keith Marchwood has changed his mind about that locket. Or perhaps it's the pictures."

"He wouldn't!" Jen said indignantly, but she tore open her letter, looking anxious. "It is from him." And she sank on the window-seat to read the

letter.

“Oh, how kind he is! Listen, Jack:

“DEAR MISS JEN,—Your charming letter gave me real pleasure. To confirm what we arranged together, I shall be willing to take young Spindle back and to overlook his mistake, on condition it does not occur again. Tell him to take a short holiday with his sister, if you can put up with him for a few days. When he returns to us, I wish him to come to see me at once.

“I hope your invalids are doing well. Will you let me have your instructions re the Abbey pictures? I shall wait till I hear from you.—Yours sincerely,

“KEITH MARCHWOOD.

“Oh, how marvellous! My ‘charming letter’! There, Jacqueline Wilmot! He did like it, you see! ‘What we arranged together’! How lovely of him! ‘My instructions re the Abbey pictures.’ I shall write and ask him not to send them just now. Jack, I’m terrified about Joy. I could see Nurse was bothered.”

“I thought she looked worried,” Jack agreed, her face sombre. “Joy can’t go on being so ill. She must either get better, or she’ll——” She checked herself.

“I can’t believe that will happen,” Jen said vehemently. “We’ve prayed so hard, all of us. She must get better!”

“Oh, of course! Don’t talk about her. Come to brekker, and then you can take your message to Timothy. I’ll wash up and do our room.”

“You’re a sport!” Jen exclaimed. “I must answer this letter; don’t you think so?”

“He seems to like you, so he won’t mind having another. Ask him not to send the pictures just now. Joan doesn’t want to be bothered with anything till Joy’s better.”

“No, but when Joy is better, won’t she be bucked about them!” Jen sighed.

She went to the Abbey presently, to find her “stowaway.”

“Timothy Spindle! Oh, there you are! I came to tell you——”

“What’s the news of Miss Joy?” Mrs. Watson looked anxiously from her door.

“None. Bad. She’s just the same, and Nurse is worried,” Jen said, as shortly as she could. “Mrs. Shirley and Joan are better. Timothy, I’ve a message from Sir Keith Marchwood. You’re to have a few days’ holiday here with Susie; I’m sure Mrs. Watson will put you up, and we’ll send Susie

whenever we can spare her. Then you'll go back to town and try again. Sir Keith's terribly nice; he's been tremendously kind about you. He says he'll overlook what happened, as he knows you only made a mistake, but of course you won't ever do it again, will you?"

Timothy was staring at her, breathless and wide-eyed. "No, miss, I never will! But—but Mr. Simmonds——"

"Oh, don't worry about him! He's gone. Sir Keith knows you didn't take his brother's things; most likely old Simmonds did it himself."

"Gone?" Timothy gasped, incredulous relief dawning in his face.

"Yes, rather. They've got rid of him, because he was dishonest. If you'd like to dance with joy, please do it," Jen looked at him wistfully. "I did a jig and then a somersault, when I heard first; Sir Keith was rather frightened. But I don't feel I can do it just now. It would be all right for you, of course."

"I can't believe it!" Timothy exclaimed. "Seems like it can't be true."

"It's true. You'll never be dishonest again, will you? It would be dreadful if they had to get rid of you. It would be letting down the Abbey. After our writing to Sir Keith about you, you couldn't do that. It's as if we've promised you'll be all right, you know."

Timothy saw that clearly, though it was, to his mind, not the Abbey he must not let down, but "little Miss Jen."

"I never will, Miss Jen. Not if they laugh at me or tease me to go with them ever so," he promised.

"Then you'll get on jolly well. When you go back you're to go to Sir Keith; he wants to speak to you. You needn't be frightened; he's terribly kind. Now you think about it, and I'll send Susie, and you can tell her yourself. Think about Mr. Simmonds, Timothy. Perhaps you'll dance with joy after I've gone."

"What years it seems since we were at the Manor, seeing Sir Keith!" she said to herself, as she went gravely through the garden. "And it's only two days! Yesterday was the longest day I've ever known."

There was no sign of Jack, or of anybody, when she reached the house, so she crept upstairs and wrote a brief letter before going in search of Jack.

"DEAR SIR KEITH,—Thank you very much. Timothy Spindle is so pleased, though he didn't dance for joy, as I did. I hope I didn't frighten you. Please don't send the pictures yet. Nobody would have time to look at them. Joy is very ill with pneumonia, and we don't know—but of course she'll get better. She's much worse than she was when we talked to you, and Mrs. Shirley is ill too, and we've two nurses. It's worse than the measles. Please keep the

pictures till everybody is better. I'm sure you'll understand. I expect they'll all be better soon now.

“Thank you again just terribly much for the locket and purse.  
—With love from

“JEN ROBINS.”

She gazed at the letter. “I wonder if he'll mind having my love? Now that I've talked to him it seems the proper thing to say.” And she addressed and closed the envelope.

The beds had been made and the room tidied, while she was in the Abbey. Jen looked round gratefully. “Good old Jack! She must be in the kitchen. I'll go and help.”

Jack looked up from the cup she was wiping. “Timothy all right?”

“Rather! He was jolly pleased.”

Jack put down the cup and took up another, her hands shaking.

Jen gave her a startled look. “Jack! Is anything wrong? Jack!” she cried. “What's up?”

Jack bit her lip and swallowed hard. “Nurse spoke to me. She said I was to tell you. Beastly of her! She ought to have told you herself.”

“Told me *what*?” Jen gasped. “Jack, you don't mean——?”

“They'll know about Joy to-day—very soon now. She wants you to be prepared. She's afraid they may not save her. But there's still a chance,” Jack said desperately.

Jen caught her breath. “It will kill Joan. I can't bear it! Don't come, Jack!”

She rushed away out of the house and back to the Abbey, through the chapter-house, down into the little old church, and flung herself on the steps of the Abbot Michael's tomb, praying with all her heart that Joy might live.

“Give her back to us! Think what she means to Joan! And poor Auntie Shirley; they've been so good to Joy. Don't take her from us!” she sobbed.

## CHAPTER XXII

### JACK TAKES CHARGE

Jack watched Jen's flight with troubled eyes. "The silly kid will go into the Abbey, of course. She won't stop to think, and those ruined places are fearfully draughty. We don't want any more pneumonia. She told me not to go, but I don't believe it's safe to leave her alone."

Grim and determined, she followed Jen. On the garth she met Timothy and put a hurried question.

"Miss Jen came running, and she went in there," he pointed. "Looked like she'd seen a ghost, she did. Can I do anything for her?"

"Give me a rug and some cushions from your room," Jack commanded.

With the rug slung over her shoulder and cushions under both her arms, she went cautiously down to the crypt. "Jen likes this place, and it's the only sort of church there is left. Yes, I thought so! On the cold stone, in a thin frock—ass!"

Over-strain made her voice sharp with anxiety as she bent over Jen. "Idiot! You'll have a chill next. Don't you know how risky it is? Come on this rug at once!"

"Oh, Jack, go away!" Jen gasped.

"Not till you're on a rug," Jack said firmly.

Jen thrust the rug under her, and Jack seized the chance to make sure she was protected properly. Then, instead of going away, she put down the cushions and sat on them, flung her arm round Jen's shaking body, and crouched beside her.

"It hasn't happened yet, Jen. Keep on hoping! Let me hope—and—and pray too. You said two would be better than one. I won't talk, but we must do what is best, and if two are better, then let me be the other one."

Jen's hand clasped hers and they lay in silence.

Presently Jack, with rare understanding of her friend's need, drew her hand away. She knelt and kissed the back of Jen's neck, between her two plaits. "You'd rather I wasn't here. I'll come back presently." And she crept away.

For a while she worked gravely in the kitchen and pantry. Then, glancing at the clock, she went to consult Cook.

A few minutes later Jack trudged across the lawn to the Abbey gate, heavily laden. She set down her basket and a rucksack on the garth, and went back to the crypt.

Jen lay as she had left her, as quiet as if she was asleep. But her tense position showed that she was all too wide awake.

Jack bent over her. "Get up!" she commanded, the authority of a team captain in her tone. "You've been here long enough. Come up into the sun."

"Is there any news?" Jen rested her tired head on her hands.

"Not a scrap. The doctor's there. They're doing everything. Come up to the garth, Jen."

Jen hesitated. "I'd rather stay here. Can't you leave me alone?"

"No. Come on! I want you. Come *now*!"

Utter astonishment made Jen obey. Jack had never spoken in that way before. She rose silently and followed.

Jack put the basket on her arm and slung the rucksack over her own shoulder. "Now come with me. I'll let you come back quite soon, if you do what I tell you. But we must *do* something; I can't bear this hanging about and waiting any longer."

Jen's wrath at the tone of authority died away. Suddenly she knew that Jack needed her; that Jack was almost breaking down, and that she had been doing nothing to help.

"I've been a beast. I only thought of myself," she said apologetically. "Sorry, Jack! You're my visitor, and I've buried myself and left you all alone. What do you want to do?"

"Go somewhere. Do something. I won't talk, if you'd rather not, but I can't bear that house just now." Jack's voice was unsteady. "Let's get out of it for an hour. The Abbey may be a help to you, but it's no use to me. We're different. Come out on the hills. There's a flask of hot milk, and sandwiches and fruit in this bag, and you've got hard-boiled eggs and cake. Cook says she'll be glad not to have to give us lunch."

"Will it really help her? I don't want to feel I'm having a picnic while Joy may be——"

"But perhaps Joy isn't," Jack broke in. "It's not a picnic. It's a tramp on the hills, for exercise. We'll feel better when we've walked, no matter what happens."

"Right you are," Jen said heavily. "I'll go wherever you like."

Jack handed her a bar of chocolate. "Tuck into that. Sure you haven't caught a chill in your inside?"

"My inside's feeling rotten, but it's not a chill. Not that part of my inside," Jen explained.

Jack gave a short laugh. "I washed and wiped dishes and dusted till my inside began to go funny too, and I couldn't bear it any longer. Not a sound; nobody to speak to; Grace snivelling, and Cook looking like thunder. And you buried in the depths of the earth!"

"I'm sorry," Jen said abjectly. "I'm beastly sorry, Jacky-boy. I'll do anything you like, to make up for being such a pig."

"We'll climb to that cave and have our grub there," Jack proposed. "Then we'll come back and see how things are. Two hours might make a difference."

Jen agreed, though not very cheerfully, and they took the track to the hills in silence. They had to cross the lawn to reach the lane, and both glanced up at Joy's window, in their minds seeing her as she had sat there, calling to them, two days before. They looked at one another, but there was no need for words.

They were opening the gate to the steps through the wood, when a cry from behind made them swing round, white and breathless.

Susie Spindle raced along the path. "Oh, miss! Nurse, she called me; she saw you from the window. She said—catch them and say this, 'Don't feel too bad. Miss Joy is holding her own. We hope we'll save her.' Oh, Miss Jen! Will she get better?"

"It's not as good news as all that." Jack glanced at Jen's white face. "But it means there's hope. Buck up, Jen, old thing! Did you think it was——?"

Jen leaned on the gate. "It might have been. Oh, that's better news! If she can hold on long enough, surely she'll come back! Thanks awfully, Susie! I'm glad you caught us. Will you do something else for us?"

"Sure, Miss Jen! What is it?"

"When you can be spared, go into the Abbey to Timothy. He wants to tell you something; it's something good, so you needn't worry. But don't go yet, Susie. I want you to meet us here, at this spot, in an hour, to tell us if there's any more news. Keep watching for Nurse, and ask her, if you have a chance." She looked at Jack. "It will be better than going to the house, not knowing what's happened."

Jack agreed. "If it should be bad news we could bolt to the Abbey again. Better say two hours; Susie hasn't time to hang about waiting for us, and we won't be down in an hour."

"All right," Jen gave way, but her voice was wistful. "Are you going to drag me right to the top?" They waved to Susie and turned to climb the mossy steps through the wood.

"Right to the cave," Jack said firmly. "It will buck us up to have a good climb in the wind. I should think you'd want to go. Didn't your monk friends go up there to say their prayers?"

"To be away from people. Yes, we think they did. I feel rather like one of them to-day."

"Going to say your prayers in the cave?" Jack asked.

"Shouldn't wonder. I'm saying mine all the time."



"How d'you mean—all the time?" Jack demanded. "You're not!"

"I think perhaps it's not what we say but what we really feel that is the praying," Jen struggled to explain herself. "Not the words, but wanting something terribly badly. If we pray for a thing without caring much about it, that isn't praying; it's only a recitation. But if we want something fearfully much, with every single part of us, then perhaps the words don't matter, and we go on praying all the time, when we're too busy to say things, all through the other jobs we have to do. See what I mean?"

"Gosh! It's rather a decent idea," Jack exclaimed. "I shouldn't wonder if you were right. I'm afraid there's a good lot of recitation about me, but not when I'm thinking about Joy."

"No, we're in deadly earnest about her. I believe we're praying all the time, even if we're washing cups or making beds or climbing hills."

Jack shot a glance at her. "Jolly idea," she said briefly.

"I am so glad you're here!" Jen broke out. "Think if I'd been all alone just now! You do understand, and you don't make me feel silly when I try to say things!"

"You aren't silly. But sometimes you have rather grown-up ideas and it's difficult to put them into words."

"Awfully hard," Jen agreed. "It's marvellous of you to understand."

Jack coloured. "I don't have ideas like you do. All I can do is appreciate yours. I say! This is too steep for talking!"

Jen assented, relieved that the subject was to be dropped, for it was becoming too deep for her. They climbed in silence to the top of the wood, crossed the lane, and followed the path straight up the hill to the quarry, where the monks' cave was cut out of the chalk.

Neither had much to say, as they sat on the rim of the hollow and ate their lunch, looking down on the Hall and the Abbey and out over the wide stretch of country to the blue distance. Jen glanced at her watch from time to time, and at last she sprang up.

"We mustn't go too soon, or Susie won't be there. Come along the hill and look down on the Manor! Queer to think we've been inside. There's the lake; now we can see the house. It's a jolly place; I hope somebody will live in it some day. Now, Jack, we could go down, couldn't we? I can't bear it much longer."

"We'll go slowly," and Jack went to pack up the remains of the lunch.

They were going soberly down the wood-steps, which were slippery and uneven, when Jack exclaimed,

"Susie's waiting for us!"

Jen ignored the need for caution, and went plunging ahead. "Susie! Tell us! Oh, Susie, it's good news!"

Susie was waving her arms and shouting. “Miss Jen! Miss Jack! Miss Joy’s asleep and it’s what they wanted. Nurse says there’s every hope now that she’ll get well!”

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE SHADOW LIFTS

“Oh, glory!” Jack cried.

Jen, with a wild whoop, was dancing for joy. “Oh, good! Oh, marvellous! Oh——”

“Stop that, lunatic!” Jack caught her arm. “You’ll break your ankle. This isn’t the library at the Manor! It’s a jolly good thing Susie told us out here. If you go on like that in the house, or even on the lawn, Nurse will throttle you.”

“I know.” Jen turned a final somersault. “That’s why I asked Susie to come here. I knew I couldn’t answer for myself if there was good news. If it had been bad I should have rushed off to the Abbey, as you said, but I was afraid if it was good I might have an attack of—what did Sir Keith Marchwood call it?”

“Delirious excitement. Well, you’ve had it. Susie’s sure you’re mad.”

“Are you, Susie?” Jen asked with interest.

“I’m glad about Miss Joy,” Susie said cautiously. “Nurse says as how we’ll all have to be quieter than ever.”

She looked at Jen doubtfully.

“I know,” Jen assured her. “I shall be definitely as silent as a mouse in the house. But they couldn’t hear us out here.” And she shook off Jack’s hand and began dancing round in a wide circle, great leaps on to her left foot, her arms flung up.

“Try the other leg,” Jack mocked. “You’ll wear out that foot, bumping on it like that.”

Jen ended with a few steps in front of Susie and flung-up arms again. “Wouldn’t do. That was a bit of ‘Princess Royal’ jig. You have to land on your left, but I didn’t bump. I came down frightfully gently.”

“Do it again and I’ll watch,” Jack suggested.

Jen repeated the dance. “That was capers. You ought to caper about when you’re too joyful for words.”

“It was capers all right,” Jack agreed. “And you did come down lightly. But then you’re always light when you dance. I didn’t know it was anything real; I thought you were just celebrating again. All the same, I should have thought you could change the leg now and then. Doesn’t it make you stiff?”

“Till you’re used to it,” Jen grinned. “Susie, do you think I’m batty?”

"I see Miss Joy and Miss Joan do that one day on the lawn, and a lot more. Dancing together, they was."

"We shall really have to adopt Susie and teach her to speak English," Jen said seriously. "I say, Susie, I'll tell you a secret, because you were the one to tell us about Joy! Where do you think Jack and I went on Wednesday?"

Susie stared at her blankly. "In the Abbey?"

"Good guess! But it wasn't the Abbey this time. We went to the Manor, and we talked to Sir Keith Marchwood about Timothy; he'd come from town for the day."

"Oh, Miss Jen!" Susie looked at her in an agony of suspense. "Is it the police, Miss Jen?"

"Silly kid, no! I told you there was good news; good for everybody, now that Joy is better. Sir Keith is going to be nice to Timothy. I won't tell you the rest; Timothy will want to tell you himself. Sir Keith's given me a gorgeous present; and the most marvellous thing of all, Susie—there are some pictures of what the big church used to be like, before it was pulled down, and he's going to give them to Joan, to hang in the Abbey! Isn't that terribly thrilling?"

Susie looked bewildered. "Yes, Miss Jen," she said politely.

Jen laughed. "Go and talk to Timothy! He'll tell you what Sir Keith said. You don't care two hoots about pictures for the Abbey, do you? And you think we're quite mad. But Joan will care, you know. It's the very biggest present she could have. She'll be crazy with joy."

"Scoot along to Timothy, Sue," said Jack. "We're going to creep into the house."

Susie vanished, still looking puzzled as to why pictures of a lost church should be so important.

Jack turned reproachfully on Jen. "That poor kid thinks you're a lunatic. Why did you tell her all that stuff?"

Jen laughed again. "I don't know. I just felt I had to tell her. It seems such a big thing to us, but I could see she didn't care a scrap. Let's go in. Perhaps Nurse will tell us more about Joy."

Nurse smiled at them as they crept upstairs, and nodded reassuringly. She signed to them to be quiet, and they went to their room, and presently slipped out again to go and tell Mrs. Watson the good news and to beg for tea in her rooms in the Abbey.

The shadow seemed really to be lifted from the Hall at last. Joy slept, and woke to sleep again, and gained strength steadily. Mrs. Shirley improved a little every day and rejoiced in having Joan as her nurse and companion. Joan herself was almost well, but the shock of her mother's illness and the anxiety over Joy had told on her in her weakened state, and

she was tired and limp. Nurse forbade any window talks for a few days, and insisted that she must keep quiet and must rest and feed up till she was stronger, so the younger girls did not see her and were forced to keep their secret to themselves.

“You don’t think it would be a good plan to ask Sir Keith to send the pictures, so that they’d be here when Joan’s ready to be told about them?” Jack asked.

Jen considered the matter. “If other people knew, somebody might tell Joan. I’m looking forward most frightfully to seeing her face when she hears about them.”

“You could hide them in the Abbey.”

“No,” Jen said. “Somebody might hear about them. Joan won’t mind looking forward to them for a day or two. I want to tell her about my locket and purse, too, and all the story of Katharine Marchwood. But the pictures are the biggest thing.”

“Won’t Joy have said anything about Katharine and Peregrine? You told her, just before she was ill.”

“I’m certain she hasn’t said anything, or Joan would be asking questions. I expect it went right out of Joy’s head; perhaps she never really understood what I was saying.”

“That’s quite likely,” Jack admitted. “And what she said while she was so feverish wouldn’t sound like sense. They’d say she was delirious.”

“That’s what I think. Anybody can see Joy hasn’t told Joan a word about the Manor. We shall have to tell her all over again, when she’s better.”

“I don’t suppose Joan has been with Joy. She may not have seen her at all,” Jack said. “It’s her mother she’s been allowed to sit with.”

On Monday evening, when the younger girls had spent three quiet days together, at cricket practice, or rambling on the hills, Nurse Parker spoke to them as they went up to bed.

“I suppose you’re going home to-morrow, Jack?”

“I hadn’t heard of it.” Jack stared at her. “Won’t they have me here any longer? I’m sure,” indignantly, “I haven’t been as much trouble as all that!”

Nurse laughed. “I thought you came for a week?”

“Oh, but I don’t want her to go!” Jen cried. “I’d be lost without her now! We didn’t say a week, did we?”

“When did your case of measles at home begin?” Nurse looked at Jack.

“Friday night. I see what you mean,” Jack said glumly.

“We can’t keep you here much longer. If you should by any chance develop the trouble, you might give it to Jen. You’d be better at home, where your father can watch you.”

“I don’t feel in the least like measles,” Jack urged.

“If I was going to have it, wouldn’t I have taken it from Joan or Joy?” Jen demanded.

“Probably, but we can’t be sure. There’s no use in running a needless risk. Jack must go home before there’s any chance of either of you infecting the other. It would mean another fortnight of quarantine.”

“I simply adore being in quarantine in the summer term,” Jen said defiantly. “But I don’t want Jack to have measles, just for my sake,” she added.

“I don’t intend to,” Jack grinned at her. “All right, Nurse! I’ll ring up and talk to mother in the morning.”

“Then I suppose our happy time is at an end!” Jen groaned.

“You’ll be back at school next week. I’m going to whack you into shape for the return match with St. Anne’s. They come to play us in a fortnight,” Jack said. “I’m sure your fielding’s gone to pieces, though you’ve worked at your bowling all right.”

“We must beat them again! They’ll put on a terrific spurt, hoping to have their revenge. O.K., Jacky-boy! I’ll work. But if you go down with It, the match will have to be postponed, you know.”

“No measles about me,” Jack said cheerfully. “If I caught one from Mary, it’s been blown out of me long ago, by the wind on your hills.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### BETRAYED BY SUSIE SPINDLE

Jen and Jack came down from the hills on Wednesday afternoon, carrying their picnic baskets. Mrs. Wilmot and Nurse had agreed to one more day, but Jack was to go home in the evening.

“Jen! Jenny-Wren!” called an eager voice.

“It’s Joan! At her window again!” Jen set off at a run. “Oh, Joan! Are you all right? You look quite well. Oh, you’re dressed! You do look nice! Oh, Joan, how soon can you come downstairs?”

“In a day or two. Dr. Brown is being very careful. But I’ve been on the terrace in the sun to-day, since we knew you were safely out of the way. Jen, what’s this about pictures hidden at the Manor? Pictures of the Abbey church? It isn’t true, is it?”

“*Who told you?*” Jen gave a wild cry, her face crimson, then white.

“Gosh! Who told you, Joan?” Jack asked, hurrying to Jen’s side.

Joan stared at them. “What’s the matter? Is it all a joke? I don’t understand.”

“Who told you?” Jen shouted.

“Susie. I talked to her from the window before I went out. I wanted to hear about her brother.”

“The little pig!” Jack gasped. “Oh, what a little brute! Jen, old girl, hard lines!”

“I’ll *never* forgive Susie Spindle!” Jen cried.

She turned and rushed away, not to the Abbey, but back into the woods from which they had come.

“She means it. She never will, and I don’t blame her,” Jack said bitterly.

“Jack, what does she mean? I don’t understand in the least!” Joan asked, completely bewildered.

“Jen’s been counting the days till she’d be able to talk to you. She wouldn’t write, because she wanted to see your face when you heard about the pictures. She’s been dying to tell you, and looking forward terribly to being allowed to see you. And now it’s spoiled. Susie—little beast!—has told you. Jen will break her heart; it means a frightful lot to her. If I see Susie, I shall shake her all to bits,” Jack said angrily.

Joan looked grave. “I’m terribly sorry. I wouldn’t have listened to Susie, if I’d understood. But Susie meant no harm, Jack. She didn’t understand; I’m certain of it. Can’t you make Jen see that?”

“No.” Jack’s tone was blunt. “I don’t know how. Perhaps you can, but I couldn’t. It’s a good thing I’m going home; Susie won’t be safe while I’m here. I feel just sick about Jen. You don’t know how much she’s been looking forward to telling you. She’s talked of it every day.”

“Susie didn’t understand,” Joan said again. “And, of course, I didn’t. Hadn’t you better tell me more about it?”

“No. It’s Jen’s story. If you really don’t understand, there may be something left for her to tell you. Susie’s done enough harm. I’m not going to butt in, too.”

“I see that. But it’s very hard on me! I don’t know whether to believe what Susie said or not.”

“Oh, you can believe it all right! Susie couldn’t make up anything like that, if she tried.”

“Why did Susie know about it?”

“Jen told her, that day we heard Joy was better. Susie met us in the wood and gave us the news, and Jen went off her head with joy and danced ‘Princess Royal,’ and then she told Susie. I didn’t think the kid had grasped what it was all about.”

“She evidently did understand. She seemed to think I had helped Timothy as well as Jen, and she wanted to tell me something that would please me. I’m sure she never thought of Jen’s point of view at all. Pictures of the Abbey church, Jack? Is it really true?” Joan pleaded. “Oh, well, if you can’t tell me, at least you could fetch Jen! Explain to her that I don’t know the whole story and I’m dying to understand. Won’t you do that, Jack?”

“Must give Jen time to get over it. She had a ghastly shock!” Jack said gloomily. “She’d been dreaming about telling you; and then to find you knew——!”

Suddenly her eyes hardened. Joan followed their direction, and saw Susie crossing the corner of the lawn, on her way to the raspberry canes in a strip of fruit garden.

Jack strode towards her. “Hi, you! Stop a moment!”

“Jack, be careful what you say!” Joan cried.

From the shrubbery came Jen, rushing at full speed upon Susie. Jack ran to join her, but had no need to speak.

“You little beast!” Jen was shaking, half-sobbing still, her cheeks wet with tears. “How could you do it? I hate you! I’ll never forgive you! I’ll never speak to you again. I’m sorry I helped Timothy. I’m sorry I ever spoke to you. I’d never have believed any one would do such an awful thing. I never want to see you again!” Her voice broke, and she fled to hide herself in the shrubbery.



Susie, terrified, looked at Jack. “Miss Jack, what be the matter with her? I’d”—she choked—“I’d do any mortal thing to please Miss Jen, as was so good to Timothy and I.”

“You’d better keep out of her sight, and out of mine too, you little bounder,” Jack said bitterly. “Why couldn’t you think? You’ve just about broken Jen’s heart. Didn’t you *know*, you silly idiot, that she wanted to tell Joan about those pictures herself? You’ve gone and spoilt it for her. You really are the biggest ass I’ve ever known.”

She turned and followed Jen into the woods.

Susie, white and frightened, dropped her basket and stood staring after them. “Miss Jack! Oh, Miss Jen! I’m sorry. I didn’t know——”

Joan, helpless at the window, called to her, but Susie did not hear. Sudden terror seized her; had Miss Jen really meant it?

Just as Jen’s dream had crashed about her at Joan’s question, so Susie’s fell in ruins now. She was eager to please Joan, but since that night in the Abbey Jen had been her idol. She crept to the bushes and pushed her way through.

Jen lay on the ground, torn by sobbing. Jack had her arm round her. “Buck up, old dear!” she was pleading.

Jack looked up and saw Susie’s frightened face.

“Get out!” she said roughly. “This is your fault. Get away from me, before I do something to you. We don’t want you.”

Susie gave a heartbroken sob and fled across the lawn, down the path, and into the Abbey, the only place where she could hope to be alone.

Joan saw her go, but could do nothing to help.

“Jack!” she called. “Jack! Jen! Please come here!”

There was no response. Susie’s basket lay on the lawn; cook would wait a long while for her fruit. No sound came from the shrubbery, and none from the Abbey.

## CHAPTER XXV

### JOAN HEARS THE STORY

Nurse Parker came along the shrubby path and stood beside the two girls. Jen still lay on the ground. Jack sat by her, patting her shoulder.

“Do buck up, old dear!” she whispered at intervals.

Nurse looked down at them. “I don’t know what has happened, but I want my patient to come indoors, and she absolutely refuses to do it until she has talked to you again. So please come back and explain all this at once.”

“It’s rotten for Joan, Jen. She’s in an awful fog about things,” Jack said. “Couldn’t you pull yourself together and tell her the story properly?”

“You tell her,” Jen said brokenly. “I can’t. It won’t be the same.”

“No, that little blighter has spoiled it. But Joan doesn’t know what it’s all about yet. I’m sure Susie muddled it. By the way,” Jack said, trying to lighten Jen’s gloom, “when you speak to Susie next time, it had better be about English grammar. I don’t know what they taught her at school, but she calls you ‘Miss Jen, as was so good to Timothy and I.’ You can’t let her go on like that.”

“I’m not going to speak to her ever again.” Jen’s tone was hard.

“Oh, well! Joan will put her right. I don’t suppose it matters, if you don’t want ever to see her again. But you’d better come and talk to Joan, for she’ll stay at that window till you do. We don’t want her to have pneumonia next.”

Jen sprang to her feet at this appalling suggestion. She rushed across the lawn and up on to the terrace.

“Joan! You haven’t stayed too long, have you? You won’t go and have pneumonia?”

Joan laughed. “No, Jenny-Wren. But I can’t wait another moment to know what all this means about pictures. Susie didn’t tell me much. Won’t you explain the whole thing?”

Jen’s lips quivered. “Joan, I did want to tell you myself. I’ve been thinking about it for almost a week—ever since last Wednesday. It was the day Joy began to be so ill. We haven’t seen you since. I’ve thought of nothing else.”

“I know,” Joan spoke with real sympathy. “I’m terribly sorry your surprise for me has been ruined. But I’m certain Susie meant no harm; she just didn’t understand. I don’t really know all about it yet. I’m longing to hear the whole story.”

“Jack and I went to the Manor,” Jen said hurriedly, her eyes lowered lest, looking at Joan, she should break down. There was no pleasure in her telling; all the joy had been taken away. But it was necessary to satisfy Joan and persuade her to go indoors before the wind grew cold.

“To the Manor? But what made you think there might be pictures of the Abbey at the Manor?”

“We didn’t go about the pictures. We went to look for family portraits of the Marchwoods. I thought there might be one of Kitty Marchwood, wearing my locket. I wanted to know if it was really hers; to prove it somehow.” Jen shot a shy look up at Joan, whose eyes had widened in puzzled wonder.

“You monkey!” Joan exclaimed. “You hadn’t any right to do that!”

“We didn’t do any harm,” Jen urged. “But Sir Keith Marchwood turned up, to look for some important papers in his library——”

“Sir Keith himself? And he caught you? You deserved it! Tell me what happened!” Joan demanded in breathless interest. “Susie didn’t know anything about all this!”

“He didn’t catch us. We rushed away and came safely home. But we’d found a picture, and she was wearing the locket——”

“You really found a picture of Kitty?” Joan cried. “Sorry to keep interrupting your story, but it is so surprising, Jenny-Wren!”

“She was Katharine Marchwood, and she married our Peregrine and came to live here. We told Joy, when she spoke to us at the window, but I expect she forgot or thought she’d dreamt it. I know!” as Joan began to remonstrate: “the dates are all wrong; she was two hundred years before the Katharine who was robbed by the highwayman. The locket was given back when the first Katharine died; and it was handed down in the family, till it was stolen and lost. Sir Keith told us all that.”

“You’ve taken my breath away!” Joan exclaimed. “I thought it was about Abbey pictures you were going to tell me!”

“That comes later. You see”—Jen glanced up at her—“when we’d run away and were safely in the garden, I began to think, and I felt I couldn’t keep the locket, now that I knew for certain it really did belong to the Marchwoods. I couldn’t, could I, Joan?”

“I shouldn’t think so,” Joan agreed. “What did you do?”

“I fetched it and the purse and we went back, and I gave them to Sir Keith.”

“You really did?” Joan’s eyes gleamed in admiration. “That was jolly decent of you, Jenny-Wren! Weren’t you frightened?”

“A bit,” Jen admitted. “Because, of course, we had been in the house, though we hadn’t burgled or done any harm, except breaking the rotten catch of one shutter. He quite understood, and he said he wouldn’t send for

the police. The caretaker and the valet had been raving about the police and calling us burglars.”

“I expect you felt bad, didn’t you? How I wish I’d been there!” Joan’s face was full of amusement.

“He was terribly kind. He said I might keep the locket and the purse as long as I wanted them, but after I die they must go back to the Marchwood family, in case there are some girls by that time. There aren’t any just now. So I made my will.” Jen shot another shy glance up at Joan.

“You did? On the spot?” Joan gave a shout of laughter. “Oh, splendid, Jenny-Wren! What did you say?”

“I’ll show you, later on. I kept a copy, but it’s upstairs. Jack and Sir Keith witnessed it.”

“It was quite proper, Joan,” Jack had followed Jen. “He kept it in exchange for the locket.”

“I expect Sir Keith enjoyed himself,” Joan remarked. “I shall have to be told this story again! There’s too much to take in all at once. Hurry on to the pictures, Jenny-Wren! Where do they come in?”

“He told us to look in the drawing-room, if we’d like to see something that would interest us. And there, Joan”—Jen looked up eagerly at last, and even in her keen excitement Joan rejoiced to see that the joy which Susie had killed had come back—“there, hanging on the walls, were pictures of a lovely church—one of the outside and one inside. I rushed to him to ask if it could be the Abbey church, and he told us the story.” And she described breathlessly how the pictures had come to be painted.

Joan’s face was radiant. “Then they’re real! I didn’t see how they could be. I was afraid they would be only imaginary pictures, some artist’s fancy of what the church might have been like.”

“Oh, they’re real! Ambrose saw them, and they were done from his descriptions. They aren’t made-up things.”

“I’m aching to see them!” Joan exclaimed. “I hope Sir Keith will let me go in to look. You told him how much I should want to see them, didn’t you?”

Jack looked at Jen expectantly. But no wild outburst of excitement came. Jen was still exhausted by shock and disappointment.

“Oh, he’s going to give them to you—to the Abbey. He’ll send them as soon as we ask for them, but while Joy was so ill we thought we’d better wait. They’re to hang in the refectory.”

“Really?” Joan’s eyes blazed in delight. “Oh, that’s marvellous of him! How very kind! They’ll be our greatest treasures; it’s what we’ve always longed to have.”

"I told him that. I said they ought to be in the Abbey, not hidden at the Manor."

"Jen, you didn't! Did you really? But what cheek, kid!"

"Of course I did. I had to get them for you somehow, and it was true anyway. He said he'd often thought so himself, but he didn't like Sir Antony and so he didn't give them to him. But if the present owner of the Abbey would like to have them, he'd send them; and I said you jolly well would!"

"I should think so indeed! 'Like to have them'! There's nothing in the world I'd like so much! You seem to have had a busy day last Wednesday!"

"And then we came home, and there was Joy, hanging out of the window catching pneumonia!" said Jack. "I said it was risky, but she wouldn't go in till we'd told her about Katharine being married to Peregrine."

"Joan, oughtn't you to go in now?" Jen asked anxiously. "We've told you the important bits. We'll tell you more about it to-morrow, and when you're out of quarantine you shall see my will. Haven't you enough to think about for to-day? It would be awful if you caught cold."

"We couldn't stand all that worry over again," Jack added.

Joan laughed. "It won't happen to me! I'm practically all right; don't worry! But I will go in. Just tell me what the church is like, Jenny-Wren!"

"Oh, gorgeous! Huge!" Jack said.

Joan looked at Jen. "Can't you do better than that?"

Jen gave her a quick look. "Very plain and dignified, Joan; no ornaments—real Cistercian, and early, not like the refectory. Decorated windows—beautiful patterns—no stained glass. A low bell-tower in the middle; I'm so glad there was a bell! The pillars inside are Early English, with lancet windows high up; all very white and simple. I can't remember much more, but it was the sort of church you'd want to say your prayers in, not a place just for show."

Joan's face was radiant as she took in the points of the description. "Thank you, Jenny-Wren! You've learnt your lessons well in the Abbey. It sounds just what I'd have expected the church to be like. How soon can we have the pictures, do you think?"

"I could write to Sir Keith, now at once. I asked him not to send them while Joy was so ill."

"Oh, will you?" Joan cried. "Oh, marvellous! Now I'm going in to rest and think about those pictures; and after tea I shall tell Mother and Joy all the story!"

## CHAPTER XXVI

### SUSIE IN TROUBLE

"So Susie hadn't told Joan all about it, after all," Jack said, as Jen turned to go indoors.

"I'm going to write that letter," was Jen's only answer. "Then you could post it in town this evening. It might go a little sooner; he simply must have it first thing to-morrow."

When the letter was ready it was time for tea. "Our last meal together till next week!" Jack said gloomily. "With luck, I'll see you at school on Monday, but if either of us comes out in spots it will be two weeks longer. Don't do it, if you love me, wife!"

"Not a bit likely. We're both all right."

"You're not," Jack eyed her keenly. "You aren't your usual noisy self. What's up? You aren't going to be ill, are you? Is it just gloom because you're going to lose me?"

"Don't be an ass! I'm sorry you're going, of course, but I've a rotten headache as well."

"Better tell Nurse!" Jack exclaimed hopefully. "If you're going to have measles, I may as well stay here."

"It isn't measles."

"What is it, then? Couldn't you produce a temperature, just to oblige me?" Jack pleaded.

"I don't want to talk. I'm dead tired."

Suddenly Jack remembered that half-hour in the shrubbery. "It's not measles. It's that little pig Susie. Poor old Jen's done in," she said to herself. "Sooner I go the better. She'll have to get over it by herself." She looked up. "Ring me in the morning, to say you're all right, old thing! I don't like leaving you looking like a piece of string."

"I'm all right, only tired. Don't fuss, Jack! We've had a marvellous week. Let's talk of all the jolly things we've done!"

Jack adopted the idea with enthusiasm, and chattered of picnics and cricket and tramps on the hills, till the sound of her father's car at the door sent her rushing to fetch her coat and suitcase. Then she was gone, and Jen stood alone on the terrace, waving good-bye.

She turned to the Abbey path. "I shall go and talk to the cats, as I did before Jack came. Here comes Mrs. Watson! I wonder what she wants?"

She waited on the lawn till the caretaker reached her.

“What’s up, Mrs. Watson? Is it a message for Joan?”

“For somebody,” the caretaker said grimly. “That there Susie Spindle is in the Abbey and I can’t—my goodness!”

Jen had gone, into the house and up to her room. She locked the door and flung herself on her bed.

All her feeling for the Abbey, all her love for Joan, were jarred and out of tune. She was not old enough to analyse and understand what she felt. She was heartbroken and she had to be alone. Not even Joan could have comforted her.

“Everything’s spoiled. I can’t even go into the Abbey. Oh, why did I tell that horrible girl?” she sobbed.

Mrs. Watson stared after her, then shook her head and hurried to the house. “Another of ’em! I don’t know what to make of these here kids. Cook! What’s your Susie been a-doin’ of?”

“That’s what I want to know!” Cook said heatedly. “I sent her to pick fruit for my jam, and a full hour and a half ago it was, and she’s never come back. I’ll Susie her, when I see her!”

“I’ve got her,” Ann Watson explained. “In the Abbey she is, and cryin’ fit to bust herself. Came rushing in some time ago, and dived down into the old church, and there she lays, a-cryin’ her heart out. I can’t do nothing with her; she won’t listen to a word I says. So I comes here to ask what’s up, and little Miss Jen’s in the garden, and as soon as I says, ‘That there Susie Spindle is in the Abbey,’ that very minute Miss Jen rushes away from me like a wild thing. It’s too much for the likes of me. What’s the matter with them all?”

Cook shrugged her shoulders. “Miss Jack’s gone home. Perhaps Miss Jen’s upset about that. You send Susie to me and I’ll give her what for. Keeping back my jam like this!”

“I tell you I can’t do it,” Mrs. Watson protested. “I can’t do nothing with the child. She just cries and lays there like a lump.”

“What’s wrong with her?” Grace came to listen, her eyes wide.

“Can’t tell you that. I asked her, and she said, ‘Miss Jen said—she said ——’ and then she turned on the taps again and cried a heap more.”

“Shouldn’t have thought Miss Jen would scrap with Susie,” Grace said. “She’s been good to the child, that she has.”

“You try Susie again, Mrs. Watson, there’s a good soul,” Cook suggested. “Tell her as how I’m waiting for them rasps. Say I’ll be real mad with her if I don’t have ’em soon.”

“Better say it’ll be all right if you gets ’em quick,” Grace said wisely. “That’s more likely to bring her back.”

"You say that, then," Cook assented. "Tell her if she comes back at once I'll say no more about it, seeing as how something's upset her."

"It won't be any use, but I'll try," Mrs. Watson said doubtfully, and departed on her quest.

The time passed, but Susie did not appear. At dusk Mrs. Watson came from the Abbey again.

"No good," she reported to Cook. "That girl was crying herself sick, and she said she'd never come back to the house, so I've made her come up out of t'old church and lie on the bed her brother had, and she's sleeping like a log. Pity he's gone back to London! He might have talked some sense to her. I thought she might have come to her wits by the morning. She'd be no manner o' use to you just now."

"You done well," Cook agreed. "We'll tell the mistress in the morning; pity to worrit her at night, and her not too strong yet. Perhaps they'd let me speak to Miss Joan. You keep that Susie where she is until to-morrow, Mrs. Watson. Lock the door on her; we don't want her ramping over the country, saying as how we've been cruel to her."

"Cruel! Goodness me, who's been cruel?" Grace cried. "Look how kind Miss Jen was about her brother!"

"Clean off her head, if you ask me," Mrs. Watson said. "But I can tell you this—whatever's gone wrong, it's something to do with Miss Jen. That's the only word Susie will say—'Miss Jen's mad with me.' Has Miss Jen said anything to you?"

"Gone to bed with a headache," Cook explained. "Grace took up some supper, but she didn't eat it all. I guess she'd been crying too."

"I don't know what's taken them both. Let's leave them alone till the morning. I'll lock Susie in, and a very good idea, for which I thank you, Cook," and Mrs. Watson went off to lock the door of the little room, leaving milk and biscuits by Susie's side in case she woke.

Before breakfast Grace went through the garden to the Abbey. "Any luck this morning?" she asked, putting her head in at Mrs. Watson's door.

"Bad as ever," Ann retorted. "I been and talked to her. She wishes she was dead and she's never going back to the house. Miss Jen hates her and won't ever speak to her again, and Susie wants to die."

"Lord sakes! Doesn't sound like Miss Jen. What's Susie been doing?"

"Wouldn't tell me. Like to try your hand at her? There's the key."

Grace took the key doubtfully. "I'm not much good with kiddies."

She unlocked the door and stood looking down at Susie. At her entrance Susie started up, wild-eyed and with swollen crimson face. Then with a sob she crouched on the bed again and buried her head in the pillow.



“There now, Susie! What’s all this about? Nobody’s going to eat you,” Grace remonstrated. “You come home along o’ me, and we’ll say no more about it.”

Susie was incoherent by this time. “Miss Jen, she said—I told Miss Joan—I never meant no harm. I’ll never come—I couldn’t bear it—I’d rather die. Miss Jen hates me; I spoiled her secret. I didn’t know; I’d *die* to please Miss Jen! She’ll never speak to me again.”

“That isn’t like Miss Jen. Whatever did you do?” Grace exclaimed.

Susie shook and sobbed, and would say no more.

Grace locked the door and went back to Mrs. Watson.

“No good. Nothing to be done here. That girl’s going to be ill, if something doesn’t stop her soon. We’ll have to tell them at the house.”

“You ask Miss Joan. She’ll know what to do,” Ann Watson said. “She knows about girls, what with being May Queen and all.”

“Miss Joy was a queen too.”

“Aye, but Miss Jen thinks a mighty lot of Miss Joan,” Mrs. Watson said. “If they can talk to her at the window you can.”

Grace went soberly away to report to Cook and to demand from Nurse an interview with Joan as soon as possible.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### LETTING DOWN THE ABBEY

Joan, sitting on the window-sill in the sunshine, heard Grace's story and looked grave. "I know what's happened, and I can see how Susie feels. I'll talk to Jen; she's the one who must put things right. Where is she, Grace?"

"Gone out, Miss Joan. She had a stick and she took her lunch. Said she was going on the hills."

"Up the Monks' Path to the cave, I expect. Keep a look-out for her, Grace, and tell her I want to speak to her as soon as she comes in. I should leave Susie alone for the present. Ask Mrs. Watson to see that she has her meals; and I think—yes, I'm afraid you'll have to keep her locked in, just for to-day. In that state she might run away, and we don't want that to happen."

"I'll tell Mrs. Watson, Miss Joan. Susie's cried herself nearly ill; I don't believe she could run far, even if she thought of it," Grace said.

"Poor kiddy! I'm sorry for Jen, too. I wish I could go after her, but I'm afraid it wouldn't be allowed." Joan frowned in anxious thought. "Well, thank you, Grace. I hope we'll put things right soon. It's awkward for you all, and it's sad for Jen and Susie. We must help them, if we can. Ask Mrs. Watson to be good to Susie; it isn't really her fault—she didn't understand, and she's desperately unhappy. Tell her we're trying to help."

"Thank you, Miss Joan. Mrs. Watson said you'd know what to do," and Grace went away comforted.

"I wish I did!" Joan sighed. "How can I help, when I can't go after Jen?"

There was nothing to do but wait. Joan thought and puzzled over the problem, and wondered. In the early afternoon her face lit up with a sudden idea.

"That might do it! I believe I could make Jen see it. I've been dreading her coming back, but now I wish she'd hurry." And she watched the path that led from the hills with new eagerness.

Jen came at last, heavily and not looking up. She had sat on the edge of the quarry, unhappy and restless, not understanding her own discomfort, unable to reach a decision without help and unable to find the help she needed.

"She isn't a bit like herself, poor kid," Joan thought, as she watched her come. "How could she be? Everything's out of tune. With Susie in the

Abbey, even that refuge is taken from her. Jenny-Wren! What a long time you've stayed with the monks!"

Jen looked up, with a start. Her eyes were tired and she shrank under Joan's look. "Oh—Joan! I hadn't anything else to do. It's rotten without Jack."

"I'm sure you're missing her. But you might have thought of me. I want somebody to talk to! Joy isn't strong enough for talking yet, and Mother has to keep quiet. I'm almost fit again, and I've been lonely and dull all day."

"I'm sorry! Oh, I am so sorry!" Jen cried. "I never thought you could be wanting me!" She put down her rucksack and sat on the stone wall of the terrace. "Joan, I've been afraid to ask you. Did they cut off Joy's hair when she was so ill?"

Joan laughed. "No, Nurse relented. She talked of it, but she waited one more day, and Joy's temp. came down, so they spared her hair. I'd have been sorry, and so would Mother. I believe Joy would have been rather glad!"

"Nurse said she'd shave me, if I took measles. I've been worried about Joy. I didn't want her spoiled."

"Don't worry any more; Joy's all right. You won't be so silly as to take measles now, will you, Jenny-Wren?"

"Oh no! I'm very fit, and so is Jack."

"You don't look too fit," Joan said severely. "Didn't you sleep well? Were you missing Jack all night?"

Jen grew crimson and her eyes fell. She could not run away; that would have been rude to Joan and hard on her, and Jen was incapable of unkindness to Joan. But she would have liked to go and she showed it, as she sat looking at her swinging feet.

Joan gazed down at her with deepest sympathy. "Feeling bad, Jenny-Wren?"

"Rotten!" Jen burst out vehemently.

"What's wrong?"

"Everything. I don't know; I don't understand. Joan, can't you tell me what's the matter?" she asked unsteadily, without looking up. "I'm feeling bad about—about Susie; but she did play a rotten trick, Joan! You know how much I wanted to tell you myself. You understand, don't you? She spoiled it for me, and I was so thrilled about the pictures. I'd looked forward so much to telling you. Why do I feel so rotten about being wild with her? I know that's what is wrong; I'm as wild with her as I can be, and it's making me feel awful. But I had the right to be wild, Joan! I've thought all day, and most of the night too, and I can't see why I feel so bad."

"You're rather a brick!" Joan exclaimed. "I never imagined you'd go as far as that all alone."

Jen pushed back her plaits and looked up indignantly. "What d'you mean? I *am* wild with Susie, and I think I've the right to be. But it's making me feel I'm a rotter. What's bricky in that? I want to know why I feel like that."

"I can tell you why quite easily! You're a brick to have thought it out so honestly. I supposed you'd spent the day hating Susie and feeling ill-used, and that I'd have to tell you it was wrong. You've seen that for yourself; you admit it's making you feel rotten. That means you know it's wrong."

"Well, why?" Jen demanded. "You said you could tell me."

"Because you're generous through and through, and your real self knows that Susie didn't mean any harm, that you ought not to blame her so bitterly. You're denying your generous side, and of course you're feeling bad."

"Oh!" Jen reddened again. She sat swinging her foot and staring at her plimsolls. Presently she looked up defiantly. "Then I'll have to go on feeling rotten for ever. Susie ought to have thought before she babbled to you. I don't want any more to do with her."

She slid from her seat and picked up her bag. "I'll go and have a wash before tea."

"One moment, Jenny-Wren," Joan said quietly. "There's something you haven't thought of. Jen, there's another fugitive in the Abbey—another stowaway! What about the ancient rights?"

Jen stared at her wide-eyed. "Joan! What do you mean?"

"In the Abbey, hiding from her enemy. Susie's taken refuge there, and she won't come back. She's cried till she's almost ill, because she cares so much for you and she knows she's hurt you. She never meant any harm; she didn't understand it was a secret. She isn't educated; she doesn't think clearly. All she can say is that you hate her and won't speak to her, and she wants to die."

"Silly little idiot!" Jen muttered, her lips trembling.

"Of course. But she means it and she's very unhappy. No one can persuade her to come out of the Abbey. She's a stowaway, right enough, and she's taken refuge. Now, Jen, what about it? Are you going to restore the ancient rights of the Abbey, when it really costs you something?"

Jen stood kicking a rose-leaf and staring at the ground.

Joan went on relentlessly. "Does the Abbey really mean anything to you, or is it only sentimental talk? I know it will need a great effort for you to forgive Susie, but that means you've a chance of doing something for the Abbey that is really worth while—of proving how much it means to you. You see that, don't you?"

"Joan, do stop!" Jen cried desperately. "The Abbey's ruined for me now!"

“I think it will be, if you let this chance go. I honestly don’t think you’ll ever be quite comfortable in there again, unless you play the game now. You’ll feel you’ve let the Abbey down. It’s almost like a challenge, isn’t it?”

Jen, with a hunted little gasp, fled into the house.

“Poor kid!” Joan half laughed. “I had to say it, but I hated doing it. She’ll rise to it. I’m certain of that. But she’ll have a fight, and nobody can help her. She’ll have a bad time. But the Abbey will win!”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### ANOTHER STOWAWAY IN THE ABBEY

Jen crept down to her lonely tea, looking white and tired. She had spent a rebellious, unhappy hour in her room, with the door locked, but she knew that if she refused to appear Nurse would come to look for signs of measles. For the first time she was glad that Joan was not yet certified quite free from infection.

Nurse, meeting her in the hall, glanced at her curiously, but Joan had told her a little of the trouble, so she asked no questions, but made a note to keep an eye on Jen for the next day or two.

Shut in her room again, Jen's struggle went on. Susie had no right—it had been enough to make anybody wild—how could such a thing ever be forgiven?

A stowaway in the Abbey—well, she deserved to be. There was something to be said, after all, for the enemies who pursued the guilty person fleeing from justice. It was a mean trick to run to the Abbey, knowing he—or she—would find refuge; a rotten trick! Any one who was guilty ought to face up to the consequences, not hide in a church.

Jen, in the depths of misery, threw off her clothes and flung herself into bed.

"I can never go into the Abbey again. It's ruined for me. I can't help it; Susie's a rotten little pig, and I can't—I couldn't—oh, everything's awful! I'll go back to school and never come here again. I know what Joan thinks; I shan't be able to come back."

She fell asleep, worn out with the struggle that tormented her. One thing which Joan had said she dared not admit to her mind; with all her strength she fought to keep it at bay.

But when she slept her defences were down and her real self came into its own. For hours she lay without dreaming, exhausted; then, in the early morning, she suddenly sat up with a jerk.

"Joan said—she said Susie had been crying for two days, till she was nearly ill—because of *me*! She said Susie wants to die, because I won't speak to her. Oh, gosh! What shall I do? I can't let the kid go on like that!"

That was the picture she had been holding at bay—Susie crying hour after hour, refusing to leave the Abbey, not taking refuge from punishment, but because she was miserable. "Because I said I wouldn't speak to her. I'll have to put that right. She's only a kid, and I suppose she really didn't

understand. What did Joan say?—"Not educated. Can't think clearly." And she has nobody, like a mother, or Joan, to go to. She upset me terribly badly, of course," and her lips quivered at the memory of her disappointment, "but I seem to have upset her, too, much more than I thought. I don't know why she cares so much. But she mustn't go on crying like that!"

She was dressing quickly. It was not, after all, loyalty to the Abbey or to Joan that had wrought the change, though it was by the appeal to the Abbey that Joan had won her attention and had been able to paint that harrowing picture of Susie sobbing in the Abbey. It was her own friendly nature, coming back into its own, after shock and bitter disappointment had driven it out. Susie was in terrible trouble; she must be helped. No one else could do it.

"It's because of me," Jen thought, marvelling as she brushed her hair. "She seems to care a terrible lot about me. I don't know why. Perhaps it's because of Timothy. That was Joan, really, but Susie will think I did it. I'd better put her right about that. But first I must stop her crying. I can't do anything else till I've seen to that."

She could not have lain in bed with that picture of Susie in her mind. It was not yet seven o'clock, but the garden was full of sunshine and singing birds, and she had slept enough. She put on plimsolls and crept downstairs to the garden door.

At the Abbey gate she remembered that she had no key and that it was now kept in Mrs. Shirley's room. During the night the gate would be locked; yes, she could not open it. She hesitated, then raced by the shrubbery path to the beech avenue, and set out to go all the way round to the front gate of the ruins—down the avenue, and along the road, till she came to the entrance which led to the big gate-house.

"It will take quite ten minutes," she said to herself. "But there's nothing else to do. I couldn't scream till Mrs. Watson heard and came to open the gate; and the underground doors would be locked too. I couldn't possibly sit down and wait till Nurse could fetch the key. It might not be till nine o'clock! Now that I've thought about Susie crying like that, I can't sit still till I've done something to stop her."

She remembered the time when she and Jack, locked into the Abbey instead of out of it, had rushed home by this long way, very late for dinner, in the days when the school had been living at the Hall. That had been more than a year ago.

"It's a gorgeous morning for a walk." She turned into the road and went more soberly along towards the gate-house. "Nothing was nice yesterday, but somehow to-day seems different. I wonder if Mrs. Watson will be up yet? She ought to be; it's almost seven."

It was early for Ann Watson, but her mind was not easy about her guest in the little room, and she had risen to go and look at her. Jen's tap on the outer door brought her to the entrance, looking startled.

"Eh, Miss Jen! At this time o' day!"

"The gate was locked, and I couldn't wake Mrs. Shirley to ask for the key. I want to speak to Susie."

"Well, there now! I hope as how you'll be able to make her see sense," Mrs. Watson exclaimed. "She just lays there and weeps. I can't do nothing with her."

Jen's shiver was partly due to dismay over Susie and partly to horror at Ann's English, which was worse than usual in her annoyance with Susie. "Where is she, please?"

"In the wee room you slep' in t'other night. I locked her in; Miss Joan said to do it, for fear she'd run off somewhere. She's in a state and no mistake."

Mrs. Watson led the way to the garth and unlocked the door in the cloisters. "I don't like her looks. Seems to me she's downright poorly."

"I'll speak to her. Please don't come in!" Jen pleaded. "She might not like it."

Ann shrugged her shoulders and went to put on her kettle. "A cup o' tea wouldn't hurt nobody," she said to herself.

Jen slipped into the room and closed the door. "Susie!" she said gently. "I say, Susie, I'm just terribly sorry. I didn't understand until this morning."

With a wild cry Susie started up, flinging back her untidy brown hair. "Miss Jen! Oh, Miss Jen, I didn't mean it! I'm that sorry! I didn't know you'd care! I never meant no harm, Miss Jen!"

She was flushed and hot, and her eyes were bright with fever. One look was enough for Jen; she spoke quickly and with energy, but went no nearer than the door.

"I say, Susie, have you a bad cold, or is it just crying? Is your throat sore? I'm quite sure you've a headache."

"I don't know. I'm sore all over. Miss Jen, I never meant——"

"Don't worry about that any more. Listen, Susie! I'm sorry for what I said. I didn't mean it; about not speaking to you, you know. It was all rot; but I'm sorry I said it. I didn't know how you felt; and you didn't know how I felt! We'd better call it square and say no more about it. So you'll stop crying, won't you? You've nearly made yourself ill, you silly thing! Now you're to lie down and stop thinking and try to go to sleep. I'll come back presently and sit beside you, if I can; but I've had no breakfast yet. You can wait till I've had something to eat, now that you know it's all right, can't you?"



Susie dropped back on her pillow, with a sob of relief. "It's all right! Oh, I am so tired!"

"You'd better rest. Now that you've nothing to worry about, I expect you'll go to sleep."

Jen slipped out, and, closing the door quietly, went to Mrs. Watson's kitchen. "Will you give Susie some breakfast? I hope she'll be able to eat it. She'll be all right now; she won't cry any more. May I have the key of the garden gate? Thanks! I'll bring it back presently."

She went off by the tresaunt, to let herself into the garden of the Hall.

"If that's not measles, I'll be surprised! Just fancy Susie having it! We never thought of that. I don't believe anybody could look so much like measles and not have it. Nurse will need to see her at once!"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### A LONGER HOLIDAY

“Nurse!” Jen called up to Joan’s window. “Can I speak to you? I’m afraid it’s rather important.”

Nurse looked out at her with startled eyes. “I’ll come down—Well, what’s the matter?”

“Susie Spindle. She’s in the Abbey, and if she isn’t beginning measles I’ll eat my hat.”

Nurse gave an exclamation of dismay. “And you’ve been with her?”

“I didn’t go past the door; I have some sense! As soon as I saw her I guessed, and I didn’t go near her. But I had to talk to her, or she’d have gone on howling herself into hysterics. It may be only crying, of course, but I’m afraid it’s measles. I thought you’d like to look at her.”

“If it’s measles, you won’t go back to school this term,” Nurse said grimly.

Jen stared at her. Then with a whoop she dashed down to the lawn and began to turn head over heels at express speed.

“Oh, cheers! Oh, good! Joan will be better and I’ll still be here! Oh, marvellous!”

“What you need,” Nurse said sternly, “is a severe attack and a fortnight in bed, and to have your head shaved.”

“There’s not a thing the matter with me,” Jen assured her. “I’m as fit as anything. I felt rotten yesterday, but it wasn’t measles. I’m going to have another fortnight here, and it will be simply marvellous.”

“They might as well send you home to Yorkshire. There won’t be any term left by the time all this quarantine is finished.”

“Well, wouldn’t that be marvellous too? Whatever they decide I’ll be lucky,” and Jen turned a cart-wheel and came upright again at the foot of the steps. “But I don’t think they’ll send me home. I may have caught a germ from Susie this morning. Auntie Shirley and Joan will want to be sure I’m safe; they wouldn’t like me to take their measles home to my family.” And she whirled over on her hands again.

“Jenny-Wren, what are you doing?” Joan, still in her dressing-gown, called from the window. “You seem to have come back to us; you weren’t our Jen last night! Is anything the matter?”

Jen, with a whoop, dashed up to the terrace. “Joan! Oh, Joan-Queen, I’m sorry I was a pig to Susie. I let down the Abbey badly, didn’t I? And I let

you down too. But it's all O.K. now, Joan. I've talked to Susie and she won't cry any more."

"That's good news! I'm very glad to hear it. I don't wonder you were celebrating."

"Oh, well!" Jen reddened. "I was rejoicing, of course, but I know it was a bit brutal. Nurse is shocked, and you will be too. I'm sorry about Susie; I really am. I was thinking about my own good luck. It's so wildly unlikely, and yet it seems to have happened. You see, Joan, I'm afraid Susie's going to have measles."

"Gracious!" Joan exclaimed, startled. "Oh, I say, I hope not!" She looked at Nurse in dismay.

"I'm going to see the child," Nurse said. "If it's true, it's most unfortunate. Jen seems sure, but perhaps she's mistaken."

"I hope she is mistaken! We don't want to start the business all over again."

"Well, you go and look at her," said Jen.

"I'm going," and Nurse went off to the Abbey.

"Are you sure it isn't only that Susie has made herself ill with so much crying, Jen?" Joan asked anxiously. "That would give her a headache."

"It looked like measles to me. Joan, if it is, will you send me home? There's only about a fortnight of the term left, so after another two weeks of quarantine——" And Jen paused.

"Do you want to go? It would be rather hard on your mother, wouldn't it?"

"If I went home and was ill there? That's what I think. I'm not going to be ill; but there's the quarantine, and that would be an awful fag for Mother."

"It doesn't seem fair to give her that worry," Joan agreed. "She isn't expecting you till the end of July, and after all, it's our measles! It's our responsibility. We ought to look after you, and if you should have it we'd like to nurse you."

"I knew you'd say that!" Jen shouted in triumph. "I'd like to go home, of course, but it would be simply marvellous to be here when you're well again."

"I'd like to have your company," Joan admitted. "Joy won't be fit for much for some time, and Mother will have to take things quietly too. They'll comfort one another, but I'm all right and I want to go out and do things—climb up to the cave, for instance."

"And you'd have to do it all alone," Jen added. "Oh, let me stay and be company for you, Queen!"

Joan laughed. "I still hope it isn't measles and that you'll be able to go back to school on Monday, for your own sake."

"That would be a frightful blow, now that my hopes have been raised," Jen said gloomily. "I don't believe Susie will let me down like that."

"I'm afraid your devotion to your studies isn't what it should be, Jenny-Wren."

"I'm not a bit keen. I'm sorry about cricket, though. I haven't been much use to Jack, after all. But they wouldn't want me to infect the whole team."

"If Susie really has been so inconsiderate, I think we'll keep you here," Joan said. "I'm hoping to come down to-day; that was my bit of good news, but I've had no time to tell you. We'll have tea under the trees. Nurse is sure the doctor will agree."

"Oh, bully! Gosh, won't I be glad to have you again!" Jen cried. "I'm tired of this Romeo and Juliet business."

"So am I," Joan laughed. "Here comes Nurse! Now we shall know the worst."

"Or the best," Jen murmured.

"It is measles," Joan groaned. "I can tell by her face. Look how grave she is!"

"A bit grim," Jen assented. "Oh, well, we'll have to make the best of it! I won't rejoice too loudly, for I know it's not the proper thing and it's rotten for Susie."

Nurse nodded, in answer to Joan's question. "No doubt of it. Pity that child went near her, but no one expected this. She's very poorly; I must get her to bed at once. I suppose you'll have her in the house?" and she looked at Joan doubtfully.

"What else could we do? She'll be all right here, won't she? She's not too ill to be nursed here, I mean?"

"Oh, no, she'll be all right. But it's upsetting for you to begin it all again, when we hoped you were almost clear. You could send her to hospital?"

"Oh, we couldn't do that!" Joan exclaimed. "Poor kid, she'd be terribly lonely and frightened! Mother will want to keep her here, if you can stay to help us."

"I can stay, if you want me. I'll see to it, then. You wouldn't like her to stay where she is? The caretaker could help to look after her."

"Not in the Abbey! We may have tourists there at any time. It wouldn't be fair," Joan explained.

"Then the woman shall help me to carry her, as soon as I'm ready for her here. But first we must see to breakfasts for you people. The child is all right where she is, for an hour or two."

"I'll write and tell Timothy," Jen said. "It's rotten for Susie to have no mother and no home, and it will upset Timothy to hear she's ill."

"You made it all right with Susie, didn't you?" Joan asked anxiously. "Such a trouble on her mind might be bad for her, while she's feverish."

"Oh, quite all right! I know she understood. I said I was sorry."

"Good for you! Jenny-Wren, don't think I didn't know how you felt. I sympathised with you tremendously, but when you asked me why you felt so bad, I had to tell you, hadn't I?"

Jen, flushed and ashamed, spoke quickly. "Joan, I was horrid, I know; and I felt horrid. When you challenged me to show that I really meant what I'd said about the Abbey, I ought to have gone dashing to find Susie at once. It took me hours to make up my mind; I feel bad about that. And it wasn't really because of the Abbey that I went, after all; and not even because of you. I just couldn't help it. I had to go."

"Of course you did," Joan smiled down at her. "Was it the thought of Susie's misery that drove you to it?"

"I suppose it was. I woke up thinking about her, crying like that, and then I couldn't go fast enough. I could hardly wait till I'd dressed. I hadn't understood how bad she was feeling, and although you told me, I wouldn't think about her at first. When I did, I went straight away."

"That was more like you, Jenny-Wren. Aren't you glad you did? Suppose we'd found Susie was ill, and you hadn't been able to tell her and set her mind at rest?"

"That would have been awful," Jen said soberly. "I'm jolly glad I was able to tell her myself. I didn't let down the Abbey and you for so terribly long, did I?"

"Not for long, and not badly," Joan assured her. "Now I'm going to dress. Don't you want your breakfast?"

"Starving," Jen called back to her, and went indoors.

Then she came flying out again. "Joan! Joan! A letter from Sir Keith Marchwood! It must be about the pictures! Come and hear what he says!"

Joan leant out of the window. "Quickly, then! Nurse wants me to hurry."

"He's glad to hear Joy's better," Jen was skimming through the letter. "He'll give instructions about the removal of the pictures immediately. He hopes I won't be so mistaken as to be the next invalid. Rather not! I wouldn't be so silly. Isn't he a darling? Oh, Joan, do you think they'll come to-day? Wouldn't it be simply marvellous?"

"Not to-day, I should think. That would be almost too quick. But we shall have them soon now. I'm thrilled to the limit about those pictures, Jenny-Wren!" Joan, eager and excited, withdrew to her room again.

“Perhaps they will come to-day! Sir Keith knows what a hurry I’ll be in!” and Jen danced up and down the terrace, and then rushed in to breakfast.

## CHAPTER XXX

### TREASURES FOR JOAN

Radiant with joy, Jen carried out tea and spread it under a big tree, with a rug for Joan's feet and cushions for Joan's back, and a table for Joan to pour out at.

"Isn't it perfectly marvellous?" she sighed happily, as she settled her guest in her chair and made sure she was comfortable. "Now, Joan, is there anything else I could fetch for you?"

"Not another thing," Joan said, laughing. "You're looking after me beautifully. It is nice to be out again! Oh, there's Timmy! Catch him for me, Jen! I haven't spoken to a cat for a fortnight!"

"I've talked to them quite a lot." Jen dashed off in pursuit of the shaggy grey kitten. She brought him back and dropped him into Joan's lap. "There! I knew there was something else you ought to have. I told the Mother Superior all about your measles and about Joy. She was frightfully sorry."

"How did she show it?" Joan asked laughing.

"She didn't. She put her nose into her tail and went to sleep. But I know she was feeling sorry. I told Nurse you ought to have one of them in your room, but she wouldn't listen."

"I'm sure she wouldn't. Here comes the Curate too. I believe they know I'm in the garden again."

"The Curate doesn't care much about anybody. Jack and I are sure there's a girl friend in the village. Perhaps he'll tell you about her."

Jen ran to catch the slim young cat, and was bringing him in triumph, while he struggled to escape, when a car came up the beech avenue and stopped before the terrace. She stood, gazing over the black body in her arms; then she dropped the cat and rushed to Joan, who had started up.

"Joan! Oh, Joan! It's the pictures from the Manor!"

"Are you sure?" Joan came forward quickly.

"Oh, rather! The Jenks man is there; he's the one who called me a burglar and talked about sending for the police. But there's another person as well."

A young man was coming from the car to meet them. Jenks had recognised Jen and had said a word of explanation.

He raised his cap. "I am Sir Keith Marchwood's secretary. He is grieved that he was not well enough to come himself to superintend the removal of

the pictures. Where would you like us to put them? I am instructed to deliver them to the owner of the Abbey in person.”

“This is her. I mean, she’s it,” Jen cried excitedly. “This is Joan, and the Abbey’s hers.”

Joan’s colour rose. The Abbey had been hers for less than two years, and the thought still had the power to thrill her. “I am Joan Shirley, and the Abbey is mine. Will you be so good as to bring the pictures indoors? I’ll show you where to put them.”

“Not in the Abbey, Joan?” Jen asked breathlessly.

“Not yet. Mother and Joy must see them. We’ll have a grand ceremony when we take them into the Abbey.” Joan controlled her eagerness before the strangers, but her voice quivered with strong feeling.

The secretary and the valet lifted one picture and carried it in. They placed it on a settle, where a good light shone upon it, and went to fetch the second.

Joan stood gazing in a dream at the Abbey church—the high beautiful choir, the severely simple pillars, the plain strong lines of the roof, the sunlight streaming through the windows of unstained glass. Jen’s hand crept through her arm.

“All right, Joan?” she whispered.

“At last!” Joan said. “We’ve seen the church at last. Oh, Jen, I do thank you for this!”

“Me?” Jen gasped. “It’s nothing to do with me! It’s Sir Keith—here comes the outside picture!”

“Oh, isn’t it? It’s everything to do with you.” Joan steadied herself and turned to the secretary. “Thank you for your care in bringing them. They are great treasures and we shall value them always. I shall write to Sir Keith. We are very grateful to him. Can we do anything for you? May we give you tea?”

The offer was declined, however, and the car drove away, while Joan turned back to her treasures.

“I was afraid they’d say yes, and we’d have to go and wait on them. I want to sit and gaze at these! So that’s how it looked when the pilgrims came! It’s just what I’ve always hoped it would be like!”

Jen drew up a big chair in front of the pictures and set a stool beside it for herself. “Now we can worship them! Did you have enough tea? Shall I fetch your cup? Don’t you need something more, to buck you up after this excitement?”

Joan laughed and dropped into the chair. “I’ve had enough. I only want to look at these priceless things.”



"That's what I want too." Jen leaned against her. "It's marvellous to see them here at last!"

"It's wonderful to have them. To think that they've been there, at the Manor, waiting for us for three hundred years!"

"With the Abbey just a heap of ruins, turned into a farm, and used as barns and store-houses!"

"The hiding-place of highwaymen and robbers." Joan added another chapter to the Abbey's chequered story. "It's so marvellous to know these are real," she said at last. "They might so easily have been a modern artist's fancy pictures. That's what I thought you meant at first. But any one can see they're good old work, and we have Sir Keith's word for their date."

"Ambrose saw them," Jen added. "And Peregrine, of course, and his Katharine Marchwood. Don't you think my locket would like to look at the pictures again? It must have gone to see them often while they were being painted. I expect Katharine wore it always."

"You certainly ought to let the locket meet the pictures again," Joan laughed, her eyes bright. "Oh, Nurse! Come and look! Just see what's here!"

Nurse had heard the story. "Very fine," she agreed, coming to look.

"When can Joy see them?" Jen asked. "Isn't she going to get up soon?"

"Soon, but we shall go carefully with her. She had quite a bad time."

"Mother will see them before Joy does, I expect," Joan remarked. "You said she could come down and sit on the terrace in the sun, perhaps tomorrow. How is Susie, Nurse?"

"Bad, but going on all right. She didn't do herself any good by that silly fuss yesterday."

Jen reddened. "I didn't know, Nurse. I'm frightfully sorry."

"Not your fault. Susie brought it on herself," Joan said quickly. "I can't have you looking gloomy to-day, Jenny-Wren. Remember that I owe these treasures to you; oh, yes, of course I do! Who told Sir Keith he must give them to me?"

"I didn't! Not like that, Joan!" Jen protested.

"Could I help with Susie?" Joan looked up at Nurse. "It would be safe enough, wouldn't it?"

"You might have it over again! Oh, Joan, don't!" Jen cried in dismay.

Nurse laughed. "I can look after Susie. You'd better keep away from her, both of you. Be out of doors all you can, but don't tire yourself at first," she said warningly to Joan.

"That's definite, anyway. We do what we are told!" Joan said, and turned to gaze at the Abbey church again.

"It will be gorgeous to see these two hanging in the refectory!" she sighed happily.

"When shall we put them there?" Jen asked.

"Soon, but not yet," Joan said quietly. "We'll let Mother and Joy see them first."

"When the great day comes we'll have a triumphal procession! I wish I could play something and march in front of the pictures, but I can't do anything that would be really useful," Jen sighed. "A piano's such a silly thing! I'd love to march at the head of a procession, but a drum or a mouth-organ's all I can think of, to play."

"Try a comb," Joan suggested, laughing.

"Not good enough. It wouldn't be respectful to the pictures. Shall I invite Sir Keith? He might like to come and be in the procession."

"I doubt it," Joan said. "But you must tell him when we hope to hang the pictures in the Abbey. Some day he might care to see them there."

"I don't suppose he's ever seen the Abbey. He didn't like Sir Antony, so he wouldn't come while he was alive."

"He hasn't come since we've been here," Joan said definitely. "Perhaps he'll come now, to see his pictures in their proper place."

"Your pictures! Our pictures!" Jen cried.

It was a fortnight before the pictures were carried to the Abbey. In the interval they remained in the hall, in view of everybody in the house.

Jen, watching happily, knew that Joan's eyes brightened whenever they fell on her new treasures.

At last, however, it was time to take them to their final resting-place. That they must hang in the refectory no one had questioned. The Abbey books and parchments were there, and there, too, were the beautiful dishes, the great plates and jugs and ewers, which had been used in the church and which had been found near the long passage leading to the hills. The pictures of the great church must hang on the refectory walls, looking down on the other treasures of the Abbey.

There was much to rejoice over, when at last Joan decided that the day had come. Susie was almost well again; Timothy had written, with great pains, a letter telling how kind Sir Keith had been and how much happier he was now that the butler had gone. Joy was well enough to come downstairs and lie on the terrace, well wrapped up, for some hours every day. Mrs. Shirley was herself again, though Joan kept a watchful eye upon her. It was so near the end of the term that it would have been useless for Jen to go back to school, except to pack for the summer holidays; and neither she nor Jack had shown the slightest sign of measles.

"We can hardly call it a procession; just the men with the pictures, and you and me to follow, Jenny-Wren," Joan said. "Shall we carry flowers, or dance the Helston Furry as a lonely couple?"

“No, we’d feel silly. But we ought to do something, Joan!”

“To celebrate,” Joan agreed. “I know! We’ll have a country-dance party on the lawn, to welcome the pictures. We’ll hang them in the refectory, and after we’ve danced for a while we’ll go into the Abbey and the Hamlet Club shall see the new treasures.”

“Oh, couldn’t the Club be the procession?” Jen cried.

“No!” Joan laughed, her tone firm. “The pictures will be hanging safely in the refectory before the Club is allowed to go near them. They’d want to carry them, and then they’d drop them. I know the Hamlet Club! But they shall dance a welcome to the pictures. We’ll send out the invitations at once, and Mother and Joy will watch the dancing from the terrace.”

## CHAPTER XXXI

### A JOYFUL DAY

Ann Watson had never shown the Abbey to a client who was so slow. He was not old, but he was crippled by rheumatism and leaned on the arm of his valet and on a stick. But he was determined to see everything, and after what seemed like an astonished look round the garth and the cloisters, he insisted on climbing the refectory stair, painfully but resolutely.

For a long time he sat before the pictures of the great church, thankful for the chair which Ann placed for him. She described how the pictures had been found so recently and the other treasures only a year ago, but he hardly seemed to be listening. He examined the parchments and the church plate with great care, and then pluckily went on to see the rest of the ruins, even going down to the crypt to examine the old church underground, with the tomb of the first abbot and the hermit's well.

He was so slow in his movements that it was after six when he came up to the garth again and he had not seen the sacristy or the site of the great church, with its white violets flowering among the bases of the ancient pillars.

Ann was in despair, but dared not show it. The Abbey was supposed to close at six. She knew Joan would not wish any one to be hurried away, and certainly not this elderly invalid; but she was afraid of what might happen at any moment.

They were turning back to the garth from their inspection of the spot where the altar had stood in the vanished church, when a distant sound of voices told Ann that her fears were realised and they had stayed too late.

Down the dark passage which led to the Hall came a stream of girls, all laughing and shouting; more and more followed, till the quiet garth was filled with noise and laughter. All wore loose swinging frocks of vivid colours, yellow and blue and green, violet and red and brown and gold; some had white caps laid on their hair; all wore light stockings and flat black shoes. The transformation of the silent green-and-grey garth into a place of radiant colour and enjoyment was instant and amazing.

"Is it a children's party?" The visitor turned to Ann.

The caretaker looked worried. "It's the dancing, sir; country-dancing, on the lawn at the Hall. They've come to see the pictures. We hadn't ought to be here; it's after six."

"They've no time for us," he said, with a chuckle. "And I do not think they would object. Is this one of your heiresses—the tall girl in grey, with the auburn hair?"

"It's Miss Joan; the Abbey belongs to her."

"Ah! Here is somebody I know," Sir Keith Marchwood murmured. "Still in a state of wild excitement, I see!"

A long-legged girl in vivid blue, with flying yellow plaits, shot ahead of the crowd and went leaping up the refectory stair.

"It's Miss Jen. She wants to show the rest," Ann said.

The red-haired girl in the plain grey frock ran round the outside of the crowd and stood at the foot of the stair, to see that too many did not try to force their way up at once. The girl in blue had disappeared, the first to reach the steps and go racing up.

A slim boyish figure in a gym tunic, with smooth black cropped head, came sauntering down the passage after the rest. She, of all the noisy crowd, was in no hurry, and her look swept round the garth and fell on the visitor in the gap which led to the site of the great church.

Her dark eyes danced and she came across the garth to him. "I say, how marvellous of you to come to the party! You remember me, don't you? I'm the one in the background; the one that didn't turn head over heels."

"The second witness to a certain document," Sir Keith agreed.

"I thought you'd know me again! I'm Jack. Did you see Jen? I guess she was the first to arrive, judging from the rate she was going when she started."

"She seemed to be leading the crowd," Sir Keith assented. "She was—er—a little excited, I thought."

Jack grinned. "You bet! I mean, yes, she was. Joan invited the Hamlet Club to see the pictures; that noisy crowd in gaudy frocks is the Hamlet Club; and Jen said it was her job to show the others, as she and I found the pictures."

"It was certainly her right," he agreed. "Why are you not in a—a gaudy frock too?"

"Because I don't belong to the Club. I go in for cricket; but they let me come as a visitor, because I helped about the pictures. Jen will be terribly pleased to see you. There! Joan's shoved them all safely into the refec. I'll tell her about you; she'll be thrilled to the limit to know you're here."

"Ask her——" he began, and Jack paused. "Ask her if they would do a dance for me. I should be much interested."

"They'll always dance, if you give them half a chance. They'll go on for an hour yet; perhaps you could come back to the garden and watch. This is

an end-of-term party to celebrate the pictures, and because the measles and quarantine are done with and everybody's all right again. I'll ask Joan."

Jack sped away and disappeared into the refectory, while Ann Watson, relieved and rather overwhelmed to find that her tourist was a friend of the family, hurried to bring a chair and place it in the sunshine.

"Is it Sir Keith Marchwood, sir? I didn't understand. Miss Joan will want to thank you for the pictures."

As Sir Keith sat stiffly down, Jack appeared again, and with a wave of her hand raced to the tunnel and off towards the Hall. Then Joan came alone from the refectory, a slight grey figure in the dark doorway of the ancient stair.

She crossed the garth quickly. "How good of you to come! Oh, Sir Keith, I do thank you for the Abbey church! It was the one thing we were still missing. Now we feel we have the church again, thanks to your pictures. Oh, please don't get up! Jen told me. Did you manage to climb to the refectory? How brave of you!"

"I have been both up and down. The crypt is truly an amazing discovery. My dear young lady, I understand you are now the owner of the Abbey?"

"I am. Isn't it wonderful?"

"The Abbey? Or the fact that it is yours?"

"Both!" Joan cried laughing. "I still can't quite believe it."

"I congratulate you on its condition. I came here as a boy, when it was a heap of ruins. It seems incredible that all this beauty could have been so completely hidden; and that, having been ill-used in such a way, it could be restored to something so nearly approaching perfection. I was astounded by my first glance at the garth and buildings. And the refectory is amazing."

Joan's eyes were shining. "It's perfect, isn't it? We have to thank Joy's grandfather for that. All I have to do is to see that it's kept as he left it."

"And make discoveries adding to its treasures and its history."

"Well, yes, we have done that," Joan admitted. "We've had wonderful good luck, in that way. And you've helped; you've given us one of the biggest of our new treasures."

"I am glad that the pictures should have a fitting home at last. I have always felt they were out of place in my drawing-room."

"You can't tell how much I value them," Joan said earnestly. "I'm so glad to have the chance to thank you. My letter felt very inadequate. I hoped you'd come some day. Jen will be so pleased! If you can spare the time, I hope you'll come to the house; Mother would like to see you, and Joy wants to thank you too. Oh, here comes Jack! She said"—and she laughed—"that you'd like to see a dance. I thought we'd do one for you here, just one, and

then perhaps you'd come to the garden and watch the rest of the party. Jack went to fetch the fiddler; we can't do anything without music, you know."

A girl in white stood tuning a violin in front of the chapter-house. Jack dashed to the refectory to collect some dancers.

"The garth was very colourful, when your girls arrived," said Sir Keith.

"I'm afraid the girls were very noisy! But it really is a festive occasion; we haven't met for a month, because of illness and quarantine, so we're rejoicing because it's all over, as well as about the pictures. We'll dance 'Newcastle'; it won't be the first time in the Abbey!"

Joan went out on to the garth, as a chord on the violin brought a crowd of girls running down the stair, still breathless from Jack's warning shout: "I say, you noisy lot! Sir Keith Marchwood's out there, and Joan says you're to come and dance for him!"

With a shriek of joy, Jen rushed across the garth. "Oh, topping! Marvellous! How lovely of you to come! I'll come back—but I must dance. Joan! Oh, Joan, 'Newcastle' with me! I've always wanted it here, since I watched you, that night last summer! Oh, Joan, take me!"

Joan laughed and held out her hand. "Be first woman, Jenny-Wren. Ready, Margia, thank you!"

Sir Keith watched, knitting his brows, surprised by the fascination of the sight; the blending colours weaving always in new patterns; Joan's grey and Jen's blue meeting and parting, and coming together again at the end. The eight well-trained dancers gave a really beautiful rendering of "Newcastle," and the old grey walls all round made a wonderful setting for the vivid colours of the dresses. The stars, arches, and lines safely over, the dancers bobbed to their partners, then laughed and caught hands in a ring and began again, as the fiddler repeated the tune.

Jack, with mischievous eyes, had run back to the refectory and said a word to the rest of the Club. "That thing you do in a big ring; you know the one I mean! Do it round these others. You'll fill the whole garth."

They came streaming out from the refectory in a long line, hand in hand and led by Jack, who ran round the garth drawing the string of girls after her, till she reached the other end of her circle and the ring was complete, outside the dancing group.

A shout went up: "'Sellenger's Round'! Oh, please, Margia!" The fiddler changed the tune. The inner group saw what had happened, gasped, and laughed, and joined in the new dance, a small ring within the larger one. The circles swept clockwise and back, and up to the centre, all the arms raised as one.

Then, as the rings broke up into a confused mass of colour, Jen's voice rang out above the babel. "Three cheers for Sir Keith Marchwood and the

pictures!”

“Thank you, my dears, for a great treat.” Sir Keith rose, as Joan came to him. “I need not go back to town for an hour. I should like to see some more of your dancing.”

“Then please come to the garden and let us entertain you properly. Mother will be so glad to see you; you shall sit on the terrace, and Joy will tell you the names of the dances. Jen wants to talk to you, and you must see her dance; she’s worth watching. I’ll make her do a jig for you. Girls! Back to the lawn, and on with the dance!”

THE END



## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *Stowaways in the Abbey* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]