

"The Crystal Heart"

By PHYLLIS BOTTOME

Author of "The Dark Tower"

Illustrations by Norman Price

Love was born on a May morn,
But he died
At eventide,
An eventide in June.
—E. H. COLERIDGE.

I

MRS. FEATHERSTONE had called her Joy because she came into the world with the barest whimper, and seemed subsequently to be so contented with her arrival.

She liked all the things that babies usually like, warmth and her mother's breast, the feel of responsible fingers and safe knees. But she liked also, from the first, the hazard and strangeness of baths, the hard, bright rims of basins, the loneliness of her deep cot, and the clutch of her helpless fingers upon naked air. Nobody needed to provide Joy with a dummy or a coral ring. Behind her very large blue eyes lay secrets of incommunicable mirth.

Elder sisters might nurse her with the awkward handling of awe, presumptuous brothers might toss her toward the ceiling with the impunity of ignorance, she might be left alone for hours to crawl all over the vast expanses of the nursery floor, and when a remorseful nurse hurried upstairs, after an inordinate tea, to see what had happened to baby, Joy would still be found smiling unexactly at the universe.

Earth and air were alike to Joy, a friendly playground; and human beings, even her father with his irritating beard, born to be her play-fellows. For all the animal creation she had an ecstatic and unhesitating ardor. At two years old the highest form of human pleasure known to her was being hurled upon a gravel path by an Airedale and having her fur bonnet amicably worried. Reinforced by a biblical picture in the nursery, her love of lambs became a mania. At three years old she was accused of blasphemy because she persisted in stating to an elder sister that she had found the Lamb of God in the field below the garden.

She was discovered at the same early age following the local shepherd and his flock, trailing faint, but eager, in the dusty rear of the sheep, two miles from home, under a pink sun-bonnet, fully convinced that she had found the Good Shepherd, and was approaching paradise. The shepherd apologized profusely for this involuntary abduction, but averred that he could n't call her "off it," she was "that set."

Even at three years old Joy was a difficult baby to convince of sin. Her visions shook reality out of her head, and made her deal elastically with circumstance. All the little Featherstones (there were nine of them) were plucky. They had been taught by

their mother never to tell lies and not to cry when they were hurt, but usually they had some sense of the inimical in things and people.

Joy had none. If a hand had been raised against her, she would have grasped it confidently; nor was there any enmity set between her and a serpent.

Day after day, unknown to the entire household, she visited a vicious horse in the stables. She had heard her father say it was "a dangerous brute," and she knew he meant something not very nice by "brute," but she did not know what he meant by "dangerous." It hurt Joy to think that so noble a creature as a horse should be called something that did not sound quite nice. She was afraid that Skylark might have overheard the criticism and taken it to heart. She had to stand on a wooden box to reach up to the handle of the loose-box, but she opened the door very carefully, so as not to startle Skylark, who stood looking down at her with all the whites of his vicious eyes rolling, his teeth bared, and his ears plastered flat against his wicked head. He had not quite made up his mind what he was going to do to her.

Joy stood quietly under his nose, holding an apple out on a flat hand, and murmuring affectionate and unvarnished praises of his nature.

Skylark's great nostrils dilated nervously above her, and then he moved to one side to give the little figure room, dropped his velvet nose down to her hand, and took his apple. It cannot be said that a fruit diet altered Skylark's unpleasant disposition, but he never betrayed his temper to Joy.

What she took him to be he was as far as she was concerned until Mr.

Featherstone succeeded in selling him to a friend.

After Skylark's departure Joy tried to content herself with the stable cat, a creature of nomad habits and without natural affections. The stable cat had lost an ear, her frequent families vanished like the dawn, and she had no charm for any one but Joy. Joy was heard murmuring softly over her as she tried to claw her way out of the child's sheltering arms: "You must n't mind not being a dog, dear Kitty, nor even an inside cat. I love you much the best, and I s'pect God does. You see, it's so *kind* of you to be a stable cat."

The dogs (the entire household of dogs, ranging between eight and ten, and not counting Mr. Featherstone's two retrievers, who were not allowed indoors) worshiped the ground Joy walked on. They belonged to the other children (Joy was seldom the legal possessor of anything), but they served Joy first in the spirit. When she came dancing out on the lawn, they let the nine points of the law escape, and danced with her. Joy always danced. She danced on the tips of her toes when she was angry, and she danced like an unflurried bird when she was glad.

What she did when she was sad was never known; there was no apparent pause between her ecstasies. She grew a little wistful sometimes over the sharp nursery feuds which raged above her devoted head, or she could take a violent tooth-and-claw part in them when roused; but nothing baffled for long her sense of life's enchantments.

She set the multiplication table to a tune, and when she was given dry bread and water for a punishment, she

turned it into a fairy-story, and asked if she might have it every night for a treat. Joy was not a naughty child, but life did not have the same horizons for her as it had for the other children; her horizons were farther away and more luminous.

They were all children of the same parents, but they called themselves the "first" and "second" families on account of a prolonged break in their ages. Margaret, Paul, James, and Walter were all old, and vanished into the world rapidly, with infrequent and romantic returns. Joy and Maude, Archie and Rosemary, were comparatively young and had an air of permanence.

Rosemary was so young that she was like Joy's own child. Joy was nine when Rosemary was born, and in an instant her passion for puppies, kittens, dolls, and even waterfalls sank into insignificance. Joy loved everything and everybody still, but she knew, when she gazed down at this unexpected visitant, pinched, a little yellow, with a whining cry and a rather more unstable neck than most babies, that she could never love anything so much again.

Maude was Joy's companion sister, —there was barely a year between them,—and they did everything together; but Maude was n't like a newborn baby. On the contrary, she often seemed older and wiser than Joy. She knew more about the world and how to act in it, and she was n't at all easily dazzled by its charms. The likeness between the sisters was very strong, but all Joy's features that ought to be small were smaller, and all her features that ought to be large were larger, than Maude's. Her coloring was delicately, firmly

pink, whereas Maude's coloring in moments of excitement or emotion turned to mauve.

Maude deeply resented these differences, but she was relieved to find, as she grew older, that she usually got what she wanted, whereas Joy, tentative and never on the lookout for possession, made few acquisitions, and could usually be induced to part easily with those that she had.

Mr. and Mrs. Featherstone seldom interfered with their children and lived a long way off. There were three flights of stairs between the nursery and the drawing-room, and there was a great gulf fixed between middle-aged Victorian imaginations and those of their offspring.

Mrs. Featherstone was still a very handsome woman, and her husband had been exceptionally good-looking when he was young. Unfortunately, he had not worn well. Life had picked out his weaknesses and had set them on his face. He was not a strong character, and he reinforced his decisions by a spirit of petty tyranny. He was not a reasonable man, and he had a good many principles, which he fell back upon for defense when his intellect failed him. This is apt to be an aggravating quality in family life, especially when the principles are said to be religious; and it must be confessed that Mr. Featherstone irritated his family exceedingly. When they got the better of him intellectually, he laid them out morally, and put an edge to their exasperation by applying penalties. He had not so strong a nature as his wife, and he never forgave her for finding it out.

Mrs. Featherstone was a tolerant, quiet woman with a dreadful courage and a merciless sense of humor. She

was not the wife for a weak, vain man who wanted to pose as master in his own house. She let him pose, but he knew that she saw through his pose.

Mrs. Featherstone never laughed at him out loud, and she never gave him away to any one else, not even to her children. She belonged to a generation of women who kept married unhappiness to themselves and did not think it a matter of great importance.

Mrs. Featherstone loved the country, the moors, which stretched for miles behind the house, and the sea, which lay beneath the cliffs in front of it, with passion. She loved her children with indulgence and common sense, and she did not love her husband at all. Yet she no more dreamed of giving him up than she dreamed of giving up Rock Lodge because it faced north and the kitchen range was extremely inconvenient.

She never failed Mr. Featherstone in any of the duties of a wife, and as a housekeeper she was faultless. Mrs. Featherstone had never been very intimate even with her children, but they all adored her and took from her their cue to life. She had no favorites; that is to say, no one discovered which was her favorite. She did not punish easily, and she never praised.

She visited the nursery at breakfast-time, kissing each child once, satisfied herself that they were clean, healthy, and without real grievances, and did not see them again until after nursery tea, when she had them down-stairs with her till bed-time. If there were visitors, the children played by themselves with drawing-room toys on the floor, and if they were alone, Mrs. Featherstone read out loud to them in a musical voice, and with a singu-

larly perfect diction, Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, and Tennyson's poetry.

She never allowed any of her children to tell tales, or to boast of anything they could do or possessed. The most awful thing she could say, because they knew how very much she meant it, was, "You are not behaving like a well-bred child." Nevertheless, in moments of real grief all the children knew they could safely turn to their mother. She did not underestimate youthful disaster.

When the stable cat died (to be accurate, she came by her death through having given undue provocation to Archie's new bull-terrier) and Mrs. Featherstone found Joy lying prostrate beside her, having tried, without advantage, stretching herself over Eliza's mangled form seven times, according to the familiar example of the prophet Elijah when raising the widow's only son, Mrs. Featherstone knew that no light comfort would suffice.

Joy was confronted by death for the first time, and the universe reeled under the shock of her discovery.

Mrs. Featherstone took Joy into her arms and set to work to rob the grave of its victory.

"Poor Eliza," she said soothingly, "will never feel pain any more."

"She can't lap milk," wailed Joy. "Why can't Eliza lap milk? I've tried, oh, I've tried so hard to raise her! I've asked God till I'm sick of Him. I don't believe He's there. I don't believe a kind God would make a cat go stiff for nothing."

Mrs. Featherstone's mind raced hurriedly over the possible alternatives to this problem and rejected all the more plausible ones.

"I'm afraid," she said gently, "it

was Archie's new bull-terrier who did it. You know we can all hurt each other if we like. God lets us, but He does n't like it. He wants us to help each other instead. But if we had n't the power to do harm, we could n't have the power to do good, either. We must have both; and if we misuse our power, dreadful things happen."

Joy's sobs slackened.

"I 'm not sure," she said tearfully, and it was her first doubt of any created thing, "that God *ought* to have made a bull-terrier at all if He did n't want Eliza to be hurt. O Mummy, what happens to stiff cats?"

Mrs. Featherstone looked at Eliza, dispassionately. It was difficult to predict a future for a cat of such exclusively materialistic habits, but she did the best she could, and suggested a handsome funeral for Eliza's immediate present.

"And may we pick the Madonna lilies under the wall?" asked Joy, leaping to her feet in recovered ecstasy.

Much to the gardener's annoyance, Mrs. Featherstone agreed to the sacrifice of the lilies, and Eliza's grave was strewn with this inappropriate emblem. Joy danced hand in hand with Mrs. Featherstone about the sacred spot, singing with touching fervor her favorite hymn,

There is a Home for little children,
above the bright blue sky.

It is to be hoped that Eliza's spirit was accommodated elsewhere, as she had a very strong dislike of children, and would have deeply resented any home which was given up to them.

Mrs. Featherstone read the "Morte d'Arthur" out loud to the assembled family after tea. She knew that as a

picture of death it was a little fanciful, but she longed to remove the last traces of horror that still lingered in Joy's eyes.

The reading was a great success. The seven queens and the dark barge overlaid the specter of reality. Eliza and King Arthur floated into the land of Avalon together,

Where far beyond those voices there is
peace.

II

It was Joy's fourteenth birthday and the first of June. She started the day at dawn. Every bird in Devonshire was awake, and all of them seemed to Joy to be in the Rock Lodge garden.

Fat thrushes with operatic voices shook themselves into trances, black-birds, with ringing notes piercingly sweet and loud, got the better of the most reluctant worms, and divided their talents with impartial rapture between securing their breakfast and making most meticulous music. Chaffinches sprayed their brief melodies from bough to bough, and every finch and lark and tiny wren set the seal of their loud joy upon the morning.

Far away in a hollow glen the cuckoo dropped his wandering challenges, playing hide and seek with outraged heads of families. Muffling the ecstatic screams of a fox-terrier puppy called Absolom under her skirt, Joy crept out upon the lawn.

The lawn was very wet with dew, and Joy had taken neither time nor pains over her toilet. She was the age of *Juliet*, but she had none of *Juliet's* preoccupations. Her mind was as blank and innocent as a newborn leaf blowing this way and that to catch a light adventure. She looked

back at the old house with a sudden thrill at her heart. It was hers; it must be hers forever. The transfiguring golden light covered it, and the birds' persistent voices all around it made it like a shell of melody. All the happiness of Joy's smooth and eager years was harvested in its old walls.

She could not think of life without her home. The mossy, precipitous drive the horses had to be lead so carefully up and down, the swift drops and scrambles of the little paths from rocky platform to rocky platform on which garden beds yielded only to the stoutest and most persistent flowers, were as much a part of her as Maude and Archie. The Rock Lodge garden was bad for gardeners, but it was a paradise for children. Joy put Absolom down gingerly, and watched a white and clamorous streak pass through the shrubberies and out on to the moors. Absolom had smelt rabbits, and the law and the prophets no longer existed for him.

There was nothing to be done but to fly after him. Joy's skirts were short, her legs were long and slender; she flew without increase of breath up the steep path which led to the moor. She had not meant to go to the moor; she had meant to go down to the village and thank the villagers for sending her presents. She had found in the hall, left overnight, a jackdaw, two baby rabbits in a basket, cowslip wine, and heather honey. They came from the little pink, shell-like cottages hidden in the trees below her. Lynton was full of smiling, calm, immovable people with strong instincts and pleasant manners, who hated slowly and steadily, loved forever, and on the whole minded their own business with placidity; and they were all Joy's

friends. Nobody ever hurried or altered their plans at Lynton, or tried to please anybody more than they intended to go on pleasing them, and nobody ever changed.

"So if I live here always," Joy thought as she hurried up the path, "they 'll always love me." Life stretched before her like the summer day, sunny and inexhaustible.

When she reached the top of the moor above the house, Absolom had vanished.

Far away, and yet so near that she could have dropped a pebble on to it, lay the lawn of Rock Lodge, with the unshaken summer sea, as still as blue bells in a wood, beneath it. The little perched and sliding town of Lynton clung to the cliff's-edge above the deep-green valley of the Watersmeet. The valley lay between two steep and heather-tufted cliffs; a rapid river with waterfalls tossed a bright, impatient way under green bushes from end to end of it.

Three streams met high up in the valley, raged and played together in a fine lather of waterfalls, and then united in a swift and businesslike way in a race to the sea. Joy had followed all the streams to their source and knew half their secrets, where to find a company of kingcups overlooking a deep pool, and where the big trout lay under the shelving rock.

But she never told the boys where the trout lay; she had no wish for the death of living things. It was one of the reasons why she liked best to be alone with Absolom and Rosemary. Absolom and Rosemary were too young to kill anything; they could chase rabbits all day long, and no one be the worse for it. Nicolas was different. He liked to kill rats in a

barn with terriers, and he liked it better if Joy was there to see. Not that you could call Nicolas cruel; he was remarkably kind. He carried Rosemary for hours on his back when she was tired, and mended anything that was broken. Nicolas was part of Joy's life, too, quite as much as any of her brothers; rather more, perhaps. Not that Joy could have described what Nicolas was to her. He was Nicolas, and came a long way after Rosemary in her affections.

The Pennants, who were his people, lived only four miles away at Foxglove Hall, and came over constantly on ponies. The only fault Joy had ever had to find in Nicolas beyond the rats, which was hardly a fault, as all boys shared the same desire for their extinction, was that Maude wanted him to like her best, and Nicolas would n't. Joy had explained to Nicolas that it would be much simpler if he would like Maude best, and that he could go on liking Joy second best, which would suit her just as well and be pleasanter all round; and Nicolas, with his curiously hard and honest eyes fixed on her, had said, "You little fool, I shall like you best as long as I live."

It was curious how this remark had remained with her. She remembered it again now as she sat on a tuft of heather, her eyes ranging far and wide in her search for Absolom. Nicolas had not explained why he cared for her like that; but, then, Nicolas never explained things: he only did them when he had said he was going to do them, and even sometimes when he had not.

He was going to take her to the Doone Valley this afternoon alone, and, if her mother would let her, on

Fidget. As soon as she could recover Absolom, Joy must go and look for her mother in the harness-room and ask her for leave to ride Fidget. It was tiresome that on her birthday she was n't to have Archie and Maude with her, but Nicolas had said it was his last day at home, where a broken collar-bone had conveniently laid him, and that he would have his own way about it. He would n't have minded Rosemary, but it was too far to take her, and Nicholas had been so beautifully kind to Joy—he had saved all his pocket money for ages to buy her a brindle bulldog pup. The puppy was to be called Ajax and was very fat; if you stuck a finger into him he rolled over. He was the most deliciously ferocious-looking lamb of a puppy, and Nicolas was training him to be obedient. The training had got as far as Ajax sitting down and wagging his tail, with his head on one side, and all his wrinkles looking very anxious, whenever Nicolas addressed him.

Ajax was one of the dreams of Joy's life realized, and she shrank from being ungracious to the giver of a dream.

The silence of the moors inclosed Joy as if the skies were walls. She sat very still, because it seemed as if her whole being was surrounded by something unseen. It was a curious feeling that she had had before when she was quite alone. If you kept perfectly still and did n't think of anything at all, you melted away from yourself; you became a part of the day and of the listening air. It was a very wonderful feeling, only you could never tell any one about it. It was like being a part of God.

Three white gulls, sailing on their motionless wings, sank down almost

on a level with her head. She watched the shadows their great wings made by her on the grass; their uncanny, changeless, yellow eyes rested on her as if to see whether she was fugitive or a landmark. It was quieter than ever when they were gone, so quiet that Joy could hear her own heart beat, and the light air which stirred the grasses had a song in it. Everything she loved was fast asleep below her; only behind the silent beauty something that was akin to her was stirring. It was as if she and the heather, the butterflies, and the small golden bees, the wide and motionless sea, the raveled fleeces of the summer clouds, were all balanced and held upon a giant hand.

The silence was like the breath of some great being; and if his silence was so golden, what would be his speech? Far away below her in the time-ridden world she heard a clock strike eight.

It was a long while before the sound reached her senses. When it did, she shivered as if she were called back from a perpetual safety. Mother would be up now in the harness-room cleaning Fidget's harness. Far away at the cliff's-edge Joy caught a flash of white moving in and out of the low furze-bushes. The flash stopped dead as her voice recalled it. "Absolom! Absolom!" For a few moments Absolom continued his search, pretending that he had heard nothing, but not for long. Joy was upon him fleetly than his own four legs, and had him by the scruff of the neck. He slued a wicked, jocular eye at her, well knowing the worst that would come to him, and as soon as he was released after a perfunctory shake, crept with imitation shivers to her heel.

Mrs. Featherstone had bought Fidget with her pig money. The grooms had enough to do with the carriage horses, two hunters, and the children's ponies, so Mrs. Featherstone did everything for Fidget herself.

Fidget was a standing reproach to the grooms. Her coat was as soft as satin, her harness sparkled on the dullest mornings, and her leather had the fine smoothness of a laurel-leaf.

Her character was almost worth the care taken over her personal appearance, for Fidget had a warm and generous heart. She was at once lively and reliable, and if she had not been so obviously a lady, she might have been described as a "perfect gentleman."

She let herself go on grass, and walked delicately as if on egg-shells down the awkward drive. Any one with judgment and nerve could ride her, but it must be owned that she felt herself compelled to unseat any one who attempted to ride her without these two qualities. She gave her best to her rider, and expected consideration and sympathy in return. Joy slipped into the harness-room, Absolom bustling in beside her with an air of never having left her side.

Mrs. Featherstone kissed her daughter with unusual tenderness. She wondered if many mothers had so straight and lithe and beautiful a girl to greet upon her fourteenth birthday, and knew that none of them had ever greeted one so innocent, and so unconscious of her beauty.

"I'm going with Nicolas if I may," Joy asked breathlessly, "and may I ride Fidget as a birthday treat? If I must n't, may we have lunch and walk? We want to go to the top of the Doone Valley.

"I finished 'Lorna Doone' last night. Nicolas promised to take me. He says all the savage Doones are dead, but I think there might be rather a nice one left."

Mrs. Featherstone took up Fidget's immaculate bit and redoubled the polish on it.

"And what about Maude and Archie?" she asked.

"Nicolas says not," Joy explained regretfully. "He thinks the ponies could n't take them there and back, and, besides, I don't think he particularly wants them. Archie says he does n't care about the Doones if they 're dead, anyway; but I think Maude would have liked to go."

"And yet Nicolas seems to have thought it not too far for you to walk," said Mrs. Featherstone, reflectively.

"He knows a short cut for walking," Joy explained; "but walking is n't quite so like a birthday, is it?"

"No," agreed Mrs. Featherstone. "Well, you 'll be quite all right with Nicolas, of course, and you may ride Fidget. Only come back in time for your birthday tea at five, and bring Nicolas with you. The rest of the Pennants are coming over then. You are getting rather old now," she stated, glancing at her daughter. "You 're nearly as tall as I am."

"I don't feel old," said Joy, truthfully; "I think it 's only my legs."

"I dare say it is," Mrs. Featherstone agreed. "Still, I think at fourteen I told Margaret she must stop kissing boys and men except her father and brothers, and I suppose you had better do the same. Nicolas is eighteen now, is n't he?"

"Yes, he 's something awful at Winchester which sounds like 'preposterous,' but means you can do as you

like," said Joy. "He 's going back to-morrow because his broken collar-bone 's all right. I 'm afraid he won't like my not kissing him when he gives me Ajax. Still, I can kiss Ajax instead, can't I?"

"You can kiss bull pups as much as you like," said Mrs. Featherstone, gravely. "Nicolas will have to put up with that as a proxy."

"Mummy," Joy asked thoughtfully, "are men very different from women?"

Mrs. Featherstone looked very hard at Fidget's bridle before she answered, then she said slowly;

"Not particularly; a wise woman once said the older she grew the more sure she felt that there were only two kinds of people, men and women, and that they were very much alike. Still, there are certain differences. Women have to remember one or two things in their behavior to men. They must never allow any liberties to be taken with them, and they must not encourage men whom they do not wish to marry. Admiration is very nice, but it would not be very fair to accept a great deal of it unless you were prepared to give something back. Above all, they must play the game with other women. I think the basest thing a woman can do is to take away another woman's man."

"But they can't when they 're married, can they?" Joy asked.

"Not without sin," said Mrs. Featherstone, sternly.

"I don't think I shall ever marry," said Joy, standing on one slim foot and twirling slowly round on it. "I think I shall keep children, chickens, and a bulldog."

Mrs. Featherstone put down the bridle with a sigh, which might have been relief at her daughter's untouched

innocence or despair at the failure of experience to reach the consciousness of youth.

"I wonder if you would like to be confirmed this year," she suggested, giving up the problems of this world to touch upon the lighter ones of the next. "You may wait until you are fifteen if you prefer to wait. You know what confirmation means, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Joy, lightly—"going to the other service and being able to be a godmother. I should like to be nearly everybody's godmother in Lynnton. I don't think I need wait till I'm fifteen, do you?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Featherstone, thoughtfully. "Confirmation means strengthening. I suppose you are ready to be confirmed when you wish very heartily to have your religion strengthened and are prepared to do your best to strengthen it. You do wish that, don't you?"

Joy stopped twirling, and opened Fidget's loose-box. She had found a carrot on the harness-board and gave it to Fidget.

Fidget tossed her head as if alarmed, pretending that she had never seen a carrot before and believed it to be poisonous; but at last she took it with extreme caution and munched it with delicate precision; then she rested her wet mouth affectionately on Joy's shoulder.

Joy had a curious feeling rather like Fidget's about the carrot. Did she really want religion? Might n't it be embarking on something which would prevent the taste of something else? But, like Fidget, in the end she took the carrot. After all, she had always liked what she knew of God, and why should n't she like even more what she

did n't know? Presumably, religion was that which taught you more.

"There is the breakfast-bell," said Mrs. Featherstone. "Shut the loose-box door carefully, and wash your hands. You can certainly be confirmed at the next confirmation if you like." This was all the advice that Mrs. Featherstone gave her daughter to fortify her to meet the problems of this life and the next.

III

They were all assembled about the door to see Joy mount Fidget. Nicolas, with Ajax crammed in a bag under one arm, had ridden Moonlighter over with some difficulty, and deposited Ajax, who was half suffocated with what he had succeeded in biting out of the bag, at her feet.

"O Nicolas!" she gasped, "how angelic of you! I must n't kiss you, because I'm fourteen, but I can kiss Ajax. Is n't he too heavenly?"

"Oh, I see," said Nicolas, drawing back against Moonlighter and turning rather red and stiff.

Joy knew by his voice that he had n't liked it. She had guessed he would not, and hiding Ajax in a cloud of her long hair, she kept her face away from Nicolas so that she should n't see how much he minded. Nicolas never liked any one's seeing that he minded; and then she heard Maude say;

"But you can still kiss me, Nicolas."

A moment's comfort seized Joy's heart. Would n't this friendly substitution do? She looked up quickly, and saw that it had n't.

Nicolas bent his head politely, and went through the form of kissing the cheek forced upon his reluctant notice; but his gray eyes looked very cold, and his whole expression resembled Jacob's



"Joy did n't think about happiness. She let her spirit out on the back of speed"

when, "Lo! in the morning he found it was Leah."

"Come here, and I'll put you up," he said shortly to Joy.

She pressed Ajax into Archie's willing arms, embraced her mother, and met her father's eyes, which appeared as usual to have seen something wrong and to be reserving it for future censure. He never had things out with them at the time, as their mother did. Then she slipped her slim foot into Nicolas's hand and sprang up to Fidget's back.

It was a perilous and delicious height. Riding Fidget was utterly unlike riding the children's two ponies, Catch-Me and Merryweather; they were quick goers, with the perverse and mischievous pony hearts, hard mouths and unresponsive intelligence.

Fidget was like having all your own nerves under you, and somebody else's

as well. Her paces were easy and intelligent, her response like lightning. She recognized immediately that the light figure on her back had the hands and seat of a born rider, and would give her the sympathy she needed.

She danced about a little in the drive, hunched her back, and sidled like a crab, and then, tossing her head, set out down the dangerous path as carefully as if she were walking on a tight rope.

Mrs. Featherstone looked on with assured and confident eyes. Then she moved quickly to Moonlighter's side and said in an undertone, "Take care of her, Nicolas." Aloud she said, "You'll be back to tea at five o'clock sharp."

Nicolas touched his hat and nodded. He knew what she meant, and he forgave her what he had to forgive her for the sake of her trust in him.

"Really, my dear," said Mr. Featherstone, coldly, "I should have thought that even you would have noticed that young Pennant is no longer a child. I very much dislike to see a big girl like Joy riding about the country alone with him. It looks bad, very bad indeed, and is enough to start a scandal. Besides, I'm not sure that it's even safe."

"Oh, Fidget's perfectly safe," said Mrs. Featherstone; "Joy knows how to ride."

"I was n't referring to the horse," said Mr. Featherstone, "but to the young man. You might at least have sent a groom with them."

"She's all right with Nicolas," said Mrs. Featherstone, thoughtfully. "But I'm not at all sure that Nicolas is all right with her. However, poor boy, a groom could hardly remedy that state of things."

Mr. Featherstone's eyebrows shot up into his hair with annoyance.

"What an extraordinary assertion to make, Angelica!" he said coldly. "But if you have brought Joy up to be forward, I cannot say that I feel at all surprised. One thing I must insist upon, however. These unchaperoned rides must not continue."

"They won't," replied Mrs. Featherstone; "Nicolas goes back to Winchester to-morrow."

Mr. Featherstone frowned heavily and backed into the house. He could find no fault with his wife's acquiescence in his orders, and yet as usual she had evaded the spirit of them. It was as if her submission was accidental, and might at any time spring away from him like the rebellious branches of a tree.

It was a wonderful ride. They went down and down into the depths of

Lynmouth, and across the foaming torrent which rages through the main street of the village, and then they climbed up out of it, on to the top of the world.

As far as the eye could see the moor stretched before them, broad and rimless, into the high clear sky. The gorse-bushes ran here and there like spilt gold.

Moonlighter was a powerful black horse; he suited his paces to Fidget's with gentlemanly consideration. He knew better than to disobey the will that was on his back.

Neither Nicolas nor Joy talked very much at first. Nicolas was thinking hard of what he meant to say to Joy and of what he intended *not* to say to her; and Joy was alive in a world of her own. She felt very grown up because she was on Fidget's back, and yet she did not want to be any more grown up than that. She wanted not to give up her earlier consciousness.

It was joy enough to share the life of the climbing hedges, to pick out the giant foxgloves in lonely corners, to watch for the honeysuckle, flung like a network of embroidery over the tops of the low walls, or to surprise a flock of pink ragged-robins in a ditch, side by side with low forget-me-nots. She feared that something would interrupt her dreaming, because Nicolas was so very silent and sat so stern and still on his big horse, as if there was a storm in his mind. Nicolas was always very still in a storm; you hardly knew that he was fighting until he had finished fighting.

She glanced at him from time to time, and thought how old and handsome he was. His well-knit, erect figure was so like what Nicolas was inside, as straight as a die and as hard

and unbreakable as a sycamore. His gray eyes, under thick, fair brows, had the sparkling fighter's spirit in them; his mouth, well shaped and a little too thin, was the mouth of a boy who had learned very early how to control himself and others.

He could be very gentle when he felt deeply and very implacable when he did not feel. Few people touched his heart, and nobody but Joy had ever touched his imagination.

Nicolas would have been a romantic figure to Joy if she had not known him so well. She thought of this as she glanced at him, and knew that, after all, he was only Nicolas.

He was the sharer of a hundred childish adventures; she had seen him naughty and punished, dirty and red with temper, and the picture of dejection and cleanliness in church on Sundays. He was just the same as when they had been cut off by the tide, when she was eight and he was twelve, and he had not told her about it; but made her race with him across the dwindling sands, and she had thought he was so unkind to make her run when she was tired. He had forced her on against her will, but without panic, until they reached the dangerous corner, when she saw the waves running closer and closer to the cliff's edge; and then he had lifted her in his arms and staggered through them into safety, and only for that minute, when the cold water struck and dragged at them, had he let her know, because he could n't help it, that there was any danger.

He had got much older suddenly while he was away at school, and his voice had changed; but Nicolas had n't changed. He had n't, perhaps, changed enough.

When they got on to the moors, Fidget and Moonlighter sniffed the keen and eager air, and thrilled to meet it. It became difficult, and then impossible, to hold them in, they let themselves out on the grass, galloping with stretched necks and flying hoofs. The sharp air ran through them and over them, till their riders felt like runaway giants. The horses raced side by side with the wind, the soft turf vanishing under them, and the open moor before them.

It was a swift, enchanting hour. Nicolas never forgot it; it was his most perfect moment of human happiness. Everything he wanted was near him and still attainable, with his own will and hand to guide it.

Joy did n't think about happiness. She let her spirit out on the back of speed. No emotion shadowed her free, untroubled consciousness. She thought of nothing but the air and their passage through it. Now at last she knew what it felt like to be a bird. Fidget moved under her as easy and swift as wings. The air sang in her ears and whipped against her cheeks. She wanted to go on forever and to forget that she was ever human and a girl; and Nicolas stopped her.

"It 's time we pulled up," he shouted; "there are rabbit-holes."

She looked at him reproachfully. Of course it was perfectly true that there were rabbit-holes, and they pulled up.

"Jolly, was n't it?" said Nicolas. He was smiling now. The gallop had disposed of his temper; at least Joy thought it was the gallop. She did not know it was her face. Nicolas let his eyes rest on her with brotherly approval.

"You ride Fidget well," he said.

Behind his brotherly approval and scant praise his heart was at her feet.

It amazed and delighted him to watch her untroubled beauty. The hair that hung below her waist was the color of ripe corn, her eyes, beautifully set with chiseled lids, were of the deep, unshadowed blue of a gentian; her lashes were long and very dark, and her level, thin, black eyebrows made her skin look as white and soft as a cloud. Her features were small and delicately finished; a dimple came and went at the corner of her red, tip-tilted lips; her chin was a little pointed and had an eager air. But behind her beauty, giving it a life that no mere loveliness of line and color could give, was the gentleness of her heart.

There was neither pride nor tyranny in those soft eyes and curving lips; only a deep sincerity and an immense well of eagerness to love and to be loved.

Nicolas was not a poetic person, but as he looked at her he remembered a line of a poem which seemed descriptive of Joy,

A heart at leisure from itself, to soothe
and sympathise.

Joy had that leisure.

Nicolas knew that it was the rarest thing in the world to find beauty without vanity, charm without selfishness, a being so lovable and yet so humble in its loving, and he longed passionately for Joy to remain what she was, not to be spoilt by indiscriminating praise or blunted by adoration, even his own adoration; and above all he did not mean to take advantage of the fact that whatever you asked of Joy she gave.

"This is the Doone Inn above the

valley," he said rather drily, turning Moonlighter's head toward a rough grass path. "We'd better leave the horses here and lunch. It's too rough a road to take them down the valley."

The Doone Inn was a low, gray house set four square on the moor, close to a water-course. A fringe of thin trees did very little to shelter it in the winter from the roaring moor winds, and the hills above it shut out the light of the sun.

But in summer it was a green and fragrant spot, moss-covered and shady, with the tinkling of water always in the air, and above it the shadows racing over the purple hills.

Nicolas lifted Joy off Fidget and took both horses away to look after them himself, while Joy made friends with the landlady over a string of yellow ducklings.

Featherstone and Pennant were familiar names to Mrs. Palmer. She gave them the best she had and spoke to them in the high, soft Devon drawl, affectionately and at length. It puzzled Joy a little because she spoke as if they were older and belonged to each other; but fortunately Nicolas, though he got very red, did n't seem to mind.

When Mrs. Palmer had left them to themselves, they had bacon and eggs, fruit and clotted cream, saffron cakes, and home-made cider, and survived it. Nicolas told her all sorts of interesting things he must have found out on purpose—real historic stories of the Doones and their dark doings.

"I wish there were some of them left," Joy said with a little sigh when he had finished.

"Why do you?" asked Nicolas. "They had bad blood and were the terror of the country-side. Men like that should be stamped out. That's



“But, Nick, you know I like you, awfully, even though you are good,” she whispered, her eyes filling with tears”

why I want to be a soldier, because you know *how* to stamp out a pest then. Do you know, Joy, I believe you like people better when they're wicked. Do you? It's most unfair if you do.”

Joy paused reflectively over her dancing yellow cider. Nicolas was good. He would never be anything else but good. Conscientious, honest as daylight, and self-controlled, he could n't have broken any law that he did n't think worth breaking for a higher one, and he had no pity on sinners or on weaklings. He had never in his life said that he did n't mean to do what he had done.

That was it, perhaps: he had no pity. Joy could n't help liking the sinners for whom Nicolas had no pity.

“I don't think I like them because they're bad,” she explained; “only, if they're bad, you see, it's very dreadful for them—is n't it?—and cuts them off everything that's nice. They're outlaws and have n't any real homes, and people don't love them; so you're sorry for them, are n't you? Sorrier than if they'd just been happy and good; and I suppose being sorry, Nicolas, makes you fonder of them somehow, does n't it?”

“It does n't seem quite fair to me,” said Nicolas, flushing a little, “to care more for people who have made a hideous mess of things than for those who have n't.”

Joy sighed a little. She could n't explain exactly what she meant. The father of the prodigal son must have

experienced the same difficulty when the righteous home-staying son objected to the fatted calf.

"If you 're noble," she said consideringly, "you 've got everything; and if you are n't noble, you 're ashamed and have n't got anything, either. It must be so awful to be ashamed."

"Knowing you 're straight is n't everything," said Nicolas, stubbornly; "a man wants more than that." He sounded somehow as if he had been very much hurt. Joy stretched her hand out to him and laid it close to his arm, on the table.

"But, Nick, you know I like you, awfully, even though you are good," she whispered, her eyes filling with tears. It was dreadful, suddenly in the midst of cider and Devonshire cream, on her birthday, to discover that Nicolas was unhappy and that she had made him unhappy, though she did n't know why.

Nicolas did not touch her hand; he took his arm off the table resolutely, and stuck his hands into his pockets, but not as if he wanted to quarrel.

"Oh, I know," he said quickly—"I know it 's quite all right, old girl. I think we 'd better be moving." Only it took almost five minutes before it was all right, and even then it was different.

They went to see if the horses were getting on well with their food, and crossed the stream by stepping-stones. Nicolas took her hand now, of his own accord, to help her over the stream, but dropped it quickly on the other side.

He began to tell her all about his school. It was a great compliment to Joy, for Nicolas never breathed a word of his school-life at home or to any one else. His life might have been

cut off short as he shut the garden-gate to go to the station, and only resumed when he opened it on his return for the holidays. It was very interesting, of course, but it was n't exactly what Joy wanted. She would have liked best to go back into the child world and talk about romance and Doones and things that never happened. Nicolas was making her feel grown up again, and as if she were riding Fidget high up over every one's heads.

She wanted to be a child with a free consciousness, but Nicolas would not let her be a child. He dragged her into his responsible world, where she found herself forced to be his equal, and share his difficulties and discoveries.

He was the head of his house. Prime ministers may sometimes feel important, but never as important as Nicolas. They cannot believe their mistakes to be so irretrievable, or their efforts so instinct with the very wind of fate. They are not young enough to be sure they are indispensable.

Nicolas described his house master to Joy. He was anxious that she should make no mistake about his house master, and not think he was silly about him or thought him a hero. Still, that was what he did think him.

They both wanted the same things. They wanted a house they could be proud of, not particularly a "swotter's house" ("swotting" was working hard at books, Nicolas explained), nor even a house that carried off all the school honors at games, although games were tremendously important; but a decent house, a house they could depend on, without a rotten spot.

Nicolas spoke mysteriously to Joy about a thing called "tone." Tone

was what they wanted most; Nicolas had fought for that thing called "tone," fought hard, and for years against great obstacles, and then they 'd got it. They really *had* got it. "It was a decent house," Nicolas explained. "I 'd have liked you to know any of our chaps," and then suddenly they lost it.

A fellow with a great deal of influence and popularity, awfully good at games, did n't care a hang about "tone"; he was no end of a slacker and so clever they could n't get hold of anything against him. Yet they knew. They knew he was going through the house like poison, like rat poison, undermining its "tone," and if they could only spot him breaking any twopenny-ha'penny rule, the house master could

sack him on the spot, and then they 'd be safe again, and Nicolas could go off to Sandhurst with a quiet mind.

"But *he* would n't be safe," said Joy, stopping short in the precipitous downward path that looked over the Doone Valley, purple and dark and deep beneath them, "O Nicolas,

think if he were expelled, how awful it would be for him!"

"It would n't matter a curse about him," said Nicolas, grimly. "Rotters don't count. It would be a jolly good thing all round. You don't understand."

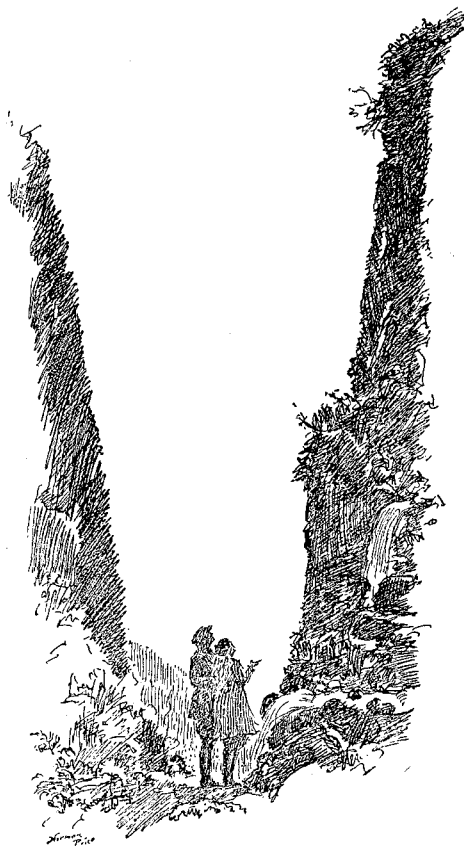
"I could, if you explained," cried Joy. But Nicolas shook his head; he either could n't or would n't explain. He only said darkly:

"Well, I 'll find him out one of these days, and then we 'll see. I 'm not going to have my house mucked up because of him."

Joy tried to resign herself to Nicolas's righteousness, backed by that of his house master; but her mind clung obstinately to the lost sheep, and left the ninety and nine just persons to shift for themselves.

"What 's his name, Nicolas?" she asked aloud. She remembered that Lord Tennyson had remarked "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of," and it occurred to her that the salvation of this unfortunately black sheep might be one of them.

Nicolas would not like her to pray



"Its precipitous sides leaned over them dark and formidable"

for him, but if she knew his name, she could pray for him without Nicolas being put to the trouble of knowing anything about it.

But Nicolas said abruptly;

"Oh, I could n't tell you his name, of course; that would be giving him away."

"But I shall never meet him," Joy explained.

"You might," replied Nicolas, and he added under his breath, "but I hope to God you never will!"

They stood now in the wildest part of the Doone Valley; its precipitous sides leaned over them dark and formidable even on a summer's day.

Joy pictured to herself the frozen winter and *John Ridd* flying over the mountains on his skis to rescue *Lorna*, starved and freezing in the valley. *John Ridd* was enormously big and strong and very kind except, of course, to Doones. It seemed as if very strong men had to be unkind to somebody. Joy sank down upon a patch of heather and did not want to talk or think of any one but Doones.

Nicolas lay at her feet, turning a little swath of grass into a ring. He had very neat, quick fingers.

"Look here," he said after a long pause, "will you promise me something, Joy?"

"Anything?" asked Joy.

"Well, I could hardly ask you that," said Nicolas in a low voice, his eyes bent on the ring. "That would n't be fair, would it, to make you promise in the dark? I'll tell you what it is first. You won't mind my asking you, will you?"

He spoke with unaccustomed diffidence, which made Joy feel as if she were nearly a hundred years old.

"No," she said, wondering what it

could possibly be. "I don't think you would ask me what I'd mind, Nick."

He drew a quick breath before he spoke, as if what she said had either pleased him very much or hurt him very much, she was n't quite sure which.

"Then," he said, flushing deeply, and keeping his eyes still carefully turned away from her face, "if I'm not to kiss you again, will you promise me that you won't let any one else kiss you?"

It was such a curious question that Joy kept quite still for a moment, thinking it over. It was very odd that on her fourteenth birthday kisses should assume so tremendous an importance.

"Do you mean never in the world?" she asked anxiously.

Nicolas smiled a little, a very tender smile that made him look gentler than she had ever seen him look, except when he was playing with Rosemary.

"I should like that, I'm afraid," he said; "but I'm not going to ask it. What I want to ask is, that you won't let any one else till I get back from India. If I have any luck, I'll pass for Sandhurst this summer, spend a year there, and three in India. That will be four years, Joy. Could you, do you think, promise for four years?"

"You don't mean uncles or the boys, do you?" Joy asked conscientiously. Mother had said she was to kiss the boys; but Nicolas might be more particular even than mother.

"No, I don't mind relations," said Nicolas, with the little smile again, "only no one else. Promise?"

"I promise," said Joy, quietly.

Then Nicolas looked at her. It was a long, tender, searching look,

scrupulously unpassionate, as if he were taking her face into his heart and keeping it there forever.

The curious part of it was that though he looked away and began talking of nothing in particular directly afterward, it seemed to Joy that no matter how hard she tried after that, she could n't feel quite like a little girl again.

Nicolas had dropped the grass ring he was making, near her on the ground, and though Joy looked at it and saw that it was finished, she did not pick it up; and as for Nicolas, although he had taken such pains with it, he seemed to have forgotten all about it.

They went all over the valley, and found traces of old and crumbled houses. Nicolas remembered fresh and awful tales of robbers and revenges till it was time to go home. They talked a great deal about *Lorna Doone*, but Nicolas said that he preferred fair heroines himself, and that in general he thought all the girls in books were beasts.

They found the horses fresh and ready for a start, and Mrs. Palmer gave them the heartiest farewell, and wished them unitedly a long life and a future like a summer's day, and Nicolas shook hands with her and thanked her.

Then they rode off till they came to the turf, and galloped a splendid, breathless gallop again. Only Joy did n't like it so much as she had in the morning; it seemed somehow less visionary and more as if they belonged to the earth.

They arrived home exactly at five o'clock. Joy had never had to think of the time at all; she knew Nicolas would remember.

All the other Pennants were there,

with Julia, whom Joy adored. Julia was seventeen and really grown up, but she could run like a hare and had no nonsense about her, though she was said to be the prettiest girl in Devon.

Ajax had behaved extremely well, and knew her again, or appeared to, when Joy knelt before him on the floor.

Rosemary flung her arms round Joy's neck and half strangled her with welcome.

There was a huge birthday cake, with fourteen ridiculous pink candles on it, and Nicolas put one in his pocket, because he said you never knew when a candle would n't come in handy.

It was a most successful tea party, and even after the Pennants had gone home the birthday was n't over.

Joy was to go down to dinner for the first time. It was ten o'clock before she went to bed. Maude was already asleep.

Joy had asked if Maude might n't come down to dinner, too, and when mother had said "Yes," and even father had agreed that she might if it was understood that it was n't to start a precedent, Maude said she would n't come down, after all. However, she agreed to eat Joy's dessert if it was brought up to her afterward; and she had eaten it.

Mrs. Featherstone came in when Joy was in bed, and the candle out. A big full moon like a silver lamp was climbing above the Rock and pouring light over the little bare room.

"You're a happy girl?" Mrs. Featherstone asked as she bent over Joy. She did not usually ask such intimate personal questions.

"Yes," said Joy; "only, Mummy, I don't feel *exactly* the way I did."

"Don't you, darling?" asked Mrs. Featherstone. She sat on the edge of Joy's bed as if this was rather important. "What has made you feel different?"

"I don't know," said Joy. "P'raps it was dinner down-stairs and being fourteen; p'raps—" Joy paused. It suddenly occurred to her that perhaps

it was not kissing Nicolas, and the curious part of it was that she found she did n't want to say anything more about Nicolas, even to her mother. She found herself saying instead something quite different.

"And, Mummy, p'raps," she said, "I really *am* old enough to be confirmed now."

A Dance

By *OLGA MISHKIN*

Dance!

Dance away my love!

Rest your lovely head upon his shoulder,

Look up adoringly into his eyes,

Smile!

Purse up your tiny lips,

And tease with your roguish dimples!

Forget me,

And dance away!

Whirl!

Whirl away my love in his arms!

Sway your charming body to the tantalizing music,

Lend your dainty ear to his seductive murmurings,

Blush with pleasure at his significant caresses,

And whirl away!

Little does he dream,

Your joyful, foolish adorer,

That ere few hours have fled,

You will be nestling close in my embrace with only thoughts of me.

Like a naughty child,

Like a suppliant child,

Begging unvoiced forgiveness for your neglect;

Repaying a thousandfold for the few fleeting moments of forgetfulness

With which you pain me.

Little does he dream.

And how I laugh at him!

And how I laugh!

Dance away!