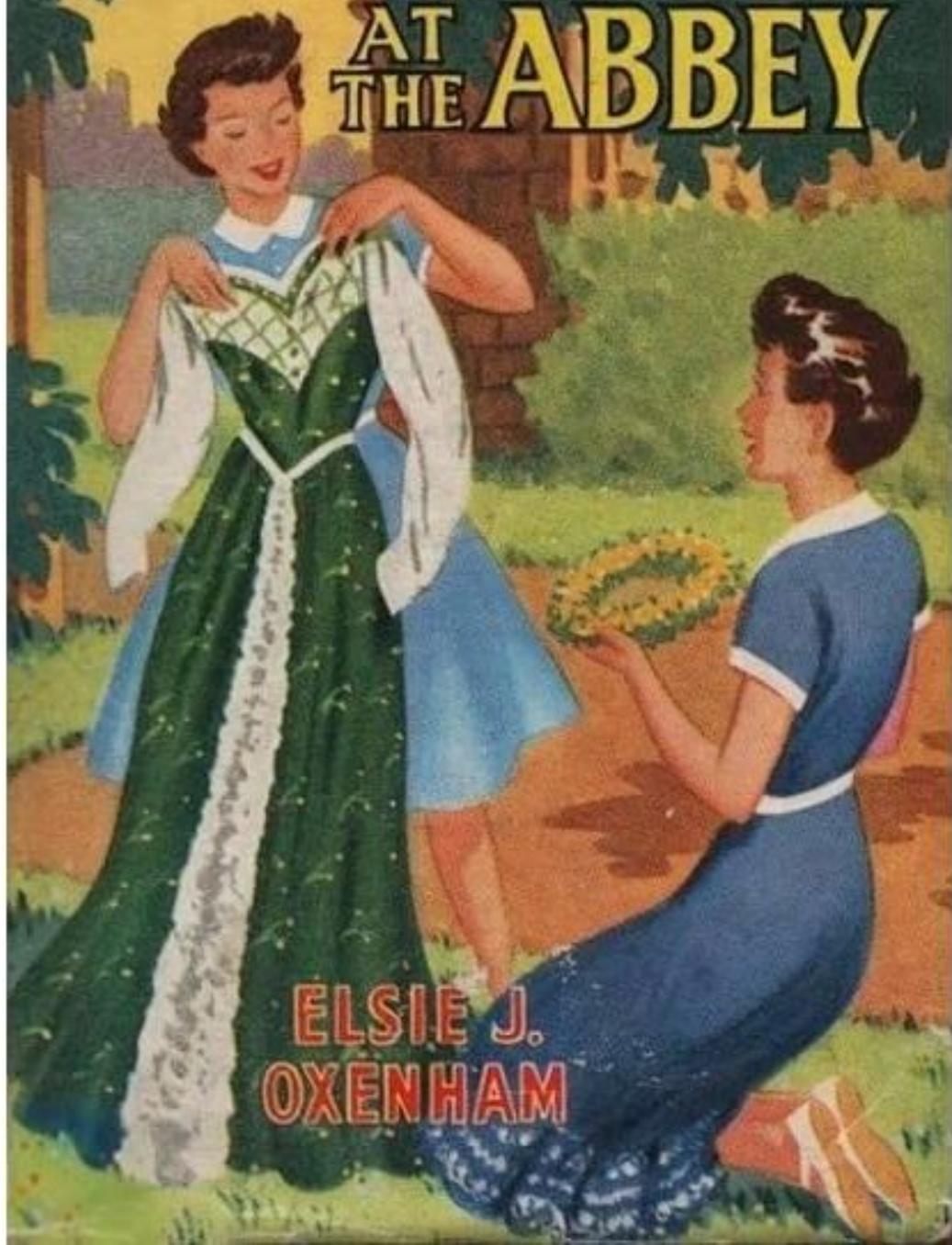


TWO QUEENS AT THE ABBEY



ELSIE J.
OXENHAM

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TWO QUEENS
AT THE
ABBNEY

by
ELSIE J. OXENHAM

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LONDON AND GLASGOW

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TO ALL THE FRIENDS
AT MARLPOSTS
AND TO

JANET MARGARET ARGENT

WITH LOVE

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CHAPTER I

THE TWINS ARE PUZZLED

"But why don't they want us?" Elizabeth looked at Margaret with troubled eyes.

"They'd like to have you, but they don't want me, and I'd like to know why," Margaret muttered.

"That's silly. They know they can't have one of us without the other. I'd never be Queen unless you were Queen too."

"It's jolly decent of you. But what's wrong with me? I thought I was quite a nice girl," Margaret groaned.

"I wish those people would hurry up. We want to talk to Rachel," and Elizabeth gazed across the cloister garth, waiting patiently for the Abbey Guardian to appear.

They had come to the Abbey to consult the Abbot, a position Rachel, the guide and caretaker of the ruins, was filling very capably. To the younger generation of schoolgirls she had become counsellor and friend, and the twins had often come to her for help.

They were bright, pretty girls of nearly fifteen with deep brown eyes and beautiful dark red hair worn in short curls. They were standing in the cloisters, looking across at the chapter-house door and windows, but at the sound of voices they vanished into a little room in the walls.

"Going at last. They've been a long time in the crypt. We'll catch Rachel as soon as they've gone," Elizabeth said.

Rachel, dark-haired and wearing her uniform, a white gown with a girdle, like a monk's robe, led her clients to the entrance and the clang of the gate told that they had gone. The twins ran out and caught her as she turned to go into her little home within the walls.

"Rachel! We want you! We've been waiting!"

"Oh, twins! I'm glad to see you," Rachel said hospitably, putting aside thoughts of the story she had been hoping to correct.

"We want to talk to you. We're bothered," the twins spoke in a breathless duet.

"Carry on!" Rachel took the big chair, lifting out a black cat and a pair of kittens and dropping them neatly into their basket. Her other cat, Golden Rory, came from the kitchen to greet her; she tickled his ears and looked at the twins.

The trouble came out with a rush. "It's school. They're choosing the new Queen. It's to be Phyl."

"The maid-of-honour. That often happens, doesn't it?" Rachel looked thoughtful.

"Often, but not always. Rachel, we may be silly, but we did think it might be us."

"It seemed so sensible for us to be Queens and we're old enough," Margaret urged.

Rachel looked still more thoughtful. "I don't think it was silly. You are old enough now and it is rather the family tradition for girls to be May Queens, isn't it? Your mother, and all those aunts! I know people have hoped you would be Queens some day. Nobody suggested it?"

"I don't think they want us. We'd like to know why. What's wrong with us?"

"What's wrong with me?" Margaret demanded, "I believe they'd have Elizabeth, but she wouldn't be Queen without me."

“Perhaps they don’t like the idea of having two,” Rachel was temporising. “It’s never been done, has it?”

“It isn’t that,” Elizabeth gave her a straight, fearless look. “They used to talk about having two Queens, and they said it would be fun. Rachel, it’s us. They don’t think we’d do it well. Why is it?”

“Have they said so?”

“Not straight out, to us. But we know.”

“Betty and Diana were talking, and we heard,” Margaret explained.

The two gazed at Rachel and she knew she must help.

“It’s hard for me to say, twins, when I’m not at school. But I expect they think you might not always remember to put the Club first and yourselves nowhere.”

“I wouldn’t like to be nowhere,” Margaret said hurriedly.

“You mean, we’d think first of what we wanted, whether it was best for the Club or not,” Elizabeth was pondering the question. “Would we, Twin?”

“I wouldn’t leave me out altogether. I’d do both.”

“Sometimes you can’t do both. Twins, think hard about this.”

“We’re thinking very hard,” Elizabeth asserted.

“We have been, for days and weeks,” Margaret cried.

“It isn’t your fault,” Rachel spoke weightily and bravely, “but all your lives you have been made to feel you were important people. You can’t remember, but from the moment you were born you meant just everything to your mother. She had heard about your father being killed in Africa; she felt she had nothing left. And then you came along and she had two babies. Can’t you see what that meant to her? For years she just lived for you, and without understanding, you felt you were the centre of the world and everything moved round you. Then you had your new father and he wasn’t used to children and he was very fond of you and very proud of you. Now it’s different; they have their own three babies and your mother has them and Sir Ivor, as well as you. But the feeling of being important had worked into you, and it wasn’t made any less by your journey to New York. I’m quite sure people made a lot of you there and on the voyages, and you still felt yourselves important people. Remember, as I said, it isn’t your fault, but it has happened to you. I don’t mean that you swank; I’m sure you don’t. But you can see how the girls feel—that you might not put the Club first.”

The twins gazed at her. “Then can’t we do anything about it?” Margaret demanded.

“What did your mother say about Phyl?”

Elizabeth said slowly, “That she was sure Phyl would be a good Queen. But I think she was disappointed, Rachel.”

Rachel thought it very likely, but was glad Joy had not put the idea into words.

“You’re not so very old yet, twins,” she said. “You’ll only be fifteen by May-Day. Sixteen would be a very good age to be Queens.”

The twins looked at her again.

“They might choose us next year,” Margaret cried.

Elizabeth, as usual, went more deeply into the matter. “You mean, in a year we might be different and they might like us better? We could try, Twin.”

“I’m sure they like you now,” Rachel said quickly. “But you could try sometimes to put other people first. Think of the Club and the school! Phyl will be a good Queen, I’m sure.”

“She’s rather old,” Margaret objected. “She’s having a long time as an almost grown-up cookery, but you forget, because her hair’s so short.”

“She doesn’t do much cooking,” Elizabeth remarked. “She’s too keen on music. If she was orchestra, she’d be chosen to be leader and play fiddle solos, but she’s piano.”

“Have they chosen a leader yet?” Rachel glanced at Margaret, knowing how her hopes had lain in this direction. “It will be hard for anyone to follow Rosalind Kane.”

“Joyce has been doing it, since Rosalind left last summer. She’s older than any of us, and she’s jolly good. But she left at Easter,” Margaret’s tone was full of meaning.

Rachel gave her another quick look, “Are you to get the job? You’d do it very well.”

“Nobody knows. There’s Jennifer, in our form,” Margaret admitted.

“She’s good too,” Elizabeth said. “Miss Howard might choose her, Twin.”

“Rosalind wanted me to be leader after her,” Margaret urged.

“Twins, don’t worry about school. All this has just happened; you aren’t to blame,” Rachel said. “But don’t let the girls see you had hoped to be Queens. Back up Phyl for all you’re worth and always put the Club and the school before what you want yourselves.”

“We’ll try,” Elizabeth spoke gravely. “Thank you, Rachel. You do help, you know.”

“I’m glad they think so, but it’s hard to put ‘not public-spirited enough,’ into words for fifteen year-olds,” Rachel said to herself, as she turned back to the Abbey after seeing the twins out by the gate into the garden of the Hall.

CHAPTER 2

BELINDA SINGS

Phyl, nineteen, fair-haired, pianist and cookery student, soon to be Queen of the Hamlet Club, rang up the Manor and asked leave to call on Lady Marchwood.

Jen welcomed her cordially and led her into the garden for tea under the trees. "Congrats! I hear you are our new Queen."

"They've chosen me. Lady Marchwood, I had to ask you—do you mind if I'm the Wallflower Queen?"

"How pretty! Why should I mind?"

"You often carry wallflowers when you're being Queen. I don't want to take your idea."

"Nice of you! But they're not my flower. I only have them to remind me of the Abbey. They grow all over it, and I love it, and them, so much. My colour is much lighter—beech-brown. You'll have rich red brown, I suppose?"

"Chestnut, lined with bright yellow. Those are the real wallflower colours."

"That will be lovely, with your fair hair," Jen agreed. "Oh, go ahead, Wallflower! I'll carry cowslips. You've made a good choice and quite an original one—which is difficult, as you'll be the twenty-seventh Queen. Queen Phyllis, I suppose? I've never heard you called anything else but Phyl."

"I'm never called anything else, but I'm really Phyllida."

"Queen Phyllida! Oh, that's very pretty! Make the Club use your whole name. It's a pity to waste it."

"I don't think they could. I'm too old to be Queen," Phyl began. "They wanted somebody younger—really in the school, not a cookery student. But there didn't seem anybody outstanding, though a lot of them are jolly nice kiddies."

"They didn't think of asking the Abbey twins?" Jen seized the chance to put the question, which had been much discussed by herself and Joy Quellyn, the mother of the twins.

"For a lot of things we'd have liked to have them," Phyl said frankly. "They'd be very pretty, as Queens, and they're rather special both in games and music. Margaret's cricket and fiddle and Elizabeth's 'cello are all above the average. But there's something the girls feel they haven't got; not yet, anyway. Perhaps it's just that they aren't old enough."

"Not in their ideas. They've always been young for their age," Jen assented. "The girls may be right. Their time may come."

"I hope it will. We like them, you know. They were very nice to me. They came and congratulated me in the loveliest way."

Jen nodded and changed the subject. "After tea you must come into the Abbey and I'll give you some wallflowers from the walls. They scent the whole place and they come early because the Abbey is so sheltered. I've a bit of news that you may pass round at school. We only heard this morning. Littlejan Fraser is on her way home, but I'm afraid she won't be in time for May-Day."

"Oh, good! She'll have been in Ceylon for almost three years. We'll love to have her back—she'll come to school again, won't she?"

"As a cookery student. I expect that's the idea; we shall hear her plans when she arrives. She was nineteen at Christmas. Just right for a senior student!"

"I'll be glad," Phyl said happily. "She was such a good queen; she'll be able to help me."

"Do you expect to need help?" Jen raised her brows.

"I might," Phyl explained. "We're short of old queens; Rosalind has left, Jansy's gone abroad on this tour with the President, Jean's at college. But Littlejan will be somebody splendid to fall back on. I might need somebody; I get worked up over music sometimes, and nothing else seems to matter. I wouldn't mean to neglect the Hamlet Club, but I might not be able to help it."

Jen's brows rose even higher. "But as Queen you would surely put the Club first."

"You can't quite understand," Phyl assured her. "There are times when only music counts. Littlejan—Queen Marigold—could take over for me."

"But, my dear girl—oh, well! You can consult Littlejan about that." Jen hurriedly changed the subject.

But as she said good-bye to Phyl at the Abbey gate she wondered if perhaps the Hamlet Club had made a mistake.

"I can't do anything. They've chosen and they'll have to take the consequences. But a Queen who doesn't put the Club first may turn out to be a disaster. Littlejan will help, of course, but she may not be able to hide that she is doing so, and Phyl obviously doesn't think there is any need to hide it. I hope the Club isn't going to be disappointed."

There had been great rejoicing when Littlejan Fraser's letter arrived. She had lived at the Hall, with the twins and their cousin Jansy Raymond, for three years, for the whole of her school life in England, as her home was in Ceylon; she had been one of the best queens the Club had known and had been a moving spirit in its doings both before and after her reign. She had brought about the choice of Jean, her maid-of-honour, to follow her as queen, and had stood by her, and then by Jansy, during their reigns. At nearly seventeen she had been swept away by her father at a few hours' notice, to give much needed help to her mother in a crisis, but had been promised a year or two more at school as soon as she could be spared. Everyone, at home and at school, had mourned her going and she had been badly missed. Her stay in Ceylon had lasted longer than had been expected, as there were two baby sisters and her help had been invaluable to her mother.

At under twenty she could still be accepted as a senior cookery student, however, and no one had any doubt that she would choose to go back to school. Certainly she would be a strength to the Club and an immense help to Phyl. But it did not seem quite right that help should be needed.

But as the car from the Hall bore her away from Southampton about a month later, it was not of school Littlejan was thinking, nor of the old friends she was so soon to meet. The car was littered with newspapers and she was devouring them eagerly.

"Bring me every morning paper there is," she had said to her escort, before he left her to rush to the London boat train.

She was a little disappointed that no one had come in the car to meet her. There had been a friendly note of warmest welcome from Joy, handed to her by Frost, the chauffeur, but she had hoped perhaps Jansy or the twins would come. She had a very close friendship with Jansy, almost sisterly; she had thought Jansy would be thrilled by her return. And it was Saturday morning; surely Jansy could have spared an hour!

Then, wrapped in the newspapers again, she had had no time to think of Jansy or the twins.

The night before, as the liner crept up channel, the wireless in the lounge had suddenly been switched on.

“We forgot the concert,” somebody had said. “There’s that new singer. I hope we haven’t missed her.”

From the set had come a beautiful soprano voice, in an aria from a Mozart opera, clear and sweet and strong.

“Lovely! What a splendid first appearance!” was the exclamation at the end.

The announcer was saying something. Littlejan leapt to the set to listen, just too late. “He said Anne—what was the rest of it?” she whirled round. “Who was she? We missed the names at the beginning.”

“Her name’s Belinda Bellanne. It’s her first concert. She’s been trained by Dr. John Robertson.”

“But I know her!” Littlejan cried. “I heard her sing years and years ago. Why did we miss the beginning? Will she sing again?”

“Listen! An encore,” said her friend.

The beautiful voice filled the lounge. “Miss Bellanne will sing again in the second half of the programme,” said the announcer, at the end.

“One of Lady Quellyn’s songs. ‘To a Skylark,’ I believe it’s called. I’m afraid the second part isn’t being broadcast,” and the friends smiled at Littlejan’s excitement and acute disappointment.

“Tell us what you know of her,” they asked.

“I went to stay at Lady Quellyn’s house, years ago, and my mother had to leave me, the very first night, and rush off to Scotland. I hadn’t had time to feel at home; I hardly knew the people, and I felt awful. Lindy—that’s what we called her—came to comfort me, and said it was like the first night at a new school and she was a senior and must buck me up. She was a year or two older than I was; she was being nursery governess to Lady Quellyn’s twins. We were very friendly, but then she went to America with the Quellyns. I’ve never forgotten that first night and how kind she was. We knew she was to be a singer. She’s lived with the Quellyns and then with Dr. and Mrs. Robertson, and they’ve all helped to train her voice.”

“She’s certainly had every chance! And her voice shows it; it’s beautiful and she is obviously well-trained. She should go far. I wonder what the papers will say in the morning? We’ll get them when we arrive.”

That was what Littlejan wanted to know, and she devoured the notices as the car sped towards the Hall.

“They’ve all been nice to Lindy,” she said to herself, as they swept round the village green and up the tree-hung lane to the Hall. “What a bit of luck that I heard a scrap of her first concert! Here’s the Abbey gate! Oh, it’s lovely to be home again! Dear old place!”

CHAPTER 3

THE RETURN OF LITTLEJAN FRASER

Deliberately, as the car rushed up the beech avenue, Littlejan took a ring from her finger and dropped it into the pocket of her big coat, a glint of mischief in her eyes.

"I don't think Frost had time to see.—Oh, the bells! How lovely of somebody!" as two sweet-toned bells began to chime, somewhere beyond the trees—two high notes and one low, repeated time after time. Rachel, watching from the Abbey gate, had seen the car pass and had hurried to the garth to ring the greeting.

"'Welcome home!' That's perfect. I remember they rang 'Good-bye! Come again soon!' as I was starting and I just couldn't bear it." Littlejan leaned from the car to listen. "I suppose Rachel thought of it; nice of her."

Then the car was at the door of the Hall, and Joy and Jen were there, full of eager greetings.

"Marigold! Lovely to see you again!" Jen used the name which had been Littlejan's as queen.

"Marvellous of you to say that! You know it's the only place I could come to—really home—in this country," Littlejan exclaimed.

"Oh, you might have gone to Joan, as she's your godmother, or to the Castle," Joy argued.

"No," Littlejan said. "I'll go to see them all, but this place is home. I went away from here and I've always wanted to come back."

"Come inside. Frost will see to your things——"

"Yes, but—" and she whirled back to the car. "I want all those papers. They're infinitely precious. You'll pick them up for me carefully, won't you, Frost?"

Reassured by his promise she turned to Joy again. "I couldn't have those precious papers thrown away."

"Are they about Lindy Bellanne?" Joy laughed. "We have them here too. Don't they say nice things about her? But how did you know?"

"We heard a little, as we came up channel. We missed most of the concert, but somebody switched on just in time and we heard Lindy sing your song. Isn't her voice lovely now?"

"We were there," Jen proclaimed. "We went to town, all of us."

"But where is everybody? The house seems very empty. Where are the twins? And—oh, where is Jansy? I'm longing to see Jansy again!"

"We'll tell you all about it while we give you lunch. The twins had cricket practice and though they wanted to be here to greet you, Elizabeth was firm," Joy explained. "It was the proper thing to turn up for cricket and there must be no slacking. Jansy—that's another story!"

"What do you mean? Is anything wrong with Jan?"

"Very much the other way. She's probably in Madeira at the moment."

"Jansy—in Madeira? Oh, tell me quickly!"

Jen gave a shriek of excitement. "Joy—her ring! Littlejan Fraser—oh, you're *not* engaged! Look, Joy, an emerald ring!"

"Marigold, what does this mean?" Joy demanded.

Littlejan's eyes gleamed. "Why not? You've both been engaged! Isn't it a jolly ring?"

"But—but who is he? Where is he? Why didn't you tell us?"

“Be prepared for a shock,” Littlejan said solemnly. “Look, Lady Joy—Lady Jen!”

She drew another ring from her pocket and slipped it into place beside the emeralds, and held out her hand, her eyes triumphant.

“Not—oh, *no!* Not *married!*” Jen and Joy wailed together.

“Marigold, what does this mean?” Jen stood over her and thundered out the question wrathfully.

“Tell us, Littlejan!” Joy begged.

“It’s all right, really, and there’s every reason for it, and it won’t make a scrap of difference. I’m going to stay with you—if you’ll have me—he’s going away—he may be away for two years,” Littlejan spoke at full speed.

“Oh!” They stared at her doubtfully.

“Who is he? And where is he going?” Jen found her breath first.

“To the Antarctic; a marvellous chance! He was longing for the appointment, but he hardly dared to hope he’d get it. He was radio officer on Father’s ship; we met going down channel, just after I’d said good-bye to you all. Father thinks a jolly lot of him.” There was pride in every note of her voice.

“You might have told us you were engaged!”

“But we weren’t! We were just friends. Then suddenly it happened, and it seemed better to belong to one another as he was going away for so long. It’s only what you did, Lady Jen. Sir Ken was going to Africa, so you married him in a hurry. But you stayed at home and did without him. I can do it too. Of course, I shall feel bad, but all my life I’ve been saying good-bye to people and being left at home. I know all about being lonely.”

“That’s true, of course,” Joy agreed. “But a husband is different, Littlejan.”

“A husband! You baby! I don’t believe it,” Jen raged. “It just isn’t possible! It’s absurd!”

“I’ve been ragged all the way home from Colombo,” Littlejan’s eyes gleamed. “People found out and they called me the Baby Bride. There was nobody else on board who had just been married, so they dropped on me for all sorts of things—to give away prizes at sports, and so on. ‘The bride must do that—the Baby Bride,’ they used to say.”

“But where is he? When shall we see him? I still don’t believe it!”

“He’s rushed off to London by the boat train, to see the people who are appointing him. It’s Saturday; he had to see them before the week-end. He’s coming to see you as soon as ever he can. He’s so frightfully glad about leaving me with you. We only hope you’ll put up with me,” Littlejan cried incoherently.

“But what’s he called?”

“What is your name, Marigold?” Joy demanded.

Littlejan’s dark eyes danced. “Littlejan Fraser.”

“*What?* You don’t mean—? Is he a cousin?” Jen found her breath first.

“Not that we know of, but there are heaps of Frasers. He’s not cousin enough to matter, but his name is Fraser. Isn’t it convenient?” Littlejan said airily. “I’m Mrs. Fraser instead of Miss Fraser, that’s all, but I’m still Littlejan Fraser, and I’m going back to school, and I’ll take off my rings, and nobody need know anything about it. It’s lucky for me. Len thinks it’s very sensible.”

“Len! We’ve heard his name at last! Is he Leonard?”

“*No!* Lennox Fraser; and it’s a very fine name. His mother was Mary Lennox.”

They gazed at her. In her excitement she was such a vivid personality, with glowing dark eyes and shining face.

“I don’t wonder Lennox Fraser was fascinated,” Jen murmured, half to herself.

“Mrs. Lennox Fraser,” Joy said thoughtfully, “yes, it is a good name. Do you really mean to go back to school?”

“Rather! I want to take that cookery course. And then we’ve a lovely plan——”

“Marigold!” Jen shouted, “Marigold, *don’t* have a family! Don’t start that! You’re not twenty yet! Oh, don’t have a baby, Marigold!”

“You weren’t twenty when you had Andrew,” Littlejan retorted, “and Mother was only twenty when she had me. I shall have two babies if I like.”

“You probably will. But don’t you see? Joy, don’t *you* see? It would make Jandy Mac a grandmother! Oh, Marigold, no! You really must *not!*”

“What a dreadful thought!” Joy said laughing. “It makes me feel forty years older!”

“Mother doesn’t mind,” Littlejan said defiantly. “She told me to go ahead and she’d be proud to be a grandmother before she’s forty.”

“I simply can’t bear the thought of it,” Jen groaned.

“What does your mother feel about this marrying business?” Joy asked more quietly. “Did she think it was wise?”

“I haven’t told you that part of it,” Littlejan started on her explanation. “You see, Lady Joy, Father is retiring in a few months. He’s reached the age and he thinks it’s best. He wants to live in this country, on the South Coast, and grow roses. So Mother’s given up the house in Ceylon and gone off with the babes, Cecily and Jantyjoy, to visit the old friends in Samoa before she leaves the South Seas for good and all. She wants to show off her new little ’uns! They’re three and five years old now. It all happened at once—Len’s appointment, Father’s decision to retire, and Mother’s plan for this trip to the Islands. I had either to go with her and let him go off to the Antarctic, or marry him and come here with him. I’d have loved to be married here with all of you to help——”

“Yes, why didn’t you?” Jen exclaimed. “We’d have loved to help to marry you.”

“I knew you would. But I couldn’t have had Mother and Father, and they mattered most. We had a jolly wedding, and then Len and I came off and left her to go to the Islands. He had to hurry home to see these people, so we sailed for London and I was called the Baby Bride by everybody on that ship.”

“I don’t believe it even now, in spite of your rings and your stories,” Jen still gazed at her incredulously. “Mrs. Lennox Fraser! Well!”

“You’ll like him. You’ll see him very soon,” Littlejan said happily.

CHAPTER 4

THE TWINS HEAR THE NEWS

“Do you think I’ll need to tell everybody?” Littlejan asked, as they sat down to a much-needed meal. “If everybody’s as thrilled as you were it will be very tiring! I thought I’d go to school and not tell anybody, except perhaps the Head. I’m still Marigold, or Littlejan Fraser. What does the rest matter?”

“You’ll have to tell the twins and Jansy,” Joy pointed out.

“Jansy! Oh, tell me what you meant! Why is she in Madeira? When did she go? Is Auntie Joan there too?”

“No, Jansy’s with the President. The reason is rather sad,” Joy said. “The President has lost her baby girl, little Shirley Rose. She’s the first of us to lose a child. Shirley was never strong and she died last February. The other children felt it terribly; there’s Dickon, who is one day younger than Jansy, and Cis, two years younger; then Ted, who has always been delicate but seems much stronger lately; and Shirley was the baby. They were a very united family, and the rest have missed the baby sister dreadfully. So the President and Mr. Everett decided to take them all for a spring cruise, to give them new things to think about, and as Cis would be the only girl in the party they invited Jansy to go with them, to be company for her.”

Littlejan looked up. “Does the President want Jansy to marry her Dickon?”

“Match-making, Marigold?” Jen asked.

“No, but does she? Would she be pleased?”

“I’m sure both she and Joan would be delighted, but they can’t arrange it.”

“The President’s having a jolly good try to make it happen.”

“Littlejan, what do you mean?”

“Taking them off together on a ship like that. I hope Jan won’t get married too soon. I don’t approve of early marriages,” said the Baby Bride.

“Marigold, how can you? What about yourself?” Jen exploded.

“Jansy was asked to be company for little Cicely,” Joy reminded her.

“She may have been, and she’ll be nice and kind to Cis. But with Dickon just her own age —” and Littlejan shook her head.

“She’s one day older. She always insists on that,” Joy laughed. “You think she and Dickon will be pals on the voyage?”

“I know what it’s like on these cruises. They’ll have heaps of chances. Does she like him?”

“Very much, as a schoolgirl, and that’s all she is—a few months over sixteen. Don’t make up fairy stories, Marigold.”

“You get a lot older when you go travelling and running round on ships and in the ports you visit. Jansy’ll be much more grown-up when she comes home.—And how,” Littlejan went on, with rising indignation, “you people can have thought I’d come home still a kid, like I was before, I simply don’t know. I’m positive certain Lady Jen expected me to be just the same and not changed at all.”

“Well, I did,” Jen confessed. “I’ve looked forward to seeing Queen Marigold again.”

“You’ll see her all right! She isn’t far away. But how could I possibly not have grown up, with all that travelling, and meeting new people—all Mother’s friends in Ceylon—and

voyages and all that? How could I? Tell me that!”

“One for us, Jenny-Wren,” Joy remarked. “Are you really so very grown-up, Mrs. Fraser?” Littlejan coloured. “Are you going to tease me no end? I don’t really feel grown-up, you know.”

There came what she had once called ‘a rush of twins,’ and Elizabeth and Margaret were upon her, their arms about her.

“You’ve come back! Our dear Littlejan! And just the same as ever!” Margaret shouted.

“Our Marigold!” Elizabeth cried. “You’ll be a queen again, won’t you? But you’ve missed May-Day. Why did you?”

Littlejan held them off. “Let me look at you! Three years!—yes, you are bigger—who is the new Queen? Not either of you?”

“It would be both of us,” Elizabeth said with dignity. “It’s Phyl, Marigold. We crowned her a week ago. Why weren’t you here in time for May-Day?”

“I couldn’t manage it. I’d have liked to be.”

“Will Phyl be a good Queen? You know her, don’t you?” Elizabeth asked.

“Rather! She and Tessa were in that funny little school that Jansy taught so well. I don’t see why Phyl shouldn’t be a good Queen. Did Tessa do well? I heard all that story in Jansy’s letters.”

“Oh, yes! Jolly decent. Phyl’s the wallflower Queen——”

The telephone rang and Joy went to answer it.

Jen rose. “I must go home, and you must feed these hungry cricket girls. Did you know I have a very new infant, Littlejan?”

“But I thought Jan said you meant Barbara Rose to be the end of your family?”

“We did,” Jen admitted. “But we relented and had one more. I wanted to have another try for my sixth boy. He came all right; he’s called Simon Patrick.”

“Then that’s your whole morris side! How super for you! But I thought you meant to call him Francis?”

“He wanted to be Simon,” Jen said airily. “He’s just like all the rest—big and fair and hefty.”

“What a thumping relief!” Littlejan laughed. “If he’d been a little dark Marchwood, like your first two girls, it would have spoiled your set.”

“We’d have had to put in Barbara, in a jersey and shorts; she’d have looked the part. He’s only one month old—I must go home and see to his dinner. Rosamund has another boy too; did you know? We had a baby-boy race and I won. Simon and Peter are practically twins.”

“Simon and Peter!” Elizabeth chuckled. “Sounds like the Bible!”

“Is the new Kentisbury baby called Peter? I’m glad it wasn’t more girl twins!”

“Peter Geoffrey Kane. Their little Geoff was so lonely; one small boy after four girls; they just had to have another, to be company for him. They’re delighted; Ros says she’ll be satisfied now, and I think I shall too. Maidlin had a little boy at Christmas. Two boys and two girls for her; and very nice too,” Jen said.

“He’s Malcolm, but they seem to call him Mac for short. Mary-Dorothy is there to-day, spending the day with Maidlin.”

“I wondered where she was,” Littlejan commented.

“Littlejan!” Joy called. “Somebody wants to speak to you. He says he’s Len.”

With one bound Littlejan was at the phone, with the door shut.

Joy laughed. Jen looked at her eagerly.

"I like his voice. Slightly Scottish; very pleasant. He's coming here this afternoon."

"Who was it?" the twins spoke breathlessly. "You said Len. What does it mean? Who is he?"

"That, my dear girls," Joy said, "is Littlejan's husband talking to her. He said—"May I speak to my wife?" " and she laughed across at Jen.

"Husband? She couldn't be married!" cried the twins.

"She says she's married. Didn't you see her ring?"

"How horrible of her!" Margaret said gloomily. "She won't be a bit the same."

"She seemed just the same," Elizabeth was more cautious. "But I'm sorry. I wish she wasn't married."

"She says she's going to school with you. He has to go away, on a long voyage to the Antarctic; he's a radio officer, from her father's ship. Perhaps being married won't make much difference to her," Joy began.

"Perhaps," Jen said darkly. "Joy, thank you for my nice lunch. As soon as we've heard what Marigold has to say, I'll go home to young Simon."

"Look at her face!" Elizabeth whispered, as Littlejan came from the telephone. "Does being married make you look like that?"

"Like what? She's only a bit shiny."

"Yes, lit up, as if he'd switched on a light inside her. Just with talking to him on the phone! How odd!"

Littlejan's face was indeed alight as she turned to Joy, and again Jen said to herself, "I don't wonder Len Fraser was fascinated!"

"He says you told him to come here as soon as he could. It's just terribly kind of you, Lady Joy!"

"My dear Marigold, you know we're dying to see him!"

"Hear, hear!" said Jen loudly.

Littlejan coloured and laughed. "He wants to come. He's seen his people and they want him to start almost at once. He likes them and they seemed to like him. He'll tell us all the plans."

"Why did you do it?" Margaret shouted. "We don't want you to be married!"

"Let's see your ring! Then perhaps we'll believe it.—Oh, I like the green one!" Elizabeth cried.

"The gold one is the one that matters," Marigold said seriously. "Twins, you needn't worry. I'm only one little bit married. I'm going to school with you and everything will be like it used to be."

"But you can't go to school, if you're married!" Elizabeth protested.

"Oh yes, I can! I want to learn to cook. My name's Mrs. Fraser instead of Miss Fraser; that's all the difference. But don't tell people at school unless I give you leave."

The twins stared at her. "But you must have a new name, if you're married! People always do."

"You'll need to explain that mystery," Jen said. "Joy, may I come back this afternoon to meet—Len? Or must I say Mr. Fraser, Littlejan?"

"He'd rather be Len," Littlejan grinned at her. "We'll phone you when we know his time for coming."

CHAPTER 5

EVERYBODY MEETS LEN

The station taxi drew up. Littlejan was waiting at the foot of the steps. Len Eraser jumped out and took her in his arms, in front of everybody.

“Gosh!” said Margaret.

Littlejan struggled out of his embrace. “You only said good-bye to me this morning! Don’t be mad, Len!”

“It was a week ago,” Len assured her. “Now I want to see all these kind friends.”

He was big and brown and burly, blue-eyed and fair, and not at all shy. Littlejan led him up the steps. “Lady Joy, this is Len. Len, this is Lady Joy’s house. Sir Ivor Quellyn is in Paris for a concert to-night, but you’ll see him when he comes back. This is Lady Jen; she lives next door. These are Lady Joy’s twins.”

“I know you all,” he assured them. “Littlejan has never stopped telling me stories.”

“You call her that?” Joy shook hands cordially. “We’re delighted to see you, Mr. Fraser.”

“Len!” said Littlejan, in the background.

“But we’re a little stunned, you know.” Jen came to greet him.

“I never call her anything else, except perhaps Marigold,” he said. “When they asked me if I would have Joan for my wife, at our wedding, I almost said no. When am I going to see her dressed as a Queen?”

“That depends on how long you stay——”

“Couldn’t we have a party for him?” Elizabeth put in.

“Hello, Twins!” His eyes rested on them in delight and then went to Joy.

“Yes, they’re mine,” she agreed. “How long can you spare for us?”

“Tell us what you’ve arranged!” Littlejan begged. “I suppose you’ve really got to go away?”

His eyes laughed at her. “You’ve known that all along. I must go very soon. The *Adventurer*—that’s our ship—is fitting out and is nearly ready. I’m going to have a look at her next week; you can come, if you like.”

“Won’t you have to do a lot of outfitting? Polar clothes and all sorts of things?” Jen asked.

“They want us to do all that in Sydney. We start from there,” he explained. “They know all about fitting out for the Antarctic in Sydney, where half our crowd is to join us. A lot of Australians are going with us. So we’re to pick up our personal outfits there.”

“Then won’t we see your fur coats and things?” Margaret demanded.

“I’m afraid not, Miss Twin. Which are you?”

“She’s Margaret,” Littlejan said. “Len, tell us more! Can I come as far as Sydney on the ship?”

“No, Mrs. Lennox Fraser,” Joy said with emphasis. “You aren’t going to start off again like that.”

“It would be mad, Marigold,” Jen said gently. “You’d have to say good-bye to him in Sydney and you’d be all alone among strangers.”

“I had heaps of friends in Sydney. I expect some of them are still there——”

Len interposed. “It wouldn’t be allowed. This is a business trip and sweethearts and wives aren’t invited. I shall say good-bye to you here. And”—he turned to Joy, his tone deepening

suddenly, with strong feeling—"I can't tell you how glad I shall be to leave her in this beautiful place and with such kind friends. I shall feel very happy about her."

"Wait till you've seen the Abbey!" Jen said. "We'll take you there after tea."

"We sail on the fifteenth," he looked at Littlejan.

"Monday week," she said, in a small voice.

Joy rose. "Now that we've heard these plans and have seen Mr. Fraser and know that he really exists——"

"Len!" said Marigold. "Didn't you believe in him?"

"Not quite. Now it's time to tell everybody. I shall ring up Rosamund. Wouldn't you like to speak to Joan yourself? She's your godmother."

"Yes, I'd like that. You come too," and she looked at Len. "She's sure to want to hear your voice. What shall you say to the Countess? Tell her I'll come soon to see her and Chestnut.—My pony, Len!"

"I remember the story," he nodded.

"I shall just say—'Littlejan Fraser is home again, plus husband,'" Joy told her. "You'd better be somewhere near. Rosamund will want to speak to you."

"Godmother! Littlejan speaking." Marigold had been granted first turn at the telephone. "Yes, I'm safely home, and I've brought somebody with me. We were married in Ceylon just a month ago, before we sailed."

"Godmother, this is Len speaking." Joan's wild exclamation of surprise was cut short. "Lennox Fraser, Littlejan hasn't had to change her name. Not a cousin, just another of the clan Fraser. I'm called Len. We'd like to see you. I've heard all about you." He handed the phone to Littlejan.

"Aunt Joan, he's nice. But he's going away to the Antarctic; that's why we got married. Yes, it is sad, but it's nice to know I belong to him. Mother likes him tremendously and Father thinks no end of him. He's been Father's radio officer for four years. We'll come to see you and tell you all about it. Lady Joy wants the phone now."

"Tell us one thing!" the twins spoke together.

"Is it to be a secret at school, about her being married? She said something like that. But we want to tell people."

Joy and Jen looked at Littlejan. "You can't possibly," Joy began.

"Besides, it would be mad," Jen said frankly. "It would leak out. Tell everybody and be done with it. You'll be ragged, of course, but you'll have to stand that."

Littlejan looked at Len. "What do you think?"

"Tell folks. You aren't frightened for them to know?"

Littlejan's chin went up in a well-remembered gesture.

"I'm proud. All right, Twins. We won't make a secret of it."

"Come on, Twin!" and they raced away.

"What are they going to do?" Littlejan cried.

"They've gone into the garden," said Len.

"They've gone to the Abbey. I wonder——?"

"Be ready to come, if I call you," and Joy went to ring up Rosamund.

"We told everybody!" The twins came rushing back, as Joy turned from the phone.

"What do you mean? Everybody? You haven't had time!"

"Twins, what did you do?" Littlejan demanded.

“We rang up Phyl, from the Abbey, and asked her to have a party for you and Mr. Len, on Saturday of next week,” Elizabeth said triumphantly. “You can dress up for him, if you like. You know you’ll be glad to have some dancing again!”

“We told Rachel. She was thrilled to bits,” Margaret added. “So was Tessa. We’ll tell everybody at school on Monday. They’ll all come to the party.”

“Do you think Jansy will be home in time?”

“For next Saturday? No, certainly not. She and the President have missed May-Day, of course. The new Queen says she’s going to be unlucky, as so few queens could be at her crowning; Jen and Rosamund couldn’t, nor Jansy and the President.”

“It’s for Phyl to say whether she’s an unlucky queen,” Jen said. “I hope she’ll see to it that she isn’t.”

“It’s like stepping out of a book and finding it has come alive,” Len Fraser said. “I know all these people from Marigold’s stories. *I* shall be thrilled to see that they are real.”

“Do you think you’ll have forgotten the dances, Littlejan?” Elizabeth asked. “It’s years and years since you did any.”

“Or have you been doing them on the ship, or in Ceylon?”

“No, I haven’t had any dancing for three years. But I’m sure I shan’t have forgotten. You two are little monkeys! Who gave you leave to arrange a party like that?”

“You know you’ll like it!” Elizabeth protested. “We thought it would be marvellous for everybody. They can all say nice things to you at once, and you’ll get it over and done with.”

“There’s something in that,” Marigold admitted. “A sort of cold plunge into the deep end!”

When they went to the Abbey after tea, a deeply-thrilled Rachel grasped Littlejan by the hand. “Marigold, thank you for the most cheerful romance I’ve met for some time! It’s a lovely story and I can see you’re very happy. I am so glad for you and for—Mr. Fraser?” and she turned to laughing Len.

“No, only Len,” he told her. “Everybody’s shy; they will call me ‘Mister.’ I know you, and your Abbey, and your dancer-sister, from Marigold’s yarns, and Benedicta, who has taken on your sister’s garden. I want to see it all.”

“Off you go! You don’t need me to show you round. Marigold is quite as good a guide as I am. Didn’t she put me through an exam before I took on the job?”

“And passed you with honours. But please take us round, Rachel,” Littlejan pleaded. “I know I’ve forgotten a lot in all this time. And I want him to hear it from you.”

“Forgotten the Abbey? Never! You couldn’t forget!”

“I could forget the dates very well. Please, Rachel!”

“One can’t refuse anything to a bride,” and Rachel led them round the ruins, thrilling Len to the limit with her stories of old days and the sight of the tunnels under the Abbey.

As they returned to the Hall, Mary Devine, Joy’s secretary and assistant, met them on the terrace. “Littlejan, my dear! You have given us a surprise! Mr. Fraser, I’m glad to meet you, _____”

“Len!” Littlejan insisted.

“She keeps saying that, like the Greek chorus,” Len grinned. “I’m going to leave her with you, Miss Devine. I know you’ll be good to her.”

“We’ll try,” Mary smiled.

“When he goes away, I shall come to your room at night to be cheered up, Mary-Dorothy.”

“I’ll give you coffee and biscuits,” Mary promised.

As they sat on the terrace in the twilight after dinner, Littlejan turned to her husband. “Now, Len! You’ve seen it all and you’ve met, or spoken to, nearly everybody. Will it do?”

“It will do more than well. Shall we tell them our plan?”

Littlejan leaned forward and spoke eagerly.

“Lady Joy, we want a bit of land. Will you sell us a scrap, somewhere near the Abbey?”

“Tell us a little more, Marigold,” Joy begged. “You take my breath away!”

“It’s quite simple and sensible. When Len’s grandfather died the big old family house was sold, for nobody wanted to live in it, and the money was divided among the grandchildren, so that when they were ready to settle down they could each build their own house as they wanted it and where they wanted it. Len’s share has been banked and piling up interest, as he didn’t know what he wanted, except to roam about the world on ships. Now he wants to have a house of his own——”

“I want to build a house for you,” Len corrected her.

“There’s no special place he wants to live, so he asked me. I said there was only one place I wanted to live, and I’d always go on wanting it, and that’s right here. But he had to come to see if he liked it too. He loves it, so——”

“It’s beautiful country, within easy reach of London. And the kindest possible people as friends for my Marigold. So, Lady Joy——”

“So will you sell us a scrap of land somewhere near the Abbey gates? He’ll build a little house and we’ll live here for ever and ever, and when he has to go away I shall be near you people,” Littlejan said breathlessly.

“It sounds like an idea Rachel and Damaris once had,” Mary said thoughtfully, “a little house at the Abbey gates, but that was before Rachel knew she was going to live in the Abbey.”

“I’ve heard about it. I’ve bagged her idea. But she doesn’t want it now. Could you, Lady Joy?”

Joy was looking sober. “We’d have to ask Joan. The Abbey is hers, though the land outside is mine. I like the idea, Littlejan and—Len! It would be nice to feel Marigold was settled close to us for good and all. We’ll go round to-morrow and see if we can find the right spot.”

“The house would have to be tucked away in a corner. We don’t want to spoil the loneliness of the Abbey,” Littlejan said earnestly. “But we could plant things, and we only want a little spot.”

Joy agreed. “I think I know the place. We’ll consult Joan and perhaps Mr. Edwards of the farm. But there’s one condition, Marigold. If ever you want to get rid of the little house or to sell it, Joan and I must have the first offer. We couldn’t have just anybody living there. We might like to lend it to friends. We could buy it back from you.”

“That’s only fair,” Len and Littlejan spoke together.

“We’ll put that in writing. Then you’ll feel secure,” Len said.

“But I know I shall love it and I shan’t ever want to sell it,” Littlejan added.

“If we find the right spot and you decide to go ahead, we’ll ask Jack Raymond or Jock Robertson to vet the plans for you. They know all about building, and drains, and lights and things,” Joy promised.

“I wondered if this was what you had in mind,” Jen said next morning, as Joy led them to her chosen spot. “I’d like to see this corner put to good use.”

"It's always seemed a forgotten patch. I thought Littlejan and Len might like to give it a new lease of life."

"It will suit me," Littlejan said happily.

The dark line of ilex trees, evergreen oaks, which hid the barn from the Abbey garden, ended when it reached the lane but began again on the other side of the low Abbey wall, beyond the carriage gates and the plank bridge across the fish stream. Here it curved round till it met the Abbey walls, and continued behind them as far as the trees of Joy's gardens, shutting off from the road a strip of waste land, overgrown with nettles and poppies and bushes. It was a sunny spot, as the dark trees at the back made a wall, shutting off north winds; there were big grey bushes below the trees, and a low wall protected it from the road which led to the Hall and the Manor.

"But this is wonderful!" Len exclaimed. "Why has it never been used?"

"It has been used, but not lately," Joy said. "It must have been some sort of special garden, shut off from the rest of the Abbey ground. But it has been neglected ever since we came to live here."

"And that's a good many years," Jen said. "I drive past it every time I go to the village, and I've often thought about it. But I didn't see how we could make anything of it."

"There's been a house in there. They'll find the foundations when they begin to dig," Len said. "People have lived there. See those nettles! They always grow where people have lived, I'm told. May we have this patch, Lady Joy? I shall like to think of Littlejan in her own house, with that wall of dark trees protecting her at the back."

"They're evergreen oaks; they keep their leaves all winter," Joy said. "Do you like it, Marigold?"

"I love it. We'll have rock plants in all the cracks of this wall, like those on the Abbey wall; Benedicta will give us plenty of scraps, and it will be all lovely colours. A low grey stone house; I can see it already."

"We'll ask Joan. It's obviously Abbey land, so it must belong to her. I'll have a talk with her," Joy promised.

"You'll have to think of a name for your house," Jen remarked "Ilex Cottage?"

"Don't be funny about it!" Len begged. "I don't want to think of my wife living at 'Foundatlast'—all in one word, of course, or 'Myeholme'—spelt just like that."

"How ghastly! It would be 'Ourholme,' which wouldn't be half so funny, anyway. I'll be sensible, Len, and I'll consult you. I promise."

"You can't live here quite alone," he said.

"I'll find somebody to share it with me, till you come back. Or I'll have a dog—a bloodhound from the farm," and she laughed at a memory of old days. "How frightened the twins were of Bess, till they found she had babies!"

"We'll beg for one from Mr. Edwards," Joy said, as they went back to the Hall.

CHAPTER 6

LEN MEETS THE HAMLET CLUB

There came a telephone call and Mary went to answer it.

“Somebody’s late,” Joy remarked.

“For Marigold,” Mary called.

Littlejan sprang up. “You’d better come, Len. The late person might want to speak to you.”

A clear, very sweet voice spoke. “Littlejan, I’ve just heard. I’ve been in town all day. Maidlin told me your news. Are you really properly married? But you’re such a baby!”

“It’s Miss Belinda!” Marigold gave a joyful shout. “I wondered if I’d dare to ring you up! We heard you sing last night, just a little bit of you. It was too gorgeous for words. When can we hear you again?”

“I’m singing soon in *Elijah* with Maidlin. I’ve always hoped to do it. I’ve been in town with Dr. Robertson rehearsing all afternoon, and getting used to the hall. That’s why I had to ring you so late; I couldn’t go to bed without telling you how thrilled I am. Are you going to bring him here to see Maidlin—and Marjory and Dorothy, and Jacky-Paul and Malcolm? We are proud of our two boys!”

“We’ll come,” Littlejan promised. “But it will need to be planned. We’ve so many things to do. And he’s going away, you know.”

“Yes, I’m sorry about that. But you must have known!”

“That’s why we did it. It’s nice being married. Miss Belinda!”

“Is everybody ringing you up? I’m quite sure they are!”

“Not yet, but I expect they will, when the news gets round. The twins, quite on their own, have arranged a party in the barn for next Saturday, so that the whole Club can buzz round and say nice things, as the twins put it. I don’t know if Phyl, as Queen, will confirm it. It was quite their own idea.”

“I’ll tell Maidlin. What a time you’ll have! My very best wishes, Marigold.”

Belinda was right about the ringing up. The phone was busy for the next few days, and whoever went to answer it automatically turned to look for Littlejan.

“For you, Marigold,” was said again and again.

“I’m going to ring up Miss Raven at school,” Joy said firmly. “This will get round to her and she’ll think we are very rude. If you really mean to go back to school, she must be told at once.”

“You think I should, don’t you? I don’t know anything about cooking!”

“Most certainly I do. I’ll arrange for you to go and see the Head. You know her, don’t you?”

“I had one term with her, when she took over from Miss Macey. But she may not remember me. I didn’t do anything very awful that term!”

Phyl, the reigning Queen, rang up, wildly excited and agreed to the Saturday night party. Tessa rang also, and many of those who had known Littlejan at school, as soon as the word had been passed round.

“Marigold’s home—she’s coming to school—she’s *married!*”

“But she’s still called Littlejan Fraser, only now she’s Mrs. instead of Miss. She’s going to learn to cook.”

The twins suddenly found themselves important people.

“Tell us about Marigold! What’s she like now? And the man she’s married—is he there too? Tell us all about it, Twins!”

And delighted, the twins held forth to an enthralled audience.

Len and Littlejan found their days very full. They called on the headmistress and were greeted with amusement but a little reproach. “You are far too young, Mrs. Fraser!” said Miss Raven. “Oh yes! You may come back to school. It’s very wise. But I don’t really consider you needed to get married. I think we must overlook that!”

There were visits to all the parts of the family. Len had to go to Kentisbury to see Chestnut, the pony, and to meet the household at the Castle—to the Pallant, to see Maidlin and Belinda Bellanne and to hear her plans for the opening for her career as a singer—to see Joan Raymond, Littlejan’s godmother, and be introduced to her brothers, Alastair and Alan, enjoying extended holidays, owing to building alterations at their school in York. They were amused and respectful towards their married sister and definitely overawed by Len.

One day was spent in a visit to *The Adventurer*, Len’s ship which was so soon to sail, and Littlejan met some of his future shipmates and was shown his radio office and as much as was possible of the ship.

“Lucky dog!” said more than one, for, glowing with happiness, she was indeed Marigold, all her bright and vivid colouring to the fore.

“Not so funny when it comes to saying good-bye,” said one understanding comrade, however.

She was Marigold again on Saturday night in the barn, all eager excitement as she went to meet the Hamlet Club. Everyone had voted for full dress for her and Phyl, and for any more queens who wished it, since Len had missed May-Day, and he was determined to see her in her robe and crown.

He was led to the barn by the twins and given a good position. With an eye for dramatic effect, Queen Phyl came in, wearing a beautiful train of warm chestnut brown, lined and edged with gold, and followed by Tessa, in her train of lemon yellow, decorated with vivid spikes of lupins in all colours.

She was followed by a tall fair-haired girl, robed in demure lavender, and a shout of welcome and surprise went up from the Club. She bowed and smiled with great dignity and went to take the place prepared for her.

“Nanta Rose! Queen Rosalind! How has that happened?” Jan exclaimed.

But a roar of welcome had broken out, as Littlejan came in, wearing her brilliant orange train and a crown of marigolds.

“Littlejan! Queen Marigold!” shouted the Club.

“Oh, beautiful!” Len Fraser cried. “I am glad to see this!” and his eyes followed her as she stood and bowed, laughing at the girls.

“Now she’ll be mobbed!” Joy said. She and Jen had come to look on but had not dressed as Queens. “Let Marigold have to-day. We are back numbers,” Joy had said.

“But we didn’t know our dear Lavender would be here,” and Jen hurried to the Lavender Queen, who sat laughing and looking on at the excited throng crowding round Marigold. “Nanta Rose, it’s grand to see you, but how has it happened? We thought it was too far for you to come. We didn’t forget you, but we didn’t see how you could possibly come from Wiltshire for one evening, and so very soon after May-Day!”

“Are you staying with Rosamund? We knew she couldn’t be here,” Joy said.

Queen Lavender smiled up at them. "I'm staying with Tessa. It was her idea. She begged me to come; she remembered how Marigold and Jansy and I had been friends and how bad we felt when she went away. We couldn't have Jansy, but she asked me to come to her for the night, and to bring my train and my fiddle. I hope they'll let me play for some dancing when all this excitement is over. Isn't it lovely to see Marigold again? And she looks so happy and well! I want to talk to her and to see if she really is wearing a gold ring!"

"She'll let you look at it," Jen said solemnly. "Presently you must speak to Mr. Fraser too. But just at the moment, I suppose——"

"I'm expected to stay put," Rosalind smiled. "He looks very jolly. He can't take his eyes off Marigold."

Littlejan broke away from the crowd who were still cheering her, and pushed her way free to run to Rosalind.

"Nanta Rose, how lovely of you to come!" She used the old school nickname.

"Let me see that wedding-ring!" Rosalind demanded. "How could you go so far ahead of us all, Marigold?"

She took Littlejan's left hand, still unbelieving. "Is that your engagement ring? Oh, I do like it!"

Littlejan gave a shout. "But you've got one too! Oh, everybody—Lady Jen! Lady Joy! Nanta Rose is engaged! A lovely sapphire ring!"

On her second finger Rosalind wore the blue ring given to her as Queen, as a gift from the Club; three small sapphires set in silver. But on the third finger next to it was a big beautiful sapphire, surrounded by small pearls—an obvious engagement ring.

She flushed at the excitement, as the friends crowded round. "It's very new. We haven't told people yet. We'll announce it properly next week. I wanted the Hamlet Club to know first."

"But who is he? Where is he?" Marigold burst out.

"Is it Derek Grandison?" Jen demanded.

"It couldn't possibly be anyone else," Rosalind retorted. "Marigold, I'm sorry to butt in on your day, but I couldn't bear to take off my lovely ring. Derek brought me to Tessa's this afternoon, but he was shy, so he's gone on to town to see his people. He has new music to discuss with Dr. Grandison. He'll take me home to-morrow."

"Is he that one that wrote the Abbey music? Jansy told me," Littlejan asked eagerly.

"He is," Joy said. "When are we going to hear the Song of the Abbey again, Nanta?"

"Soon, I think. Hasn't Sir Ivor told you he wants it at one of his summer concerts?"

"I'd heard rumours and I've had hopes," Joy smiled. "Our Marigold will like to hear the Abbey song."

"I'll love it! And to see him," Littlejan added. "I'm dying for both things!"

Under cover of the chorus of congratulations to Rosalind, Jen turned to Tessa. "How nice of you to invite Nanta Rose! We never thought it would be any use asking her."

"She wanted to see Littlejan. I owe a lot to her," Tessa said. "It was her doing that the girls chose me as Queen, and then she stood by me when I made such an ass of myself and it was owing to her I was crowned at all. I wish I could do something really big for Nanta Rose!"

"You've done something by bringing her here to-night. She's very happy to see Marigold again."

"Everybody—and Nanta Rose!—you must speak to Len!" and Littlejan whirled Nanta and Phyl to her husband.

Not in the least shy, he sprang up and the Hamlet Club crowded round.

“Littlejan looks lovely to-night,” Tessa said.

“She has a very special reason,” Jen laughed. “Oh, she’s radiant! Len had a wire from town; their sailing is postponed for about three weeks. Somebody very special, a real V.I.P. who is putting up a lot of money for the expedition, wants to sail with them as far as Sydney, and he can’t get away till the end of the month. It means Len and Littlejan will have a least a fortnight longer than they had hoped. She has been like this, on top of the world, ever since the news came.”

“How marvellous for them! She does look happy. She won’t come back to school yet, I suppose?”

“I’m quite sure she won’t,” Jen smiled.

“Will she collapse when he goes?”

“She’ll cope with it,” Jen said confidently. “She has plenty of pluck. But she’ll need it. If she goes as far into the depths as she’s up in the air to-night, we shall all have to rally round and keep an eye on her. I don’t think she will. She knows she has to lose him, and she’s very brave.”

CHAPTER 7

LITTLEJAN IS HUNGRY

When the news of the reprieve for Len and Littlejan reached Rosamund, she took prompt action. "Come to see me, both of you, at once! I've a plan for you," she phoned.

"What can she mean?" Marigold marvelled, and they obeyed the summons eagerly.

"You must do something about these two weeks," the Countess said firmly. "Go somewhere by yourselves; do something definite, so that you'll always remember this as a very special time. Don't just mess about at the Hall! Mr. Fraser has seen everything and met everybody and he knows all about Marigold's home. Now go and enjoy yourselves alone together!"

They looked at her, enthralled. "But where?" Littlejan asked.

"My Lady Countess, what a kind idea!" Len cried.

"Go to Vairy," Rosamund commanded. "Be another honeymoon couple for Vairy! It's our Honeymoon House. We've sent at least five nice young couples there already, to say nothing of ourselves. You two can be our seventh."

"Vairy! Oh, heavenly!" Marigold cried. "In Scotland, Len, close to a wonderful loch; the loveliest place!"

Rosamund glanced at her. "I think you'll find your relations, the cousins and aunts, have died or left the village. I know your family belonged to Vairy; your mother used to go to stay there. Off you go! I'll arrange it for you. I'd like to think your two weeks at Vairy would be a very special memory with you both."

"Oh, it will! It's quite marvellous of you!" They spoke together in a joyful chorus.

Then, all too soon, the happy busy time was over. Len left late one night, to sail on an early morning tide. Littlejan flatly refused to go even to the train with him.

"Say good-bye to Len on Wycombe station? Not likely! I'll start with him, and he'll put me down at the Abbey gate and I'll come home through the garden. I'll like that."

As Frost and the car raced away, she turned to the Abbey and almost stumbled as she went up the drive between the pansies and sweet-briar bushes.

"Rachel, let me in! I want to go home this way. Don't talk to me!" she said unsteadily. "I've just said good-bye. Len's gone," and she ran through to the garth and disappeared in the darkness.

"Poor kid!" Rachel said, as she locked the gate, and turned into her house within the walls, to make a pot of strong tea.

"Littlejan!" She found her crouching in the chapterhouse. "Marigold, you must go home. Think of me! I can't go to bed while you are wandering in the Abbey."

Littlejan rose stiffly; she had been tense and rigid with strong feeling.

"No, Rachel, you can't. I'm sorry; I'll go home now. But I wanted a few minutes here."

"Of course. Come with me for one moment and then I'll unlock the garden gate for you.—Drink that!" and she poured out a cup of tea.

"Oh—Rachel! You are kind! You are the Abbot, taking care of people; you always have been. I feel better for that. Thank you so much! Good night!"

Rachel went with her as far as the lawn, for the shrubbery path was dark. "Good night! Try to go to sleep. It's what he would want, you know."

“Angel! Abbot!” and Littlejan ran across the lawn.

“Poor Marigold! I hope she won’t cry all night,” and Rachel locked the Abbey gate and went home to bed.

The house was dark, but was filled with music, for Joy sat at her beautiful piano, playing a dreamy nocturne, with one small light turned on. Littlejan stood behind her, and spoke unsteadily.

“Lady Joy, I’ve come home. Thank you for everything. Good night!”

Joy caught her hand. “Good night, my dear. Come to me if you want anything, or go to Mary-Dorothy.” She drew her down and kissed her.

“Thank you! *Thank* you!” Marigold hugged her and fled, with a sob.

“Poor babe!” said Joy, who had known many partings. “But we can’t help. She’ll see it through for herself. I hope she’ll go to Mary.”

It was midnight when a tap came on the door of Mary’s brown study. She had been expecting it and had not gone to bed.

“Mary-Dorothy, I’m hungry.” Littlejan stood, with bright pathetic eyes. “May I go down and raid the larder?”

Mary drew her in. “There’s no need. We’re going to have a cosy little supper together. Sit there!” and she put her into a big chair beside the gas fire. “I’m glad to hear you are hungry. Dinner was a long time ago and you just pecked at your food; I was watching you. It would be odd if you weren’t hungry. I’m glad you didn’t go hunting for food; it’s all ready for you.”

While Littlejan watched with startled eyes, she drew out a small gate-legged table, her latest treasure, spread a cloth on the polished surface, and laid covered plates before her guest. Delicate slices of chicken and ham and a plate of bread and butter, tomatoes, egg sandwiches, and a dish of stewed fruit, with two fresh apples. “How’s that? If you want something hot I’ll go down and make an omelette, but I don’t want to disturb the house too much. With coffee and biscuits, will you live till the morning?”

“Oh—Mary! It’s a feast! You are kind! I knew you’d feed me, but I never thought you’d have everything ready!”

“I want some supper too,” Mary assured her. “Tuck in! I’ll do the coffee.”

“I’ve been fed and comforted by two Abbots,” Littlejan told her.

Mary smiled and raised her brows. “Rachel?”

“She made me drink tea and brought me safely home. She’s the Abbot in the Abbey; you’re the Abbot in the house.”

“I was never called that before.”

“Oh, but you always have been; both of you. I haven’t come to talk, Mary-Dorothy. I’m tired, but I knew I couldn’t sleep till I’d had something to eat. I only expected coffee and biscuits.”

“That wouldn’t have been enough. Of course you’re tired. You’ll sleep when you’ve had a good meal.”

“Thanks to you. Len will be thrilled to hear how kind you’ve been.”

She spoke steadily, and Mary gave her a quick look of appreciation for her courage.

“You’ll be kept busy, writing to him. Your letters have always been famous in the family.”

“I’ve work to do too. To-morrow I’m going to school, to be Marigold again.”

“We’ve said you were being Marigold several times lately. You’ve seemed so vivid and so much alive.”

“This will be different. This Marigold has work to do. I’m going to see about those twins.”

“The twins?” Mary asked, puzzled.

“At school. There’s something not quite right. I mean to find out what it is.”

“They haven’t said anything, so far as I know. If they’ve told their mother she hasn’t passed it on to me.”

“They might not tell anybody. I’ve been watching them. When they’re asked about school, they say—‘Oh, it’s all right’!—but they don’t seem keen. Something’s bothering them; not a row or anything like that, but they’re gloomy about something.”

“Perhaps they’re disappointed because they aren’t queens.”

“I’m disappointed, and I believe Nanta Rose is too. At that party, I saw her look at them and then at the new Queen. I believe she’d hoped it would be the twins.”

“I’m sure Joy hoped for it. Perhaps the school feels they are not quite ready.”

“I believe there’s something else. I want to help.”

“We may all be very glad you are there.” Mary put a cup of coffee before her, rejoicing that her thoughts were turning outwards; that she ‘wanted to help,’ instead of needing to be helped herself. Her respect for Littlejan deepened.

“Marigold is hungry for more than sandwiches to-night,” she said to herself, as Littlejan finished her coffee. “But she’ll fill her mind with new things. She’s had to do it before.”

Littlejan lay back in her chair. “Mary-Dorothy, I’m going to bed. You’ve been kinder than kind, and I’ll never forget. To-morrow I’m going to get busy; it’s the only way. It—well, it isn’t cheerful to be the one that’s left behind. It’s happened to me so often. Do you remember how Lindy helped me, when I was only thirteen and Mother had to go off to Scotland and leave me here? I’d only just arrived, and I felt terrible and so lonely. Lindy comforted me and helped a lot. Now you’ve helped too. And I’m glad—” she ended defiantly—“I’m *glad* we’re married and belong to one another. May I come sometimes at night and sit here with you for ten minutes? I shan’t want to talk. It will only be if I’m too lonely to stay by myself. But it isn’t fair to you, Mary.”

“I’ll be badly hurt if you feel like that and don’t come,” Mary told her. “Slip in and sit here, for company, whenever you feel like it.”

“I shall tell Len you said that. Good night, Mary-Dorothy—and thank you!”

CHAPTER 8

A NEW START AT SCHOOL

Littlejan came down to breakfast wearing a neat blue skirt and a white blouse and school tie, her cooking overall packed in an attaché case.

“You don’t look like a married lady,” said Elizabeth.

“First eleven colours! Are you going in for cricket?” Margaret asked hopefully.

“Elizabeth!” Joy reproved her elder daughter sharply.

“Oh, sorry! We’re not to say things like that——”

“I don’t mind,” Littlejan said haughtily. “They won’t worry me. I shall play if I’m asked, Margaret. I used to be in the team.”

“They’ll ask you all right. Where did you get the school colours?”

“My old ones, of course. My gym tunic’s in my case. I’m ready for anything.”

The postman arrived and Joy handed her a letter. “He must have posted it as soon as he reached London.”

“He must have written it before he started, or in the train,” Littlejan retorted. “I’ll write tonight an air-mail to Marseilles.” She stuffed the letter into her pocket.

“Don’t you want to read it?” Elizabeth cried, staring at her.

“In the car,” Littlejan said briefly. “We mustn’t be late. We must remember we’re school people now.”

“Come on, then!” Margaret shouted. “Here comes the Manor car, with Rosemary and Michael.” And they were off to school.

Littlejan glanced at her letter, while the twins watched respectfully. It was only a few lines, of love and good-bye; she put it out of sight and sat gazing from the car, her face very grave.

Then she turned resolutely to the future. “Tell me things about school. Is Phyl a good queen?”

“Only middling,” Elizabeth said.

“She forgets things,” Margaret said bluntly. “We had a meeting and she was late, and it was because she was practising and she’d forgotten the time.”

“She’s a lot too keen on music to be a good queen.” Elizabeth was equally blunt.

Littlejan pursed her lips. “That’s a pity, when she has the whole year to come. I wonder if you’re right?”

“Anybody’ll tell you,” Margaret assured her. “Nobody used to notice how good Phyl was at forgetting, but now that she’s the queen everybody knows.”

“I should say—how bad she was,” Elizabeth objected.

“Oh well! We all know Phyl forgets.”

“I hope she won’t forget some day when it matters a lot. It’s queer she and Tessa should both be queens. They were so nice to me when Jansy and I had that little week-end school.” And Littlejan became very thoughtful.

“There’s a party at school on Saturday week,” Margaret said. “Will you dance with us? Or are you too important now?”

“I’ll dance with you both,” Marigold promised. “A party! That will be fun.”

“We thought perhaps you wouldn’t like parties any more.”

“Why not? I’m all out for parties. I’ve had to go without any dancing for so long.”

She went to report to Miss Raven and then sought the senior room, where the cookery students were assembled, waiting for Miss Newman. A shout of joy greeted her.

“Marigold! Here’s our married Marigold! Good day, Mrs. Fraser! Where’s your husband?”

“In the Bay of Biscay, or down Channel somewhere. And I shan’t see him again for two years, so I’ll be glad if you’ll forget all about him.” Littlejan dealt with the prospect of ragging promptly, her voice steady and determined.

They looked at her awkwardly, with sudden realisation of the crisis in her life. “Sorry! We’re asses,” Tessa exclaimed.

“You are, rather,” Marigold told her ruthlessly. “Tell me about things! Is Miss Newman nice? Do we have desks? Where do we keep things? When do we put on our overalls?”

“Lockers, in the cookery room. We go there presently, with Miss Newman,” Tessa sounded subdued, feeling she had been tactless.

“I say, everybody, I’ve done the most awful thing!” The Queen burst into the room, dismay in every line of her face.

“Oh, Phyl! Not again? What’s happened?” There was a general shout.

“Marigold! Gorgeous to have you here! You look as if you’d come to stay,” Phyl cried.

“I’ve come to learn to make soup and puddings. What’s happened, Phyl?”

“It’s a lesson on making gravy to-day,” somebody told her.

“Most useful! What’s up, Phyl?”

“I’ve arranged a party for the Hamlets; the notices went round yesterday. And it’s for Saturday week; Saturday week, you know!” Phyl’s tone told of tragedy.

“Oh, Phyl!” Tessa cried. “How mad! You’ll have to miss the concert.”

“I won’t do that!” Phyl vowed.

“I haven’t had my notice yet. I wasn’t here yesterday. I’d have reminded you,” Tessa began.

“I knew about the concert, but I got muddled about the date,” Phyl wailed. “I thought it was a week later.”

“What’s Saturday week?” Marigold asked. “What’s all the fuss about?”

“The Quellyn concert at the Albert Hall. Rosalind is playing the Abbey Song, for the first time at a big public show. We’re all going and I’ve called a Hamlet Club party!”

“Oh, Phyl! Why don’t you think?” There was a chorus of dismay.

“I’m going to that concert,” Littlejan said firmly. “I’m dying to hear the Abbey Song and to see Nanta Rose play it. The Albert Hall! My hat!”

“It’s her first time; her first big public concert,” Tessa said. “When she played the Abbey Song before it was a half-private affair, in Dr. Grandison’s house. She was lovely, Marigold. She invited Phyl and me. I want to hear her play it again.”

“I’ll have to put off the Hamlets,” Phyl said. “The next Saturday will do.”

“They won’t like it. You’ve had to put off the party once already because you’d forgotten the big match.”

“You can’t have a party that Saturday. There’s the Risborough match, and the team won’t be back in time,” she was told.

“Then we’ll give up the party for a week or two. It doesn’t really matter,” said the harassed Queen.

“Couldn’t you possibly miss the concert and run the party for them?” Littlejan suggested. “I know how hard it is to find a free Saturday. It’s your party, after all.”

Phyl turned on her. "I wouldn't miss the concert for a fortune! Tessa, I suppose you couldn't do the party? You've heard the Abbey Song, and you aren't as keen on music as I am."

"Of all the mean things!" Tessa raged. "I want it quite as much as you do!"

"Then Marigold? The Club would love to have you as M.C.! Oh, do, Marigold!"

"Phyl, don't be so horrible!" There was a general chorus. "It matters more to her than to any of us. She hasn't even heard the Abbey Song!"

"I'm going to hear it now," Littlejan said, her tone firm. "I couldn't think of missing it."

"Well, I can't miss it either. We shall have to give up the party, that's all."

"They won't like it," she was assured again.

"Then they can do the other thing. Do you think I'd miss Rosalind's first big concert, just for country-dancing?"

"Put like that—no, I don't," Littlejan acknowledged. "But there's more in it than that. You've called the party and you're the Queen!"

"You'll be letting them down," said Tessa.

"I'm not going to miss that concert for the Club," Phyl's tone was final.

"I couldn't do it, even if I wanted to, which I don't," Littlejan remarked. "I wouldn't be allowed to miss it."

"No, there'd be a perfect howl of wrath from everybody at home, if you tried to be self-sacrificing," Tessa agreed. "Nobody would hear of it. She couldn't do it, Phyl—and I won't. That's all about it."

"Besides, I don't see why I should," Littlejan said, sturdily. "Some day I'd love to run a party for you, but I must hear Nanta Rose play the Abbey Song."

"O.K.! I'll send round notices," Phyl said curtly.

Littlejan and Tessa looked at one another. "It's the second time that poor party will have been put off," Tessa hinted.

"It's an awful pity. Isn't there any other way?" Littlejan began.

"Can you think of one?" Phyl snapped, and there was an uncomfortable silence.

"Could they come to the barn on Friday night?" Littlejan began.

"I couldn't be there on a Friday. I have a very special music lesson," said Phyl.

"Perhaps one of us could run the party. I'd love to do it."

"It isn't a very good night. There's school choir practice," Tessa said. "Better let it go, Marigold."

"I'm sorry about it," Littlejan said regretfully.

"Do you like being back at school?" Elizabeth asked, as the car carried them homewards.

"Very much. It's fun. We've been making stews and gravy."

"Messy," said Margaret. "We haven't got domestic minds. It's a pity about the party. We were looking forward to it."

"Has Phyl made another muddle?" Elizabeth asked severely.

But Littlejan had no intention of betraying senior secrets. "We'll have the party presently," she said.

"Do they call you Mrs. Fraser in class?"

"No, Twins. I asked Miss Raven to tell people I didn't want that. Miss Newman calls me Joan, of course—until she forgets and says Littlejan."

"We always forget about Joan," Elizabeth chuckled.

“They’re feeling better to-day,” Littlejan said to herself. “They’ve cheered up quite a lot. I do wonder what’s on their minds! But I shan’t ask them; not yet. They might not tell, and that would be difficult. I won’t tell them I’ve noticed anything.”

CHAPTER 9

JANSY TALKS ABOUT LIFE

“If you want to fall on Jansy’s neck, so far as you can do it by phone—” Joy met them at the door.

“Is she home?” Littlejan leapt from the car.

“She’ll join you at school to-morrow and come here with you as usual afterwards.”

Littlejan ran to the telephone. Closest of all her friends in the early days had been Joan’s daughter Janice, or Jansy. They had been almost like sisters, for Jansy’s sisters, Jennifer and Jill, were several years younger than herself.

“Can I speak to Jansy, Aunty Joan? Oh, Jan, you’re back again! It will be heavenly to see you. Have you had a gorgeous time?”

“Marigold, what have you been doing? Mother told me. Why did you do it? Are you dreadfully grown-up and old and settled down?”

“I’ll raid your bedroom to-morrow night, just to show you,” Littlejan vowed. “Why didn’t you come home a few days sooner? You won’t see Len; he’s far away by this time.”

“It does sound queer—Len! Is he nice?”

“Not too bad,” Littlejan grinned at the phone. “Don’t talk about him too much, Jan. I’m really feeling—well, you know!”

“Awfully bad?” Jansy asked with deep sympathy.

“It’s not very cheerful to have a husband on the high seas! But I won’t let it get me down.”

“You wouldn’t be you, if you did. Have you really gone back to school?”

“I’ve been making stews and gravy.”

“Aren’t they very bucked to have you back?”

“They are, rather. Do you think Phyl will be a good queen?”

“I’m not too sure,” Jansy said cautiously. “She gets so wrapped up in her music.”

“Yes. She’s making muddles, putting off parties because she wants to go to concerts, and forgetting things.”

“Doesn’t sound too good. You and I and Tessa will have to take care of her.”

“The Queen shouldn’t need to be taken care of.”

“No,” Jansy admitted. “I’m a bit worried, Marigold. The Club mustn’t go to pieces, and they do need bucking up now and then.”

“I don’t believe Phyl will be a good buck-up. We may have to help.”

“I’ll do anything I can,” Jansy promised. “I think all these old Cookery people are a mistake as Queens; Phyl’s the third, straight off in a row—Nanta Rose, Tessa and now Phyl. They’ve too many other things on hand—not the first two, but Phyl’s too busy to have time to be a good queen.”

“You think we need somebody more in the school, as you and I and Jean and Mirry all were?”

“Yes, I do. It’s only these last few years we’ve had Cookery people; younger queens would be better. They’d know more what was going on. But Tessa did quite well and Nanta Rose was super, and an angel.”

“You told me. You know she’s engaged? She came to my welcome party wearing a lovely ring, to tell the Hamlet Club before other people knew.”

“Lovely of her! We like Mr. Grandison. We’ve been hoping she’d marry him, ever since that first concert when she played his Abbey Song.”

“I’m dying to hear it.”

“I’m dying to hear it again. It’s marvellous, Littlejan. Twins all right?”

“Ye-es. They seem a bit under the weather. I don’t know what’s wrong.”

“I’ll have a look at them to-morrow. Good-bye till then! I’m dying to see you—and your rings!”

Littlejan grinned and turned from the phone.

Jansy had a serious talk with her mother that evening, while the thoughts of her trip still clung about her and before she plunged into the worries and turmoil of school life. When Jenny and Jimmy and Jill were in bed Joan sat by the open window and invited her eldest daughter to join her. John, who came next in age to Jansy, was at boarding-school; with the three little ones so much younger Jansy was very close to her mother and there was a real and deep friendship between them.

“Tell me more about your trip, Jansy! Did you get on well with the President? Was she very sad about losing little Shirley?”

“She was, of course, but the doctors had told her Shirley wouldn’t ever be strong. But things didn’t work out as the President meant, you know.”

“Oh?” Joan looked at her in amusement. “In what way?”

“She asked me, to be company for Cis, so that Cis wouldn’t be alone with Dickon and Ted and no other girl.”

“Yes, we understood that was the idea. It seemed a good plan,” Joan encouraged her to go on.

“Cis didn’t want me,” Jansy said bluntly. “I don’t mean in any nasty way. We got on quite well together. But what Cis wanted was Ted. I saw that almost at once.”

“Her little brother. As she’d lost the baby sister she turned to him,” Joan said, in much interest.

“She wanted to take care of him. She didn’t want me to take care of her.”

“I see. Then you were left out—you and Dickon?”

“Ted wouldn’t have been any use to Dickon. There’s years and years between them. Dickon thinks a lot, and he wanted to talk to somebody sensible.”

“Someone of his own age. That’s interesting, and very natural,” Joan agreed. “Then you and he were thrown together? Did you like that?”

“We talked a lot,” Jansy admitted. “I’ve always liked Dickon, you know.”

Joan looked at her thoughtfully. Things seemed to be shaping as she and the President wished. She wondered how much Janice would tell about those intimate talks.

“What did you talk about?” she asked.

“Oh—life!” Jansy said airily. “All sorts of things. Why things happen, and so on. Why Shirley came at all, when she was going to die in two years. And what things mean, and all that’s likely to happen.”

“And did you settle these weighty problems, you and Dickon?” Joan hid her amusement bravely.

“We decided that we couldn’t settle anything, but that it was a good thing to think about puzzles.”

“Very wise!” Joan commented. “You certainly can’t arrange or explain the world, but I’m sure you were right to discuss the problems and not to shut your eyes to them.”

“Dickon says that’s running away from life.”

“Dickon’s right. Did you settle your own futures as well as those of the rest of the world?”

“I told you, we didn’t settle anything. But I felt as if I was finding out lots of things, about Dickon as well as the world.”

“And did you like what you found?”

“I know more about him. Yes, Mother, I liked him more. Do you think we could get married some day?”

“I think,” Joan said carefully, “that you’ll need to know him a lot better before you talk of marrying him. You aren’t ready for that yet, Janice.”

“I know,” Jansy said readily. “It’s just that I can’t imagine me marrying anyone else, after talking like that to Dickon.”

“That’s all right! How does Dickon feel? Do you know?”

“Oh, he asked me if I’d marry him some day.”

“*Did* he? You are a precocious pair! And what did you say?”

“That I’m not going to marry anybody until I’ve been to college, but that so far I like him better than anyone else.”

“Very wise, Jansy dear. Is Dickon going to college too?”

“To a business college; he doesn’t want degrees and things. He’s going to help his father in the business in Ceylon. That’s all arranged.”

“Then he’ll be going to Ceylon to learn the ways of the business?” Joan asked, with interest.

“Yes, quite soon. He’s looking forward to it. Mr. Everett wants somebody and it will be years before Ted would be ready.”

“Oh, yes! Dickon must help his father—and a very good thing too,” Joan said to herself, when Jansy had gone off to bed. “If Dickon goes to Ceylon it will give these young things a chance to find out what they really want. He will meet plenty of other girls, and Jansy must go to college and meet other men. And in time we shall see if anything comes of all these long discussions on life!”

She rang up the President next day. “Oh—Cicely! Are you prepared to receive Jansy as a daughter?”

“In time. Not yet, I think,” the President answered.

“Oh, not yet! But our offspring seem to have gone ahead during this holiday.”

“Quite a long way,” Cicely agreed. “They talked for hours. But they seemed to enjoy it. Dickon is growing up; it was just what he needed. I don’t know what it was all about.”

“Life and all that!” Joan said, with a laugh. “I can’t betray any more of Jansy’s confidences, but I’m sure it was all very serious.”

“They’re both at the earnest stage. But it didn’t damp their enjoyment in any way. They had a very good time and went for all the shore excursions and had a lot of bathing and boating together.”

“Jansy’s had the time of her life. And she looks so well. We’re very grateful to you.”

“If she decides to be a daughter to me some day, I’ll welcome her joyfully,” said the President.

CHAPTER 10

THE LEADER OF THE ORCHESTRA

Littlejan and Jansy fell into one another's arms when they met at school next day. Littlejan showed her emeralds and her wedding ring, and then they had to separate, Littlejan to her stews and gravy and Jansy to French with the Sixth form.

They all met in the car to go home together, and Jansy turned on the twins at once.

"I had a few minutes free and I looked in at the orchestra practice. It seemed to me that Margaret was leading the violins. Is that right?"

"Doing it jolly well too," said Elizabeth.

"I was leader of the orchestra," Margaret sounded gratified. "But it was only for to-day, Jansy."

"How do you mean? Hasn't Miss Howard decided who is to be leader?"

Gloom descended on Margaret.

"She can't make up her mind," Elizabeth explained. "She keeps trying them both. It was Peggy-Twin's turn to-day."

"Both? Who's the other one?"

"Jennifer. She's in our form and she's jolly good. Sometimes I think Miss Howard likes her best," Margaret said.

Jansy shot a look at Littlejan. "So that's the trouble! Marigold was sure there was something wrong, Twins."

"Well, there is!" Elizabeth exploded. "Twin had wanted to be leader of the orchestra and be chosen to play solos for years and years. When Nanta Rose left Joyce took over, but she went at Easter, and Miss Howard won't decide between Twin and Jennifer. Isn't it enough to make us worried?"

"I didn't know that was Margaret's great ambition," Littlejan said.

"They choose Elizabeth for 'cello solos, she's far and away the best 'cello we've got," Margaret cried. "I'm terribly bucked when she's playing, but I did want to have solos too. They're always given to the first violin. I've wanted to be it for years."

"And Miss Howard can't decide between you and Jennifer. That's difficult, Twins, but you'll have to wait. Nobody can do anything to hurry things," Jansy said.

"We know that. But it's bothering us a lot," Elizabeth wailed.

"I think perhaps she'll tell us to-morrow. She'll have had time to think about to-day's practice," Margaret's anxiety was very plain.

After bedtime Littlejan slipped into Jansy's room. "Just for one minute, Jan. We ought not to do it. But it is so nice to have you back! And I'm so lonely."

Jansy gave her a quick look, as she made room for her on the bed. "I'm sorry, Marigold. It must be beastly."

"It is rather. It's all right during the day; I can keep busy and there's heaps to do and think about. But at night I do miss him terribly. Let's think of something else! Our Queen has had a new idea; she's all thrilled about it. Now that you've come back that makes three ex-queens; she wants you and me and Tessa to be a committee, to help to run the Club."

Jansy's eyebrows shot up. "What a mad idea! It's not so difficult, is it? No queen has ever wanted a committee before."

“I know. I don’t like it. Phyl was pleased to be chosen, but she isn’t so happy when being queen means work.”

“And worry. Finding the right day for things, to suit everybody,” Jansy agreed. “Shall we help or shall we be pigs and refuse?”

“For her own good,” Littlejan agreed. “It might be better.”

“We mustn’t be an official committee, for people would have to know and they’d say things,” Jansy decided. “But perhaps we can stand by and give a hand when we see it’s needed. We can’t have the Club saying Phyl’s a slack queen, even if she is! I don’t blame her for putting off next week’s party, though some of the girls are doing so. None of us would have wanted to miss the Abbey song; the party would have been very thin. But we do blame her for forgetting the date and calling the party for that day. Everybody says—‘another of our queen’s muddles!’ It’s an awful pity. But what can we do? Shall we talk to Rachel in the Abbey? She always has ideas.”

“You can’t. She’s gone away. Benedicta’s taking care of the Abbey,” Littlejan told her.

Jansy stared at her blankly. “But why? Mother won’t like that.”

“I’m quite sure she knows all about it. Rachel has gone to stay with her sister, the ballet dancer who’s married and lives in the Lake District.”

“Oh, I see! Yes, Mother said Rachel must go to Damaris sometimes.”

“There’s always Mary-Dorothy, if you want to talk. She’s as kind as ever,” Littlejan rolled off the bed. “Night, Jan! Thanks for putting up with me! I feel better now. Oh, by the way, how did you get on with Dickon?”

Jansy looked startled. “Jolly well. Why shouldn’t I? We’ve always been pals.”

“Did you see a lot of him on the cruise?”

“Quite a bit,” Jansy said casually. The confidences she had given to her mother were not to be shared even with Marigold. “He’s all right. We talked a lot.”

“I bet you did!” but Littlejan did not tease her for more.

Rachel’s absence was explained next morning. Joy opened a letter from Ambleside and her face lit up in delight.

“News from the north! All’s well. Raimy Rose has arrived.”

The girls stared at her. “Raimy Rose?” Jansy asked.

“Who’s the person with the funny name?” the twins spoke together.

“Who is it? And where has it come from? What does it mean?” Littlejan cried.

“It means that Damaris, our dancer, has a daughter. Rachel is so happy about her niece.”

“Oh, what fun! Will she be a ballet dancer some day?”

“But what did you call her?” Jansy demanded.

“Raimy Rose. Raimy is Rachel Maidlin, made into one word. They’ll tell her what it means when she is old enough to understand. Damaris was determined to call her first daughter for Rachel and Maidlin. Rose is Brian’s choice; he has always wanted a girl called Rose. They planned that their next girl should be Damaris Rose, but, as Damaris says, the next one may be a boy and Brian might have to wait years for his Rose-girl.”

“It’s very pretty,” Littlejan said, with enthusiasm. “I hope she’ll be a dancer some day! May we tell people at school?”

“Oh yes, certainly! I’m quite sure Damaris is very proud and happy, and Rachel too.”

“Raimy Rose Grandison! When you get used to it it’s a jolly fine name,” Jansy approved warmly.

“Damaris says it’s such a good name for programmes,” Joy laughed. “But that’s rather far in the future.”

“I expect she’ll be trained in ballet all right!” Littlejan said.

The twins, though pleased about Raimy Rose, were obviously burdened by the thought that Miss Howard might give her final decision that day.

“If she chooses Jennifer I shall simply die,” Margaret said.

“Don’t be silly,” Joy said ruthlessly. “You’ll be disappointed; we’ll all be disappointed. I’d like to see you lead the orchestra and take the solo at the end-of-term concert! But there’s no need to talk about dying.”

“But Twin will feel dreadfully bad, Mother,” Elizabeth urged.

“I hope she’ll be brave and play beautifully under Jennifer, if it should be necessary,” Joy said firmly.

“Do you know Jennifer?” Littlejan asked. “I don’t think I do, yet, but I’m going to look out for her.”

“Oh, I know Jennifer! Jansy chose her for my maid, when the twins forsook me to be maids to her and Nanta, didn’t you, Jansy? She’s a nice child and a good dancer. I don’t know anything about her music.”

“You may know more than you want presently,” her younger twin said darkly.

Their hopes, or misgivings, were justified. Miss Howard sent for Margaret as soon as they arrived at school.

“Can I come too?” Elizabeth asked anxiously, seeing that her twin was white and tense.

“No!” Margaret snapped. “She’d think I can’t do things alone.”

“Sorry, I didn’t think of that,” Elizabeth said hurriedly.

Miss Howard smiled at Margaret in a reassuring way that sent Twin’s heart up with a bound. Quite unconsciously, at the back of her mind, was the thought of the musical family behind the twins, who would be pleased if they won distinction at school; their composer mother, Lady Quellyn, and their step-father, Sir Ivor Quellyn, conductor of orchestras all over the world; certainly they would be proud and gratified. So far as she knew, Jennifer had no musical history at all. The twins surely must have inherited something and must have learned much, with their constant concert-going since early childhood. Definitely Margaret was the more suitable candidate.

“Margaret! I have been thinking about the orchestra. You played very well yesterday. Jennifer is good too, but perhaps you have had more experience, so I have decided that you shall be the leader. I am sure you will do well.”

Margaret’s face lit up in joy. “I will try, Miss Howard. I want to be leader most frightfully.”

“I know you are very eager for it and you certainly play well. But you must keep it up, you know. Play always as well as you did yesterday. Don’t get careless or slack!”

“Oh, I won’t! I’m far too keen, Miss Howard!”

“We’ll give you a nice little solo at the concert. Your solo playing has always been good. I’m not anxious about you there. You had better tell Jennifer the question is decided.”

Margaret looked at her in dismay. “Won’t you tell her? She won’t like it, if I do.”

“Well—perhaps,” Miss Howard admitted. “It might be better. Send her to me, then.”

Margaret’s face, as she entered the Fifth form room, told her story. She was aglow with joy and pride.

“Oh, Twin, I’m it! I’m to be leader—”

“Oh, Twin, it’s you!” Elizabeth spoke at the same moment.

“I say, Jennifer, Miss Howard wants to speak to you.” Margaret whirled round to the rest of the girls. At sight of Jennifer’s white face she paused, her wild joy checked.

“Miss Howard has chosen you, I suppose she wants to tell me?” and Jennifer turned to go.

“I say, Jenny, I’m sorry,” Margaret stumbled on the words.

“It couldn’t be both of us,” Jennifer said curtly, and pushed past the others to the door.

“Somebody had to be disappointed,” Elizabeth said, reasonably enough. “Don’t look so upset, Twin.”

“But she looked awful. I wish it could have been us both.”

Then the gong rang for classes and no more discussion was possible. Jennifer slipped into her place, looking pale and strained. Margaret tackled her work, her eyes alight with joy and relief.

CHAPTER 11

TWINS IN TROUBLE

When break came, the twins were the first out in the playground, having been quick to secure their milk and biscuits. Neither of them had looked at Jennifer.

“She’ll howl, now that she’s got the chance,” Margaret said. “I’d have done it, if she’d been chosen. But she knew it had to be only one of us, Twin.”

“I don’t think she need make quite so much fuss,” Elizabeth said. “Everybody has to put up with things sometimes. Drink your milk before you spill it, Twin.”

“Jenny hasn’t come out yet—” Margaret began, disposing of the milk hurriedly.

“I say, you two!” the head girl, Daphne, came up to them. “I’ve heard about this business. Diana called me into your room because Jennifer was crying so much that they thought she’d make herself sick. The rest told me why she’s so much upset, but they said they didn’t think you knew; she didn’t tell anybody till Miss Howard had decided.”

“Isn’t it only because she wanted to be leader and Miss Howard chose Margaret?” Elizabeth demanded.

“There’s more in it than that. Jennifer’s crazy to go on with music and have really good training, better than she’ll get at school, but her people can’t afford to let her take it up in earnest. She wants to make music her career and play at concerts, but they say she’ll need to do something else, to earn her living.”

The twins looked at her uneasily. “That’s horrid for her, but we can’t help it,” Margaret began.

“Jennifer has a godfather who is well off and who thinks a lot of her, and he’s very keen on music. He’ll come to the end-of-term concert, and if he saw her leading the orchestra and playing alone, she thinks he’d feel she was worthwhile, and he’d decide to back her up and see her through a musical training. She feels Miss Howard’s choice of Margaret is the end of everything for her. That’s why she’s so much upset.”

“Well, I can’t do anything about it!” Margaret burst out. “Miss Howard did choose me! I didn’t ask her to do it!”

“You could do something,” Daphne said bluntly. “It doesn’t really matter to you. Your musical training is safe enough. Your mother and Sir Ivor Quellyn will see that you have all you need. But it does matter to Jennifer.”

“Do you mean—?” Elizabeth began breathlessly.

“You know what I mean. Margaret could help, but nobody else can do anything.” And Daphne left them to think it over.

“Does she think I ought to give up being leader?” Margaret cried. “Do they all think that? Twin, do they?”

“I can’t tell you. I don’t think it.”

“You don’t, do you?” Margaret almost sobbed. “I’ve wanted it so fearfully badly and for such a long time. Twin, I couldn’t!”

“It’s hard lines,” Elizabeth began. “It spoils it all for us. We can’t feel as glad as we ought to do, when it matters so much to Jenny.”

“I couldn’t give up being leader, after looking forward to it for years and years. And I won’t!” Margaret said vehemently.

“We’ll ask Mother. She wants you to be leader.”

“She does! Oh, she does! She’ll be pleased I’ve been chosen.”

“We’ll have to go in,” Elizabeth said. “Don’t talk to the rest. They know how keen you were; they’ll understand.”

“I can’t think about French,” Margaret muttered.

The group surrounding Jennifer glanced at them.

“Anyone else would give it up for poor Jenny’s sake. It matters so much to her,” Diana had just been saying.

“But not Margaret Marchwood. It’s not her way to do things like that,” Ann said.

“She wants it frightfully badly.” Betty had more sympathy with Margaret. “It’s rotten for her too. She can’t feel as good about it as she ought to do.”

“Good! She ought to feel rotten,” said Ann.

“Perhaps she does. Don’t say anything, Jenny dear, do buck up! Miss Verity will be here in a minute.”

Jennifer’s shoulders were still heaving. Margaret looked at her uneasily, as she went to her desk.

Jennifer stumbled to her feet. “I must go and wash. Will you tell Miss Verity I’m not well?” Her face was white and her red eyes were swollen.

Margaret looked away quickly. She did not know, but it was the last moment of her care-free rather self-centred childhood. “I couldn’t, Elizabeth! I couldn’t!” she whispered.

“What’s going on here?” Miss Verity surveyed her class. “What’s the matter, Jennifer?”

“I don’t feel well,” and Jennifer fled.

“She doesn’t look well. Go with her, Diana! Margaret, what’s wrong with you?”

Margaret shook her head dumbly, while the rest of the class looked at her with interest and Elizabeth’s hand crept into hers.

“Tell me about this! In French; we’ll have some conversation; those verbs can wait. Allons donc, mes enfants! Dites-moi!”

Their French was far from fluent, but this was better than verbs or dictation; at least it was about something real. Stumblingly and with much help they explained, and Miss Verity delivered judgment, as Jennifer and Diana returned.

“That is sad for Jennifer, and for Margaret. We can see she is troubled for Jennifer’s sake. But Margaret has been chosen; Jennifer must be brave, that is all. Some other way may open for her to have her music.”

Margaret looked at her, a spark of hope in her eyes. Jennifer shook her head hopelessly and the spark died.

When the rather dreary lesson was over and had been followed by a quite unsuccessful arithmetic session, the girls were released for a short break before school dinner. Jennifer rose. “I shall go home. I’ve a headache; Mother will understand. I don’t want any dinner.”

“I’ll go with you,” Diana said hastily. “It’s not much out of my way. I’ll see she gets there safely—” to the other girls.

Jansy Raymond, from the Sixth, appeared at the door and came across to her cousins. “I’m going to take you two out to the dairy for lunch. It’s all right; I’ve got leave.”

The twins looked at her. Then, unexpectedly, Elizabeth said, “It’s jolly nice of you, Jansy, but we don’t want to go.”

“Don’t want—? Why ever not? I thought you’d be glad,” Jansy cried, astounded. “Littlejan’s coming too.”

“We don’t want to talk to anybody. Don’t be cross, Jansy. It’s only that we don’t want to talk.”

“Just what I thought you would do!” Jansy cried, while the rest of the class listened, amazed and thrilled. “Daphne told us, and I thought——”

“It was nice of you,” Elizabeth acknowledged. “I’ll tell you why at night. Just now there’s too much to say, or not enough. I’m not sure which. But we don’t want anybody, do we, Twin?”

“I don’t know. I don’t understand. But if you say it, I’m sure that’s what we feel.” Margaret sat with bent head and spoke unsteadily.

“You’re quite certain about it?” Jansy said gently.

“Certain sure, though it’s awful nice of you to think of it.”

“Well, of all the queer things!” Jansy said to herself, as she turned to go into school dinner, giving up thoughts of a dairy lunch, and to explain to Littlejan.

The twins went in to dinner, after a silent stroll in the playground, and sat alone together, hardly speaking to one another, so far as anyone could see. The rest of their form eyed them from a distance, with dawning understanding of Margaret’s struggle and Elizabeth’s sympathy which needed no words.

“Do you think Margaret is really going to give up for Jennifer?” Betty asked, when Diana had returned for afternoon classes.

“From what you’ve said, she seems to be thinking about it. It will be marvellous if she does. But it doesn’t seem like her. I wouldn’t have believed she’d be decent enough to do it.”

“Perhaps she’s decenter than we thought. People sometimes are. Perhaps Margaret has never had to do a thing like this before.”

Elizabeth said one word of explanation to her twin, as they went out to the playground again. “It would have been fun to go with Jansy, but we didn’t want the rest saying she’d told us what to do. And they would have said it.”

“I see,” Margaret admitted. “No, we didn’t want that. We don’t need Jansy and Littlejan to tell us. We—I’d better do it before we go home. Then they can’t say Mother told us what to do either.”

Elizabeth’s arm squeezed the hand that was tucked through it. “I think Mother will be glad.”

“I thought she’d be sorry, and perhaps cross. She wanted me to be—you know,” Margaret wailed. “She said she’d be proud.”

“Perhaps she’ll be prouder because you’re not,” Elizabeth said thoughtfully. “I believe it’s bigger, somehow, to give it up for somebody else, after you’d been really chosen.”

Margaret winced. “I don’t know how I shall bear it, but—but I’ll go to Miss Howard before we go home. You’ll come too, won’t you?”

“Perhaps Miss Howard won’t let you give it up,” Elizabeth sounded hopeful.

“Jennifer’s too good for that. Miss Howard said it was difficult to choose,” Margaret’s tone was dreary.

She was right. Miss Howard looked at them with amused sympathy when they appeared before her.

“Please, Miss Howard, we think it should be Jennifer to lead the orchestra instead of me,” Margaret spoke bravely, but she could not quite keep her voice steady.

“You are thinking of Jennifer and of how much this means to her?” Miss Howard spoke gently.

“We didn’t understand. Now that we know, we feel it would be mean to—to stick to what you said,” Elizabeth tried to help her twin, for it was plain Margaret could not bear much more.

“I appreciate the offer. It is very good of Margaret,” Miss Howard began. “Jennifer can do the job, of course. But I felt Margaret would be more suitable——”

“Oh, you won’t let us down now!” Margaret cried. “It’s been so hard to decide, and she’ll be so pleased.” Suddenly she saw a picture of Jennifer’s tear-stained face and knew she could not bear to bring back that look. “Please, Miss Howard! It—it was when I saw Jenny’s face and knew how much it mattered to her,” she faltered.

“I see.” Miss Howard’s voice was kind. “Have you told her yet?”

“Oh no! We had to ask you first.”

“Quite right. Tell her first thing in the morning. Very well, Margaret. Jennifer shall lead the orchestra and you will be brave and work loyally under her.”

“Yes,” Margaret whispered. “I will do it, Miss Howard.”

“I hope your mother will not be disappointed.”

“We think perhaps she’ll be glad.” Elizabeth gave her a straight, earnest look.

“I should be glad, if Margaret was my girl. It is a brave, generous deed. I should be proud. Tell Jennifer in the morning, Margaret. I shall send for her too.”

“We’ll do better than the morning.” Elizabeth drew her twin away. “Jenny’ll have a dreadful night. We’ll save her from that.”

“She’ll cry all night,” Margaret said. “Can’t we stop her? Oh, here’s Diana! Has she been waiting? Did she guess?”

“I saw her hanging about. She’ll give Jenny a message,” Elizabeth said, as Diana bore down on them. “You tell her, Twin. Yes, go on! It’s your job!”

CHAPTER 12

JOY IS PROUD

“We’ve been to Miss Howard. Jennifer’s to lead the orchestra. Will you tell her?” Margaret’s words came with a rush. It was not easy to speak, however, and her voice broke. She braced herself to a big effort. “I’m sure Jenny will do it very nicely.”

“Margaret, you brick! You sport!” Diana cried. The quiver in Margaret’s voice had told her everything. “May I tell Jenny? She’s feeling fearfully bad.”

“We don’t want her to cry all night. Please don’t talk about it. Tell the others!”

“Twin, here’s the car!” Elizabeth cried. “Come and get your coat!” and they ran off together.

“I never really thought she’d do it,” and Diana’s eyes followed them. “I’ll tell the rest, you bet I will! I think more of Margaret Marchwood than I ever did before!” And she went off, to bring the light of a great joy and relief to tired Jennifer.

The twins were already in the car when Jansy and Littlejan arrived. “All right, Twins?” was Jansy’s greeting.

“They don’t look all right,” Littlejan murmured.

“Leave us alone!” Margaret’s tone was truculent.

“I really think you’d better,” Elizabeth explained. “We don’t want to hear what you think about it. It’s done with and finished. We’ve been to Miss Howard. Margaret’s given up the orchestra to Jennifer.”

“She looked so dreadful,” Margaret said.

“Oh, good, Peggy-Twin!” Littlejan exclaimed.

“Margaret, you brick!” Jansy cried.

“Don’t talk to us!” Elizabeth commanded. “We want to know what Mother thinks.”

“She’ll be pleased. Surely you know that?” their elders spoke together.

“You didn’t want to ask her before you decided?” Jansy asked curiously. “You didn’t want to ask us either? Was that why you were so queer at dinner time?”

“We didn’t want the others to say you’d told us what to do.”

“I see,” Jansy was interested and appreciative. “Jolly sensible of you! I thought you were very odd. Nobody can say you didn’t decide quite on your own.”

“Change the subject!” Littlejan said firmly. “Margaret’s been splendid. We won’t worry her. I like Miss Verity for French, Jansy.”

“You hadn’t had her before, had you?”

And the twins were left in peace till the car reached the Hall. But once there Margaret could hold herself in no longer.

“Mother! Mother!” she rushed in, very much as Joy herself would have done twenty years before. “Oh, Mother, Miss Howard chose me for the orchestra, and I went and asked her to have Jennifer instead, because it matters more for her and she was crying such a lot, so she’s to be the leader, and—and do you mind?”

Joy caught her in her arms. “My dear! I just don’t understand. Tell me, Elizabeth!”

Margaret was crying heart-brokenly. Elizabeth, near to tears herself, told the story. The elder girls had slipped away to leave the twins with their mother.

Joy soothed Margaret gently. “My good Margaret! That was very brave and generous.”

“You don’t mind that she won’t be the leader and have solos?” Elizabeth asked anxiously. “We’ve been a little bit bothered about that.”

“I’d have been proud to see Margaret lead the orchestra, but I’ll be much more proud to see her playing under Jennifer. I’m glad and happy that she’s been so brave. As for solos, they don’t all always need to be given to the leader. Miss Howard might give Margaret solos too. I’m pleased and I’m proud of you, Margaret.”

“Then that’s all right. I’m so tired,” Margaret sighed.

“Did she have to do it?” her stepfather, Sir Ivor Quellyn, frowned when he was told the story. “It would have been good experience for her.”

“It’s been better experience for her to make the big effort,” Joy said firmly. “I honestly wouldn’t have believed she could do it.”

The same thing was said freely at school next day. The story was known before the twins arrived, and there was a new atmosphere of respect towards Margaret, of which she was instantly conscious. The Fourth form had decided that they thought more of her than they had ever done before; that she mattered, in fact, and that she had a lot in her. They had always thought well of Elizabeth, but had been more doubtful of Margaret.

Jennifer ran to her, her face radiant. “Margaret, you don’t know how I thank you! It may be the start of all sorts of things for me, marvellous things! I’ll never forget it was your doing.”

“Mind you play so well that the old godfather will give you anything you want. Don’t let me down!” Margaret retorted.

“I’ll try my hardest. But I think you’d have been better. I believe Miss Howard thinks so too.”

“Then you must prove to her that she’s making a mistake,” said Elizabeth.

“Tell us, Elizabeth!” Diana coaxed. “Did you tell Margaret she’d got to do it? Did she do it to please you? We know you hadn’t been home, and you didn’t talk to Jansy Raymond. But somebody must have made Margaret——”

“Nobody did!” Elizabeth flashed at her. “Margaret made up her own mind. Why shouldn’t she? Do you think she hasn’t got a mind? I didn’t talk to her; hardly at all. I just stayed close to her, so that she’d know what I was thinking. I knew what she was thinking. There was no need for talking.”

The rest had seen that for themselves during the dinner hour. “I suppose that’s what comes of being twins,” Betty and Ann said, much interested. “Must be rather jolly!”

Joy watched her daughters carefully for the next few days. They were quiet and unlike themselves, feeling the strain of the difficult decision, Elizabeth no less than Margaret. Elizabeth reported on the orchestra practices, which were frequent, for the end-of-term concert was in preparation, and assured her mother that both Margaret and Jennifer were playing well and that both had been given short solo passages.

“Miss Howard looks at Margaret in a queer way sometimes. I think she’s sorry she couldn’t have her for leader,” she said.

“I expect Margaret is playing even better than she used to do,” Joy said wisely. “That often happens, after a difficult time.”

“Well, she is; I’m sure she is.”

“Haven’t you a solo too?”

“Oh yes! They like the ’cello. Miss Howard won’t let me off.”

“Don’t have measles, either of you,” Joy said, with a laugh. “It would be very awkward for Miss Howard.”

She was glad of the excitement of the Saturday night trip to town, to hear Rosalind Kane play the Song of the Abbey in the Albert Hall, knowing that the great occasion would mean a new interest for the depressed twins. To the family, Rosalind was still ‘Nanta Rose,’ who had spent more than two years at the Hall as a schoolgirl; the Abbey Song had been written for her by the young composer whom she was to marry in the autumn, and they had heard the first performance in the early spring. That had been semi-private, in Dr. Grandison’s music-room: this, in the Albert Hall, with Sir Ivor Quellyn conducting, was a much bigger thing, and no one had any doubt that it would mean an even bigger triumph for Rosalind.

The twins looked forward to it as eagerly as anyone, and were much brighter and more like themselves.

“There’s a special bit in it for us. Did you know?” Elizabeth asked of Littlejan. “Derek put it in on purpose.”

“This is it,” and Margaret seized her violin and played a tiny skipping phrase. “We always listen for it. It’s our bit; it’s Rachel’s cats dancing about the garth. And this is the Abbey garden, and the flowers, and the robins.”

“I’m thrilled that I’m going to hear it at last,” Littlejan told them eagerly.

It was a thrill for the whole family when they drove to town and presently watched Nanta, a slim white figure, dwarfed by the great hall and the big orchestra although she was so tall, come forward to play the Song of the Abbey. A roar of welcome greeted her, for her engagement was now known and good wishes had been showered on her from every side.

She flushed a little, understanding the greeting, bowed with great dignity, and raised her violin.

“Rachel will be getting more clients for the Abbey,” Jen murmured, under cover of the rapturous applause at the end. “She says she often has parties, carrying concert notes and demanding to be shown the Abbey. Like it, Mrs. Fraser?”

Littlejan had been deeply moved. “It’s glorious! I could see the Abbey and its stories all the time. I’m glad to have heard it.”

“Did you listen for our bit?” Margaret asked. “We heard it, and Twin shook hands with me.”

Littlejan laughed. “I heard your dancing cats!”

“What a lot of clapping!” Elizabeth was applauding vigorously, as Rosalind came out to bow again and again.

“It must be heavenly to play like that, and to be clapped like that,” Margaret said wistfully.

Her mother smiled at her. “You aren’t ready for the Albert Hall yet, my dear. Nanta is having a wonderful reception. I expect Derek Grandison is very proud and happy.”

“I should think he’ll say thank you to Nanta Rose for playing his music so beautifully,” Jansy remarked.

“I’m sure he will. But this next item is a thrill too, Twins. You want to hear your Miss Belinda sing, don’t you?”

“Such luck to have Belinda Bellanne on the same programme! We’re all dying to see her,” Littlejan said.

“Not luck. We begged Ivor to use her and he has always said she must sing for him,” Joy said.

The applause for Rosalind was reluctantly dying down. Belinda, very pretty in white, with yellow curls hanging down her neck, came out to sing.

“Oh, lovely! It is a glorious voice!” Jen whispered.

“She’ll have a big reception too,” Joy said. “Yes, Ivor is pleased. Belinda will go far. She’s to sing in ‘Elijah’ with Maidlin very soon; it has always been her great ambition; we must come to hear that too. She’ll have to sing again—yes, here she comes!”

“How nice of her!” The Abbey crowd looked at one another, as Lindy began to sing ‘The Skylark.’

Joy coloured and laughed but looked pleased. “That suits Miss Belinda’s voice. It was written for her. I must thank her.”

“We’ll speak to her afterwards, won’t we? And to Nanta Rose?” Jansy asked anxiously.

“If we can get near them. We’ll certainly try,” Joy promised.

Among the friends waiting to greet Nanta were the party from Kentisbury. The Countess had brought with her young Mrs. Bill Kane, who had been unable to come to the spring concert because her small son and daughter were only a few days old; she was full of delight that she had heard The Song of the Abbey at last and was eager to thank Rosalind, who had been her first friend at Kentisbury, and also Lindy Bellanne, whom she had met in Maidlin’s house.

“A very satisfying evening!” was Joy’s verdict, when the greetings and congratulations were over and they were driving home.

“A lovely time!” said the twins and Littlejan and Jansy.

CHAPTER 13

QUEENS-IN-CHARGE

The end-of-term concert at school went well. Joy watched with satisfied eyes as her daughters played solos and Margaret took her place as second to Jennifer, looking grave, indeed, but loyally doing her best.

Jennifer came rushing to the twins in great excitement. “He’s here—my godfather. He’s pleased! He says he thinks I may be worth helping. He’s going to think about it. Margaret, thank you a thousand times! Did you mind so awfully much?”

“I’d have liked it better if I’d been you,” Margaret admitted. “But, I say, Jenny! You were jolly good, you know.”

“You *are* nice!” and Jennifer ran off, wildly thrilled, to speak to her godfather again.

“Jolly of Margaret! She’s done the thing handsomely,” Jen turned to Joy.

“Yes, she has been good,” and Joy looked pleased and happy.

The term ended on a difficult note for the Hamlet Club, however. The Queen ignored the date of the end-of-term party and arranged a special farewell lesson with her piano-master for the same evening.

“Well, I’m sorry,” she said, when she realised what she had done. “But there aren’t many evenings left before we go away for the hols, and the Professor could manage that night. There are plenty of you to run the party.”

“Then you didn’t forget? You did it on purpose?” Littlejan pursed her lips.

“I couldn’t help it. I had to go to the Professor once more. You can be M.C., Marigold. Or Tessa.”

“Not I. I couldn’t run a party. I’ve never done it,” Tessa said. “I should be scared stiff for fear I’d make a mess of calling out the dances.”

“Didn’t you have to do it when you were queen?” Littlejan asked.

“No—Jansy helped. They knew I was shy, and scared of it. But we’ve got you, Marigold. You’re splendid on platforms; we’ll be all right, Phyl.”

“That’s all very well, and I’ll love to do it. But the Club likes the queen to be there,” Littlejan argued.

“I can’t be there this time. You can make excuses for me,” the Wallflower Queen said lightly.

“Has she been like this all the term?” Littlejan asked, as they changed their shoes to go home.

“I missed half of the term,” Jansy seized the chance to say nothing of the things she had been told.

“What about it, Tessa?” Marigold insisted.

“She doesn’t care much about the Club,” Tessa said unwillingly. “There have been other times. We must help her, Marigold.”

“The poor Hamlet Club! Have we ever had a queen who didn’t care before?”

“There was one slacker—before Mirry,” Jansy looked up. “But the Club lived through it. We’ll pull them through again.”

“Oh, rather! I’ll do all I can,” Littlejan promised. “But—well, we’ll see.”

“What were you going to say?”

“I can’t tell you just now. You’ll help with the party, won’t you? I’d like to dance sometimes.”

“Of course, I will. We’ll do it between us. Pity Tessa’s so shy, isn’t it?”

Tessa grinned at them. “It isn’t shy; it’s frightened. With Jansy-Lob and Littlejan-Marigold in the hall I simply wouldn’t dare to call out dances.”

“Ass!” said Jansy.

“Not a bit of it. I feel you two are ‘Teacher.’ You taught me when I was just starting. Do you remember Jansy? *‘I will not have those crossings skipped!’* I still laugh when I think how she danced with rage. I’d as soon recite cake recipes to Miss Newman as dances in front of Jansy.”

“You must have been terrifying as a teacher, Jan,” Marigold said. “I’ll never stop being sorry I missed those classes of yours.”

“What did you mean just now, Littlejan?” Jansy asked, as they drove home together.

But Littlejan would not tell the sudden thought that had come to her. “We’ll do the party between us. You and I will keep hopping on and off the M.C.’s chair, while the other one dances, and Tessa can be just a humble member of the Club.”

“Has Phyl let us down again?” The question was freely asked, when it was found no reigning queen was present at the party.

“She had a lesson she couldn’t possibly put off. It was really urgent,” the girls were told by the queens-in-charge.

“Phyl’s a lot too keen on those lessons and she doesn’t care twopence for the Club,” was the usual comment.

When the line of queens formed up for the procession at the usual summer fête, early in the holidays, Tessa, in her brilliant lupin train of lemon yellow was the leader, since Phyl was at the seaside with her family. Tessa was followed by Jansy, in lobelia blue, and by Littlejan robed in glowing orange, and a roar of cheering went up to greet these two.

“They feel you stood by the Club at that party,” Tessa said, as they took their flower-decked thrones. “We’re lucky to have you two.”

After the fête came the regular scattering of the clan for holidays. Littlejan went home with Jansy, to spend some weeks with her brothers from boarding-school. They were big lads now and she was very proud of them; they were amused and respectful towards their married sister, but were disappointed because she would not accept a hearty invitation to North Wales for swimming and boating and climbing.

“I’m going to stay here quietly with Auntie Joan, if she’ll have me,” she said. “You can all go to Quellyn, and take Jansy and John with you, if you like. Alastair is sixteen now; you’d be perfectly safe. Robin would look after you.”

At Joan’s suggestion, Dickon Everett was invited to join the party, as a small return for the President’s kindness to Jansy in the spring; and Dickon, already knowing John Raymond well, went joyfully and was soon equally friendly with Alastair and Alan. They boated and swam, fished and climbed, and with a party of four boys to wait on her Jansy found plenty to do.

“But why won’t you come, Marigold?” she pleaded. “You know you like Moranedd and you love Robin, and there’s her new little girl that you haven’t seen yet.”

“Gwyneth fach. You must tell me about Bobbi-bach too; he’ll be quite a big boy now.”

“I should do too much,” she said quietly to Joan. “I couldn’t resist it, if I went with that crowd. I’d go swimming; and I do think it’s better not.”

Joan gave her an amused kindly look. "You might be tempted to overdo it. Jansy will be upset when she hears you aren't going back to school. I'm glad to have you here with me and our babes."

On the first evening at home, when the holiday adventures had been told, Jansy began to make plans for the coming term.

"I'm not going back to school, Jan," said Littlejan abruptly.

"Not—going—back?" Jansy stared at her blankly. "But why? You liked it, didn't you?"

"I loved it. But I'm not going to start another term. I've told Miss Raven."

"But—but—you don't think you know all about cooking, do you? You only had six weeks!" Jansy cried, righteously indignant.

"I learned quite a lot. The Head thinks I'm doing the right thing. But I'll come for the Hamlet Club, if they need me. We can't depend on Phyl, that's evident, and Tessa isn't coming back this winter. You and I must be queens-in-charge."

"Well, I think it's rotten! We need you at school," Jansy raged, bitterly disappointed.

Littlejan laughed. "Sometimes old married ladies are better not at school, Lob."

"What has being married to do with it?"

"Everything," Littlejan said simply.

"It didn't matter a scrap last term! We forgot all about your being married!"

"Last term's not this term," Littlejan said cryptically. Then she burst out—"Oh, Jan! Don't you *know*?"

Jansy stared at her. Then, with a rush, she was on her knees beside her. "Oh, Littlejan, don't! Don't do it! You will be all grown-up and spoiled! We want you like you always were! Oh no, Marigold!"

"Oh yes, Lob!" Littlejan's arms were round her. "I'm so glad and happy. Do be nice about it, Jan!"

Jansy looked up at her. "Do you *want* it, Littlejan? Fussing about with prams and nappies and all that?"

Littlejan's face was aglow. "I want it badly. I'll be proud. And I'm lonely without Len. Can't you understand?"

"Well, I think it's too bad; you aren't old enough," Jansy wailed. "You might have had a year or two with nothing altered and you just like you used to be."

"I'm afraid if that's what you want, a good many things will be altered, Jan. But the changes won't be at once, you know. I'm coming back to live with you; Lady Joy wants me, because of the twins. You'll see plenty of me for months and months, and I'll come to Club meetings, if I can. You won't say anything to the twins, or to people at school, will you? There's heaps of time for all that."

"When?" Jansy whispered.

"February. I'm looking forward to it, Jan."

Jansy gave her another quick look. "I suppose it will be worth it," she said grudgingly. "But I still think it's a pity. You might have waited!"

Littlejan laughed. "I'm glad! And Mother is so pleased."

"Won't she come home?"

"Perhaps she will. But she knows everybody will take care of me here. I couldn't be in a better place. She isn't worried about me, and she's going to be so proud!"

"The twins will be upset, if you don't go back to school. They'll want to know why."

"They'll find out some day. They have you to see them through."

Littlejan spent much time that summer wandering in her patch of ground near the Abbey gates. The plans for the little house had been discussed at length by Jack Raymond and Jock Robertson, both experienced in the building of houses, and she felt entirely satisfied that all would be as she wished. Every point was told to Len in letters, but it was difficult to get answers from him now, and all decisions had to come from her.

She called to Benedicta to come and criticise the site, before the men began to dig the foundations.

Benedicta, small and slight, with lint-white curls about her neck under a soft garden hat, came from her weeding, thankful for a rest from stooping.

“I’m glad you’re going to use this patch,” she said. “It’s looked so unhappy and derelict.”

“I might call it The Patch. It will need to have a name.”

“Poppy Patch, or Poppy Cot.” Benedicta surveyed the wild poppies which had sown themselves among the nettles. “Those will have to come out.”

“Len was very emphatic about the name. It’s not to be anything funny.”

Benedicta laughed. “I agree with Len. The name will turn up when you’re ready for it.” She was looking curiously around. “What an odd lot of things have been growing here! All gone to seed and straggly, but you can still make something of them, if you care about them.” She went over to the big grey bushes below the ilex trees.

“What are they?” Littlejan asked. “Lavender, and—is it rosemary?”

“Right! and southernwood—old man, you know. All nice for smell but not much to look at. That’s a jolly bed of foxgloves,” and she knelt and examined a low-growing mass of undergrowth.

“Those weeds will have to be cleared away,” Littlejan began.

“I’ll help. I’m sure Rachel and Damaris would want that. But this isn’t weed. Here’s thyme, and pimpernel, and marjoram; it’s a mass of herbs, all matted and run wild. Do you know what I think?”

“No, but I can see you think it’s important.”

“This was the monks’ herb-garden,” Benedicta announced in triumph. “All these things are useful herbs. You’ll find valerian—yes, over there—and hemlock—and eyebright; they’d want all those; even the poppies are used as medicine. And those foxgloves are worth a lot.”

“Gracious! What for?” Littlejan cried, much intrigued.

“Heart trouble; to buck people up. Foxglove is digitalis—a valuable medicine. I’m sure this was the Abbey herb-garden, and these are the foundations of the monks’ still-room, where they stored and sorted the herbs and made up their medicines.”

Littlejan’s face was glowing with delight. “I do like that idea! Do you really mean it?”

“I’m sure of it. It would be too chancey for all those herbs to have come together by accident. I wonder they’ve lived so long, but most of them must have sown themselves. They’ve gone a bit wild, but we can replace them, and they’ve given us their message. I’m certain this was once a herb-garden, and it must have belonged to the monks.”

“Another bit of the Abbey for us!” Littlejan exulted. “I must tell everybody I’m going to live with monks! Do you think they’d mind?” in sudden anxiety.

“Why should they? I should think they’d be pleased.”

“Benedicta, you really are a blessing! I should never have thought of it! I didn’t know what half the things were,” Littlejan said joyfully.

“You’d better call it The Herb Garden, and plant some marigolds. They were used as medicine too, I believe. I can give you plenty.”

“Marigold Corner? Rosemary Cottage? Lavender Patch?” Littlejan grinned. “I must go and tell everybody. I do thank you, Benedicta!”

CHAPTER 14

ROSALIND IS MARRIED

On the first day of the autumn term the twins, grinning widely, came down to breakfast in the blouses and skirts of seniors, since they were now promoted to the Fifth Form.

"My grown-up daughters!" Joy looked at them in amusement.

"Just like Jansy and Littlejan!" Margaret crowed.

"Are we tidy, Mother?" Elizabeth asked.

Joy turned them round for careful inspection. "You'll do. Yes, you're very neat. I really think you'll need to let your hair grow."

"Oh no, please! What's the use of having all that bother, if you're going to cut it off again later on? You did that!"

"It will be queer without Tessa this term. But we'll have Jansy and Littlejan. Phyl's not much good, is she?"

"You'll have Jansy, but only Jansy," Littlejan spoke from the doorway.

They whirled round. "Marigold! What's up? You aren't dressed. Where's your uniform?"

Littlejan wore a comfortable frock and a crimson cardigan. "I'm not going to school with you. I've grown up and left—in earnest this time."

"Oh, but we want you!" There was a united shout. "You mustn't leave school yet! Oh, Marigold, please don't be grown up!"

"You haven't done much cooking," Elizabeth said, in a tone of reproach and scorn.

"Enough to be quite useful. You'll have to get along without me."

"Mother, did you know? Isn't she mad?"

"I've known for some time. She's going to stay at home and help me."

"But why? What will she do all the time?"

"She'll find plenty to do. Come to breakfast, Twinnies."

"Writing to Len all day! It must be boring to be married," Elizabeth exclaimed.

"Deadly dull," said Margaret.

Littlejan laughed. "I shan't be bored. I've a lot to do in The Herb Garden. I'll come to help the Hamlet Club, if I'm needed."

"Well, you'll have to. We can't depend on Phyl."

"Perhaps she'll reform this term, now that she won't have Tessa behind her," Littlejan suggested.

"More likely to be slacker than ever, without Tessa to shove her."

"It wasn't exactly being slack," said Jansy, coming to the table. "She was only slack to the Club. She cared enough about other things; about music."

"The girls won't like it when they hear Marigold isn't coming back," Elizabeth said gloomily.

Littlejan awaited their reports with interest at tea-time. But the twins had found a new excitement.

"Mother! Mother!" they rushed in, as they had done two months before. "Oh, Mother, something so marvellous!"

They were both radiant. Joy stared at them. "What is it, Twinnies?"

“Jennifer. She’s left! That old godfather’s taken her away and sent her to a boarding-school in London, where they do heaps of music and a friend of his teaches the fiddle. The friend came with him to that concert, to hear Jenny play, and she liked her solo and said she’d be glad to teach her. So—don’t you see? The orchestra, Mother!”

“It comes to Margaret. Girls, I am so glad! Your great ambition is achieved at last, my darling.”

“Miss Howard sent for us,” Elizabeth said breathlessly, “and said she was more than glad to have Margaret to lead the orchestra. That’s what she said—‘more than glad.’ I believe she wanted her all along.”

Margaret was looking supremely happy. “I’m glad now that I let Jenny have the chance.”

“The girls won’t forget you did it,” Joy said.

“They’re much nicer to us than they used to be,” Elizabeth remarked.

“They’re awfully cut up because Littlejan isn’t going back. Everybody’s upset, and they want to know why. The team wanted her for hockey this term.”

“That’s why—partly,” Marigold told them. “I don’t want to play hockey. I never was keen on it.”

“You needn’t have played, if that’s all!”

Littlejan shook her head. “Difficult not to play. Don’t you want your tea?”

“Look, Twins!” Joy brought a letter. “An invitation to you to be bridesmaids for Nanta Rose—I should say, for Lady Rosalind. She wants Jansy too.”

“Goody! That will be fun. What are we to wear?”

“I bet you it will be a blue wedding. You know how Nanta Rose loves blue,” Elizabeth said.

“Yes, blue frocks. She’ll wear white, of course.”

“Hasn’t she asked Marigold?” Margaret cried. This was greeted with hoots of derision from Jansy, and Joy laughed. “You don’t have old married ladies as bridesmaids, Twinnies.”

“Marigold isn’t old. She doesn’t seem like being married,” Elizabeth protested.

“Except when she won’t go back to school,” Margaret grumbled.

“Nanta writes that she’d have liked to have Marigold, but she knows it can’t be done. Littlejan must go with me as a guest,” Joy said. “The wedding is at Kentisbury, at the end of the month. Virginia’s home is too far in the country. Rosalind must have a Castle wedding, like all her sisters.”

“I suppose none of the little twins can be bridesmaids yet?”

“No, they aren’t old enough. Rosabel and Rosalin are only five; Rosamund can’t risk it. She doesn’t know what Rosabel would do. But Roddy and Hugh will be pages for Nanta.”

“It will be a very little procession. Or has she asked Rosemary and Myonie too? They looked nice at Mary Damaris’s wedding.”

“She has asked them. Two little boy pages; two small girls; two quite big girls, and Jansy.”

“Jansy will look like a mother, keeping an eye on us,” Elizabeth chuckled.

Joy glanced at her. “Nanta has asked Rachel from the Abbey to be a grown-up partner for Jansy, at the end of the procession.”

“Oh, that’s nice. Nanta Rose used to go to the Abbey a lot, to talk to Rachel.”

“She’s very fond of Rachel, and of the Abbey. She wanted our Abbot to be one of her maids.”

“Marvellous of Nanta Rose to think of it,” Elizabeth said.

“Nice for me to have Rachel for a partner,” Jansy agreed.

"Rachel's a little shy about it," Joy laughed. "Nanta would have liked a quiet wedding, perhaps here, but that wouldn't be possible. She and Derek are too well known, half musical London will be there, after that performance in the Albert Hall."

It was indeed a big crowd of notable people who filled the halls of Kentisbury Castle for Rosalind's wedding reception. She stood receiving good wishes with great dignity, smiling happily and with a sudden radiant look for friends from the Abbey and for her bridesmaids.

"It seems to me," said Elizabeth Marchwood, "that Littlejan's getting as many nice things said to her as Nanta Rose. Everybody's giving her good wishes; I don't know why."

"Only our own folks. I don't know what they're saying to her," said Margaret.

Littlejan escaped from the crowd of well-wishers and made her way to Belinda Bellanne, who had come with Maidlin. "We're coming to hear you sing in *Elijah*."

"I've longed for it for so long." Lindy's face lit up. "To sing with Maidlin! It's the dream of my life. They want me to have extra training, to sing in opera, but I don't feel ready for that yet."

"Is that what you're worried about? I've been thinking you looked a bit bothered."

"No, it's something else. There's somebody here I don't want to meet. I wish we could—oh, Maidlin and Jock are going home! That will suit me."

"Who is it?" Littlejan asked eagerly. "Show me, Miss Belinda!"

"No," Lindy said abruptly, and hurried away to join Maidlin.

"If it's that fat little red-faced man I don't wonder she ran away," Littlejan said to herself, as a stout elderly man pushed his way through the crowd towards Belinda and her escort.

Littlejan watched, thrilled to the limit. But he was too late; a chattering group separated him from his quarry. Jock Robertson had seen him; with a word to Maidlin he took her arm and grasped Lindy's hand and piloted them to their car.

"And he is left lamenting," Marigold murmured. "A good thing too. A creature like that mustn't be allowed to hang round our Miss Belinda!"

She found a chance to speak to Rosamund quietly. "Lady Kentisbury, who was that cheap, nasty fat man, with a very red face? He looked like a foreigner."

"What do you know about him, Marigold? He's Sir Konrad Abrahams; he has any amount of money and he's given a lot of it to help music and concerts."

"He looks like bags of money. Perfectly horrible! I loathed the very sight of him."

"Your judgment is sound," Rosamund said. "He isn't a pleasant character. Was he trying to get near Lindy Bellanne?"

"Just that. But she ran away and Maidlin took her home."

"Maid told me he has been haunting Lindy, but she won't have anything to do with him."

"She shows her good sense. She couldn't like someone like that, no matter how much money he had."

"No. I think she'll keep her head. You needn't worry about Belinda. How is your little house getting on?"

Littlejan's face lit up. "It's beginning to look like a house. The walls are going up; you can see the rooms. But they're very tiny; I'm worried for fear we've made a mistake and they will be too small."

"I believe rooms often look like that. Don't worry—they'll be big enough. Didn't Jock Raymond vet the plans for you? Then they'll be all right. You'll have great fun getting it ready."

"I'm looking forward to it—our own little house at the Abbey gates."

“What are you going to do? You can’t live in it quite alone, you know.” Rosamund noted the brave ‘our’ but made no comment.

“I’ve had an idea,” Littlejan said eagerly. “I want Benedicta to come and live with me, instead of going to the village every night. It would be so convenient for her garden, and she’d be company for me.”

“A really good idea,” Rosamund exclaimed. “Do you get on well with her?”

“Everybody does. She’s so nice. But I haven’t asked her about coming to live with me yet. There are so many things to happen first.”

Rosamund agreed. “You’ll stay with Joy and the twins for the present?”

“I want to. Lady Joy is so kind. I feel surrounded by nice people.”

“It’s a jolly happy feeling,” Rosamund assented.

CHAPTER 15

SANCTUARY

The twins settled down contentedly for the new school term, Margaret happy in the fulfilment of her great ambition, Elizabeth rejoicing for her sake.

Jansy gave up her schoolgirl plaits and wore her hair in one long thick tail and looked grown-up and responsible. As the only ex-queen left at school she looked out for ways to help Phyl and found many opportunities.

The whole family drove to town for the performance of *Elijah*, and in rapt delight heard the beautifully blended voices as Maidlin and Lindy sang together in duets and quartets. Lindy's highest ambition was achieved also and she was radiantly happy. The critics gave high praise and foretold a big future for her.

Two days after the concert Littlejan was sitting knitting on the terrace of the Hall when a car came racing up the beech avenue. She eyed it curiously. "It's Maidlin's car. They didn't say they were coming to-day," and she put down her work and went to the top of the steps to greet the guests, calling to Joy in the house.

Jock Robertson lifted out a small suitcase, and Belinda Bellanne sprang from the car. "Now you can make your own explanations!" and Jock was in the car again and speeding down the drive before Joy could appear.

"Miss Belinda! Oh, Lindy, have you come to stay with us?" Littlejan cried. "Look, Lady Joy! Look who's come."

Lindy ran up the steps and dumped her case on the terrace. "I've come to ask for sanctuary. You can't refuse, you know."

Joy was asking eager questions. "You are always welcome, Belinda. But what has happened?"

"Just for a few days. Dr. Jock and Maidlin have to go away for those Hallé and other concerts in Manchester and Edinburgh—Maid's singing for him—there's nobody left at home but the children and Nurse Honesty. I had to come away. I want you to hide me. I've really come to the Abbey to be kept safe and protected."

"Sanctuary—that's true." Littlejan eyed her curiously. "We all come here to be kept safe and protected. But why, exactly, Miss Belinda?"

"There's a horrible man!" Lindy grew crimson. "Lady Joy, has Maid told you? He haunts me after every concert."

"The fat man with the red face?" Littlejan cried. "I saw him at the wedding and the Countess told me."

"Everybody knows," Lindy said bitterly, as Joy nodded agreement. "People grin and look at me as soon as he appears—and he always does. I wouldn't marry him if he had all the money in the world and was the only man left alive!"

"I hope not!" Littlejan broke out. "He looked a dreadful creature!"

"My dear, I'm glad you came to us," Joy said. "Maid had told me he was troubling you. And she and Jock have had to go and leave you? Yes, I see. You had to come away—and this was the right place for you to come."

Lindy looked at her with tragic eyes. "My sister is in the North, visiting friends. There's a temporary cook, and dear Honesty, and the babies. We all feel he may turn up and try to see

me. Everybody said I'd better go away, so that Honesty could say I wasn't there. And Maid said—'Go to the Abbey. They'll take care of you.' It seemed the right thing to do!"

"It was the right thing to do," Joy said briskly. "We'll rally round, and if Sir Konrad turns up we'll soon get rid of him for you."

"But I can't stay here. He'll come, and he'll make a fuss, and it isn't fair to you, in your house." Lindy spoke at breathless speed. "It's the first place he'll come to; everyone knows you are Maidlin's friends. And the next place is Kentisbury. I can't have him making scenes in all your houses. I'm going to hide, where he'll never think of looking for me. But I don't want to be quite alone. I've come to borrow Littlejan."

"Oh! I'll love to go with you." Marigold sparkled. "But where are we going? Where will you feel safe?"

"But do you think it's best?" Joy began.

"To Maid's little house near the sea. I've got the keys. He can't possibly know anything about it, and there's no reason he should pick out that one ordinary little bungalow from the whole of the South Coast. We'll be safe there, and we'll picnic, just for a few days. I'll be staying with Mrs. Fraser; what could be more proper or suitable?"

Littlejan gave a shout of laughter. "A real correct chaperone! Mrs. Fraser—how useful to be married! Oh, Lindy, how lovely of you! We'll keep house together and no one will ever suspect you are you or I'm me!"

"Maidlin and Dr. Jock will be back in a few days." Lindy looked at Joy. "Will you let her come?"

"I think she'll please herself! But why, Miss Belinda? You'd be safe enough here. There's no need to hide," Joy began.

"Oh, I think there is! If I'm nowhere about, you can tell him so," Lindy said earnestly. "If I were here, it wouldn't be easy to refuse to let him see me, but if I'm not in the house——"

"And what if, by chance, he finds you two girls in the bungalow?"

"It will be a miracle if he does."

"If he does, I shall deal with him! Mrs. Fraser will tell him sternly and firmly that he can't see Miss Bellanne!" Littlejan proclaimed triumphantly. "But Lindy's right, Lady Joy. He won't find us there. I'd love to repulse him, but I'm sure I shan't get the chance. I could be perfectly horrible, if I tried."

"I thought we'd beg Lady Jen for her little car," Lindy said eagerly. "I know Frost wouldn't give us away, but the fewer people who know the better. I've been driving Maid's car for years, you know. But she and Jock had to take it for their journey."

"There's no need to borrow from Jen. We have a new tiny run-about, for use when Ivor needs the big car," Joy said. "I can do without it for a few days. Jen and her crowd are in Yorkshire; you could have gone there, if you won't feel safe here."

"It was Maid's plan that I should go to Step Down. Will you really lend us the little car? I'm glad Lady Jen is away; he won't be able to go and annoy her."

"In fact, I'm the one to bear the brunt of your troubles!"

Lindy gave her a quick look. "Do you mind? I'm quite sure you can deal with anybody!"

"I'm sure I can! No, I don't mind. I'm prepared to tell Sir Konrad firmly that he can't see you, even if you are in the house, but perhaps it will be easier if I can say truthfully that you are not here. The bungalow is on the telephone, isn't it? Good, then give me the number. I'll let you know if we have any trouble."

"Could we go at once?"

“I’ll pack a tiny case,” Littlejan said, with dancing eyes, and she hurried away.

Joy’s look met Lindy’s. “Take care of her. Don’t let her do too much.”

“I’ll take care of her like a mother, even if she is the married person. Isn’t it a thrill, Lady Joy?”

“Which? You and Sir Konrad?”

“The horrible creature! No, Littlejan. I can’t believe it.”

“It’s true,” Joy smiled. “Don’t have any car accident or let anything else happen to her.”

“I’ll be more than careful,” Lindy promised.

“Is the house aired? You’ll see to that?”

“It’s all right. Dr. Jock and Maid go there often, or they send other people. I’ve stayed there a lot, and Honesty and my sister. It’s always ready, but we’ll put bottles in the beds just to be safe. It was the last thing Maidlin said—‘Bottles in beds, Belinda!’ We’ll be all right, Lady Joy.”

Littlejan appeared with a small suitcase and followed Lindy to the garage. They took possession of the little car, and then they were off, leaving Joy on the terrace, much amused and not quite convinced that it was necessary.

“Lindy and Littlejan.” Marigold chuckled. “What a joke! Look, Miss Belinda! That’s going to be our little house. Isn’t it wildly exciting to see it?”

“I’ve heard about it from Dr. Jock. He saw the plans, didn’t he?” Lindy slowed down, and the girls sat in the car and gazed at the framework of the little house. “What a peaceful spot! I shall come and stay with you, Mrs. Fraser.”

“Yes, please. I’ll be glad. But let’s go on. You don’t want to be anywhere about, if that dreadful man should turn up.”

“No. And I’m afraid he will. But Lady Joy has Sir Ivor, if he’s at home. Sir K., that’s what Maid calls him—is the sort to make a row but to clear out quickly if he sees another man. How he could ever think I’d put up with him for one moment!” and Lindy shook her head. “But he’s thinking of his pots of money. He can’t believe anyone wouldn’t be tempted.”

“Lady Joy can handle anybody; she won’t need Sir Ivor. I rather wish Sir K. would come after us. I’d like to have a go at him.” Littlejan said, with relish.

“I don’t wish it,” Lindy retorted, and set the car to the road for the South and Sussex and the sea.

CHAPTER 16

REPULSING SIR K.

“Littlejan gone away?” Elizabeth said, in blank dismay, when she was met by this news on the return from school. “Oh, but we want her! Where’s she gone?”

“She’s made up her mind in a dreadful hurry,” Margaret argued.

Jansy looked puzzled—“Why did she go, Aunt Joy?” They were standing on the terrace, where Joy had met them as usual.

“Somebody came and took her away, to be company for her, just for a few days. We lent them our little car and they’ve gone off in her. I can’t tell you who it was or where they’ve gone, Twinnies; I promised. It’s no use looking like that.”

“But why?” the twins asked together. “Why does it have to be a secret?”

“It’s very odd,” said Jansy.

“There’s a letter waiting for you, Jansy.”

Jansy ran to the house. “From Mother!” and she tore open the letter. She looked up presently. “Mother wants me for the week-end. The President has a big party to-morrow night, business friends of Mr. Everett’s; not our crowd at all; and she’d like me to be there; she seems to think I’d be some help. Cis isn’t very fond of talking to people. I’m not shy!”

“No, you aren’t shy!” Joy agreed. “You can certainly help the President to welcome her guests.”

“But it’s going to be very awkward, without Littlejan. Twins, it’s difficult, isn’t it? There’s Hamlet Club dancing at school to-morrow night, Aunt Joy.”

“Well, won’t Queen Phyl be there?”

“I’m afraid—I don’t know. There’s that very big recital in Oxford, with Morland, the pianist, playing. Phyl’s sure to have tickets and she’ll be crazy to go.” Jansy knit her brows and looked at the twins.

“Seems as if we’d have to run the party,” Elizabeth said jauntily.

“None of the others will do it, that’s certain,” Margaret agreed.

“Oh, nonsense! There must be somebody else. Or if necessary I could run down to school and do it for you,” Joy began.

“Here’s somebody coming,” said Elizabeth, at sight of a large car. “Bother! We want our tea.”

“Go in and start, then. I’ll come presently. It’s all ready.”

The twins vanished hungrily, but Jansy lingered.

“Who is it, Aunt Joy? It’s not any car that I know, but it’s a very big one.”

Joy was frowning, as she waited at the top of the steps. “I don’t know. It’s a stranger.”

There was no doubt about the short red-faced man who bounced—there was no other word for it—out of the car and ran up the steps. Joy awaited him calmly: Jansy stared in frank interest and disapproval.

“Lady Quellyn, I think? May I introduce myself? I am Sir Konrad Abrahams,—not an unknown name, I fancy.”

“I have heard of you,” Joy said frostily. “What can I do for you?”

“My goodness!” Jansy said inelegantly to herself. “I wouldn’t care to beard Aunt Joy in her den, when she looks like that! She doesn’t like this chap.”

"I've come to beg your help, Lady Quellyn. Is Miss Bellanne staying with you?"

"No," said Joy.

"Miss Belinda! Curiouser and curiouser!" Jansy thought.

His face fell. "I have been to Mrs. Robertson, but am told she is away from home. You are Miss Bellanne's friends; I hoped she had come to you."

"She isn't here. I'm afraid I can't help you."

He looked at her cold face. "Lady Quellyn, I am very anxious to see Miss Bellanne—I wish her only the best of everything. I could give her——"

"Things she probably does not want," Joy cut him short. "I can't help you. She is not here."

"Has she gone to other friends? At Kentisbury, perhaps?"

"You could go and ask them," Joy said, with a swift thought of how Rosamund and the Earl would deal with him. "I'm sorry, Sir Konrad, but Miss Bellanne is not here."

His disappointed eyes fell on Jansy.

"If you would introduce me to your daughter?"

"My daughter?" Joy was startled. She was used to hearing the word in the plural.

"He means me," Jansy said briefly.

Joy glanced at her, standing straight and grave and cold. She was so pretty, in her big school coat, with the thick red plait hanging over her shoulder. Suddenly Joy realised that Jansy was nearly seventeen.

She looked at the visitor again. "She's not my daughter. Yes, I know," as his startled eyes went from her to Jansy. "But she isn't my daughter and I haven't her parents' permission to introduce you to her."

"It might be well worth her while," he hinted.

"Jansy, go indoors at once!" Joy's carefully controlled temper blazed up. "At once, Janice!"

Utterly amazed, Jansy went obediently. Joy turned on Sir Konrad.

"You've had your answer, I have no more to say." And she left him and went into the house.

The car rolled away. Joy watched it go and then turned to Jansy, who stood looking at her gravely. "My dear, I am sorry I spoke to you like that, but I'd had as much as I could bear and I just boiled over. That horrible man! He's been running after Lindy Bellanne for weeks—Maidlin told me—haunting her after concerts and sending her flowers and sweets; he has any amount of money. She doesn't want anything to do with him, so she's run away. When he began looking at you, I just couldn't bear it. Apparently any girl will do, if she's young and fresh and attractive—and you are so very pretty! And nearly grown-up; we must take care of you. I'm glad you are going home for the week-end. I'll have a phone talk with your mother. You'll forgive me for the way I spoke?"

"That's all right, Auntie Joy. I didn't like him. It was beastly for you. Will Miss Belinda be quite safe?"

"He's taking advantage of Maidlin's absence at those concerts. Miss Belinda was here this morning."

"Here?" Jansy cried. "Then his guess was right! She's not here now, is she?"

"No, I told him so. She's taken Littlejan with her for company."

"Oh!" Jansy began to understand. "It's been horrid for you. I don't wonder you boiled over! Will they be all right?"

"I'm sure they will. He won't find them. Littlejan is to be a chaperone for Lindy." Joy laughed. "Mrs. Fraser, you know."

Jansy's eyes danced. "What fun! How very right and proper! Where have they gone?"

"I've promised not to tell anybody. You don't mind, do you?"

Jansy looked thoughtful. "No, it's better not. I'll be able to say I don't know, if anybody should ask me. Not Kentisbury, I suppose? He'll go there next! But I won't ask questions. Will he come here again?"

"I don't see why he should. And Jen is away, so he won't get any help there. I hope it's a full stop for Sir K., as Maidlin calls him."

"Sir K!" Jansy grinned. "I loved the way you spoke to him. If I should meet him anywhere I shall try to be just like you."

"You're not likely to meet him?"

"Oh, I don't know. The President's reception is for business friends of Mr. Everett's; anybody might turn up. Don't worry, Aunty Joy! I could be quite as chilly as you were."

"I hope it won't be necessary." Joy looked disturbed. "We'll send you home to-morrow afternoon."

"Mother says the car will fetch me from school. I shall have to go home to dress for the reception. Aunty Joy, don't go to help that party!" Jansy spoke earnestly.

Joy raised her brows. "But if you and Littlejan can't be there, and if you can't depend on Phyl, wouldn't I be useful?"

"Tremendously! But they'll get along without you. Aunty Joy, I want the twins to run that party."

Joy's brows rose still higher. "Our twins? Do you really think they could do it?"

"Elizabeth could do it jolly well and Margaret could play. We can't be sure of Miss Lane; since her big operation she has bad turns and she never knows when they'll happen. I've heard her say that with Margaret Marchwood on the spot she isn't really needed. If she felt bad she might not come."

"I see," Joy said, greatly intrigued. "You want our twins to come to the rescue of the Club?"

"That's it exactly. I know they can do it. It would be very good for them, *and* for the Club."

Joy looked at her thoughtfully. "Are you thinking of May-Day?"

"They think a lot more of Margaret since that fuss about the orchestra. They always liked Elizabeth, but they didn't feel Margaret was quite ready to be queen. I heard them talking when they were choosing Phyl. Now they feel better about Margaret. If the twins could lead the Club, it might be very good for everybody."

"How right you are! Very well—I won't butt in, unless they really beg me to do it and seem unhappy about the party."

CHAPTER 17

THE REFUGEES

“It’s still called Step Down,” Lindy explained, as the car sped towards the little South Coast town. “But you don’t have to do it now. There used to be such a long step down from the gate. But Dr. Jock had the opening enlarged and the path made into a sort of drive, so that he could run the car in and it can stand there for a night or two, with a big cover pulled over it. It’s so close to the house that nobody could steal it without waking everyone. So there’s no step down left. But Maidlin thought it would muddle people if she changed the name.”

“I’ve heard about it, of course, but I haven’t seen it.”

“Our hidie-hole, Mrs. Fraser!” Lindy proclaimed, drawing up at the gate. “I’ll take her in and bring in the cases. You hop out—there’s the key.”

The low grey bungalow had only a tiny front garden which was now chiefly given up to the sweep of gravel runway.

“It only meant losing two or three bushes and a bit of lawn,” Lindy explained. “The nearest garage is round the corner. For a night or two this is much quicker.”

Littlejan retreated to the shelter of the tiny porch and watched as she skilfully brought the car in. Then she turned to unlock the glass door and the second glass door which closed the six-foot entrance hall.

Lindy was at her side in a moment. “There! That’s our little house, the whole of it.”

The passage at right angles to the entrance had three doors leading to two bedrooms and a sitting-room, all looking into a tiny garden; the kitchen and bathroom faced the other way, and one more tiny room also looked out on the car and the runway. All were cream-coloured, with brown doors; the sitting-room had red brick steps leading to the garden.

“Pretty!” Littlejan commented. “What do we do first?”

They had lunched at a tea-room on their way across Sussex. Lindy promptly took command. “Tea, and bottles in beds; they’re made up and all ready. Then we go through our stores and go out to fetch bread and milk and whatever else we need. We’d better have tea after we’ve shopped, unless you’d like tinned milk.”

“You ought to keep out of sight. You’re in hiding. I ought to shop,” Littlejan objected.

“Sir K. won’t turn up here; why should he? I wonder if he’s worrying Lady Joy by now! I was sorry to let her in for that, but where else could I go?”

“That’s what he’ll say. I expect he’d go straight to the Hall. Lady Joy will deal with him.” Littlejan was wandering round, looking at everything. “We’ll both go to the shops. Let’s do it now; then we can settle down.”

“We’ll see what we need. Eggs and bread and milk, to start with. One thing I’m determined about,” and Lindy sounded very decided, “We aren’t going to use the loft. It means a ladder and you aren’t going up ladders—not if I know it!”

Littlejan laughed, but admitted to no craving for ladders. “We’ll tune in to Manchester tonight and listen to the concert. You and Maidlin were glorious in *Elijah*.”

“We had a lovely time. It’s been the dream of my life. I’m so very glad it’s happened. This is your room; here’s your case.”

“Why should I have the best room? It’s definitely bigger than the other.”

“Mrs. Fraser!” Lindy mocked. “Of course you must have the bigger room.”

Littlejan grinned. "It's only for a night or two, isn't it?"

"Just till Maidlin comes back. She'll ring up."

They sat together over a little gas fire that night and listened as Maidlin's voice filled the house.

"She's lovely. I feel like a very happy refugee," and Littlejan looked round in great content. "I'm so glad you came for me. I like this little place. I've never forgotten how you comforted me that first night at the Hall, when Mother had gone off to Scotland and I was so lonely."

"You're being useful to me now," Lindy said. "I'd have been lonely if I'd had to run away alone."

"I hope nobody will come to interrupt our peacefulness."

"I don't see why anybody should. No one knows we're here but Lady Joy and Honesty, and they won't tell a soul."

"Let me do some cooking," Littlejan begged, as they washed dishes together next morning. "I'd love to practise! And then I'm going to take out a deck chair and be lazy on that jolly concrete walk under my bedroom window, in the sun. It's as warm as July; not like October at all. Oh, I do hope we don't have any bogey-man! But I'm ready for him if he does come," she added vigorously.

The front door bell rang. Startled, the girls looked at one another. Lindy, in one leap, was in the front bedroom, peering out at the car.

She ran back to the kitchen. "It's a man. I could only see the back of his shoulder. Oh, Marigold, do you suppose——?"

"It's probably a greengrocer, but I'll deal with him, whoever he is. You keep out of sight." Littlejan's chin was up and her manner was decidedly aggressive. "I'll take care of you!"

"At least I do know Sir K. by sight," she said, and went valiantly to answer the door, while Lindy listened from the kitchen.

The chaperone flung open the door, looking belligerent. A young man stood there; no Sir K. He was tall and fair and good-looking, and definitely apologetic.

"I was told to ask for Mrs. Fraser." He looked doubtfully at the youthful person in the big cooking apron who confronted him.

"I am Mrs. Fraser. Who told you to ask for me?" There was immense dignity in the chaperone's tone.

"Not really?" His eyes filled with amusement. "My aunt told me to ask for Mrs. Fraser, and to say I come with her full permission. She said I'd find you here. Are you really Mrs. Fraser?"

"Your aunt? But who told her? Nobody knows!"

Lindy, reassured, had crept to the end of the tiny passage. Whoever it was, it was not Sir K. But how could his aunt have known?

With a solemn face he delivered his bombshell. "Mrs. Robertson is my aunt—Maidlin, you know. She married my uncle, Dr. Jock Robertson."

"It's Donald!" Lindy was behind Littlejan, her face alight with amusement and—yes, pleasure.

Littlejan stood aside. "I don't understand this, but perhaps a chaperone's going to be needed, after all! Who is he, Belinda? Introduce me!"

Lindy's eyes were dancing. "Donald Robertson, home from South Africa—Mrs. Lennox Fraser. He came to the Hall with Dr. Jock years ago, just before you came—six years, it must

be.”

“Six and a half,” Donald said promptly. “You were the body on the stretcher, and then we took the twins exploring the country and I spoiled your lesson times.”

“You ruined my school for the twins,” Lindy said severely. “But we loved the runs in the car. Won’t you come in?”

Littlejan awoke to her duties. “I was so enthralled by this ancient history. Do please come in, Mr. Robertson! Didn’t Lindy know you had come back to this country?”

“I certainly didn’t! When did you come, Donald? Did Maidlin know?”

“Maidlin did not. I gave her the shock of her life—one of them—when I walked into her hotel two nights ago and called her aunty and asked if I might go to see you.”

“To see me? But why? It was Maidlin——” she paused.

“It was Maidlin, in those days,” he said honestly. “I was just a scrap frightened of her, so I didn’t tell her I was coming. But the first evening I landed I saw that she was singing, so I went to the Albert Hall.”

“For *Elijah*?” Littlejan asked. “Come this way! Now help Lindy to carry out chairs. I’ll make coffee; I’m the cook. We all went to hear *Elijah*. Wasn’t it wonderful?”

Donald helped to set up deck chairs in the sunshine on the concrete path. “Marvellous!” he said sincerely. “I went to hear Maidlin, and there was the nursery governess singing the soprano parts. Miss Belinda, I shall never forget it. Those solos did something to me. I came away knowing I must meet you again. I had several people to see and other things that had to be done, but as soon as I could I rushed off to find Maidlin and my uncle, but they had gone to Manchester. You were not there and nobody would tell me where you had gone.”

Lindy’s eyes sparkled. “I suppose you saw Nurse Honesty. I bet she wouldn’t tell you! She’d had urgent orders. You see, there’s another man.”

“Maidlin told me. I raced up to Manchester and found them in their hotel after the concert. They told me about Sir K. I hope he’ll turn up, so that I can settle him for you! Maidlin said I should find you here and that I might say I came with her full consent and sympathy.”

“I don’t know that I quite like that!” But Lindy’s eyes were full of amusement. “Did you really call Maidlin Aunty?”

“I did. Why not? She is my aunt by marriage. But she told me to drop it, and to come to find you.”

His eyes held meaning and intention, for Maidlin had said—“Go and play with Miss Belinda! She’ll fit you far better than I should have done. I’ve always thought so.”

Belinda ignored him and went to the bedroom window, in answer to a hail from the cook, to take cups and plates and lay them on a small folding table.

“Is she really ‘Mrs.’?” Donald asked, in much amusement. “She only looks like a schoolgirl.”

“She went back to school for a month or two, but she decided to give it up, as she had other things to do,” Lindy said demurely. “I know it seems absurd, but she really is married, so she came to take care of me.”

“In case any bogey-man turned up! I hope I don’t count as a bogey.”

“That depends on how you behave,” Lindy told him. “We can’t have our hidie-hole invaded by difficult people. We were enjoying being refugees.”

“You might enjoy being discovered even more, if it was by me,” he suggested. “I see you have a little car. I’m going to get one, of course, but I haven’t had time yet. We might go out for jaunts, as we did before.”

“The car belongs to Lady Quellyn. I shall have to consult Mrs. Fraser,” Lindy said primly, and went to meet Littlejan and the coffee-pot.

“Better not go out in the car with him,” Littlejan advised, as they sat over their coffee in the sunshine. “You might run into Sir K. You’re supposed to be hiding, Miss Bellanne.”

Donald looked amused. “I’d like to run into Sir K.! If he saw me I bet you he’d vanish. He wouldn’t be pleased to see Miss Belinda had a determined escort. When do Maidlin and Uncle Jock come home?”

“Not till Tuesday night. I’ve orders to keep out of sight till then.”

“That gives us three days to play about in,” Donald said happily; and the girls looked at him and then at one another.

CHAPTER 18

AN APPEAL TO THE TWINS

"I say, Jansy! You'll be a perfect angel and do the party for me to-morrow night, won't you?" Queen Phyllida came into the Sixth Form room early on Friday morning.

"I'm afraid I can't, Phyl. I have to go home for the week-end. I only heard last night."

Phyl stared at her blankly. "Oh, but—but you mustn't! We need you terribly badly."

"I'm needed more at home," Jansy said. "Mother's sending for me after school to-day."

"Then we must have Littlejan Fraser! I shall ring her up. She'll come, won't she? She isn't ill or anything?" Phyl's tone was frantic with anxiety.

"No, but she's away. She went off with a friend for a few days, while I was at school yesterday."

"We must have one of you." Phyl's distress deepened. "Has she gone far? Couldn't she come back, just for the night?"

"I haven't the slightest idea where she's gone."

"Oh, rot! It's an excuse! Lady Joy must know."

"She didn't tell me." Jansy stiffened at the word 'excuse.' "I'm telling you the truth. I'm certain you can't have Marigold this week-end."

"But what's the Club to do?" Phyl wailed. "I simply must go to hear Maurice Morland. It's the event of the season. He's superb; I couldn't possibly miss him."

"You'd better tell the Club. They won't like it if you put off the party," Jansy said. "Somebody might have an idea!"

"But there isn't anybody else, unless we ask one of the old queens to come to M.C.! Would your mother——?"

"She couldn't, nor Lady Joy, not to-morrow," said Jansy, intent on her plans for the twins but determined not to suggest it. She knew very well that the idea must come from the girls, if the twins were to consider it for a moment. She could hear Elizabeth's instant reply, if the proposal came from herself or their mother—"Not unless they want us! We aren't going to be shoved at the Club by anybody."

"But what can we do? Oh, Jan, be a sport and think of something! I couldn't possibly miss Morland. I've longed for it for weeks."

"Then why did you arrange the party for the same night?" Jansy asked, very naturally.

"I didn't; I wouldn't have done it. It was the Head, she particularly asked me to have a party to-morrow night. I thought it didn't matter, as either you or Marigold would be able to do the party. I simply can't miss Morland, Jansy."

"Then if you can't, there's only one thing to do. Call a meeting of the Club, after school to-day, and tell them you can't be at the party."

Phyl stared at her, not liking the idea at all. "I'd hate to do that. They'll loathe me, and they'll start saying I'm a slacker again."

"You are, rather, aren't you?" Jansy said innocently.

"I shall stay away from the party and not say anything to anybody."

Jansy grew scarlet with indignation. "And let down the Club? You couldn't, Phyl."

"I could, rather than miss Morland," Phyl muttered.

“What about Monday? How will you feel? You’ll have to show up then. It will be much easier if you’ve had it out with the Club.”

Phyl could well believe that. “Then we’ll have to have a meeting. If only Tessa would do it for once!”

“You could ask her. But I’m quite sure she won’t. She’ll say it’s your job. You know how she feels.”

“She said she wouldn’t do it if you or Littlejan were there. But if neither of you——”

“You can try,” Jansy said, but her tone was not encouraging. “But you’ll have to decide about the meeting.”

Very reluctantly Phyl sent round her notices and knew it had been the right move before the time came, for, ringing up Tessa in the dinner-hour, she found her in bed with a bad cold and quite unable to come out at night.

Tight-lipped and determined, Phyl faced the Club in the library after school.

“Girls, we’re in an awful mess. I want some of you to help. To-morrow night there’s the big recital in Oxford, when Maurice Morland is playing; you’ll have seen the bills in the town. He’s one of our leading pianists and I simply must go to hear him; I’ve been looking forward to it for weeks. It’s the chance of a lifetime to have him come as near as Oxford. You don’t know what it means to me. But there’s the party! I was counting on Littlejan Fraser or Jansy Raymond running it for us, but Jansy has just told me that she has to go home for the weekend and that Marigold is away for a few days. Tessa’s in bed with a very bad cold. Oh, girls, don’t you see? What are we going to do?”

They did see and they looked back at her glumly. No use, they all knew, to expect her to put the Club before the concert; many of them realised something of her disappointment and knew they could not ask it of her.

“Our fault, for asking a music lunatic to be queen,” somebody muttered. “We might have known.”

Daphne, the head girl, asked Jansy’s question.

“Why did the party have to be to-morrow? Could we put it off?”

“The Head asked me to have dancing to-morrow. She didn’t give any reason, but she definitely chose the date. I expect she wants to bring somebody to look on, as she sometimes does. We can’t change it now. Hasn’t anybody any ideas?” and Phyl flung herself into a big chair and gazed despairingly at the Club.

“Could you do it, Daphne?” Jansy asked.

“I? Not for a second,” Daphne cried appalled.

“Will anybody else take on the job? Won’t somebody help? It isn’t so difficult,” Jansy persisted.

“I want to dance and enjoy myself,” said Wendy, another Sixth-former. “You don’t get any decent dancing if you’re stuck up on a chair calling out orders.”

“Couldn’t you go home after the party, Lob?” Daphne turned to Jansy. “It won’t be so very late. If the car fetched you——”

“No, I’m sorry, but I’m needed that afternoon and evening. I have to do a job for the President.” Jansy flushed a little, but spoke resolutely.

“For the President! No, you can’t get out of that!” the Club acknowledged, and looked at her with new respect.

“There doesn’t seem to be anybody,” Daphne began.

Then suddenly she whirled round. "Elizabeth Marchwood, you could do it, and Margaret could help to play! Girls, the twins must run the party!"

There was a shout of relief from the Club. "They know all the dances and all about parties. *And the tunes.*"

"Daphne, what a good idea," Phyl cried, her face lighting up. "Of *course* they could do it."

"We couldn't." Elizabeth made herself heard, proving that if she had her mother's soft pretty voice she could still use it to good effect. "Oh, I say! Don't be idiots, all you lot! Heaps of you are older than us."

"Than we are," corrected the head girl. "But we haven't been to a quarter as many parties as you have. You could do it jolly well. Isn't that right, Jansy?"

"I'm sure they could do it," Jansy said.

"Jansy, don't be soft," Elizabeth cried.

"It would be rather fun." Margaret's eyes were dancing.

"It would be heaps of fun; you'd love it. You'd have to give up your own dancing, most of it, but you'd do that for the sake of the Club. Margaret always has to do it when she plays."

"You don't really think we'd be good enough?" Elizabeth asked doubtfully. "It seems such a—such a grown-up thing to do, as if we were Mother or Auntie Jen."

In her heart Jansy acknowledged this; it would be a definite step in responsibility for the twins, who had expected to have everything done for them hitherto. "Come and speak to me!" she commanded.

The twins came to where she sat beside Phyl whose face was full of hope and relief.

"Buck up, Twins! You'll do it beautifully," said the Queen, but the girls turned from her to look at Jansy.

"It isn't hard," Jansy said gently. "And you're fifteen and a half. I was only thirteen when I took a class—do you remember? They were mostly juniors, I know, but Tessa and Phyl were in the class. And it was real teaching; they didn't know a thing about the dances. This would be much easier. You'd choose the dances you like best and those Margaret likes to play, and you'd only have to remind the girls of the movements, not to teach. Of course you can do it, Twins! I believe Margaret wants to do it."

"I'd like 'Lizabeth to try," Margaret admitted. "She'd do it all right. I'll play anything she wants. And the Club is in a mess," she added.

Jansy looked at her with approval; she had not expected that side of the matter to be so obvious to Margaret.

"I see that, of course," Elizabeth agreed. "Could we talk to Mother before we say we'll do it?"

"Oh, don't talk to anybody! We'll do it on our own!" Margaret decided, and again Jansy looked at her well-pleased.

Elizabeth squared her shoulders and turned and looked at the Club. "Do you really want us to try?"

The harassed Club had been waiting anxiously. None of them was prepared to rise to the occasion.

"Rather! Of course we do! Get us out of this mess, Elizabeth, and we'll love you for ever."

Phyl winced, realising that she was losing caste with the Club. But she thought of Morland and hardened her heart.

"All right! We'll have a shot at it," Elizabeth said valiantly. "But I shall make Peggy-Twin help; I'm not going to do it all."

“I’ll stand up and shriek,” Margaret grinned.

“You always were good at that!” Jansy said. “You’ll have a jolly party. I wish I could be there.”

“If you were there, you’d be doing the work,” the twins told her.

The girls were cheering in delight. Phyl looked greatly relieved. She would have her concert and the Club would soon forget.

“You’re sports, you two,” Daphne said warmly.

“We’ll all be very good,” Diana promised.

“I was afraid we’d have to give up the party,” said Wendy. “What a relief! Thank you, Twins!”

“It will be Twins’ Party,” said Jansy.

“I shall bring my ’cello and play for some of the dances,” Elizabeth proclaimed. “Margaret can do the calling-out. The music doesn’t have to be the fiddle; the dances sound lovely on the ’cello.”

“A bit growly, but quite good,” Margaret grinned.

“Not so squeaky as you, anyway,” Elizabeth retorted.

“A very good idea,” Jansy exclaimed. “I’ve heard Elizabeth play dances and they sound super. You can take both things in turns, Twins.”

“You are useful, you two,” Daphne said, warm approval in her voice.

CHAPTER 19

“TWINS’ PARTY”

Joy met the twins on the terrace as usual. “Girls, I’m sorry, but Miss Lane rang me up to ask if Margaret would play to-morrow night. She isn’t at all well and she doesn’t feel she can manage the evening. It spoils the party for you, I’m afraid, Margaret, but it will help the Club enormously. They’d be in a regular hole without you.”

The twins looked at one another. “You haven’t heard what’s happened,” Elizabeth said grimly. “The Club’s in a hole all right.”

“We’re going to run the party,” Margaret proclaimed. “You think we can do it, don’t you, Mother?”

“Have they really asked you?” Joy raised her brows.

“Oh, rather! Votes of thanks and congrats and heaps of nonsense, as we haven’t done the job yet. But there’s no one else, and they seem to think we’ll do.”

“You’ll do it beautifully. I wish I could be there to watch.”

“Jansy said that. But we told her she’d be up on the platform doing the work.”

“Mother, wouldn’t Twin’s ’cello do for some of the dances? Then I could do part of the calling-out,” Margaret urged.

“The ’cello will do beautifully. You can take turns, and the Club will love you for ever,” Joy said.

Margaret gave a startled look. As they went in to tea, Elizabeth murmured, “The Club could do something else, that we’d like better still.”

“We don’t want them to love us; at least, I suppose we do,” Margaret considered the matter.

“That comes first. But what we really want is the other thing,” Elizabeth explained.

Joy watched for any signs of anxiety, but the twins were looking forward to their party and obviously were not at all nervous. They chose their programme, each selecting the dances she could play or direct most happily, and spent a little while practising, and Joy laughed as the strains of ‘The Boatman’ and ‘Althea’ and ‘The Old Mole’ came to her, but the privilege of looking on fell to the headmistress.

Miss Raven had asked for dancing on this particular night as she had visitors to whom she wanted to show the Hamlet Club. She was interested in the Club, which had given real help to her and to the school, and she enjoyed watching their dancing and was proud of it.

“We shall not have the reigning Queen to-night,” she told her guests during tea. “She is a pianist and an enthusiast and is inclined to neglect everything for music. Maurice Morland is playing in Oxford to-night and I am sure Phyllida will feel she must be there. But the Club has several good substitutes and they will have made arrangements. The Hamlet Club is always efficient in its plans!” and she told something of the earlier history of the Club.

So she was quite unprepared for what she saw when she pushed open the door of the big hall and stood aside for her visitors to enter.

“A solo ’cello! What unusual music! But charming; and I am sure it is delightful for dancing,” said one lady, as Elizabeth swept the dancers into ‘The Boatman’.

Beside the big desk stood another red-haired girl, wearing a brilliant green dancing frock, calling clear directions. “Heys!—second couple a whole turn. Heys, again! Now siding!”

“But this is most surprising,” Miss Raven exclaimed. “Where are all our former queens?”

“Rings!” called Margaret. “Second couple half turn, change places. Now arming.”

“Surely they are twins?” the visitor looked again at the ’cellist. “They are very much alike.”

“Lady Quellyn’s girls, her first family. They are Elizabeth and Margaret Marchwood. How is this, Elizabeth?”—as the dance came to an end and the crowd broke into delighted applause. “They like your ’cello, and so do I. It leads the dancing beautifully.”

“The rhythm is so good,” said one of the strangers.

“Elizabeth has been dancing for years. But where is Jansy? Or Joan Fraser? You make an excellent M.C., Margaret.”

Margaret came forward with a touch of shyness. “They seem to like it all right. It’s rather fun, Miss Raven.”

“Jansy’s mother wanted her, so she’s had to go home,” Elizabeth explained. “And Littlejan is away for the week-end. So they seemed to think we would do.”

“You evidently do very well. They want you to go on.”

“Couldn’t we see some more?” asked her guest.

“Yes, we are interrupting the party. What happens now?”

“Margaret’s going to play. I’ll have to go up on the platform. It’s ‘The Geud Man of Ballangigh’,” Elizabeth explained, as Margaret tuned her fiddle.

“You take turns?” one of the strangers asked.

“This is the best place for you to sit. Yes, it’s rather sport; we keep changing places and hopping up and down.”

“Most useful people!” said Miss Raven. “The music is perfect, of course.”

The head girl, Daphne, came up to greet the guests. “How nice of you to come, Miss Raven!”

“It is nice of you to admit us. It seems to be a jolly party.”

“It’s going very well. Do you like our new M.C.?”

“I like them both, and the music.”

“We’re wondering if we should have them for queens, next May.” Daphne spoke impulsively. “But it’s too early to say anything about it. We’ll wait till after Christmas.”

“I won’t give them any hint. It would be a very good plan.”

“You don’t think it would matter having two, Miss Raven? We’ve never done it before.”

“Not these two. They would work together well. I think you should ask them; I’d like to see a ceremony with two queens! What are they going to do now?”

“Margaret’s going to play ‘Nancy’s Fancy’ and Elizabeth will dance. We all know it.” Daphne held out her hand. “Have it with me, Elizabeth!”

“Margaret had to play this, because of the church bells. They wouldn’t suit Old Growly.” Elizabeth called directions for the dance, then took her place with Daphne at the head of the line. “Next time I shall play ‘Old Mole’, and Twin must have a turn. And then we’re going to play ‘Steam Boat’ together and let the Club take care of itself.”

“You help us too much, you know,” Daphne said, as she led her down the middle. “You’ll make strangers think we don’t know the dances.”

“Are we overdoing it?” Elizabeth gave her a startled look. “Sorry! It’s our first time and we don’t quite know all about the job yet.”

“It won’t be your last time!” Daphne assured her. “You’re too kind, that’s all. Let the girls rely on themselves; make them think!”

Elizabeth laughed. "I'll tell Twin. Isn't she playing this nicely?"

"Beautifully. But you don't get much dancing. It's rather too bad."

"Oh well! We don't mind. It's fun, being boss of the show."

"What is the joke about this dance?" one of the strangers asked, as Margaret changed to a new tune and the room broke into laughter.

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Miss Raven. "It seems to amuse everybody."

Daphne heard and turned to explain. "It's 'The Twin Sisters.' We knew they were sure to give us that."

"How very appropriate!" the guests laughed also.

With the kindness natural to her, at that moment the President was turning to Jansy. "Nobody else will come now. You have been the greatest help, dear. Wouldn't you like the car to run down to school? You'd see how the party is going; you'd be in time for the last half-hour."

Jansy's face lit up. "I'd love it! Will you really spare the car, just for me?"

"It won't be wanted again to-night. Run and fetch your coat."

"Are you sure you can spare me? If there's anything more I can do——?"

"There isn't anything. You'll be able to report to me; I'd like to know how the party is going."

Overjoyed, Jansy hurried off, and presently was pushing her way into the school hall.

"Another red-haired girl!" said one of the strangers. "Surely an elder sister of our twins?"

"It's Janice Raymond," said the Head. "She was the Queen a few years ago, when she was fourteen, the Lobelia Queen, with a train of beautiful deepest blue. She's a cousin of the twins; they call it 'sort of cousin.' Their mothers are cousins and are very much alike."

"How nice of you to come, Miss Raven! Is it a good party?" Jansy came to greet the guests.

"An excellent party. Your deputies are doing well and giving great satisfaction."

"I was needed to help at an afternoon reception, but it was finished, so I slipped away and came to have a look at the Club," Jansy explained.

"Jansy, dance with me! Lob, have the next with me!" There was a shout, as her presence was discovered.

The twins, playing together in harmony, waved their bows at her and broke into 'Newcastle.' Jansy gave her hand to Daphne, and they ran together into a ring.

"Another beautiful dancer!" exclaimed one of the watching ladies.

"All that family dance well," Miss Raven assented.

"Twins, how lovely your music is!" and Jansy whirled up to the platform when the dance had been repeated twice. "I like the 'cello, Elizabeth! You two are the heroines of the hour; Daphne has been telling me. Thank you most awfully from us all!"

"What a posh frock!" Margaret grinned at her.

"I had to dress up for the President, and as this was a party I didn't wait to change," Jansy explained.

"Was the reception fun?" Elizabeth asked.

"No, very boring. A lot of silly people and some of them rather horrid. Business friends of Mr. Everett's. I didn't enjoy it, but the President said I'd helped her."

"Was Dickon there?" Margaret demanded.

"Of course not. I saw Cis and Ted, but Dickon was at school."

“I thought perhaps he’d come home for the week-end, to see you. He’s your pal, isn’t he?”
“Don’t be cheeky, young Margaret! Play us another dance and don’t waste our time!”

CHAPTER 20

A DETERMINED YOUNG MAN

Jansy, talking courteously to the President's guests, had found herself face to face with Sir Konrad Abrahams. She stiffened and drew away, as his eyes lit up in surprise and delight at sight of her.

"Miss—? I have not heard your name? Is it Miss Quellyn?"

She looked at him coldly. "No, it is not."

He studied her grim expression. "Perhaps you could help me in my quest for Miss Bellanne. Believe me, I mean nothing but good to her. I admire both her and her singing enormously."

"I can't help you. I don't know where she is—and if I could, I wouldn't," Jansy said, beginning to seethe inwardly.

"But Lady Quellyn obviously knew something. She would tell you——"

"She didn't tell me anything. I think she doesn't know herself."

"Well then, Miss Everett——"

"I am not Miss Everett. I am only here for to-day, to give a little help."

"Very valuable help, I am sure," he said smoothly. "Mrs. Everett must be——"

"Janice, I want you." The President had seen and, warned by Joy, had come to the rescue.

Jansy went to her in relief. "Thank you for saving my life! I'd have lost my temper and made a scene in another minute. Don't tell him my name! He's called me both Quellyn and Everett. As he can't find out anything about Miss Belinda he's trying to scrape an acquaintance with me. And I will not have it!"

Just so had she shouted from the platform at the Hamlet Club. "*I will not have those crossings skipped!*"

The President laughed. "I'm sorry he was here. Slip away for a few minutes. I'll get rid of him for you!"

As Jansy disappeared, Cicely crossed the room to Sir K. "Sir Konrad, nobody here knows anything about Miss Bellanne. But if we did know where she is, we could not tell you without her permission. She is not interested in you, and she does not want your attentions. If you continue to persecute her you will drive her off the concert platform and that will be a big loss to everybody. Perhaps you could turn your interest in some new direction. But I advise you not to let it fall on my young friend who is with me to-day. Her father would have something to say if you began to tease her. Do not come here to look for her; she is going home to-morrow, and I will not let you see her again to-day. I will bid you good afternoon." She left him to take the plain hint, and he presently left the house, looking downcast and indignant, but not before he had found out Jansy's name.

The first guest he questioned was able to tell him. "She's little Miss Raymond; a very great friend of the Everetts. She lives down in Sussex, in the country."

This was something, but was no help in his real quest. But, though disappointed, he was not yet routed in his search for news of Lindy. One more step was obvious, and he called at Kentisbury Castle on Sunday afternoon.

Rosamund, prepared by Maidlin and warned by Joy, decided to see him, if only to tease him.

“I know why you have come, Sir Konrad, but I cannot help you. I have no idea where Miss Bellanne is to be found.”

His face fell. “I hoped for much from you, Lady Kentisbury. No one will tell me where to look for her. I only mean everything that is good and kind to Miss Bellanne.”

“I believe she has gone to stay with Mrs. Fraser.” Rosamund’s eyes filled with mischief. “But of where Mrs. Fraser is, I know nothing.”

He looked very downcast. “It does not help me. Is Mrs. Fraser an old friend? Have you no idea where she lives?”

“I think they have gone into the country. Sir Konrad, your quest seems hopeless, unless Miss Bellanne wants to be found, and I gather that is not the case.”

“No one will give me the chance to convince her that I can give her anything she wishes to have.”

“I’m afraid I cannot help you. I honestly do not know where she has hidden herself.”

“I feel sure Lady Quellyn knows.”

“If she does she has not told me. Go and ask Mrs. Robertson, when she returns from the north.”

“She will tell me nothing,” and he went away, deeply disappointed and dejected.

But what Lindy had not reckoned on was a sudden craving on the part of Mrs. Fraser for a sight of the sea; Littlejan withdrew her refusal to agree to joy-rides in the car and on Sunday afternoon consented to a jaunt to the sea front, only two miles distant from the bungalow. And one road from Kentisbury back to London lay through the little south coast towns.

“It won’t take an hour, to run down and along the sea front and home again. And I want so much to see the sea and the Sunday crowds,” said Littlejan.

Sir Konrad, driving along the wide promenade, suddenly called to his chauffeur. “That small grey car we have just passed—follow it quickly. Don’t lose sight of it, but keep out of sight yourself as much as possible.”

For as the little grey car met and passed them, he had seen a head of yellow curls beside the driver, and he knew that head. Littlejan later mourned that she had not made Lindy wear a scarf over her hair.

“One can’t think of everything!” she said regretfully.

As the cars passed, Lindy turned to call back to Littlejan sitting alone behind. “Did you see that huge purple car?”

“What about it?”

“It was Sir K.’s car. Do you think——”

Littlejan sprang up to look through the back window. “It’s turned. He’s going to follow us.”

“He’s far faster than we are,” Donald said calmly. “Shall we lead him a dance through the country? Or shall we go home and have it out with him?”

“Go home,” Lindy decided. “Better get it over. I don’t want anything to do with him.”

“You won’t need to see him. I am here, and he hasn’t reckoned on that. I shall deal with Sir K.,” Donald said firmly. “May I tell him——?”

“Oh no, you won’t!” Littlejan retorted. “You’ll keep out of sight till you’re needed. It’s my right to repulse Sir K. I’ve said I wanted to do it all along, haven’t I, Belinda?”

“You have,” Lindy assented. “I don’t see what he can do, if you’re firm. He can’t knock you down and trample on you; besides, you mustn’t allow it. We’ll keep Donald in the background. You can yell for him, if Sir K. gets troublesome.”

“Why give him the chance?” Donald grumbled. “I want to fling him out. He has no right to come pestering you.”

“I suppose he saw you as the cars met. He’s been to Kentisbury; he’s on his way home,” Littlejan said. “He isn’t catching up, but he is certainly following us.”

“We’ll have it out with him and put a stop to all this,” Donald was boiling over with indignation.

“Yes, but I’ve been longing for the chance to—to repulse him,” Mrs. Fraser pleaded.

The car drew up outside Step Down; Sir K.’s car had not yet turned into St. Michael’s Avenue. Donald drove to the door and bade the girls hop out.

“One point, Miss Belinda! I shall have to see him. He won’t listen to such a very youthful chaperone. May I tell him we’re engaged? That would settle him for you!”

Belinda, crimson, ran indoors. “Not yet. I haven’t said so. You are in a hurry!”

“But we are, aren’t we? I hoped we were!”

“I don’t know. Don’t say it yet. Perhaps and perhaps not.”

“Don’t tease her, Mr. Robertson. It’s too soon for that. *I* am going to make scones for tea and really look like Mrs. Fraser!” and Littlejan flung coat and cap on her bed, pulled on her big cooking pinafore, and retired to the kitchen. “Go up into the loft, you two! You don’t mind ladders! If he tries to follow you, you can always unhook the ladders and fling him off.”

“How bloodthirsty, Mrs. Fraser!”—but Donald had no objection to retiring with Belinda to the privacy of the loft. He let down the ladder, and running up gave her his hand just as a heavy knock came on the door.

Littlejan, very full of dignity, went to the door, but waited for her guest to speak.

“I was told to ask for Mrs. Fraser,” he began, looking at her doubtfully.

“I wonder who told you that? I am Mrs. Fraser. What can I do for you?”

“Lady Kentisbury gave me your name. But surely she was mistaken? She said Miss Bellanne was staying with Mrs. Fraser.”

Littlejan’s dignity increased. “I am Mrs. Fraser. Why should you doubt it?”

His doubt was obvious, but he only said, “I have come to see Miss Bellanne. Is she staying with you here?”

Littlejan eyed him coldly. “She does not wish to see anyone. Perhaps when her real guardians return from Manchester——”

“They will not let me see her,” he broke out.

“Then why should you think I will do so?” she said sharply. “Please go away, Sir Konrad. Miss Bellanne does not want to see you.”

“I have searched for her everywhere, and now that I have found her, I insist on seeing her,” he said indignantly. “Everyone frustrates me, but having found her I shall not go away without speaking to her.”

At the top of the loft ladder Belinda, crouching with Donald, nodded slightly.

Littlejan knew she dared not cope with an angry man. “Donald!” she called, and turning to Sir K., said, “I’d really advise you to give up the idea. There’s a very determined young man with Miss Bellanne, and they are up in the loft. If you push your way in, it would be the easiest thing in the world to unhook the ladder at the top. You may get a broken leg!”

“He won’t need to come up.” Donald, looking very large in the tiny passage, came leaping down the loft ladder. “Now, sir, what does this mean? Miss Bellanne has said she does not want to see you. That should be enough for any gentleman. Must I put you out by force?”

Sir Konrad was, as Belinda had said, the sort to vanish if another resolute man appeared. Taken completely by surprise, he hesitated.

“Run along,” Donald advised him cheerfully. “I am a very old friend of Miss Bellanne and I intend to stand by her and see she is spared any annoyance. Your only course, Sir Konrad, is to get Mrs. Robertson’s leave to call on Miss Bellanne. None of us can help you. Now will you go, or must I help you?”

He certainly looked large, and young, and vigorous, and quite determined. Sir Konrad had not reckoned on this.

“I shall come back,” he said, and went to his car.

“Thank you, Donald,” and Mrs. Fraser turned to her kitchen.

CHAPTER 21

CHRISTMAS

Donald's determination was not all for Sir Konrad. As they sat down to tea and scones beside the red-brick hearth in the little sitting-room, where Lindy had kindled a small fire, he announced, "You girls are going home to-night, back to the Hall. I won't leave you till I've seen you safely into Lady Quellyn's hands."

"But we don't want to go," Littlejan objected. "I like being Mrs. Fraser and in charge of a house. What if we refuse?"

Lindy said nothing. She had already heard Donald on the subject, up in the loft, and she was learning a new respect for his strength of will.

"Then I sleep here," he explained. "You have that extra room. Or if you won't give me a bed I shall curl up in the car. It won't be the first time, when I've been touring."

"What do you think would happen to us?" Littlejan demanded.

"He knows now where you are. He might come back at midnight and force his way in. I'm not leaving you alone—certainly not!"

Littlejan sighed. "Was he like this when you knew him before, Miss Belinda?"

"Not a bit. But things were different then."

"Jolly different," Donald agreed. "Shall I go and ring up Lady Quellyn? Does she know I'm here with you?"

"Oh, she knows. We told her the story. I suppose we'll have to go back, but I want to stay here. I like this wee place."

"That's a good girl!" and Donald went to the telephone.

"You'd better think twice, Miss Belinda," Littlejan warned her. "He's going to be a bully."

"It's rather nice to feel so completely taken care of," Lindy admitted, a touch of colour in her face. "You can come to stay here later on, Marigold."

"It won't be the same. I like being a refugee. Bother Donald!"

"It wouldn't be nice at night, to be listening for footsteps all the time, and the bogey-man might come back. We've a lot to do before we can go," and they tackled fires and beds and left the tiny house safe and tidy.

"Well, young people!" Joy greeted them, warmly welcoming. "So I was right and he did find you and you couldn't cope. Well, well! It's a good thing you were there, Mr. Robertson."

"We have rather crept back, with our tails between our legs," Littlejan admitted. "Donald was a great comfort. I thought Sir K. would push past me and seize Miss Belinda and carry her off."

"I was afraid he'd knock you down," Lindy said. "You looked such a babe standing there in your pinny, saying you were Mrs. Fraser."

"He didn't believe me," Littlejan admitted.

Joy turned to Donald. "I hope you'll stay here for a day or two, Mr. Robertson. We haven't met before, but I have heard about you from the twins."

"I'd forgotten that," Lindy said. "You were in New York when he was here before. He was so good to me and the twins."

"We went joy-riding to Cheddar, and Bramber, and Kew, and it was good-bye to Miss Belinda's schoolroom. But I didn't know she was a singer," Donald said.

“No, Maidlin hadn’t discovered her voice then. The children want to see you, but they are in bed. They had a late night and a very tiring one yesterday,” Joy explained.

“You mentioned it on the phone, but I want to hear more,” Littlejan exclaimed. “Did they really run the party all on their own? But how marvellous!”

“Complete with music, violin and ‘cello. It seems to have been a complete success. I’ve had several phone calls to congratulate me—from Miss Raven, and the head girl, and Jansy, who will be here to-morrow. Everybody seems pleased; the twins have really made an impression on the Club this time.”

“Cheers! Good! We shall have two queens next May-Day,” Littlejan said joyfully. “But we won’t say anything about that yet.”

“Congrats, Twins!” she cried, as they came running to breakfast.

“It was fun. We liked it,” Margaret said.

“But it was hard work. We were tired,” Elizabeth added.

“Well I know it, as an ex-queen!” said Littlejan with heartfelt understanding.

Donald had a great welcome from the twins and was much amused at their change from tiny children to responsible schoolgirls. He could well believe they had been efficient in taking charge at school.

“Yes, they will make good queens for your Club,” he said, when they had gone off to school.

“Now that they’ve begun to look beyond themselves. They’ve been inclined to be self-centred,” Littlejan said. “If they’re going to look out and not in, they’ll begin to grow up.”

“My fault,” Joy said. “I kept them children too long. The Club has taught them a few things which they needed to learn.”

“The Club will teach them more yet,” Littlejan foretold, already looking forward to May-Day.

Phyl arrived at school radiant with happiness. “How did the party go? I had the most gorgeous bit of luck! Some people I know were there and they’re friends of Maurice Morland and I was introduced to him after the concert! Wasn’t that marvellous? They told him I was a pianist and he shook hands with me and told me to go on and I would get more and more joy out of my music. And he gave me his autograph! It was a wonderful evening!”

“We had a good time too,” said the head-girl. “Twins, come and be congratulated!”

“Party go well?” Phyl asked casually.

“Much she cares about the party!” muttered Wendy, as the twins came in, almost shyly.

“Get on all right? I knew you could do it,” Phyl said. Daphne poured out the story of the successful party, and Phyl’s satisfaction was great. “It’s marvellous! Now we know we can depend on you another time, Abbey twins!”

“Another time we shall want to dance!” Margaret said rebelliously.

“We’ll play fair. We’ll see Phyl doesn’t impose on you too much,” Daphne promised.

“Well, I’m not available for parties in the third week of January,” Phyllida proclaimed. “I’m giving you plenty of warning. I’m going in for several events in the Musical Festival and I mean to do really well. Morland is to be one of the adjudicators; now that I’ve met him I must—I must——”

“Distinguish yourself!” Daphne supplied the word which Phyl had shrunk from using. “Of course you must, and we know you will, old thing. We can do without you as queen for a week, and we’ll wish you all luck.”

“She’s not a brilliant success as queen,” Wendy said, under her breath. “She really doesn’t care about the Club. Oh well! It’s only till May!” and she looked thoughtfully at the twins.

Sir K. came no more to the Hall. The sight of Donald had proved very convincing and he knew his chance of making an impression had gone. Maidlin and Dr. Robertson returned, and Belinda was escorted home by Donald. At Christmas a letter came to Joy telling of their engagement, and all the circle of friends rejoiced for her.

“He’ll encourage her in her singing,” Maidlin wrote at the same time. “We shan’t lose her, he won’t ask her to go to South Africa—Jock and I made sure of that. She’ll go on with her concert work and Jock foretells a big future for her. They’ll live in the country, though I don’t know if Lindy’s great wish for a little house in The Wirral can be realised. It’s rather far from London.”

“Good for singing in Manchester and the Midlands, though,” Littlejan observed. “I’ve heard about the little house she wants. It’s to have a rock-garden, all red stones and sandy paths. She told me about it when we were alone together at Step Down.”

Christmas brought Littlejan’s gift from Len, a magnificent fur coat from Sydney, which caused all her friends sudden attacks of envy. “You may address me as ‘Duchess’ now,” she proclaimed, as she arrayed herself in it.

“Len has made a good choice. You look very nice!” Joy told her.

The preparation of the little house in the Herb Garden went on steadily. But everyone advised that it should be left for as long as possible before furnishing was begun, so though Littlejan went to work at it and to dream in the empty rooms, it still stood lonely and she remained at the Hall, waiting quietly for February and what it was to bring.

Phyl did well in the Festival, with several Firsts in her various classes. Maurice Morland remembered her and shook hands with her, congratulating her on her work and foretelling great things for her, and Phyl was radiantly happy and excited. The Hamlet Club felt its queen had distinguished herself and was proud of her and they told her so at a party which she led very capably, while the Abbey twins provided the music. The Club looked forward to a happier spring and everyone was content.

CHAPTER 22

BUTTERCUPS AND DAISIES

“Mother! Mother, what do you think has happened?” the twins rushed home from school one day early in February.

“We can guess,” Jen said, looking at their eager faces.

Joy knew very well that the Hamlet Club was meeting after school and, with a very good guess at the reason for the meeting, had invited Jen, Joan, Maidlin and Rosamund to tea. The President and Miriam and Barbara Honor had been asked, but had been unable to come. But with Jansy and Littlejan it was a very good meeting of former queens.

“They’ve asked us to be the queen,” Margaret proclaimed.

“Did you guess, Mother?” Elizabeth asked, almost shyly.

“We all guessed,” Jen told her. “Since you were such bricks about that party we’ve had hopes that the Club would use its common sense and ask you.”

“Oh, I don’t know! They might not have wanted us. What’s one party? And we enjoyed it.”

“I fancy Margaret and the orchestra had something to do with it, as far back as last summer,” Joy reminded them.

“What are you going to do about colour? And flowers?” Rosamund asked with interest. “I suppose you’ll both have the same? The something Queens; what is it to be?”

“Not the same. Don’t you think that would be rather dull?” Elizabeth demurred.

“You’ll have to think it over carefully,” Joan said. “Has Jansy any ideas?”

“I wouldn’t tell them, if I had,” said Jansy, from the doorway. “They must choose for themselves!”

“Quite right,” Joan agreed. “I remember saying that about you.”

“We haven’t asked her. But we’ve thought about it—just in case it happened, you know,” Elizabeth added.

The circle of ex-queens agreed this was inevitable. “Have you decided anything?” Littlejan asked. “Twins, I’m more glad than I can say! It will be wonderful to have you as queens and I’m sure you’ll be good ones.”

“We’ll try,” Elizabeth said, her eyes very bright.

“Then tell us! What are you going to be?”

“Dark green, to be like Mother, but darker than her green.”

The ex-queens agreed. “Very right and proper. Green has always been your colour,” Rosamund said.

“We want outsiders to connect us with Mother,” Margaret explained.

“They’ll do that all right!” Jen glanced at their hair, with a laugh. “Even if you dress in pink——!”

“Oh, not pink, Jenny-Wren!” There was a chorus of protests.

“But what about flower? And you’ve just said that two alike would be dull,” Littlejan objected.

“We want two flowers that always go together,” Elizabeth explained. “Like——”

“Like sausage and mash, or steak and kidney pudding. Two things that go together,” Margaret broke in.

“Well, what two flowers have to go together? Roses and Lilies? You aren’t going to be the steak and kidney pud. queens, I suppose?” Joy demanded.

“There *are* two that have to go together,” Elizabeth argued, and the twins eyed their seniors expectantly.

“Not mustard and cress,” Jen exploded. “Queen Mustard might suit Margaret, but I will not have a Queen Cress! I really can’t allow it! Joy, you won’t let them be mustard and cress, will you?”

Joy gave a shout of laughter. “Don’t get so worked up about nothing, Jenny-Wren. Don’t you see their faces? It’s not mustard and cress. Twins, what *are* your flowers to be?”

In her corner Maidlin began to sing softly,

“As I was going to Strawberry Fair,
Singing, singing——”

“Buttercups and daisies!” There was a shout from the waiting queens, as in unison they finished the line from the old song.

“Twins, it’s true! They do go together,” Joan cried.

“What a good choice!” Rosamund exclaimed. “Margaret must be Daisy as it’s her name, of course.”

“We thought we’d have spots,” Elizabeth explained. “The queens have had bands and borders and linings and bunches of flowers, but no one has had spots yet. Don’t you think it will be pretty, Mother? Yellow buttercups scattered all over dark green, for me, and white daisies for Twin?”

“Very pretty,” Joy said warmly, delight in her face, “and quite original. Twins, I congratulate you—and the Club. It’s a delightful choice. Did you tell the girls? Are they pleased?”

“We’ll tell them to-morrow. You had to hear first. We didn’t even tell Jansy in the car.”

“I didn’t ask you,” Jansy said. “I knew what you’d say.”

“Well, it’s decent, anyhow.” Jen sighed in relief. “You gave me a real shock. Yes, it’s a very good choice and you’ll look quite nice.”

“Putting it very mildly,” Littlejan murmured. “I suppose Tessa and Phyl will crown them?” she said aloud.

“We’d like it to be you and Jansy, but I suppose we’d better stick to the old way.”

“I’d rather not, so that’s just as well,” Littlejan said.

“If the girls call us the Spotty Queens we can’t help it,” Margaret remarked.

“I hope they won’t,” Joy said. “We must consult Margia. I wonder if she’ll feel able to tackle two trains? I’ll drive over and see how she is. I wouldn’t like anybody else to do trains for my girls, after all these years of her lovely work.”

Margia, when consulted, said the same. “Give up your twins’ robes to anyone else? I wouldn’t dream of it. I’m glad you’ve given me plenty of warning, as there are two to make. I’ll do them all right. I shall stencil the buttercups and daisies, as I did the stars for the lining of Marigold’s train. Do you remember how she said, ‘Nobody else has stars on her inside’? How is she, by the way? Will she be able to come to the crowning?”

“Oh, I think so! There’s plenty of time. She’s very well and happy. Good news from the husband, though letters are few and far between.”

“I find it hard to believe in the husband.”

“We all do. We saw so little of him. But her Mother is on her way home, and Littlejan is looking forward to her coming, and to seeing the little sisters again.”

CHAPTER 23

GRANDMOTHER JANICE

“Am I in time?” Jandy Mac ran through the barrier at the Customs shed, two very small girls clutching at her coat. Joy had driven to Southampton to welcome her and was smiling, with face full of news, as Jandy appeared.

“We’ve been held up everywhere, and we were stuck off the Isle of Wight in that beastly fog for hours. I haven’t known how to wait,” Jandy explained. “Tell me, Joy!”

“You are too late,” Joy answered. “John Lennox Fraser arrived at two-thirty this morning. Don’t worry! They’re both doing well.”

“A little boy!” Jandy cried joyfully. “Littlejan will be pleased.”

“She seems satisfied,” Joy assented. “He’s a nice little imp. She’ll have her hands full with him.”

“John! Is he really to be John Lennox? I believe Len wanted John, in some form or other, but said she could make it Ian, if she liked.”

“You don’t look like a grandmother, Jandy! Are you prepared to be addressed as Granny?”

“I don’t feel any older. I’m not forty yet,” Jandy protested. “These are the two very young aunts!” and she showed the little girls Joy had never seen. “Cecily Rose and Jantyjoy!”

“Cecily Rose and Jantyjoy! Littlejan is longing to see them again. They’ll fit in nicely with my younger brood—David and Richard and Maidie-Rose,” Joy said. “My nice nanny is looking forward to helping you with them.”

All through the long drive to the Hall Jandy was full of questions. She had lived there in her school days and was a close friend of all the Abbey circle. The car swept past the gatehouse, and she leaned forward to look eagerly. “Dear old place! And that is the wonderful garden that your little dancer made! I must see it all properly. Oh, is this——?” as they left the Abbey behind, and saw the quiet corner where the new house stood waiting.

Jandy looked at Joy, who nodded. “Littlejan’s little house—The Herb Garden. We believe it’s where the monks grew and tended their herbs. She’s tremendously keen on it; you are supposed to be going to help her to furnish—in a month or two, you know.”

Jandy agreed. “John must be taken to his own home now. It’s been tremendously good of you to keep Littlejan so long and we are all deeply grateful. I know she has been very happy.”

“We’ve enjoyed having her. But she wants to be in her own house. It’s a nice little spot.”

“A very peaceful one. I knew it must be just about here. She described it as being right in the arms of the family, with the Abbey on one side and your garden on the other.”

“That was like her. Do you hear the bells? Rachel must have seen the car.”

The Abbey bells were chiming—“Welcome home! Glad to see you!”—as the car raced up the beech avenue. And on the terrace steps was Jen, radiant with welcome.

“Come along, Granny Janice! Home again at last! And Aunt Cecily and Aunt Jantyjoy.”

“Rag me as much as you like, but I’m proud to be ‘granny.’ I must go to Littlejan; will you see to the babes? Where is she?” and Jandy went leaping up the stair, following Joy.

“Oh, Mother, dearest! Look at my darling baby! A little boy, Mother!” They heard Littlejan’s triumphant voice before the nurse closed the door firmly. “One visitor at a time, today, and only for two minutes,” said she.

Jandy reappeared again presently, her eyes shining like stars. “She seems very well and happy, and he looks a nice healthy boy.”

“An imp,” Joy said again.

“Oh, he’s all right,” Jen said. “Littlejan will have to train him or he’ll soon be the complete boss. Aren’t the little aunts going to see him?”

“This afternoon, perhaps. He’s asleep and Littlejan must rest.”

“You know what he’ll be called?” Littlejan’s little Ian; it’s almost her own name again.”

“So it is.” Jandy laughed. “But ‘Littlejan’s little John’ is rather fascinating too. She said to me that he’ll be officially John Lennox, but Ian will be a pet name, as the family has Jock and Jack already. But he may be called ‘Littlejan’s little John,’ until he’s old enough for a name of his own; I shouldn’t wonder! When he begins to run about he can be Ian! He’s fair at present, but nurse says his eyes are dark, so I expect his hair will darken too.”

“And he’ll be just like you and Littlejan. You and she are as much alike as ever.”

“You didn’t expect me to change, at my age, did you?” Jandy retorted. “I’m not going grey, if I am a grandmother! I’ve done that before any of the rest of you, at any rate! No signs of granny-hood for any of you, I suppose?”

“Oh, no! It’s a long way off for us. Even Jansy isn’t ready to be married yet, though there’s Dickon in the offing, I’ll admit. But it will be some years before even Joan is promoted, and longer still for me or Jen,” Joy said.

“And your twins are to be queens, I hear. Congratulations! It’s next best thing to having a grandchild!”

“Buttercup and Daisy Queens,” Joy said. “The idea has been received with great delight at school.”

“The news of Littlejan’s little John will be received with wild excitement,” Jen said. “The twins have gone off to spread the story. They’re deeply thrilled with the new baby.”

The twins had indeed rushed into their classroom, shouting “Queen Marigold’s got a little baby—a boy! He’s called John Lennox.”

A crowd was round them in a moment. “Tell us, Twins! How simply marvellous! Littlejan Fraser with a baby!”

“She calls him ‘Littlejan’s little John’,” said Elizabeth.

“But he’ll perhaps be called Ian for every day,” Margaret added. “Because there are other Johns in the family, you know. He’s got yellow hair.”

“His daddy had yellow hair,” said Daphne, who had seen Len at the Hamlet Club party.

“Marigold’s mother’s coming this morning,” Elizabeth said. “I expect she’ll be pleased about the baby.”

Janice’s pleasure in little John was obvious to all her friends. In the course of the next few days they all came to the Hall to see the new little John and many invitations were showered on Janice to come and see the latest additions to the various families—Rosamund’s small Geoff and Peter, Maidlin’s Jacky, Paul and Malcolm, Joan’s Jillian Rose, and Jen’s small Simon, were all strangers to her. She had stayed in most of the homes on previous visits and was urged to repeat these and to come to stay at the Castle and the other homes and see how the sets of twins were growing up.

Rosamund with her usual hospitality, carried off the Very Young Aunts, as she insisted on calling Cecily and Jantyjoy, to join her own nursery party, saying there were already too many children at the Hall, and Joy and Janice agreed gratefully.

"I'll love to come, but I've promised to help Littlejan with her furnishing," Janice protested.

"Heaps of time for that! Joy isn't going to turn her out," Joan said. "The Herb Garden can wait."

"Littlejan will be lovely with her baby," Jen remarked. "She's so very happy. It's a joy to see her."

Janice assented. "Do you remember how fascinated she was by Cecily, when I brought her home with me when she was a few months old?"

"For Marigold's abdication and Queen Jean's crowning," Jen agreed. "Marigold had never nursed a small baby before, and she was beautiful to watch with Cecily."

"I'm looking forward to seeing her with her own boy," Jen said. "And now you'll be able to watch Joy's twins crowned. It's very satisfying!"

Margia brought the new trains to the Hall and spread them out for the admiration of the family. On the rich dark green of Elizabeth's were stencilled showers of golden buttercups; on Margaret's were wreaths of tiny daisies. Just to 'mix things up thoroughly,' the golden-starred train had a white lining, the white-starred one was lined with gold. These linings were turned over to give Elizabeth a white border and Margaret a golden one, which was a great satisfaction to her, as she really preferred her sister's glowing colour to her own more simple white, but had accepted 'Daisy' as a tribute to her name. The touches of gold gave her great comfort, and everyone was loud in praise of the new robes.

"How kind you are, Margia!" Joy exclaimed, deeply touched; every detail of the twins' crowning moved her to warmest interest. "That gold is a great consolation to Margaret. It was more than kind of you to think of it."

"I saw she really liked the gold better, so I was determined she should have some," Margia said quietly. "I did want your twins to like their trains! I felt they really must be rather special."

"I remember you said that about Littlejan's orange robe, that it must be something rather special," Joan said; she had come to tea with Margia and to see the new trains. "I believe you really came to see her and her boy, and the new robes were only an excuse."

"There's something in that. I did want to see him," Margia admitted. "She's rejoicing in him; and she looks so well."

"Everyone's rejoicing in him. But we all wish his father could be here."

"Yes, it's the one cloud in the sky, for Marigold."

"Come and have another look at them," Joy said, as Margia rose to go. "Littlejan is to get up for a short time to-morrow. Nurse is being very strict, we're such a big family and there are always people about."

She was proved correct, for when they entered the bedroom, Jansy stood there, the baby in her arms, her face beautiful in its adoration.

"How pretty she is, with her hair down her back like that," Margia almost whispered. "And so very like her mother when I first knew the Abbey Girls."

"Isn't he a lovely boy, Aunty Joy?" Jansy turned to them. "I love his tiny fingers!"

"And his toes," Joy said. "They're adorable."

"Jansy has forgiven me for having him," Littlejan said, as she lay back on her pillows and gazed at her son and at Jansy's rapt eyes.

"I love you with your hair done like that, Jan. It gives you quite a new face; did you know? And I love to see you nurse my boy. When I told her about him she sympathised with

me over having to mess about with nappies and prams,” she said, looking at Margia.

“I’ve taken it back. He’s worth it,” Jansy said, cuddling the tiny toes under their petticoats.

“As for prams and cradles, I hope you won’t dream of buying either,” Joy said promptly. “Maidie Rose has done with the twins’ cradle and the pram too. You know you can have both, for as long as you want them.”

“I rather hoped so,” Littlejan admitted.

“Heaps of prams and cradles in the family. Mother could lend you ours. Jill’s grown out of them long ago,” Jansy said.

“I knew somebody would lend me things like that,” Littlejan said happily.

CHAPTER 24

A BLOW FALLS

Joy, down very early to see the twins and Jansy off to school, sat reading the paper while she waited for Janice to come to breakfast. Suddenly she gave an exclamation of dismay and studied a paragraph intently.

Jansy looked up. "Anything wrong, Aunty Joy?"

Joy was white. "Trouble for Littlejan. Len has had an accident; this is a report from Antarctica. Oh, I hope it isn't too much for her!"

Jansy looked distressed. "There's the car; I ought to go. Can't I do something to help?"

"Don't say anything to the children. I don't want to spoil their morning. I'm sorry you had to know, but I was upset and I couldn't hide it. Tell the twins in the car on the way home and ask them to come in very quietly, just in case the news has been too much for Littlejan. We might be having trouble with her."

"But there's little John! She can't be ill!" Jansy argued.

"I hope she'll realise that. Tell the children to hurry now and take them away. Thank you, dear. We must have the house quiet."

The school party set out, the twins, full of thoughts of school, noticing nothing strange in their mother's manner. Jansy begged Frost to stop in the village and buy her a paper, and studied it anxiously while they drove to Wycombe.

Joy ran up to Janice's room. "Jandy! I must speak to you. Oh, I'm glad you're here!"

"I'm just ready. Am I late?" Janice threw open her door.

Joy closed it carefully behind her, just as Janice gave a cry.

"Joy! What's wrong? You're white! Is anyone ill; Littlejan or the boy?"

"An accident to Len. In the paper. We'll have to tell her."

Janice grew white also. "It may kill her. Can't we keep it from her for a few days? She's not strong yet."

"Not possible. You know how she searches the papers every day for a bulletin from the expedition. It's the first thing she does, after attending to the boy. She'd suspect something if we hid the paper from her."

"Yes, she'll have to know. What happened?"

"Len was out with Dr. Hamilton, the leader of the party, when they had trouble with their dogs, and Dr. Hamilton was dragged into a break in the ice, which had opened almost at their feet. Len jumped in after him and held him up till help arrived, but he was badly crushed by the ice, which swept together again. There's no possible mistake—the young radio officer, Lennox Fraser, behaved with the utmost gallantry, saving Dr. Hamilton's life, but was badly injured in doing it"—Joy was reading from the paper. She thrust it to Jandy. "Read it! They're flying him to Sydney at the first opportunity, and he'll have every care."

"Yes!" Janice said. "They'll do everything for him. But poor Littlejan!"

"Come down and have a cup of coffee before we tell her. She won't have had time to read the paper yet. Can we make her see that it will be very bad for little John if she is upset?"

"How can she help being upset? Len means the whole world to her. I'd give anything not to have to tell her," Janice was hastily pulling on her cardigan. "I'm ready now. Coffee will be a good idea."

But the coffee, though some help, was only putting off the evil day. They were turning to go upstairs when the phone rang, and Joy thankfully postponed action still further as she turned.

Mary Devine had taken the call and was looking for her. "It's Jen," she said.

"I expected it. Jandy, show Mary the paper. We shall have calls all day," and Joy went to the phone.

"Yes, we've seen the news. Terrible!—Not yet. We were just going up to her.—Yes, a good thing Jandy Mac's here.—Oh, I will, but what can anybody do? I will call on you if we need you. You wouldn't like to come along and tell her, I suppose? No, I thought not. Her mother must break it to her. I'll ring you later and I'll give her your sympathy. Thanks for ringing!"

"Now for it! Let's get it over," she turned to Janice.

At the door of Littlejan's room they met the nurse coming out with the breakfast tray.

"Put that down and come with us. We may need you," Joy said.

The nurse gave them a startled look and followed them into the room.

"Mother! We had such a splendid night. He was as good as gold and slept right through, and I'm going to get up to-day and to-morrow. I'm to give him his bath. Nurse is going to—what's the matter? Is something wrong?" Littlejan's voice changed, as she saw their faces. "Who is it? Len? *Give me that paper!*"

Janice handed it to her, and sitting on the bed, slipped an arm round her shoulders. Joy glanced at the nurse, who kept a watchful eye on her patient.

Littlejan, with a sob, devoured the paragraph. Then she turned to her mother and hid her face, and broke into a storm of tears.

The nurse nodded, satisfied. "Better that way. She'll work it off. Is it her husband?"

"Badly hurt, in an accident on the ice," Joy murmured.

"Not dead?"

"No, not that, thank God! But it's a shock. She's been so happy."

Janice was trying to soothe her daughter. "He isn't killed, Littlejan. They'll take every care

"Sydney! Did it say they would fly him to Sydney? I could go to him!" Littlejan cried wildly. "Oh, Mother, I could go! I could drive to the airport and get into the plane! Oh, Mother, couldn't I go?"

"No, you don't!" Janice spoke sharply. "Do you want to kill your son?"

Littlejan relaxed suddenly in her arms. "Would it hurt him?"

"You'll find this upset will have hurt him quite enough," said the nurse.

"I'd forgotten all about him," Littlejan's tone was full of wonder.

"I saw you had. But you can't forget him, my dear. He won't be forgotten. He's a very fine boy and you must be fair to him and not put him back when he's coming along so nicely. As for Australia, that's out of the question; you'd just finish him off," the nurse said firmly.

"Let me hold him," Littlejan held out her hands.

Janice brought little John and laid him in her arms.

"She'll be all right now," the nurse murmured. "I was afraid she might faint, but those tears helped her."

"I should have done, if Mother hadn't been here. I felt her arm round me and it helped. Mother!" Littlejan whispered urgently, "they will take care of him, won't they?"

"Think, Marigold! He saved Dr. Hamilton; he'll be the hero of the whole camp. They'll do everything possible for him. And you can be proud of him."

"You must make him proud of you, when he reads the letters we shall write," Joy said, standing at the end of the bed. "We must be able to tell him how brave you were and how you thought of his boy before your own wishes."

"I forgot all about little John," Littlejan protested.

"Only for one moment. You saw at once that you couldn't go rushing off in a plane, and leave him to be brought up on bottles or by some other woman—a foster-mother."

"I wouldn't like that. But if I took him with me——" she said wistfully.

"You couldn't do it, my dear," Janice said definitely. "Wait at least till you know more about Len. If he's likely to take a long while to recover, they may send him home."

Littlejan's face lit up. "Do you really think so?"

"And you'd pass one another somewhere over the Indian Ocean," Joy said. "You wait for him here and take care of that child for him."

"Littlejan," Janice began carefully, "I don't want to raise too many hopes, but this may mean that you'll see him before very long. They might even refuse to have him back in the expedition; we don't know yet how badly he is hurt."

Littlejan shivered. "How soon shall we hear any more? Letters take so long to come!"

"Yes, you'll need all your patience. But if he can't go back it might mean you would have him at home."

Littlejan's face glowed with a great hope. Then the light faded from her eyes. "It would break his heart. I mustn't hope for it. But—if you knew how I've hated that expedition! I've grudged him to it every day. And I couldn't say anything. He was so proud and happy about being chosen, and it was such a help to him in his career! He knew how I felt, of course, but not how much or how badly I felt. I had to hide most of it. Oh, if only he couldn't possibly go back!"

"I think you've been very brave about it," Joy said.

"I don't care how badly he's hurt, if only I can have him at home and take care of him."

"You do care," Janice said. "You want him to get well,—quite well, and be your Len again."

"If only we knew!" Littlejan sighed. "I want him whatever state he's in. If he has to be in a bath-chair I'll wheel it with one hand and little John's pram with the other."

"We'll hope it won't come to that. We can't make plans yet, for if they should decide to nurse him in Sydney, you might be able to go to him later on, when the boy is a little older."

"In the meantime your job is to get strong and take care of little John and not make him and yourself ill by fretting," Joy remarked.

Littlejan groaned. "It'll be terribly difficult. If only we knew a little more!"

"Oh, you'll soon hear more," Joy said bracingly. "They'll find ways to let you know. There's always wireless; if the newspaper report could get through, they'll soon get word to you."

"And you must get strong, so that you and I can furnish the house and have it ready for Len when he comes home," Janice added, and the nurse nodded approval, as she came quietly bringing a hot drink and fresh hot-water bottles.

CHAPTER 25

A FAMILY AFFAIR

The twins and Jansy crept into the house, looking awed and anxious. Joy met them with cheerful reassurance. "It's all right, girls. Littlejan has been very brave; little John is not well, but nurse hopes that will pass off quickly."

"Can I go to see her?" Jansy asked wistfully.

"As soon as you've changed and had your tea. I see your paper, so I know you've read the story."

"Has there been any more news?" Elizabeth asked.

"Will Mr. Len get better? He must get better, Mother!" cried Margaret.

"We know only as much as is in the paper. No more news so far. Go and wash and have your tea, girls. There's the phone! It's been ringing all day."

"I suppose everybody wants to say they are sorry," Jansy said, as she went upstairs.

Mary Devine was a long time in the telephone room, but came at last, bringing a message she had taken down from dictation.

Joy's face lit up. "News at last, Mary?"

Mary handed her the paper. "From the doctor with the expedition, by wireless."

Joy skimmed the message, while Jansy hung over the banister rail. "Oh, Aunt Joy! Is it good news?"

"No worse, anyway!" Joy was already on her way up to Littlejan's room.

Janice, sitting by the bed, slipped an arm round her girl as she saw what Joy had brought. "Gently, Marigold! Remember the boy!"

Littlejan controlled herself with a great effort and held out her hand for the paper.

"It's only really to confirm what was in the newspaper." Joy looked across at the nurse, who was waiting watchfully.

Littlejan read the message and lay back with a sigh. "Only what we knew already, but they had to send the news to me. This man hopes to say more in a day or two. But he'll do all that can be done to save Len." Her voice quivered.

"There's one detail added," Joy said. "He says definitely that Dr. Hamilton was unconscious after his fall and would certainly have died when he was knocked by the dogs into the water, if your Len had not jumped in so quickly to hold him up. Dr. Hamilton owes his life to Len."

"It must have been hard to jump into that icy water," Littlejan shuddered. "I keep thinking about it and that terrible ice grinding about!"

"Don't think of it more than you can help. It won't help him, and you don't want to make your boy ill again," said the nurse.

"I'm quite sure Len never thought about the ice or the water for one moment," Janice said. "He saw a job to be done and he plunged in and did it."

"And saved his chief's life," said Joy.

Littlejan was very quiet and obedient now, accepting any help in the way of hot drinks and restoratives that nurse could produce. She had been alarmed by an attack of sickness on little John's part, and realised that it had been caused by her own disturbed condition of mind,

though she was much amazed by the fact. Nurse had threatened to resort to bottles for feeding him, but Littlejan was much against the idea and was doing her best to be careful.

Jansy was allowed to come when she had had her tea. She ran quietly to the bed and dropped on her knees. "Oh, Marigold, aren't you proud?"

"Proud? Yes, I'm bursting with pride, but it's a very long way down, Jan—quite buried in other things. But I know what you mean. But if only Len hadn't had to be hurt!" There was a sob in Littlejan's voice.

"That man, Dr. Somebody, would have been dead when they got him out, but for our Len. You ought to be just terribly proud."

"*Our* Len! How jolly nice of you!"

"We all feel like that. Even the girls at school—well, the Hamlet Club, because they saw him at that party, but the rest have heard reams about him, and they've felt so bad for you, because he had to go and leave you behind—they've got hold of the story from the day-girls, who read the papers at lunch-time. They came back full of it in the afternoon, and they're all saying, '*our* Mr. Lennox Fraser.' The twins have been talking about '*our* Mr. Len.' We all feel he belongs to us, and we're terribly proud of him."

"I want to go to him," Littlejan sighed. "But nobody will let me go, until little John is older and by that time"—she paused, pinching her lips. "He's been sick, Jan, and nurse says it's because I had such a shock. I was frightened! She says she may have to put him on to bottles for a day or two, but I don't want that!"

"Only till he gets all right again. He doesn't look too bad," Jansy glanced at the cradle, where the child lay sleeping.

"He's quiet now, but he's been awake and crying quite a lot. Nurse says it's his tummy. But he seems a little better. It's very frightening when he's restless and fretful!"

"You must have a good night and then perhaps he'll settle down and be all right," Jansy said.

More wireless news came to Littlejan during the next few days. Everything possible was being done for Len and Dr. Hamilton, and they would be flown to Sydney as soon as possible. But it was not possible at the moment, and the facilities available at the base camp were very inadequate.

Len was not conscious and there was fear of pneumonia. The lower part of his body and his legs were badly crushed; the doctor had done what he could in the circumstances, but was crying out for help and better conditions. But it was no use thinking of flying while the winds were so high and rough.

"It's no good losing them over the Antarctic Sea, I do see that," Littlejan groaned, and prayed all the time that the weather might change, while she struggled to keep a quiet mind for little John's sake.

She put up a brave fight and he improved slowly, but the strain told on her and her own recovery was slower than it should have been.

Then at last came a change of news. The patients were to be flown to Sydney and would have good hospital treatment and the very best of care. The hearts of the watchers at home leapt up and little John began to regain his lost weight.

"Now you shall have your lesson in giving him his bath," Nurse said, for this had had to be postponed. "I must give you all my hints and tips for that before I have to leave you."

"Leave me! You can't leave me," Littlejan protested. "I can't do without you!"

“Oh yes, you can! You have your mother; I am glad she is here. My time with you is almost up.”

“Have you to go to another case? I do depend on you,” Littlejan said gloomily.

“Not for a month or so. I want a little holiday. But I have more cases booked, of course.”

Janice overhearing this, looked thoughtful. Could Nurse be persuaded to stay a little longer? Littlejan was still a very young and inexperienced mother, in spite of her training in Ceylon in caring for her little sisters. She was definitely nervous when handling little John.

It was on Littlejan’s first day downstairs that the great news came and the appeal from the Sydney doctors. A cabled message was handed to her, and Janice went quickly to her side. Had Len collapsed on the flight to Sydney?

Littlejan looked up, her face ablaze. “He wants me to go—it’s from the doctor. They believe they can cure Len, or nearly cure him, and he’s escaped pneumonia. But he needs something to help to buck him up; ‘the effort to go on living seems almost too much for him,’ this man says. And he thinks if I could be there it might be just the thing that would help him.”

“It will be, if you go to him looking like that,” Joy glanced at her radiant face, for, filled with great hope, she was ‘Marigold’ again, as she had not been since the news of the accident had come. “The sight of you will lift him out of his listless state—which one can quite understand. You’ll be the best tonic he could have. You’ll fly, of course; you’ll be there very soon. She must go, Jandy Mac? You do agree?”

“I couldn’t possibly not go, when I’ve been sent for and it may save Len’s life,” Littlejan urged.

“I agree, and I’ll help in any way I can,” Janice promised. “But how soon will she be fit to go?”

“Now,” Littlejan said firmly. “I’m not wasting any time. Len wants me, and that’s that.”

“Yes, but—” Janice looked at the child in her lap. “Can you do it? What about the boy?”

“He must go!” Joy said quickly. “The best tonic for Len, after his wife. Little John must certainly go too.”

“We must talk to Nurse,” Janice began, and Joy ran upstairs to find her.

“Of course I shall take him!” Littlejan cried indignantly. “I couldn’t leave him behind! Mother, how could you think I would?”

“He’s very young, and you know he is easily upset. You don’t want to risk anything. We could find a nurse for him.”

“It will be easy,” Littlejan urged. “Just sitting in a plane.”

“You have to change planes, and to cope with new sorts of food. I don’t know if it’s possible.”

“Nothing else is possible. I couldn’t leave him; not likely!”

“Do these people know about him?”

“This man says my cable has arrived, and he hopes I shall be able to bring the child. They’ve told Len, but he hardly seemed to understand. But when he sees little John——!”

“Yes, I know all that. But do you really feel you can cope with him on the journey? You’re still very new at your job.”

Littlejan’s brave face fell. “I’m just a wee bit frightened. I get so terrified if he’s ill and I know so very little about him. Oh, if only——!” her eyes went to Nurse, running down the stairs.

“Yes!” Janice agreed. “If only——! She wanted a holiday. I wonder if she’d go?”

"It's going to cost the earth. Not that it matters," Littlejan said valiantly. "I'll sell the new house, if I must.—Nurse! Nurse! Will you come to Australia with us?"

The nurse stood over her. "Are you proposing to take that child to Sydney?"

"I can't do anything else. His father wants him." Littlejan's voice shook.

They looked at her, fearing a breakdown.

"Then I'm going too," said Nurse. "You can't possibly cope with him alone. You'll kill yourself and him, if you try. I don't know how it's to be managed; I can't pay my expenses. But you must have somebody with you."

"The family will pay your expenses," Joy announced, from the staircase. "Here and now I offer it on behalf of all the lot of us. Among us we will send Nurse with you. With Jen and Joan and Rosamund and Maidlin and Jandy and myself, we can surely manage a little thing like that. You shan't sell your house, or even give up the furnishing, which Jandy can see to while you are away. It must be ready for you when you bring Len home. You wouldn't like to go with her, would you, Jandy Mac?"

Janice shook her head. "Not if Nurse will go. I really don't want all the travelling."

"No, you've only just come home. It's time you settled down and attended to that new house.—Why, Littlejan?"

For Littlejan, clasping little John in her arms, was crying quietly.

"The kindest thing I ever heard. The most beautiful thought. I'll never forget your goodness, all of you," her shoulders shook. "I'm not in the least afraid now. With Nurse I'll take him anywhere."

"You'll have plenty of help," said Joy, who had flown to and from New York. "Everyone is very helpful when you fly. And everyone will know who you are—Mrs. Lennox Fraser, wife of the Antarctic hero, and his month-old son! People will just fall over themselves to do things for you; the Air-hostess will love you and the boy. So long as Nurse is there you can't have any difficulty."

"The difficulty is in believing it. I'm going to Len! I can't believe it's true."

"I think it's too much for you." Nurse looked at her anxiously.

"Then stop thinking it! I'm quite well and I'm terribly keen to go. With you there nothing can go wrong."

Janice looked at Nurse. "It's a big responsibility for you."

"I don't mind that. I've always wanted to fly, but have never been able to afford it. I shall enjoy it and it will be an unexpected holiday for me. If Mrs. Fraser will put herself in my hands and let me do my best for her, I believe we shall be all right."

"Oh, I will!" Littlejan promised fervently. "I'll do every single thing you say."

"Then come back to bed, for the rest of the evening. You've had enough excitement for one day, and with this before you, you must take things easily."

Littlejan rose obediently. "Come and talk to me, Mother and Aunty Joy! I can't possibly go to sleep."

CHAPTER 26

“GOODBYE!—COME AGAIN SOON!”

Jansy, hearing the news, ran up to Littlejan's room. “You're going to him! How marvellous for you! But how we shall miss little John—and you.”

“He's very little to be missed at all,” Littlejan smiled.

“And how he'll love the aeroplane! Any boy would. I do envy you.”

“He won't know anything about the aeroplane, I'm afraid.”

“I'm so glad for you,” Jansy said earnestly. “They're going to get Len quite better, aren't they?”

“I hope so, but we don't know very much. But even if he still has a long way to go I'm going to see him, in a few days!” Her tone was exultant.

“Here come the twins,” said Jansy, at the sound of feet on the stairs.

Elizabeth and Margaret stood in the doorway. “Marigold! won't you be able to come to our crowning?”

“We're glad about Len, but we do want you to be there,” Margaret urged.

Littlejan's voice was gentle. “I'm afraid not, Twins. I shall hate to miss it; I know it's going to be the event of the year, for the Hamlet Club and for everybody, but this is the middle of March, and I don't see how I can be home for May-day!”

“You've missed so many crownings,” Elizabeth sounded disconsolate.

“The Club won't like it.” Margaret did not quite appreciate the importance of Len.

“The Club will understand,” Jansy said. “But we shall all miss Marigold.”

Joy came in from a busy time of telephone calls, and sent the schoolgirls off for their tea. “I've spoken to Jen and Joan and Maid and Rosamund. Everybody says the same thing—‘What is she doing about the boy?’ When they hear you are taking him they say—‘Oh, good! But can she manage?’ When I say Nurse is to go too, and that it will be expensive but seems necessary, everyone says instantly—‘I'd like to help! Let me see to that!’ I said I had promised without even asking them and that it was to be a family affair, and they're all pleased and say I did quite right. Jen will be along presently to talk it over. Little Simon is getting over that trouble with his teeth, so Jen feels she can leave him now. And I've made inquiries about planes and reservations, and you can have seats on Thursday or Monday. I only have to confirm the date.”

Littlejan gave a sigh of pure happiness. “It seems too wonderful! Thursday, please, Auntie Joy! But don't let Nurse keep me in bed. There'll be heaps to do, and I want to help.”

“We'll all rally round and have you ready in time. You can't take much stuff, except what you'll need for you and the boy. You can get everything in Sydney, and you must wear your beautiful coat. We don't know what the weather will be over there, and Len will like to see you wearing it.”

“I can't believe it's true! As for all the rest of our crowd, I want to cry again when I think of their kindness. It will be the greatest possible comfort to have Nurse.”

Jen came later in the evening and sat beside her for a time. “We shall miss you, Marigold. But you'll send long letters, telling us all about Len; your letters have always been famous in the family.”

"I'm going to miss the coronation. The twins are annoyed with me," Littlejan smiled. "I'm sorry, of course. It will be wonderful to have them as queens; I'm sure they'll do well."

"Oh yes! They've made a fine start. It's good for them to realise that there are more important things even than their crowning. Once you've gone we shall have only that to think about."

"Don't say that to them," Littlejan grinned. "They wouldn't like that 'only'! Easily the great event of the season."

Jen glanced at the papers spread over the bed. "Planning for your home?"

"Mother's going to carry on for me. We've talked a lot about the furniture and she knows what I want. With those marked lists and catalogues she'll be able to do all the beginning part."

The doctor came during the evening, after hearing Joy's report. He talked to Nurse and sounded his patient and reluctantly gave his permission for the journey.

"I'm glad you will be there, Nurse. I'd rather it had been put off for a few weeks. But if you take care of her, she'll be all right."

"We couldn't stop her. If that husband is see-able she's going to see him at the earliest moment," Nurse said.

Then, before it seemed possible, the big car was rolling down the beech avenue, Littlejan clasping little John in her arms. She was radiant and excited, but with Nurse's eye on her, was keeping very quiet.

Joy and Jen and Janice were in the car too. "There must be somebody to wave good-bye at the airport!" Jen said.

Joy stopped the car half-way down the avenue. "Listen, Littlejan! We told Rachel your plans."

"I thought it was so nice of Rachel to come to say good-bye last night, and to bring the wee jacket for little John!" Littlejan said, as she listened. "She started it for Raimy Rose, but she said Raimy could wait, as we were going away."

The sound of the Abbey bells came to them across the trees. "Good-bye! Come again soon," rang the bells.

"I'll try. I hope we'll be back *very* soon," Littlejan cried.

"Plus Len," Jen said. "And in your own little house," as the car drove on and they left the gates and passed the low grey house with its background of dark trees.

"That depends on Mother. I'm leaving her hard work and a lot of it."

"And a cheque," Janice added. "I'll do my best for you and Len."

The twins and Jansy went to school next day very full of their news of the Marigold Queen and her boy. "We'll tell everybody at to-morrow night's party," Elizabeth said.

Phyllida came up, looking apologetic. "You wouldn't like to run the party, you two? I know Jansy is going home for the week-end. Everyone says how beautifully you did the Christmas show."

"But we want to dance this time," Margaret objected. "It will be our last chance before—you know."

"Before you take your places on your thrones," said Daphne. "Phyl, it isn't fair. You're taking advantage. As chosen queens, how can they refuse?"

"Is it another concert?" Elizabeth asked, looking downcast. "I do wish you weren't so mad about music! Concerts are all very well, but they shouldn't interfere with everything else."

"We can't say no. I see that," Margaret admitted.

“You know you like playing and being M.C.” Phyl urged. “A big concert in the Royal Festival Hall,” she said to Elizabeth. “Mother hasn’t taken tickets yet, but she will, if I ask her. She said—if my other duties permit.”

“Well, I should say they don’t.” Daphne spoke out in defence of the twins. “We all want to dance with these two. Can’t Miss Lane come either?”

“Maurice Morland is playing the Grieg concerto. I’m crazy to hear it!” Phyl’s tone was wistful. “But I felt I must ask you first, Elizabeth. Margaret will need to play, I’m afraid. Miss Lane isn’t well again.”

“She’s been so awfully kind about doing our queen-trains. They’re lovely, and she’s thought about them a lot and put nice ideas into them. I’d like to play, to help her,” Margaret said.

“Oh well! I’ll help,” Elizabeth said at once. “And I’ll bring old Growly and we’ll make it like the Christmas party. We can’t let the Club down now! We’ll have very easy dances that the Club knows, so that we can have one each with Daphne, if she’s not too grand. Fancy asking the Head Girl!”

Phyllida’s face cleared. “I’ll tell mother. You are sports, you two!”

“They’re jolly nice to you,” Daphne remarked. “Twins, a bit of gossip for you. You’d hear on the way home. I’m leaving at Easter. Guess who’s to be Head Girl?”

“Not Jansy?” the twins gave a shout.

“Yes, of course—Janice Raymond. Who could be more suitable?”

“We shall have the school in our pockets!” Margaret chuckled.

“It should be well run, with all you three Abbey people in charge. Jansy’s an ex-queen; she’ll be able to stand by you and Twin.”

“We don’t need her,” Margaret’s chin went up. “We can quite well be queens without Jansy to hold our hands.”

“All the same, it will be sport to have her,” Elizabeth decided. “She’ll be a good Head Girl. You’ve been a nice one, Daphne.”

Daphne laughed. “It’s a nice school!”

“Twins again! Where’s Phyl?” was the general comment as the Club gathered on Saturday evening.

“Royal Festival Hall. Her beloved Morland is playing,” said Daphne, overhearing them. “Jansy has gone home for the week-end and Marigold and son are on their way to Sydney. But we’re all right. We’ve still got our twins.”

“They do it jolly well. There’s the ’cello tuning up; I’m glad. I like it for dancing.”

“All the same Phyl’s a bit of a slacker.”

“Not much longer of her now,” someone said cheerfully. “It’s the end of the term; May-day will soon be here! She’s been a mistake as queen, but we’ve pulled through, thanks to the twins.”

The party went with a swing. The twins, conscious of having pleased everybody, threw themselves into it and played with their utmost verve, ending with “The Twin Sisters,” to the delight of the dancers, and then with “Sellenger’s Round.”

“A jolly evening,” was the general verdict, and everyone went home, contented and happy.

CHAPTER 27

DISASTER FOR THE CLUB

Air-mail letters came from Littlejan at every port of call. Little John was behaving like an angel, and had not been at all upset by the travelling; Nurse was, as usual, more than kind; and everyone was very helpful. Everywhere she was meeting with the greatest consideration and was given every possible assistance.

Then came a jubilant letter. They had seen Len; his tired wistful eyes had lit up as she bent over him.

“Len, here I am! Here *we* are! We’ve come to you. Here’s our little John. Don’t try to talk; your eyes tell me you are pleased. We won’t go away till you’re ready to come with us. I want you at home in our own little house, lying under the trees in our own garden.”

“I can’t tell you much yet,” she scribbled hastily to those at home. “I’ve had a talk with the doctor and I’m going to have another in a few days, when Len has got over this excitement. He’s still very weak and inclined to run a temp. at any moment. He can’t move, of course; he’s all in plaster. I expected that. They don’t say anything about the future.”

A few days later another letter came. Littlejan had seen Dr. Hamilton and she was glowing with delight over the things he had said of Len and of how he intended to recommend him most earnestly for the George Medal.

“It’s not one of those things that has a knighthood tagged on to it. I’m not going to break out as Lady Fraser, thank goodness!” she wrote. “But I suppose we shall have to go to Buckingham Palace to receive it. I hope they can wait till Len is ready to go! I wouldn’t like to do that on my own.”

She told how Len had smiled at his boy and had stroked little John’s cheek, whispering—“Soft! Like velvet!”

Then came another idea. “They’re talking of sending Len home. Not to be with us, of course; he’ll need hospital care for a long time yet. But there’s a special place in London where they think perhaps he can get even better treatment than they can do for him, and they want him to have the very best that’s possible. We should all travel together, and he’d have nurses on the journey; flying can be very easy, and they feel nothing is too good if it will save him. They don’t want him to be a cripple for life. You can guess how I feel! He’ll be in London and we’ll be able to see him every day. He’s going to be terribly bored presently, when he’s strong enough. He’s getting stronger, and they say it’s done him all the good in the world to have little John and me here, and that it’s a mercy we came.”

And, still later—“We should arrive about the middle or end of May. *Couldn’t* you put off that coronation, so that I could be there? I’d love to see the twins crowned.”

“I’m afraid we can’t do that,” Joy said, with a laugh. “Only another week till May-day! The twins can hardly sleep for excitement.”

But fate played into Littlejan’s hands. That night Elizabeth fairly hurled herself into her mother’s room. “Mother! Do come and look at Twin! She’s crying and she feels so bad, and— and she’s got spots! Oh, Mother! what’s wrong with her?”

Joy, mindful of her babies in their nursery, rushed to Margaret’s side. “My darling! What’s the matter? You haven’t been feeling ill?”

"I did feel bad all evening," Margaret sobbed. "But I didn't tell anybody, and you were out with Daddy, at that concert. I can't be ill now! I mustn't be ill! Oh, what about the crowning?"

"We'll see what's the matter before we think of that. Ask Nanny to come"—to Elizabeth.

Nanny came hurrying from the nursery. "That's chicken-pox," she said, after a brief inspection. "Better have the doctor."

"Margaret, stop crying! You'll only make things worse," Joy commanded. "Elizabeth, go out of this room. Tell me one thing! Were you two with Maidie-Rose and the boys last night?"

"No, Mother, we were having that picnic on the hill all day, and they'd gone to bed when we came in."

"The babies may escape," Nanny said. "Elizabeth—doubtful, I should say."

"She must get out of here, anyway," Joy insisted. "She may not have taken it. Elizabeth, go downstairs; I'll come and talk to you presently. Yes, *go*, child, for everybody's sake!"

"I want to stay with Twin," Elizabeth said rebelliously.

"Not till we've heard what the doctor says. Nanny, don't touch Margaret; we'll get other help. You might phone for the doctor, and send Miss Devine here."

"Mother, what about the crowning?" Margaret, exhausted with crying, could only whisper.

"Not for you, next week," Joy said grimly. "I'm sorry, dearest, but chicken-pox means quarantine; three weeks, I believe. The crowning will have to be put off, but that isn't for us to decide. I must report to Miss Raven and the Hamlet Club and leave it to them."

"They'll all hate me," Margaret wept again. "It isn't my fault. I didn't want to be ill."

Elizabeth, hesitating near the door, said gloomily, "Everybody will be fearfully upset. Mother, can't I be with Twin? It can't matter now; we've been together all day. If I'm going to have it I must have got it by now."

"That doesn't follow," Joy said. "We'll ask the doctor. Oh, Mary!" and she gave hasty directions to Mary Devine, and then, with a comforting word to Margaret, followed Elizabeth downstairs.

"For to-night, to help us all, you must go to bed without Twin, my dearest. Perhaps you haven't taken the thing yet. Don't you *see*, Elizabeth? If you catch it now—and you might—it will mean weeks added to the quarantine time. For everybody's sake we must keep it to Margaret, if we can. A short postponement of the coronation will be unfortunate, but not a terrible disaster. But if you start now and add on weeks, there will be no crowning before half-term. For the sake of the Club and for the babies' sake and mine, we must keep it as short as we can. You will be good, to help us all, won't you?"

"I hate going to bed without Twin!" Elizabeth wailed. "Perhaps I've got the horrid thing already."

"Then we'll pop you into bed with Twin. But perhaps you haven't. You seem very well and you were out all day. You may escape. At least, wait till the doctor has been."

The doctor confirmed Nanny's verdict, and examined Elizabeth carefully and agreed with Joy's decree. Until they knew more she must keep away from the infection; there was no need to look for further trouble. Margaret was not very ill; it was a slight attack and she would soon be herself again. But the difficulty of the quarantine remained. He thought the nursery party stood a good chance of escaping the infection. There was a great deal of chicken-pox in the town, and Margaret must have caught it at the very end of term, from some juniors of whose cases he had heard.

Margaret, with a strange nurse in charge for a day or two, cried herself to sleep, but was much better by the morning. Elizabeth, utterly desolate, wandered about the garden and went

to talk to Rachel in the Abbey.

Joy rang up Miss Raven, and then Daphne and Phyl. She had already told Joan.

Jansy was much distressed. "Oh, poor Margaret! What a blow! The crowning must wait, that's all. It's never happened before that a chosen queen was ill. I remember how Mother watched me. I said she wanted to keep me in a glass case."

"I had no idea there had been chicken-pox in the town," Joy said. "I wonder it hasn't happened before, in all these years of coronations. If only Elizabeth keeps well, it won't be so very long, Jansy."

"How awful!" cried Phyl, when she heard the news by phone. "I suppose we couldn't have the show on the right day, by crowning Elizabeth and letting Margaret just act as queen when she's better? We could take her crowning for granted."

"I wouldn't go," Elizabeth said promptly, when this idea was reported to her. "It's both of us or neither. Besides, the Club would loathe it. They're looking forward to a double crowning."

"I'm sure they are," Joy agreed. "I told Phyl I would pass on the suggestion to you, but I was sure you wouldn't consider it."

"Not for a minute! Poor Twin! To be done out of her coronation!" Elizabeth fumed. "It was just like Phyl, to have such a silly and horrid idea."

The news caused consternation in all branches of the family.

"Margaret really has distinguished herself this time," Rosamund said. "Oh well! I've been trying to force on roses and lavender and lilac; perhaps some of them may be ready after all."

"Will Rosalind be there? Will you let her know?"

"I will. I believe she's to play for the dancing. Tell Margaret to cheer up; it's not so serious. But I'm sorry for her. The Club has always been a little doubtful of 'Daisy,' but they had come to like her better lately. They'll feel she has justified their doubts."

"It isn't her fault," Joy protested. "She's terribly upset and disappointed."

"I'm quite sure she is. Give her my love and sympathy. No, she can't help it, but it is unlucky it should be Margaret. Is Elizabeth all right?"

"Very well; I think she may escape. But she's very unhappy."

"It's hard on her. Give her my love too."

Jen and Maidlin with babies in their nurseries, kept away but sent warm messages of sympathy to both twins. The only one who really rejoiced to hear the news was Littlejan Fraser.

"Perhaps we shall be home, after all, and I'll be able to be Marigold again and see our own twins crowned! It would be just too marvellous. We're really coming home," she wrote, jubilantly. "The date isn't fixed yet, but by the middle of May, perhaps we could be there. There's a chance, anyway. Give Margaret my hearty thanks for being so kind!"

Poor heart-broken Margaret cheered up a little when she heard the message.

"It's a good thing somebody's pleased. I do think it's a silly business! I'm quite all right now and yet I have to keep away from everybody, even Twin!"

"Especially Twin," Joy said promptly. "Of all the things we don't want would be for Elizabeth to begin now. She's had a wonderful escape; she's been very good about obeying orders. But she's safe enough and she can go anywhere, and we've plenty of room; while she's out on the hills you can be in the garden. If only you'll be careful not to meet."

"We'll be careful," Margaret said valiantly. "I talked to her through the window and she says we must think of the Club. We can't upset them again."

So, for the sake of the Club, the twins were cautious and gave vent to howls and whistles of warning if they saw one another in the distance, and fled to sanctuary in the Abbey.

“It’s mad, but we’ve got to do it for the sake of the Club,” Elizabeth groaned.

She remained very well, to everybody’s relief, and at last Margaret was pronounced free from infection. The twins fell into one another’s arms, and made plans for a return to school and for the great day awaiting them.

CHAPTER 28

HEAD GIRL JANICE

“Have you heard about Margaret Marchwood?” Betty and Anne, both in the Fifth Form, met before school on the first day of the summer term.

“I haven’t heard a thing. We’ve been away and only came home last night,” said Betty. “What’s happened to Margaret?”

“Chicken-pox in the hols. She won’t be back for a fortnight.”

“But what about the coronation?”

“Put off. We can’t crown a spotty queen!”

“No, I suppose not. Oh, poor Margaret. What bad luck! Is she very bad?”

“Quite well again, I heard. But still infectious.”

“Hard lines! And Elizabeth?”

“She didn’t take it, nor any of the family. Margaret’s the only one.”

“Margaret always has been a nuisance,” Betty said.

“Oh, come on, Bets! She couldn’t help it.”

“No, but it would be Margaret. No crowning yet, then.”

“May 20th, I heard someone say. That gives heaps of time for her to be all right and for anyone else to start.”

“Help! I hope Buttercup doesn’t get it *now*, or we shall have this crowning hanging over us till Christmas! I do want to see those trains! Miss Lane makes such lovely things.”

As the twins drove to school with Jansy, released from quarantine at last, with one week to wait for their crowning, Margaret gave an impish grin. “They’ll all say things to me! I say, Elizabeth, if you go and have it now, I’ll be able to sit by you and nurse you. Nobody has chick twice and I’ve got a mark on my neck to prove I’ve had it. You always find one mark left.”

“Why should I have it now? I’m not going to do anything so silly,” Elizabeth retorted.

“You might catch it, just as I did. That was really silly, if you like. I don’t know where it came from.”

“Juniors,” said Jansy. “You keep away from them. When I had it Littlejan Fraser was the brickiest kind of brick,” she added. “She’d had it in Sydney, years before, so she was safe and I’ll never forget how decent she was to me. She gave up the holiday dancing school so that she could be with me and cheer me up; she was in my room before Mother could stop her. I’d have had a ghastly lonely time without her.”

“I thought you were extra keen on her,” Elizabeth said.

“I had good reason to be. She was an angel for kindness. We learned all the parts of the Folk Play and rehearsed them together. Littlejan was the first Fool and I was Dame Dolly. If Elizabeth should ever have chicken-pox it will be your job to see her through, Margaret.”

“Don’t do it while we’re queens!” Margaret warned her. “I wouldn’t want to carry on alone.”

“You’d look funny doing a party alone,” Elizabeth remarked. “You’d have to keep hopping on and off the platform, yelling out a dance and then rushing off to play. You would look funny.”

“Don’t be silly, Elizabeth,” Jansy said severely. “If you are so mad as to start any illness, there are plenty of people to help Margaret. She wouldn’t be left to do it all alone.”

“No, I suppose that’s true,” Elizabeth subsided. “That was the Head Girl speaking. Do you like being Head?”

“Yes,” Jansy said briefly. “But not when Fifth Formers are silly.”

Margaret grinned. “Squashed, Lizbeth! Here we are! Now for it!”

The car was surrounded by a mob of their form-mates. “Margaret, you are a rotter! Are you all right again?” Diana cried.

“Doing us out of our crowning like that!” Anne added.

“You’ll have your crowning all right, but we thought it was to be ours,” Elizabeth protested. “Is Jansy a good Head Girl?”

“One of the best. What’s the news of Marigold?”

“Coming home. We heard this morning.” Margaret gave a whoop of delight. “We’re hoping she’ll be here for our day after all. I believe when they fixed the date they put it off for a week longer, to give her a chance to be there. It could have been this week quite well.”

“As it had been put off for so long, one more week didn’t matter. We did want to have Marigold there.”

“I guess Marigold wants to be there,” Betty said.

“Is she bringing the baby?” Anne asked.

“Not to the crowning,” Margaret grinned. “She’ll park him at the house for the evening; Nanny loves him and so do David and Richard and Maidie-Rose. They’ll come to us, of course; their own house isn’t ready enough for them to live in it.”

“Where will Mr. Len go?”

“Hospital in London. He’ll need to be there for ages. But they think he’s going to get better, though it will take a long time. We’re all going to see him as soon as the doctors say yes.”

“We want to see that baby,” Betty hinted.

“She’ll bring him in the car one morning and show him to Miss Raven and the Staff and if you happen to be about——”

There was a shout. “We’ll see that we are! Tell us when she’s coming, Buttercup—and—Daisy.”

Elizabeth grinned. “It’s a clumsy name. You’d better speak to us one at a time.”

“Too much noise here! Come indoors and settle down,” Jansy had turned back from the school door and now stood above them, commanding. “The Head is expecting you, Twins.”

The crowd melted at sight of her, and the twins fled, to report to Miss Raven. “The complete Head Girl!” Elizabeth murmured. “No nonsense for Miss Raymond! We’d better mind our step, Twin. Can’t have queens getting into rows.”

Janice had been busy with the furnishing of the Herb Garden, and had also paid a round of visits. Her last was at Kentisbury, where the Very Young Aunts were having a happy time with four small boys and four little girls as playmates, though Roddy hardly counted, as, at nine years old and an uncle himself to all the other children—though only he knew the interesting fact so far—he was inclined to look down on two more girls who were not even nieces.

Janice was returning to the Hall, to be ready to welcome her daughter and grandchild, happy to have seen all the parts of the family and to have found her own tinies so contented in their fairytale castle, as Littlejan had christened it long ago. It had been their first port of call, on their first visit to England, so many years ago, when Littlejan was thirteen and no one had

dreamed of Marigold or of Mrs. Lennox Fraser, and they both loved the castle and the Earl and Countess. Feeling the Hall would be crowded and busy enough, with little John and his nurse and all the preparations for the coronation, Rosamund insisted that Cecily and Jantjyoy must stay where they were so happy, with friends, ponies, and dogs galore, and Janice was only too glad and grateful to leave them there.

Margaret found she was not teased as much as she had expected. Anne's verdict—"She couldn't help it"—was endorsed by everyone, and the attitude of the girls was one of amused sympathy, rather than blame. Elizabeth's dictum—"Can't have queens getting into rows!"—kept Queen Daisy fairly subdued, so the next few days passed peacefully.

Then one morning, Elizabeth woke early. She lay thinking, then leaned out of bed to pick up a bedroom slipper and hurled it, with careful aim, at the hump in the other bed which was Twin.

Margaret grunted and rolled over. "Pig! Leave me alone."

"Wake up and talk to me!" Elizabeth demanded, her voice thrilling with excitement. "I can't think about it all alone. Oh, Twin, do wake up! It's our day! We're going to be crowned queens."

Margaret sat up with a jerk. "So 'tis! Good thing you didn't hit me in the face. I'd have looked funny marching up the hall with a black eye. And people would have stopped saying how good and sensible you are. I always thought it was a silly idea."

"They mean sensibler than you are and that isn't saying much." Elizabeth reached for her pillow. "I'm used to the sort of hump you make in the bed. I knew I wouldn't hurt you there."

"A fight!" Margaret grabbed her pillow also. "Come on!"

"Twins, it's only six o'clock," Jansy, in a blue dressing gown and with tumbled red plait, came to the door to protest.

"But it's so exciting! Weren't you excited when you woke on the day you were going to be crowned?"

"Yes, terribly," Jansy laughed. "But you could be excited a bit more quietly. You'll wake your mother."

"All right, Head Girl. We'll be good," Elizabeth promised. "You'd better go and do your hair! Come into my bed and whisper, Twin. That won't wake anybody."

"It's dreadful to live with the Head Girl! And to have her in the room next to you is just too bad," Margaret mourned, accepting the invitation.

But Joy was restless too this morning and she had always been one to wake early. She heard their voices and slipped into their room and sat on the bed.

"I'm so very happy, Twins. It's a great day for all of us. Here's a present for you. It's wonderful to know you will be queens at last."

"Buttercups and daisies!" Elizabeth said, accepting chocolates with a whoop of delight. "Have some, Twin! You do know where to find my buttercups, don't you, Mother? Margaret's daisies are all over the place."

"Common as dirt," said Queen Daisy. "And it's such a silly little name! Gorgeous chocs; thank you, Mother."

"I know where to find plenty of buttercups, with long stalks to make a lovely bouquet," said Joy, who knew every field for miles around. "They come later than daisies, but I can find plenty. And Margaret-Twin shall have some moon-daisies to make a big loose bunch. I know where they grow too, very early ones."

“You are useful!” Margaret commented. “I thought I’d need to have a niggly little bunch, like Jansy’s lobelia.”

“We’ll do better for you than that. But we won’t pick them till the afternoon, so that they’ll be as fresh as possible.”

And Joy settled down to a serious talk about the fun and the possible difficulties of being queens.

CHAPTER 29

THE TWINS ARE CROWNED

There had been much speculation in the Fifth Form as to how the twins would arrange their procession. Would Elizabeth lead and be followed by Margaret? Or would they walk side by side?

“That’s my guess,” said Anne. “They’ll want it to look like a double procession. We’ve always had single-file queens before.”

“We’ve never had twin queens before,” Betty retorted.

“Elizabeth won’t go in front of Margaret,” said Diana. “She’d feel it was trying to look more important.”

“She’s older,” Betty objected. “She is more important, for lots of reasons.”

“Well, you’ll see,” Anne said. “I’m dying to see how Miss Lane has put buttercups and daisies on the trains!”

“I don’t suppose my queen will be here,” Diana said mournfully, for she had been Littlejan’s attendant. “She hasn’t come home yet, has she?”

But no one had heard anything about Mrs. Fraser, except that she was expected soon.

Margia Lane had come to play and to gaze at the procession of robes she had designed and decorated as she loved to do. But she was not very well and was easily tired, and her face lit up as a tall queen dressed in shimmering lavender came up behind her and touched her shoulder. “Will you let me play for part of the time, when the procession is over and I’m not needed?”

“Let you! I’ll be grateful for your help, Lady Rosalind—I suppose I mustn’t say Mrs. Grandison?”

The Lavender Queen smiled at this recognition of her married state.

“The girls call me Mrs. Grandison, though they know it isn’t right. I was received with shrieks of joy. I’ll be glad to play for them again. You start them off and I’ll take over as soon as I can.” And she returned to the dressing-room, where the procession was forming.

More shouts greeted the appearance of the twins, with Joy, who had robed them carefully in the headmistress’s room. The assembled queens greeted them warmly, while audience and dancers were gathering in their places.

“What lovely trains! Oh, Twins, you do look nice!”

“Buttercups and daisies! Miss Lane is clever,” said the President, with warm approval.

“And they have got spots, lots of spots, though not Margaret’s kind of spots,” Jen added.

“How horrid of you, Auntie Jen!” Margaret protested.

“What pretty bouquets!” Joan exclaimed, as Joy handed a shower of buttercups to Elizabeth. “Moon-daisies for Margaret! I remember Marguerite had them; what a long time ago the third Queen seems!”

“Joy arranged those flowers,” Rosamund said, with conviction. “Nobody can touch her at that job.”

“Can you curtsy nicely, Twins?” Maidlin, an expert on curtseys to Royalty, asked.

Elizabeth promptly picked up her long white dress and dropped a beautiful curtsy, and Margaret followed suit.

“Oh yes, those will do. I’ll pass you with honours,” Maidlin smiled.

“We’d better get started,” Jansy, in her lobelia blue robe, came in, her eyes shining like stars. “Everybody’s ready.”

Joy looked at her quickly and she gave a tiny nod.

“Out you go, Phyllida,” the President commanded.

“What did you mean, Mother and Jansy? Have you got a secret?” Elizabeth cried.

“Is it—you know?” Margaret demanded.

“Wait and see,” Jansy said austerely.

Phyllida, in her train of glowing chestnut with its bright gold lining, was a good leader for the line of queens, though everyone had the unspoken thought that she had not really been a good queen and that her wreath of forget-me-nots might not be very thick. She would not make a speech; there was too much to say and she did not want to say it.

Tessa followed, in her beautiful lupin robe of lemon yellow, with its long spikes of every colour of lupins stretching from the corners. Then Rosalind, in demure grey and lavender, and Jean, home from college for the day, in her pale blue and dark green rosemary colours.

Jansy, in her lobelia blue, came next, and then a perfect shriek of joy went up from audience and dancers, as the Marigold Queen slipped into her place behind Jean, her brilliant orange train held carefully by Diana, found at the last moment and fairly radiant with excitement because her queen had come, after all.

“Marigold? Oh, that makes it perfect!” Anne and Betty cried joyfully.

Littlejan was radiant also. Her highest hopes were fulfilled. They had arrived that afternoon; Len was safely in the London hospital, and she would see him to-morrow. Little John had been received with delight by Nanny at the Hall. And she was in time to watch the twins crowned. She had nothing left to wish for, and her face showed her joy.

When all the queens were on the platform, Phyllida rose from her throne and knelt to be crowned with forget-me-nots by Tessa—much relieved to see that the girls had been generous and the wreath was at least respectably thick. The Club had its revenge in its shouts of ‘Speech!’ but she shook her head violently and turned to Tessa, and together they came down the hall to fetch the new queens.

“Two godmothers! Well, that’s quite right. May as well make the most of having two queens,” was the usual comment.

Cheering and shouts greeted the new queens, as they came, looking almost shy for once, walking abreast with much dignity, in a line of four, each queen led by her ‘godmother.’

“Don’t go too fast!” was Elizabeth’s last whisper, as they came out to face the crowds. “I don’t want to look as if I’m running after you.”

“Scuttling along behind me! I’ll take my time from Tessa; she does it beautifully,” Margaret promised.

So the wide procession came slowly, and everyone had time to admire the new trains, of dark green, with gold and white stars sprinkled over them and the contrasting white and gold linings and edgings.

“Pretty!” was the general verdict. “Miss Lane’s a genius at design.”

Jen had urgently proposed that Joy, being already on the platform, should crown her daughters. But Joy, though sorely tempted, had refused.

“We’ll stick to tradition. It’s Phyllida’s and Tessa’s right,” she said, and sat in her place among the other queens looking proud and happy.

So Elizabeth and Margaret knelt to receive their crowns of white narcissus, and then were helped into the thrones that awaited them. The godmothers withdrew, and the school and the

audience cheered till the hall rang.

“But why are there two?” asked a stranger in the audience. “I never heard of two queens at once before. And so much alike! It’s very odd!”

A girl from the throng in the gangway heard. “They’re the Marchwood twins. We couldn’t have one without the other.”

“I can see they are twins. What are their names?”

“Elizabeth and Margaret. *Queen* Elizabeth and *Queen* Margaret! They’ll be good queens. They’ve done a lot for the Club already. They’re lovely dancers, of course.”

“What is happening now?”

“The Club’s going to dance in their honour. They’ll have the maypole and some morris dances and some songs. Oh, Lavender’s going to play! How good of her! Miss Lane gets tired quickly.”

Rosalind was making her way down from the platform. She smiled at Margia Lane and took up her fiddle, her shining robe pushed well back out of her way.

“It’s Lady Rosalind Grandison, the violinist,” the helpful girl said to the stranger. “She’s played for the Club for years. Her music’s lovely.”

On the platform, Littlejan bent to speak to her maid. “Nice of you to wait for me, Diana! But hadn’t you partners for the dances?”

Diana looked up at her adoringly. “They’ll find someone else. I’m so glad you could be here. How are Mr. Len and the little boy?”

“Little John is splendid. My husband is in hospital. Go and dance! You’ll spoil all the sets, and we shall have muddles in public.”

Diana rose reluctantly. “Perhaps I ought to go. Did you have a fearful hurry to get here in time?”

“An awful scramble. Jansy stayed to help me, in case I managed it, and she and Mary dressed me and we came racing down in the little car.”

When it was time for the break in the dancing, the Marigold Queen made her way to the music corner. “How kind of you, Nanta Rose!”

Rosalind put down her fiddle. “I wanted to play for the twins. May I drive over to see your little boy? You went off in such a hurry that I didn’t hear of it till you had gone.”

“Oh, please do come! Little John will love to see you.”

The Lavender Queen hesitated. Then, as Margia took up her fiddle again, to play ‘The Twin Sisters,’ she turned and spoke impulsively, under cover of the music.

“Don’t tell anybody. But—oh, Marigold, I’m going to have one too! Not yet; about Christmas.”

Littlejan’s face lit up. “I am so glad for you. Oh, how you’ll love him!”

“We both want a little girl, and Derek already calls her Lavender Rose. He loves my queen-name.”

“That’s pretty. I hope you’ll have her soon.”

“Any more big concerts coming, Lavender?” Jen had seen their radiant faces and came up to make inquiries.

Rosalind smiled at her. “One more, in June. Derek has a new concerto, and he won’t have anyone else play it. But after that, no more for some time. I want a rest.”

Jen gave her a sharp look, understanding Littlejan’s delighted face. “Good for you! I’m very glad, my dear.”

“Don’t talk about it. Not for a long time yet,” Rosalind begged.

“Are you going to play for us for a little party?”

“I’m hoping to be allowed to do it.” Rosalind smiled at Margia Lane. “I’d like to play for you all to dance for the twins.”

“I shall be grateful,” Margia said. “But you must dance for the twins too.”

“Take turns,” Jen said. “I must go and change. Hi, Marigold,” for Littlejan had turned away. “Come and get into a short frock for the party!”

“No, I’ve had enough. I’m a traveller,” Littlejan protested. “And I haven’t any clothes here. I came in such a hurry; Mary-Dorothy flung a big cloak over me and Jansy rushed me to the car. I’ll watch for a while and then I must go home to little John.”

CHAPTER 30

LITTLEJAN TALKS OF THE FUTURE

“And now tell us all about everything!” Jen demanded. She had come to dinner at the Hall on purpose to put this question, after the new queens had been fed and sent off, very tired, to bed.

“After dinner,” Joy decreed. “We’ll sit round a tiny fire and hear all Marigold’s plans and adventures.”

“There haven’t been any adventures,” Littlejan said, when they had settled down. “Everything was very easy and everyone was more than kind. Nurse came back with us, but she’s gone off to her next case and I’m going to look after little John all on my own.”

“We’ll help!” There was a reassuring chorus, led by Janice.

“Yes, thanks. I know you will, but it won’t be needed. I can do for him quite well. He’ll be waking and wanting me presently.”

“What about the future, Marigold?” Joy asked.

Littlejan looked thoughtful. “No more Antarctic for Len. They won’t have him. But they do feel he has done his work for them.”

“I should think so! I’m sure Dr. Hamilton will never forget. Will *he* be able to go back?” Janice asked.

“In time, yes; he hopes to go. But not Len.”

“Isn’t he going to get quite cured, Marigold?” Jen asked gently.

Littlejan drew a long breath. “They hope so, but it will still take a long while. They think he’ll walk again, but perhaps with crutches for a time. They say he may always have a slight limp—one leg shorter than the other,” she said bravely, gazing into the fire. “My Len! I hate the thought of it.”

“But think what it might have been!” Joy urged. “That’s a very small thing, compared with a bath-chair!”

“He knows I want to wheel him with one hand and little John’s pram with the other. He laughed at the idea. I want him as well and strong as ever, but I know that’s childish. I’m very proud of him.”

“You ought to be proud!” Janice exclaimed.

“Yes. And I’m so very glad about the Antarctic! That’s unkind, for he’s disappointed. But I am glad,” she said defiantly. “I hated the thought of it, though I couldn’t say so; he was so very keen. I shall see him much oftener now.”

They looked at her inquiringly, and she explained. “He may get a shore appointment, when he’s able to go about by himself, or he might even find some job on a ship, like he had before with Father. His leg wouldn’t matter so much at sea; one leg is rather bad, I’m afraid. He’d like the ship job best; that’s what he’s hoping for, and it’s helping him to pull round. But he’d often get leave and I should see him. He feels he has so much more to stay at home for now that little John is here. He wants to see him grow up. If he can’t go to sea again he’ll be happier at home now.”

“With Littlejan and little John,” Jen nodded.

“In the meantime, you must go to your own house and make it feel like a home,” Janice said. “Little John and I will come with you, and it will soon feel lived-in and cosy. But it’s not

quite ready. I waited for you for the finishing touches.”

“Len’s looking forward to lying under the trees of the Herb Garden. We’re going—with Aunty Joan’s leave, of course—to cut a tiny gate between the ilex trees, so that we can slip in to the Abbey without going round by the road.”

“Good idea!” Joy said warmly. “Len can go there to rest and build up, once he is able to walk.”

“And I shall go house-hunting on the South Coast, to find the little house and garden where your father can grow his roses,” Janice proclaimed.

“Len expects to be terribly bored with nothing to do but get well! He’s hoping the crowned queens will come and talk to him,” Littlejan said.

“The crowned queens are hoping he’ll have them. They want to hear about the penguins. He must have heaps of stories to tell. The twins are looking forward to it.”

Littlejan assented. “The crowned queens will be very welcome. Oh, Aunty Joy, aren’t you proud? The twins have made good; the school loves them now.”

“I’m very proud and very happy,” Joy said. “Two crowned queens! And another thing that makes me proud and happy, Marigold, is that you chose to come to me to have your baby. You might have gone to Joan, or Rosamund; I know they both wanted you. But you chose to come to me.”

“But that was coming home!” Littlejan cried. “The Abbey is home to all of us; this house and the Abbey—it’s all the same! Oh, Aunty Joy! Surely you know that—you and the Abbey—it’s home!”

“And that’s true!” Jen and Janice spoke together.

“And you’re going to live right in the middle of it, in your little house at the Abbey gates, you and Len and little John,” Joy added.

“Oh yes! The Abbey is home for all of us,” Littlejan said happily.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Two Queens At the Abbey* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]