

CANDY NEVILL

CLARE MALLORY

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## Chapter One

### *One Slow Nevill?*

Doctor Nevill put his head round the door of the glory hole.

‘Anyone here want to go for a picnic?’

‘Me, Daddy!’ Bets’s funny deep voice leapt out a second before the twins could manage to chorus ‘We do’—cheek on her part, since they were older by nearly eighteen months. Mark’s expression showed that he was chalking it up against her in his mind.

Candy’s response was just her usual lazy, good-natured smile. After all, she knew very well that nobody would think of leaving the youngest out of any of the family parties. But the doctor gave her a rather searching glance before he began to shoot instructions at the four of them.

‘Find your swimming togs, then—oh, and Roslyn, Mummy says caps for all you girls—she doesn’t want the trouble with hair she had the last time. She’s collecting things in the kitchen now, and Ruby’s boiling eggs and slicing some ham. Lend a hand with getting the gear into the car, will you, Mark? Better take hats. It’s only four, and there’ll be sun for hours yet. Come on, spring to it!’

The twins and Bets were natural springers, but even

Candy knew better than to keep her father waiting. In ten minutes they were all in the big green Chevrolet, bowling down from their hill suburb through the town and up the long climb of the main north road: the two youngest tucked in front between their parents, Bets clutching a fat red notebook and pencil, and missing nothing of what they passed, Candy empty-handed and placidly unoccupied.

The twins shared the back with a large hamper—stuffed, this, with lettuces and tomatoes, a loaf and butter, the still warm hard-boiled eggs and the cold ham, a chocolate cake decorated with walnut halves and candied cherries, and oddments like biscuits and dates that Ruby, the Nevill handywoman, had tucked into corners. Carefully placed on several layers of newspapers, on the floor in front of them, were a large bowl of strawberries and a screw-top jar of thick Jersey cream. Further back, the boot of the car held the standard picnic equipment: a blackened billy for tea-making, bakelite cups and saucers and plates, old knives and forks and spoons, pepper and salt, a tin of tea, and so on. The Nevills were New Zealanders—they took their picnics seriously.

The beach was a long-standing favourite. Mark whooped when he saw the stretch of golden brown sand, dotted with people, and the sun-drenched surf.

‘Gosh, it looks good! Here, Ros, let’s unpack fast and go straight in. Isn’t that Alan Walker over there? I say, I wonder if he’s been out floundering yet?’

‘Shouldn’t think so. The Walkers only came yesterday, didn’t they? At least, Midge told me—’ full of their own affairs, the twins rushed things out of the car.

Then, with a hurried ‘That all right, Mummy?’ pulled off shirts and stepped out of shorts and were ready, having remembered to put on bathing suits underneath before leaving home. Roslyn had to tuck her long red-gold hair into the rubber cap. Even so, she was in order before her mother had finished speaking.

‘Yes, off with you. But don’t go out too far—wait till Daddy or Mr Walker’s in with you.’

Roslyn would have halted to argue.

‘Honestly, Mummy, this beach is perfectly safe. Miss Andrew says—’

‘Oh, don’t yatter, Ros. Step on it!’

Mark jerked her away. In a minute one of the groups on the sands had swallowed them. Then they were visible again, running lightly down to the surf with a crowd of other children.

The younger Nevills were not in such a hurry. Bets, indeed, retired to a comfortable patch of tussock grass and began to scribble furiously in her notebook. Candy potted round the picnic tea, straightening the plastic table-cloth where the twins had spread it carelessly, putting the red salt and pepper pots side by side, neatening the arrangement of knives and spoons and plates.

In the end they were both bustled off, but their bathing was not as a rule strenuous like Mark’s and Roslyn’s. Neither could swim, and Bets, besides, had such vivid memories of the last outing—when her plaits became full of sea water and tangles—that she was inclined to avoid any wave that rose higher than her waist. Candy had a neat dark bob that seldom tangled, but what Bets did was always right for her. They would

have remained on the edge, gingerly paddling, if the doctor had not come down, and, laughing at their squeaky protests, borne them off into deeper water with him.

‘You won’t have any appetite for tea if you don’t take a little exercise! Go on, Bets, right under!’

So they had quite an active bathe after all. And when the whole family was assembled again, everyone was clamorously hungry. The ham and tomatoes disappeared, only a red smear of strawberry juice was left in the fruit bowl, the loaf and chocolate cake shrank to shadows of their former selves. Then the children stretched out comfortably on the tussocks, while Doctor Nevill stamped out the fire that had made the billy tea, and their mother covered the bits and pieces still on the tablecloth.

It was the family habit to stay quiet for a little while after a meal like this. Nobody objected. Bets, in fact, was delighted.

‘We can have the game, can’t we, Daddy?’

Mark moved restlessly. The game had pleased the twins when they were little, but now, at eleven past, they agreed that it was rather babyish. Bets, on the other hand, loved it, and was always thinking out small additions to her father’s original framework. It was a kind of solo and chorus, with the doctor talking and leaving gaps for the children to fill in. Mrs Nevill seldom joined in it. Instead, she enjoyed watching the five players: the handsome twins, Mark now a shade bored and superior, Roslyn politely attentive; Candy, her blue eyes dreamy, her hair soft and tumbled; Bets and the doctor, both beaky-nosed, both lit up with enthusiasm,

both with a tremendous zest for knowledge and discovery.

The doctor finished dealing with the fire and stretched himself out, his voice sliding into the familiar phrases.

‘We are now lying on a beach facing the—’

‘Pacific Ocean,’ four voices supplied.

‘And if we cross this in a north-easterly direction we come to the—’

‘United States,’ said the twins, quite correctly. But Bets said, ‘No, the Golden Gate of San Francisco,’ her voice lingering lovingly over the words.

That roused Mark to open complaint.

‘It is the States, isn’t it, Daddy? We’ve always said that before.’

‘Yes, but this sounds nicer,’ argued Bets. ‘Anyway, you and Mummy did sail through the Golden Gate, didn’t you, Daddy? It’s perfectly true.’

‘It is, you know, Mark. Perhaps we could let Bets’s correction stand.’ Doctor Nevill grinned companionably at the other man of the family, but Mark took his chief consolation from the waves of fellow-feeling he could catch from Roslyn. They knew how uppish and how much in need of squashing they thought Bets. Now she was smiling widely, her plain little face brilliant with intelligence, her tongue swift to provide the following answers.

‘Leaving San Francisco, then, in the state of—’

—‘California—’

—‘at length we come to a state called—’

Anyone might expect the answer to that to be New York, because practically everybody who visits



America wants to see that part of it. But no. The reply was 'Maryland.'

'—and the biggest city in Maryland is—'

'—Baltimore,' said everybody. Even Candy knew the great hospital in which her father had studied, and the city where it was placed.

'And in Baltimore there is a famous university called—'

'—Johns Hopkins—' in a cheerful bellow.

'I like the sound of Johns Hopkins,' said Bets, diverted. 'It's an awfully friendly sort of name.'

Mark hooted at her.

'Friendly! What a stupid thing to say! It's just a name, isn't it? John was the merchant who gave the money to found the university—Daddy has it all in a book.'

'It is a friendly name,' Bets persisted. She turned to her father for support. 'Some names are exactly right, aren't they, Daddy? I mean, Mabel Ferrier sounds comfortable, and Mabel *is* and Rata Mainwaring's bossy, and Vivien Armitage—oh, kind of pale and haughty—'

'That's certainly an idea, Bets. But wouldn't anyone like to go on with the game?' said the doctor on a plaintive note.

'We would,' the twins replied emphatically.

'O.K., then, Bets. More about names another time. Now the date to-day is—'

'December the twenty-first—'

'Nearly Christmas, so in Baltimore the people will be draping back their curtains and in the front window they'll be arranging a beautifully decorated and lighted—'

'—Christmas tree,' chimed in the four.

‘—or perhaps the tree will be on the porch, or outside by the gate. And there’ll be garlands of holly and evergreens on the doors. So as you go down the street all the houses will be twinkling “Merry Christmas” to you—’

Candy, enchanted by this picture of dozens of lighted Christmas trees, slipped quietly from the chorus. Without her, the family went from Baltimore to New York; then to London, where they met red two-decker buses breasting the fogs, and were led by Bets—Mark protesting—down the Strand, through Fleet Street, and up Ludgate Hill to St Paul’s.

This was the point at which the doctor noticed that the quartette had become a trio.

‘Asleep, Candy? Or what are you dreaming about?’

Candy started. She was not going to surrender her little trees flashing from behind Maryland windows to the scorn of the twins. But her father liked his questions to be answered, and promptly, too. She fumbled for the words.

‘I—I was thinking about—Baltimore.’

‘What about Baltimore?’

Candy hunted frantically through a not particularly well stored mind. But it had some useful items in it, one of which jumped to her rescue.

‘Mrs Bentley made a cake—called Lady Baltimore.’

Mrs Nevill’s face broke into a startled smile.

‘That’s true, you know, Charles. Candy and I were there to tea when Professor Bentley’s friends from Boston were staying with them—Grace was rather proud of her American recipes! But how clever of Candy to remember!’

‘It looks as if Candy can remember some things, then,’ said the doctor in a considering way. And soon afterwards, when the twins dashed off to join the Walkers and Candy showed signs of moving to Bets’s side, he called her back.

‘No, Bets can go on for a minute. Come here, Candy.’

Candy came reluctantly. She sensed trouble, though her father’s voice was friendly.

‘Let me see, you’re nearly eight, aren’t you? You want to move out of the Prep and over to the Junior School with Bets, don’t you, Candy?’

Candy supposed she did, but she was not at all sure that she would like the only way she could hope to reach the Junior School. As she expected, the next part was horrid.

‘Then wouldn’t it be an idea to dig into those tables and the spelling? Bets would hear you, wouldn’t she? What about it, old lady? Suppose you really try hard this year, and bring in a good report next time?’

‘Candy’s very good and helpful in the kitchen—Ruby says she always shells the peas and stones dates for her,’ put in Mrs Nevill, a little anxiously.

‘One can’t pass examinations in shelling peas, though,’ said the doctor in a dry voice. ‘Yes, that’s all, Candy. But mind you wake up and do your very best.’

He could have added ‘for a change’, but though he was a very ambitious sort of father, he was also a kind one. Mrs Nevill was not in the least ambitious for the children. The thing that concerned her was the sort of people they might grow into, and, whatever happened, she was always on the side of the one in

difficulty, the one up against the, rest, the under-dog. Candy perceived this only dimly, but if she had a conviction it was that fathers, though good at starting things like picnics, are often a nuisance; while mothers are the best people in the world.

Bets looked up from her notebook as Candy approached—not for either of them the social activities of the twins.

‘What did he want?’

‘Oh, lessons,’ said Candy dispiritedly.

Bets knew all about Candy’s views on lessons, and was a dependable comforter. She was also sufficiently her father’s daughter to understand something of his point of view.

‘I expect Daddy thinks exams. are important because of being poor himself, you know. If he hadn’t passed things and won all those scholarships, he’d never have been able to go to England or America. He wants us to have what he had—university, and travelling, I mean.’

With a fleeting vision of the Baltimore Christmas trees, Candy wished with all her heart that she could cross the Pacific Ocean, too. But if exams. were the only way to see the world, she felt that her chance of reaching Maryland was very slight indeed.

‘I never remember tables and spelling,’ she said sadly.

‘That’s because you don’t like them. It’s lots easier to remember when you’re keen on a subject. Look at Roslyn’s English—she’s always spouting some poetry or other. And Mark loves working out his old football averages, and the Maths problems in the Saturday

newspaper. It's no wonder they do well in their pet lines.'

'Haven't got a pet line,' Candy mumbled, but more cheerfully.

'Well, some day you're sure to have. Actually, I haven't really found my own—I just enjoy nearly everything. But it'll quite likely be Science for me, when we start it at school. Fun finding things out. Experiments, I mean.' Bets, however, dismissed the subject now that Candy's spirits had plainly improved. 'Look—I'm trying to see how the names in our form suit the people belonging to them. Don't you think Helen Landry sounds far too dignified for a silly like Helen? And Jane Knox is a barking sort of name, yet Jane's so quiet and polite. Names don't always fit as well as the Johns Hopkins one.'

'Daddy said—my report—' said Candy on a wavering note: only too willing to plunge into this or any other project of Bets's, but a little daunted by what her future might hold.

'Goodness, that won't come for another six months—not till the beginning of July. Anything can happen by then.'

But though the summer was a delightful one for the Nevills, with a long farm holiday, and though the autumn following proved mellow enough to be filled with outdoor games and expeditions, both seasons had wings to them. May sped into June; winter descended in force, with frosts and an early fall of snow. Mid-year examinations were held, dates of the half-term break announced—everybody knew that the reports would arrive just before this holiday—and nothing at all had

happened to make Candy any fonder of lessons than before.

She took to eyeing her father warily, and began to spend more and more time in the kitchen, drying dishes or running messages for Ruby. The twins thought this queer of her, and said so. But most of the time they were so busy haunting the letter-box in turn, and comparing their marks as the examination results came out at school, that they had no time to spare for the little ones.

Bets usually knew where Candy was, but it never occurred to her to interfere. Bets had an idea that people belonged mainly to themselves. She could not explain it very clearly, but it meant that she enjoyed lying in the sun by herself in summer and curling up in her corner of the glory hole in winter, dreaming, or scribbling in the fat red notebook, and not talking at all. She thought it just as fair for Candy to have her own amusements and occupations, too. Each tended to be there when the other needed her, but they never played together unless they both felt inclined. They got on perfectly well in silence, Bets with her notebook, Candy in the kitchen or back in the glory hole turning the pages of a borrowed Mrs Beeton—this loan the outward sign of Ruby's approbation.

It was Roslyn's turn to look in the letter-box the Thursday morning that the reports did arrive. She came back to the dining-room, her fair face flushed; in her hand the thin envelope from Mark's school, Heriot, and the much bulkier one containing all that St Audrey's had to say about Bets and Candy and herself. The family had just finished their porridge and

were looking forward to sausages to follow.

Mark flicked one glance at Roslyn and knew exactly how anxious she was feeling—they were that sort of twins. He ducked his head and began to butter toast furiously. Mrs Nevill frowned, because though she was clever herself, and sewed and knitted beautifully for the children, she thought that examination results should not be considered nearly as important as being honest and kind and unselfish.

Bets went on eating stolidly, indifferent to what the school felt about her. Always being top, as she was, is like being born with lovely eyes or a fine singing voice—something pleasant but quite accidental: and you become used to it. Candy, blinking nervously, got up in a hurry to carry out the empty porridge plates. Ruby gave her a gimlet stare over the sausage pan.

‘Them reports come?’

Candy nodded, speechless.

‘Perfect pest they are, if you ask me. No, don’t wait to stack. You go and face the music, my girl. We don’t want no running away now, do we?’

Ruby said herself that she was never one for soft speeches, but Candy recognized this as kindly. She retreated obediently.

The doctor was finishing the Heriot report, and Mark’s face was red and happy.

‘Second in form, too—that’s one up on last year, isn’t it, old man? Good work. Football most promising—form monitor—what’s this, President Junior Debating Society?’

‘It’s a new thing—they’re letting us have debating in the Second Form so that it’ll be—sort of easier—when

we're in the Middle School next year.'

'And you've been elected chief noise, have you? The Second seems to elect you to anything it can.'

Mark's colour rose higher still, and Roslyn kicked him under the table to show she understood. The twins had a secret agreement that they would try to go on being the all-rounders they were until some day, when they were in the Sixth, they might both be Games Captains or even Head Prefects. It was their most private dream. But every time one of them was chosen as a president or form representative or committee member, it came a little closer to reality.

The doctor said a few more pleasant things to Mark, then handed the report to his wife and went on to Roslyn's.

'First English, first History, tenth Arithmetic—of course, you missed time with that twisted ankle. We must make that up, eh, Ros? Drill excellent—um, here's a collection of honours!—Junior Tennis Captain, Junior Hockey Captain, Form Captain, Dramatic Society representative, Social Service representative, School Games Committee! Goodness, does Roslyn Nevill run all St Audrey's?'

You could see that he was tremendously proud of her. And 'most dependable and public-spirited' at the end of it quite made up for the way the twisted ankle had lowered her to fourth in form.

After Roslyn, Bets.

'Ten subjects and ten firsts! Upon my word, Bets, you can't do more than that. Nothing but excellents! That's splendid, isn't it, Mary?'

'Only fair for games and conduct,' Mrs Nevill



pointed out. 'And look, Miss Thomson says Bets is not co-operative and takes no interest in school affairs. Have you been behaving badly in class, Bets?'

The doctor would hear no criticism of his star child, 'Oh, a rugged individualist like Bets is rather much for any schoolmistress to cope with,' he said, and laughed. Bets remained unconcerned with her own report. She had been watching Candy. And as the last sheet was unfolded, she suddenly burst into chatter.

'Though we're having winter here, I expect children in America are frightfully hot. They'll be breaking up—having graduation days, I mean—and going off to the lovely summer camps you told us about, Mummy—'

'Like the one in the Adirondacks I saw, where they had tracking, and learnt all sorts of exciting crafts? And, of course, American children play tennis as you do, and lots of them go canoeing—'

The doctor was looking displeased, but he glanced up at his wife in some surprise. Then suddenly Ruby was in front of him, tall and severe, a serving-dish of sausages held out stiffly in her big bony fists.

'And let me tell you straight, doctor, when it comes to anything in the house, young Candy's the best of the bunch of them—Roslyn too much the fine lady to soil her hands, not to mention a real gad-about of a girl, flying in and out and leaving doors open behind her, and that Bets always with her nose in a book, and Mark with his great footballer's boots over my clean floors—they do nothing but make work, all three of them. Candy's the one that can pick up a tea-towel, and set a table, and save a person's legs when the veins are giving me gip. I've known them from babies,

and it's the truth I'm telling you, doctor, there's more sense in that young one than in the other three rolled together, brains or no brains! And that's flat.'

The doctor's eyes opened wide as he looked from Ruby to his wife to Bets. He knew that Ruby was a kitchen treasure and so very important—besides, she was one of the family.

He knew that Mrs Nevill wasn't talking about American summer camps in that determined way just for fun. Perhaps he caught the implacable black eye of the most brilliant of the clever Nevills, and realized that anyone who made Candy miserable had an enemy in Bets.

Anyway, he folded the report on which the best remark was 'Could do better' and the worst 'Lazy and inattentive,' and rather to the disappointment of the twins, who believed in justice and deserts, did not scold Candy at all. He did stare at her, however, in a puzzled way, as though he was not quite sure what sort of person she was.

'What are you thinking about, Candy?' he asked at length.

Candy had been gazing in astonishment at Ruby, never before so outspoken an ally, and at the serving-dish held out stiffly in the big, capable hands. She jumped at this unexpected question, and said the very thing that was in the forefront of her mind.

'The sausages—they'll be cold.'

'There, now, didn't I tell you?' said Ruby triumphantly. 'That child's got her head screwed on, if the rest of us haven't. And if nobody has any objection, she can come out and fetch the coffee while I

hot these up a bit. The idea of standing here talking and letting good food cool down!

And Ruby marched out like a grenadier, with Candy, small, thin, and much bewildered, trotting humbly behind her. The rest of the family looked bewildered, too. For a moment it seemed as if everyone was in the wrong except the lazy and inattentive youngest, who 'could do better'.