The Farmhouse Mystery

Molly Sellers

Jocelyn Jane Smith collected the brown eggs, still warm from the hens. “Evening, ladies!” Jocelyn sang.

Jocelyn’s jade green eyes dazzled in the warm light, looking to Edengarden Castle.

She sighed, looking from the castle to her eggs, then back again. “I wonder what it’s like inside. What is it like to live there? It must be beautiful, for it is beautiful on the outside.”

After collecting the eggs, Jocelyn shut the coop and skipped, cheerfully whistling toward her house. Jocelyn’s mother saw her. “Jocelyn, my darling, how are the chickens?”

“Very well, Mama,” Jocelyn smiled. Sixteen year old Jocelyn loved to help and eagerly began preparing dinner with her mother and sister Lucy. Setting the table, laying the dishes out, and sweeping were not Jocelyn’s favorite things to do. But Jocelyn was a very helpful and kindhearted person.

After dinner had been eaten, Jocelyn and Mama went out to drink tea on the porch. As they watched the sunset, they heard the sound of hooves approaching.

Mama smiled tightly. “Mail?”

The rider nodded, “Yes, ma’am.”

She hesitantly took the letter. Recognition dawned on her face; then a sudden pain appeared. “Thank you,” she said tersely as the mailman mounted his horse and cantered across the countryside.

Mama abruptly stood up, and looking at the ground she muttered her apologies that she must go. Jocelyn watched Mama run into the house. She too got up and ran to the stables to calm her uneasiness, for the horses settled her nerves.

When she got back, she heard rapid whispering coming from her parents’ room. She laid in bed wondering why her mother was so tense.

The next morning, Jocelyn yawned as sunlight poured into her room through the

window. She staggered down the stairs. At the sight of her mother, her sleepiness disappeared with all the chaos rushing back. Her Mama, Papa, and younger siblings Luke and Lucy were already dressed with heavy leather trunks and cases standing beside the door.

Her Papa smiled, “A friend of ours would like Luke, Lucy, and your Mama and I to come for a visit. We will return in four days’ time, but you will need to stay here.” Jocelyn was now curious.

“Yes, Papa, I understand I must take care of the animals,” she replied, hiding her true feelings. The family kissed her goodbye and the carriage was sent off.

That afternoon, she kept herself busy by baking, making sure not to let any thoughts about the night’s events creep into her mind.

She had used up the last bit of flour and needed some more to make bread for dinner. As Jocelyn climbed down the stairs, she thought of how the mysterious letter had affected her family, especially her Mama. She wondered what it had said.

Jocelyn looked around the dusty cellar. As she thought, she tripped on a milk jug, tumbling into a shelf. Jams, pickled vegetables, syrup, and eggs crashed onto the floor. Jocelyn burst into tears. As she turned to put an unbroken jar of jam back on the shelf, she saw a dark shape jutting out from behind it. She put the jam on the shelf, then investigated what it could be. She wiggled it, and it crashed down. She pulled it out onto the ground. It was a royal portrait of a man, a woman, and a baby girl.

The woman was wearing an elegant velvet red dress and cape. She bore a glimmering crown, topped with pearls, silver, and diamonds. The man was wearing a smooth suit and a velvet red cape as well. He too wore a gold, glimmering crown complete with sapphires, rubies, emeralds, diamonds, pearls, silver, amethysts, and garnets. The baby was wearing a blue velvet dress and a tiara.

Jocelyn read the golden, fancy painted words. It started:

KING WILLIAM THE GREAT,
QUEEN ELEANOR THE WISE,
AND PRINCESS–

Jocelyn tried to read what the last word said, but it had faded. She sighed and thought to herself why her parents had a royal portrait. She turned around to continue cleaning up the mess when she saw the letter that had caused so much trouble and anxiety

tucked behind a carton of eggs.

Jocelyn didn't want to be nosy and read the letter. But curiosity won her, and she opened the thick envelope. Inside was a speckled, eggshell colored scroll, with the wax seal broken. Jocelyn's eyes widened as she carefully unrolled the scroll, unsure of what it contained. It said:

Immediately present yourselves at the castle.
With respect and haste,
The Grand Duke

In confusion, Jocelyn turned over the envelope to see who it was addressed to. To her surprise it said, "Mr. and Mrs. Smith, on behalf of our Royal Princess."

Jocelyn trembled with fear. Was her family in trouble? Were they in debt? Were her parents traitors? Did they capture or harm this unknown princess? In shock, Jocelyn whispered, "A princess? Who could this be?"

From that moment, Jocelyn eagerly counted down the days until her family returned. Her mind was flooded with thoughts and worries.

The day of her family's return, Jocelyn headed to the coop to collect the morning eggs. She felt worried about this letter's words. Her hands were trembling, and she was so jumpy. She saw two dark shadows in the woods behind the house. "It's just the trees," she said to herself, soothing any concern she had. Placing the last egg in her basket, she shut the door to the coop.

In the distance, one of the figures began creeping towards her. The other slunk around behind her.

Jocelyn heard the fall leaves crunching in the distance. Her head shot up. Looking around, she panicked, seeing a shadow lurking around the trees. But she stood tall, a courageous look shining on her face.

Her first thought was to run to the horse stable and ride away. But that would be right in their path. Her second thought was to throw the eggs from her basket, and that's just what she did.

When they were covered in yolk and their vision too blurry to see, she opened the coop quickly so that the hens would cause a commotion.

In the chaos, she ran into the woods where she remembered the trap her Papa had set, placed so carefully hidden in the leaves.

Running into the woods, she tumbled down right behind the trap. The two men sneered as they closed in on the helpless girl. Jocelyn shuddered. The men loomed over her. Then–

Snap! The men howled in pain as they hung from a tree in a net, furiously trying to get out.

“Why were you after me?” Jocelyn asked.

The tallest spoke in a gravelly voice. “I’m Cap. Why were we after you? Why, you’re the kingdom’s princess!”

The second man barked an order. “Cap, stop talkin’ to that blabbery gal. She knows! Anyhow, if she lies again she’s doomed.”

Feelings of emotion dwelled in her heart. But a trickle of triumph caused her to smile. “How can I be doomed if I have captured you?”

Cap glared. “Oh, you don’t want to know. Anyhow, we’re quite older than you. We know quite a bit about trickery.”

Jocelyn shuddered. “I’m the princess. You wanted to capture me, correct?”

Cap nodded. “Exactly. We want the throne. We are quite evil.”

Jocelyn immediately realized that the men were so evil that they firmly agreed. So, she stepped back and helplessly glanced around scanning the area for help.

Just then, Jocelyn then heard the sound of horses along the path nearby. Not wanting to leave the men alone in case they escaped, Jocelyn shouted for help.

Bursting through the trees, her family ran to her and embraced her tightly, thankful she was safe. She looked up, for pouring through the trees behind her family was the Royal Army, led by the Grand Duke. Looking at the net hanging from the tree, the army quickly captured the two men. The Grand Duke jumped off his horse and ran to Jocelyn, assessing the situation.

“Your Highness, are you alright?” he questioned her anxiously.

“I’m fine now, sir,” Jocelyn said, wiping tears from her eyes as feelings of overwhelm broke into her mind. She turned to her mother and asked, “Why were you hiding this from me?”

Mama sadly looked down and said, “Jocelyn, we were trying to protect you from these dangers. But now I see that you can handle these things on your own. I’m sorry I should’ve seen that you are brave.”

“I understand, but please tell me everything.”

Once settled at the farmhouse, with only Mama, Papa, the Grand Duke, and Jocelyn in the room, they took turns explaining that when Jocelyn was a tiny baby, her parents, the King and Queen, went on a dangerous mission. They were seeking peace with a neighboring kingdom, but a group of soldiers didn’t want peace and the King and Queen were killed. The Grand Duke knew the princess would be in danger, so knowing her parents well, gave Princess Jocelyn to the Smiths to raise as their own until she came of age.

Jocelyn asked, “Is the kingdom still in danger?”

The Grand Duke replied, “When the rulers of the neighboring kingdom found out about the murder, they captured the group of men, but two unfortunately escaped. The two men you caught today. We had been searching for them, and now we are safe.”

Jocelyn asked why they didn’t want peace and killed her parents. Mama replied saying that the men wanted to rule. And so they were captured, and we made peace.

Papa looked fondly over at Jocelyn, “You will now be safe and you will rule the kingdom peacefully. I love you and wish I could be with you longer, but it must be done. I’m so glad you are safe, but I’m heartbroken that my daughter is leaving.” He weakly smiled.

Jocelyn fidgeted and looked down, her voice soft and grieved.“I don’t want to rule. I want to stay here, on the farm.”

Wise Mama smiled and looked very proud of her princess–her daughter. She said, “You must, and you will be a wonderful and kind ruler. Instead of growing up as royalty, you

grew up in the country, knowing and understanding the people of this kingdom. And now you will care for their needs and know what is best for them."

At this, Jocelyn felt a fast, rising joy. She was ready and willing to take the throne. She was ready to take care and provide for her family, friends, and kingdom. She smiled, hugged her parents, and shook hands with the Grand Duke. She was absolutely ready for this responsibility. She would take care of her people.

Already, Jocelyn had been living at the castle for a month. She had to admit, she did think that the castle was lovely. Jocelyn had enjoyed the portrait so much that she had ordered it to be put in the castle immediately. The letter was hung in a glass case in her office to remind her of her adventure.

In the castle's library, Jocelyn walked up the winding steps to the balcony to see the grand view of her kingdom. She looked down into the valley, and could see her family's farmhouse in the distance. She wondered if Luke was riding his horse or if Lucy was now collecting the eggs. She thought about the next time she would see her family, as they visited often. Coming back into the library, she ran her fingers along the shelves of books. She knew she was in a story of her own.

In all her years as Queen Jocelyn, she ruled with kindness and honesty. In an instant her life changed forever, and you could say the kingdom was the loveliest it had ever been.

THE END