

**WELLS
CAROLYN**

MARJORIE'S
MAYTIME

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Carolyn Wells

Marjorie's Maytime

CHAPTER I

A MAY PARTY

"Marjorie Maynard's May
Came on a beautiful day;
And Marjorie's Maytime
Is Marjorie's playtime;
And that's what I sing and I say!
Hooray!
Yes, that's what I sing and I say!"

Marjorie was coming downstairs in her own sweet way, which was accomplished by putting her two feet close together, and jumping two steps at a time. It didn't expedite her descent at all, but it was delightfully noisy, and therefore agreeable from Marjorie's point of view.

The May-day was undeniably beautiful. It was warm enough to have doors and windows flung open, and the whole house was full of May that had swarmed in from out of doors.

The air was soft and fragrant, the leaves were leaving out, the buds were budding, and the spring was springing everywhere.

The big gold bushes of the Forsythia were masses of yellow bloom; crocuses popped up through the grass; a few birds had begun to sing, and the sun shone as if with a settled determination to push the spring ahead as fast as he could.

Moreover it was Saturday, which was the best proof of all, of an intelligent and well-behaved Spring. For a May-day which knew enough to fall on a Saturday was a satisfactory May-day, indeed!

Of course there was to be a May party, and of course it was to be at the Maynards', because Marjorie always claimed that the whole month of May belonged to their family, and she improved every shining hour of the Maytime.

The May party was really under the auspices of the Jinks Club. But as the club was largely composed of Maynards, it was practically a Maynard May party.

The bowers for the May Queens had been built out on the lawn, and though a little wobbly as to architecture, they were beautiful of decoration, and highly satisfactory to the Royalty most interested.

There were two May Queens, because Marjorie and Delight both wanted the position; and though both were willing to resign in favor of the other it was a much pleasanter arrangement to have two Queens. So there were two bowers, and Marjorie was to be the Red Queen and Delight the White Queen.

Of course Kingdon was the May King. No one had ever heard of a May King before, but that didn't bother the Jinks Club any, for they were a law unto themselves.

Kitty and Dorothy Adams were Princesses of May, and Flip Henderson was a Prince of May. Rosy Posy was a May Maid of Honor, and Mrs. Maynard was persuaded to accept the role of Queen Dowager of May.

Miss Hart was of the party, and the title of Duchess of May seemed to fit her exactly.

And now the time had come, and Marjorie was jumping downstairs on her way to her own coronation. She wore a red dress, very much trimmed with flowers made of red tissue paper. The

name of the flower doesn't matter, for they were not exact copies of nature, but they were very pretty and effective, and red silk stockings and slippers finished off the brilliant costume that was very becoming to Marjorie's rosy face, with its dark eyes and dark curly hair.

As she reached the lower hall she saw Delight coming across the street, arrayed as the White Queen. Really she looked more like a fairy, with her frilly white frock and her golden hair and blue eyes.

"Hello, Flossy Flouncy!" called out King, using his pet name for Delight; "you're a daisy May Queen! I offer you my humble homage!"

A daisy May Queen was an appropriate term, for Delight's white frock was trimmed and wreathed with garlands of daisies. Not real ones, for they were not yet in bloom, except in green-houses; and so artificial ones had been sewn on her frock with pretty effect.

King's own attempt at a regal costume had resulted gorgeously, for with his mother's help, he had contrived a robe of state, which looked like purple velvet and ermine, though it was really canton flannel. But it had a grand and noble air, and King wore it with a majestic strut that would have done credit to any coronation.

Kitty and Dorothy wore light green dresses trimmed with pink paper roses, and were very pretty little princesses; while Rosy Posy as Maid of Honor wore one of her own little white frocks, tied up lavishly with blue ribbons.

Flip Henderson's costume was a good deal like King's, as he had purposely copied it, not having any other design to work from.

Mrs. Maynard and Miss Hart were not so fancifully attired as the younger members of the party, but they wore pretty light gowns with more or less floral decoration.

The whole affair was impromptu; the children had spent the morning getting it up, and now were going to devote the afternoon to the party itself.

"We must make a procession," began Marjorie, who was mistress of ceremonies; "you must go first, Mother, because the May Queen Dowager is the most honorable one."

"Me go first, too," announced Rosy Posy, taking her mother's hand.

"Yes, you may," said Marjorie. "In fact, Baby, you'd better go first of all, because you're Maid of Honor; and so you walk in front of the Queen Dowager."

So Rosy Posy toddled ahead, followed by Mrs. Maynard, who carried a wand of flowers with gracious effect.

"The Queens ought to come next," said King, but Marjorie's sense of politeness interfered with this plan.

"No, the Duchess must come next," she said; "I don't care whether it's right or not as a procession, but I think Miss Hart ought to go before us children."

So the Duchess of May took her place next in line, and then the two Queens side by side followed.

Then came the two Princesses, and behind them, the King of May and the Prince, walking together in affable companionship. It was an imposing sight, and the paraders were so pleased with themselves that they marched round the lawn several times before going to the scene of the festivity.

But at last they went to the Coronation Bowers, and decided it was time for the ceremonies to begin.

The two crowns were in readiness for the two Queens. They were exactly alike, and were made of pasteboard covered with gilt paper. Miss Hart had helped with these, and they were really triumphs of gorgeous beauty. Each lay on a lace-trimmed cushion, and with them were long golden sceptres with gilt balls on top.

"Who's to do to the crowning?" asked King.

"Why, I supposed you had those details all settled in advance," said Miss Hart, laughing.

"No," returned King, "we didn't fix things up ahead much, we thought we'd just make up as we went along. I'll crown Flossy Flouncy, and Flip, you crown Marjorie,—that'll be all right."

The other members of the Royal Family took seats on rustic benches, and the two Queens mounted their thrones. The bowers were pretty, and as they stood side by side, framing the smiling Queens, it was a pretty picture.

"I hate to stop the proceedings," said Miss Hart, "but I think I must run over and get my camera, and take a snap-shot of this Coronation."

"All right," said King, agreeably, "we'll wait. We'll sing a song while you're gone, and you can skip over and back in no time."

So while the children sang the "Star Spangled Banner," Miss Hart ran across the street, and came back with her camera.

"Better wait until they get their crowns on," suggested Kitty, "they'll look a heap queenlier then."

So the coronation ceremony proceeded. The King and the Prince advanced majestically to the thrones, bearing the crowns on their cushions.

"Who'll make the speech?" asked the King.

"You may," said Flip, politely.

"No, you're better at it than I am. Well, we'll each make one. You can begin."

So Flip advanced, and holding his burden high at arms' length he dropped on one knee before Marjorie, and began to declaim in oratorical tones:

"Fair Maiden, Queen of May, I salute thee! I salute all the rest of you too, but mostly the Queen, because she is the principal pebble on the beach. Queens always are. And so, Fair Maiden, Fair Maynard Maiden, I salute thee."

"That's enough saluting," put in King; "go on with your crowning."

"And so, fair Queen of May, I crown thee, our Queen and our Sovereign! May your shadow never grow less, and may you have many happy returns of the day! And with kind regards to all, I'm your humble servant."

Having set the crown squarely on Marjorie's head, Flip bowed low in humble salutation, and then resumed an upright position, rather pleased with his own speech.

"I accept thy homage, O Prince," said Marjorie, as she bowed and smiled with queenly grace; "and I shall endeavor to be the best Queen in all the world, except Delight, who will probably be better."

With this graceful tribute to her companion queen, Marjorie sat down, holding her head very straight lest her crown should tumble off.

Then King advanced to Delight, and holding up the other crown, began his declamatory effort.

"Oh, Queen! Oh, White Queen! Oh, our beautiful sovereign! I bring to thee a crown,—a crown to crown you with, to show to all that you are our beloved and beloved Queen of May. Accept, oh, Queen, this crown and sceptre, and with them the assurance of our alleged loyalty, our humble submission, and our majestic royalty! I am a little at a loss for any thing further to say, as I can't think of any more highfalutin words, so you may as well put on your crown, and let's have some fun."

But though King's high-flown language failed him, it was with a very magnificent manner that he crowned his Queen and gave her the flower-trimmed sceptre.

Then Delight, looking lovelier than ever in her added regalia, made her own little speech.

"I thank you, my people, for your tokens of love and loyalty. I thank you for choosing me to be your queen, and my rule shall be a happy one. My only law is, for everybody to do just what they want to, and so I pronounce the Coronation Ceremonies over."

Delight bowed, and sat down on her throne, while the audience applauded heartily.

Then the two Queens came down from their bowers, and Royalty gave way to the members of the Jinks Club.

"Now, let's cut up jinks!" cried King, capering about in his long Court robes, and looking like a very merry Monarch, indeed. "First the May-pole dance, that'll limber us up some."

A May-pole had been erected near by, and from its top depended long ribbons of various colors. Each of the party took one of these ribbons, and under the direction of Miss Hart, they danced round the May-pole, weaving the ribbons in and out. It was a complicated matter at first, but they soon learned how, and wove and unwove the ribbons many times without getting tangled once. As they danced, they sang a little May song that Miss Hart had taught them, and as they danced faster and faster it became a frolic rather than a dignified rite.

At last, all out of breath they dropped on the grass, and begged Miss Hart to tell them a story.

"I'll tell you of the origin of the May-day celebrations," she said. "May-day has been a festival since very ancient times. Its reason for being is the natural feeling that comes to every one at the glad spring time. When Nature breaks out into new life and beauty, our hearts feel a sympathetic gladness, and a celebration of the spring is the natural outcome. The most primitive people felt this inclination, and they used to gather the flowers that bloomed in profusion about them, set them up, and to pay them a sort of homage, expressed in dance and song. The old Romans had what they called Floralia, or Floral Games, which began on the twenty-eighth of April, and lasted several days. Later in England, and especially in the Middle Ages, it was the custom for people of all ranks, even the Court itself, to go out early in the morning on the first of May and gather flowers. Especially did they gather hawthorn, and huge branches of this flower were brought home about sunrise, with accompaniments of pipe and tabor, and much joy and merriment. Then the people decorated their houses with the flowers they had brought. And because of this, they called this ceremony bringing Home the May, or going A-Maying, and so the hawthorn bloom itself acquired the name of May, and is often spoken of by that name. In those early days, the fairest maid of the village was crowned with flowers, and called the Queen of May; she sat in state in a little bower or arbor while her youthful courtiers danced and sang around her. But the custom of having a May Queen really dates back to the old Roman celebration when they especially worshipped the goddess Flora. Another feature of May-day was the May-pole, which was erected in all English towns and villages, and round which the people danced all day long. But these merry customs were stopped when the Puritans put an end to all such jollifications. They were revived somewhat after the restoration, but they are rarely seen nowadays except among children. But they are all pretty customs, and the whole subject will well repay reading and study. I won't continue this lecture now, but before the month of May is over, we will study in school hours some of its characteristics, and we will read the poem of the May Queen, by Lord Tennyson."

"I wish you had boys in your school, Miss Hart," said Flip Henderson; "you do teach the nicest way I ever heard of."

"Indeed she does," agreed Marjorie; "going to school to Miss Hart is like going to a party every day."

And then came the crowning glory of the May party. This was the feast, which was served out of doors on a table prettily decorated with vines and flowers. Dainty sandwiches were tied up with pink ribbons, and little glass cups held delicious pink lemonade. The cakes were iced with pink, the ice cream was pink, and there were pink bon-bons of various sorts. At each plate was a little pink box of candies to take home; and a souvenir for each guest in the shape of a pink fan for the girls, and pink balloons for the boys. The big balloons made much fun as they bobbed about in the air, and when the feast was over, the guests went away declaring that the Jinks Club had never had a prettier party.

CHAPTER II

A NEW PET

When Mr. Maynard came home that night he was treated to an account of the whole affair, but as two or three of the little Maynards often talked at once, the effect was sometimes unintelligible.

"It was the loveliest party, Father," said Marjorie, as she hung over one arm of his chair, and arranged a somewhat large bunch of blossoms in his buttonhole.

"Yes, it was," agreed Kitty, who hung on the other arm of the chair, and investigated his coat pockets in the hope of finding a box of candy or other interesting booty.

"It sure was!" declared King, who was sitting on a footstool near, and hugging one knee with apparently intense affection.

"And what made it so especially delightful?" asked Mr. Maynard, as he balanced Rosy Posy on his knee; "you tell me, Baby."

"It was a bootiful party," said Rosy Posy, with decision, "because we had pink ice cream."

"That *was* about the best part," said Kitty, reminiscently.

"Well, the pink ice cream part sounds delightful, I'm sure; but what was the rest of the party about?"

"Oh, it was a May party," exclaimed Marjorie, "and we had May Queens, and a May King, and May Princesses, and everything! I do love May, don't you, Father? Everything is so bright and bloomy and Maysy. I think it is the loveliest month in the year."

"Yes, it is a lovely month, Mopsy, and a good month to be out of doors.

Maytime is playtime."

"Yes, I know it; I made a song this morning about that. I'll sing it to you." And Marjorie sang for her father the little verse she had mad about Marjorie Maynard's May.

"Huh!" said King, "'tisn't your May, any more than anybody else's, Midget Maynard."

"No, I know it; but I like to think the May just belongs to us Maynards.

Anyway we have it all. It is our May even if other people use it, too."

"I don't begrudge them the use of it," said Kitty; "of course, it's just as much theirs as ours."

"Yes, of course," assented Marjorie; "I'm only just sort of imagining, you know."

"Let me help you imagine. Midget," said her father. "How would you like to imagine a whole May time that was all playtime?"

"For all of us?" rejoined Marjorie, her eyes dancing. "Oh, that would be a lovely imagination! It would be like an Ourday all the time! And by the way, Father, you owe us an extra Ourday. You know we skipped one when you and Mother were down South, and it's time for another anyway. Shall we have two together?"

"Two together!" cried King; "what fun that would be! We could go off on a trip or something."

"Where could we stay all night?" asked Kitty, who was the practical one.

"Oh, trips always have places to stay all night," declared King; "let's do it, Father. What do you say?"

"I don't get a chance to say much of anything, among all you chatter-boxes. Rosy Posy, what do you say?"

But the littlest Maynard was so nearly asleep that she had no voice in the matter under consideration, and at her father's suggestion, Nurse Nannie came and took her away to bed.

"Now," said Mr. Maynard, "what's all this about Ourday? And two of them together! When do you think I'm going to get my business done?"

"Well, but, Father, you owe them to us," said Marjorie, patting his cheek in her wheedlesome way. "And you're not the kind of a business man who doesn't pay his debts, are you?"

"I hope not; that would be a terrible state of affairs! And so I owe you two Ourdays, do I?"

"Yes, one for April, and one for May."

It was the custom in the Maynard household to have an Ourday each month. On these occasions both Mr. and Mrs. Maynard devoted themselves all day long to the entertainment of the four children, and the four took turns in deciding what the nature of the entertainment should be. Much of the previous month their parents had been away, and the children looked forward to the celebration of the belated Ourday in connection with the one that belonged to the month of May.

"Before we discuss the question further," said Mr. Maynard, "I must tell you of something I did to-day. I adopted a new pet."

"Oh, Father, what is it—a dog?" cried Marjorie.

"No, it isn't a dog; guess again."

"A cat!" Kitty guessed, while King said, "A goat?"

"Wrong, all of you," said Mr. Maynard; "now see if you can't guess it by asking twenty questions."

"All right," said Marjorie, who was always ready for a game. "Is it animal, vegetable, or mineral?"

"All three; that is, it belongs to all three kingdoms."

"Is it a house?" asked Kitty.

"No, it is not as big as a house."

"Is it useful or ornamental?" asked King.

"Both; but its principal use is to give pleasure."

"How lovely!" cried Marjorie. "I guess it's a fountain! Oh, Father, where are you going to put it—on the side lawn? And will it have goldfish in it, and shiny stones, and green water plants growing in it?"

"Wait a minute, Mops; don't go so fast! You see, it isn't a fountain, and if you should put water and goldfish in it, you'd spoil it entirely."

"And any way, Father," said King, "you said it was a pet, didn't you?"

"Yes, my boy, a sort of pet."

"Can it talk?"

"No, it can't talk."

"Oh, I made sure it was a talking machine. What kind of a sound does it make?"

"Well, it purrs sometimes."

"Then it is a kitten after all," cried Kitty.

"No, it isn't a kitten. It's bigger than a kitten."

"An old cat!" said Marjorie, scornfully.

"Pooh," said King, "we'll never get at it this way. Of course it isn't a cat! Father wouldn't make so much fuss over just a cat."

"But I'm not making a fuss," protested Mr. Maynard; "I only told you I had adopted a new pet, and suggested you guess what it is. If you give up I'll tell you."

"I don't give up," cried Kitty; "what color is it?"

"Red," answered her father.

"Ho!" cried Kitty, with a sudden flash of inspiration, "it's an automobile!"

"Right you are, Kitsie," said her father, "though I don't know why you guessed it so quick."

"Well, nothing else is red and big. But why do you call it a pet? And how does it purr?"

"You're so practical, Kitty, it's difficult to make you understand; but I feel quite sure we'll all make a pet of it, and when you once hear it purr, you'll think it a prettier sound than any kitten ever made."

"Is it really an automobile, Father? And have you bought it? And shall we ride in it? Where is it? Where are you going to keep it? When will it come? How many will it hold? Where shall we ride first?"

These queries were flung at Mr. Maynard by the breathless children without waiting for answers, and as Mrs. Maynard came in just then, Mr. Maynard told the story of his new acquisition.

"I've been looking at them for some time, as you know, Helen," he said, looking at his wife, "and to-day I decided upon the purchase. It's a big touring car, and will comfortably accommodate the whole Maynard family and a chauffeur beside. It will arrive day after to-morrow, that's Monday, and after a few short spins around this neighborhood, I think by Thursday we may be able to start for an Ourday trip in it."

"A whole Ourday in an automobile!" cried Marjorie; "how gorgeous and grand! Oh, King, isn't it just splendiferous!"

Marjorie sprang to her feet, and grasped her brother round the neck, and they flew round the room in a sort of a wild Indian war-dance that went far to express their joy and delight at the prospect.

"Two Ourdays, you know, Father," said Kitty, nestling quietly to her father's side as her madcap brother and sister whirled round the room. But they brought up with a round turn, though a little dishevelled-looking, to hear Mr. Maynard's reply to Kitty's remark.

"Yes, two Ourdays at once!" Marjorie cried, affectionately pulling King's hair as she spoke. He returned the caress by pinching her ear, and said, "Will it be two Ourdays together, Father, or one at a time?"

"If you two young tornadoes will sit down quietly for a moment, you may hear of something to your advantage," said Mr. Maynard, smiling at his two eldest children who were rather red-faced and breathless from their recent exertions.

"Sure we will!" cried King, and drawing Marjorie down with him, they fell in a heap on the floor, and sat there awaiting further disclosures.

"You see," Mr. Maynard began, "as Marjorie says, Maytime is,—what?"

"Playtime," supplemented Marjorie, quickly.

"Well, then, if Maytime is playtime for the Maynards, why shouldn't we play all through the month of May?"

"Play every day,
All the month of May,
All the Maynards may
Play all day!
Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!"

sang Marjorie who often improvised her songs as she went along. This was not a difficult one to learn, and King and Kitty took up the refrain, and they sang it over and over with great gusto, until Mrs. Maynard begged for a respite.

"But of course you don't mean anything like that?" said Kitty, when the song had ceased.

"But that's just exactly what I do mean. What do you think of the plan of the Maynards going a-Maying in their own motor car, and taking the whole month of May for it?"

Marjorie's eyes opened wide. "I know what you mean!" she exclaimed; "you mean a tour—a tour through the country in an automobile! I've heard of such things!"

"Wise child!" said her father; "well, that's exactly what I do mean. A tour through the country in our own motor, and in our own Maytime. How does it strike you?"

"It strikes me all of a heap!" cried Marjorie, throwing herself into her father's arms; "tell me more, quick! Seems as if I can't believe it!"

"I can't believe it, either," said Kitty, slowly; "but I 'spect I can by the time we get ready to start. When are we going, Father?"

"On Thursday, if Mother can be ready."

"Oh, yes, I can be ready. I've only to get a few things for the children and myself to wear on the journey."

"Yes, we must all have up-to-date motor togs, I'm sure," and Mr. Maynard looked about as happy over the projected trip, as any of his children.

"But, Father," said Marjorie, "how can you take so much time away from your business? You said you couldn't take two Ourdays together because you were busy."

"I didn't say exactly that, dearie, and anyway I was only joking, because I knew I was going to spring this surprise on you in a few minutes. I have arranged, of course, to be away from my business for nearly a month, and have planned to spend the greater part of May taking this motor trip. We will go to Grandma Sherwood's first, and stay a few days,—"

"To Grandma Sherwood's? Oh, glorious!" And again Marjorie was seized with a paroxysm of joy, and this time she caught Kitty, and led her off for a mad dance round the room. "Just think of it, Kit," she cried, "we'll be at Grandma Sherwood's together, and you can see the lovely room she fixed up for me, and the house in the tree, and everything. Oh, Kitty!"

"But I'm going to be there all summer, anyway," said Kitty, as she finally induced Marjorie to tumble on the divan amid a heap of sofa pillows.

"Yes, I know; but that's different. But what fun for us all to be there together for a few days! Did you say a few days, Father?"

"Yes, I did; but if you're so turbulent, and excitable, and noisy I think a few hours'll be enough for Grandma and Uncle Steve."

"It may be enough for Grandma, but it won't for Uncle Steve," declared Marjorie; "he loves rackety-packety children!"

"Well, he'll get his desires fulfilled when you get there," said Mrs. Maynard, smiling; "but perhaps the trip there will calm you down a little bit."

"No, it won't! It just makes me more and more crazy all the time I think of it! Oh, Father, won't we have a lot of our Ourdays all at once!"

"Indeed we will, enough to last for several years ahead. For if you debit me with last month's deficiency, of course you must credit me in the future."

"Oh, no, this rule doesn't work both ways! We'll just take all the Ourdays that we can get whenever we can get them. But what are we going to do after we leave Grandma's?"

"Well, if you all agree, I thought we might go over to New York and see your other grandma."

"Go to Grandma Maynard's, too! Oh, what fun we will have!" and Marjorie looked as if her cup of bliss were full and running over.

"And after that," said Mrs. Maynard, "if none of you object too seriously, we thought perhaps a little run up through New England would prove attractive."

"Mother," said King, looking at her twinkling eyes, "you planned all this out before? It's no surprise to you!"

"Very true, King; your father and I planned it while we were on our Southern trip. We had such a delightful outing, it seemed only fair that we should take you children for a trip also. And your father has been thinking for some time about buying an automobile, and as he can take the time now, it all works in beautifully."

"Beautiful! I should think it was!" cried Marjorie; "and Mother, will we all have motor coats and goggles, and all those queer things that they wear in automobiles?"

"You won't have any queer things, and I doubt if you'll need goggles; but you and Kitty shall have pretty motor coats, and pretty hoods and veils. We'll go on Monday to buy them."

"Oh," sighed Marjorie, "it just does seem too good to be true! It's like a fairy dream, and I 'spect I'll wake up every minute. What about lessons, Mother?"

"We've thought of that; but as your lessons would stop the first of June anyway, you'll only lose a few weeks, and so we're going to take you all out of school for that time. For this year, at any rate, Maytime shall be playtime for the Maynards."

"I'm so glad I'm a Maynard, and live in the Maynard family," said Kitty, with a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"So'm I," declared Marjorie; "there never was such a nice family, with such a bee-yootiful father and mother!"

And as if this were a signal for a general onslaught, the three young Maynards made a dash for the two older Maynards, and nearly choked them with well-meant but rather athletic embraces, which was their fashion of expressing approval and appreciation.

CHAPTER III

A TRIAL TRIP

Owing to some unexpected delay, the automobile didn't arrive until Wednesday. But when at last it came whirring up the drive, the assembled Maynards on the veranda greeted it with shouts of approval.

"Did you ever see such a beauty!" cried Marjorie, as she danced around the new car, and clambering up on the farther side, jumped over the closed door, and fell plump into one of the cushioned seats.

"Oh, Mopsy!" cried her father, "that isn't the way to get in."

"I don't care,—I am in! And it's just great in here! Why, there's room enough for a whole party."

The chauffeur who brought the car seemed a little surprised at the antics of the children, for he was a stolid Englishman, and not much accustomed to American exuberance.

Mr. Maynard had engaged him on the best recommendations, and felt sure that he was a trustworthy and capable man. His name was Pompton, and he was large and muscular, with a face that was grave but not ill-natured.

Kingdon made friends with him at once, and climbing up into the seat beside him, asked innumerable questions about the various parts of the machine.

"Suppose we go at once for a trial spin," proposed Mr. Maynard, and almost before he had completed his sentence, a chorus of assent rose in response.

"Oh, do, Father," cried King; "and let me stay here in front, so I can see how it works."

"Some other time you may do that, King, but this time I want to sit in front myself, so hop out, and take one of the orchestra chairs."

"All right, sir," and King tumbled out, and flew around to the other side of the car. Mrs. Maynard, Kitty, and Rosamond were already seated in the wide, comfortable back seat. This left two seats in the tonneau for King and Marjorie, and with Mr. Maynard in front, by the side of Pompton, the car offered perfect accommodations for the Maynard family. It was a big touring car of a most approved make, and up-to-date finish. The top could be opened or closed at will, and there were many appurtenances and clever contrivances for comfort, designed to add to the delights of a long tour.

The family had been so eager to start at once that they had not paused to get hats or wraps, and as the top was down, the strong breeze blew their hair all about, and also made conversation a little difficult.

But the Maynard children were not baffled by difficulties, and they raised their voices until they were audible in spite of the wind.

"Isn't it magnificent!" screamed Marjorie, pulling at King's collar to attract his attention.

"Perfectly gorgiferous!—and then some!" he yelled back, a little preoccupied in manner, because he was leaning over the chauffeur's shoulder, in his impatience to learn how to run the machine.

They went flying through the streets of Rockwell, and out into the country for a little run. Then as they were to start on their tour next day, Mrs. Maynard declared they must be turning homeward.

"Oh, Father," cried Marjorie, "after Mother gets out, mayn't we take Delight out for a few moments? Even only just around the block?"

"Will she care to go, Mopsy? You know an automobile isn't such a wonderful novelty to her as it is to you."

"Oh, yes, she'll care to go in ours,—and anyway I mean just for a minute."

"All right then, chickabiddy; we'll put Mother and Baby out, then we'll take Delight around the block, and that'll be about all for to-day."

So Mrs. Maynard and Rosy Posy were deposited on their own doorstep, and the big red car flew across the street to give Delight an exhibition of its glories.

She was glad to go, but she was far from being as enthusiastic as the Maynard children, for Delight was a timid little girl, and never felt entirely at her ease in a fast-flying motor. She nestled in the back seat between Marjorie and Kitty, and grasped both their hands when the car swung swiftly around a corner.

Then they happened to meet Flip Henderson walking along the street, and they picked him up as an extra passenger, and then Kitty said: "Oh, now we've got the whole Jinks Club except Dorothy Adams. Do let's stop for her, Father, and then go round one more block."

Good-natured Mr. Maynard consented, and though there was no vacant seat, Dorothy was bundled in somehow, and the crowd of shouting, laughing children were driven around several blocks.

The quiet little town of Rockwell was amazed at the sight, and thought it must be some new kind of a circus advertisement, until they realized that it was the Maynard family, and people had long ceased to be surprised at what the Maynards did.

But at last the children who were not Maynards were left at their respective homes, and the big red car again turned in at its own home.

"Where are you going to keep it, Father?" asked King, as they all scrambled out.

"I shall have a garage built on the place as soon as we get back; but for to-night our pet will have to sleep in other lodgings. Skip into the house now, you children, for I want to talk to Pompton without the interruption of a crowd of chatter-boxes."

So the three went into the house and stood together at a front window, flattening their noses against the glass, as they looked out at their new treasure. King was in the middle, behind his two sisters, with an arm around both their necks, and he explained to them in a very learned way, a great many points about the machine that they did not understand. His explanations were far from being correct or true, but as he didn't know that, nor the girls either, it really made no difference.

At last Pompton drove away with the car, and they watched it disappear down the street, and then turned to greet Mr. Maynard as he entered.

Marjorie went straight up to her father, and stood in front of him.

"I do think you are the most wonderful Father in the whole world," she said, eyeing him in a judicial manner.

"And the grandest!" said Kitty, snuggling herself in under his arm.

"And the tip-toppest!" declared King, grasping his father's other hand.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Mr. Maynard, dropping into an armchair, "I am certainly catching some fine compliments! And I'd like to return them. I don't mind confessing that I think you young people just about the highest class of goods in the market!"

"But we're not as splendid as you are," said Marjorie, thoughtfully; "because you do things for us, and we never do anything for you."

"Oh, yes, you do," returned her father; "you do all I want you to, by just living, and growing, and trying to behave yourselves properly."

"But we don't always do that," said Kitty, with a repentant air.

"You do, Kit," said King, generously, "you're always good. Mops and I are the ones that slip up."

"It's human nature to slip up occasionally," said Mr. Maynard, "but I think on the whole my kiddies do pretty well. Now, as you know, we start to-morrow for Grandma Sherwood's, and while I'm not going to give you a lecture on the subject, I *am* going to ask you to behave pretty fairly well while you're at her house. You know she's not as young as she once was, and a lot of mischievous children may make her a great deal of trouble if they wish to,—or they can refrain from doing so. Need I say any more?"

"Not another word, Father," declared Marjorie; "I promise to be as good as pie,—custard pie!"

"And I'll be as good as mince pie," said King, "you can't beat that!"

"Yes, I can," said Kitty; "I shall be as good as lemon meringue pie,—with a high, fluffy meringue, and little brown wiggles all over the top."

"You've struck it, Kit," said her brother, admiringly; "that *is* the best kind of pie,—and you'll be the best of the Maynard bunch! Say, Kitty, doesn't it hurt you to be so good?"

"No," said Kitty, placidly, "I like it."

There was not much fun in teasing Kitty, she was too matter-of-fact, so King turned his attentions to Marjorie, and with apparent innocence kicked out his foot just in time for her to stumble over it. This led to a general scrimmage, in which two Maynards, two sofa-pillows, and a footstool became very much tangled up, and Mr. Maynard and Kitty sat smiling indulgently at them, with the air of enjoying the performance and not caring to take part in it.

Of course the dinner hour and all the hours until bedtime were occupied in conversation about the projected trip, and when at last the little Maynards were tucked into bed, their dreams still continued to hover around the same subject.

* * * * *

The next day proved to be most kindly disposed as to weather, and the brilliant May sunshine sparkled on the big red car as it stood waiting for its passengers.

There was more or less hurry and scurry of getting ready, but the elder Maynards were of systematic and methodical habits, so that really everything was ready ahead of time. Two trunks had been sent on by express to Grandma Sherwood's, and one large trunk which was to accompany them on their trip, was already fastened in place at the back of the car.

The children all had new motor coats of pongee, which they could wear over other wraps if necessary. The girls also had fascinating little hoods of shirred silk, Marjorie's being rose color, and Kitty's blue. They greatly admired themselves and each other in these costumes, and Marjorie declared it gave her a trippy feeling just to look at them.

They started at ten o'clock. Mrs. Maynard and Kitty sat back with Rosamond between them. Midget and King in the next two seats, and Mr. Maynard in front with the chauffeur.

They went flying down the drive to a chorus of good-byes from the servants, who assembled to see them off, and who would take care of the house in their absence.

As they whizzed across the street, and paused for a moment in front of Delight's house, Delight and Miss Hart came running down to wave a good-bye, and their hands were full of flowers which they flung into the automobile all over its merry occupants.

"Good-bye, good-bye!" they called, for the Maynards had not stopped, but merely slowed down a little, and were now again speeding on their way. Marjorie and King stood up in their places, and waved handkerchiefs and flowers, and shouted good-bye until they could no longer be seen or heard.

"Now we are really started," said Marjorie, settling back into her seat with an air of great satisfaction. "Having all these flowers thrown at us seems like a wedding trip or something. There's not nearly so much wind to-day, and then, with this hood, my hair doesn't blow about so, anyway. Oh, Father, I'm awful hungry! Can't we stop at the grocer's and get some ginger-snaps and apples?"

"You've just had your breakfast, but I suppose automobile kiddies must have something to nibble on!" So a stop was made at the grocer's, and a supply of ginger-snaps and apples was added to their other luggage.

Mr. Hiller, the grocer, was very much interested in the motor party, and came out himself to wish them good speed.

"I don't know what Rockwell will do without the Maynard tribe," he said; "you youngsters keep things lively around town. And you're going to be away a month, you say. Well, well!"

"Perhaps it's a good thing to give the town a little rest, Mr. Hiller," said Mr. Maynard, laughing.

"No, sir; no, sir; them children of yours never does anything vicious. Full of mischief they may be, full of fun they may be, but never really naughty. No, no!"

Mr. Maynard expressed a laughing appreciation of these compliments, and then they started once more.

"Now we're really off," said King, "we won't have to stop again."

"Oh, I think most of the fun is stopping," said Marjorie; "I love to stop and then go on again. Perhaps we can get out and pick some wild flowers or wade in a brook."

"Not to-day," said her father, "but some days you may do that to your heart's content. The whole trip is going to be just one long picnic, and we're going to get all the fun out of it we possibly can."

"I think it's delicious," said Kitty, in her quiet way; "I think it's fun enough just to glide along like this, with the blue sky shining all over us, and the trees waving their boughs at us, and even the fences jig-jigging along at our side."

"You're so poetical, Kitty," said Marjorie; "I love the blue sky and the green trees too, but just now I want to see a red apple and a brown ginger-snap!"

"Midget, I believe you could eat at any time," said her mother, laughing.

"Yes, I could," said Midget, contentedly, "'cept when I've just had enough. And I do feel like eating, but I feel like singing, too."

"You can't do both at once," said her brother.

"No, but I can do first one and then the other. Now I'll tell you, Father, what to do. You make a little song for us, while I eat this apple. A kind of a little motor song, you know."

So while Marjorie ate her apple, and the other children engaged in the same pursuit, Mr. Maynard made a little song for them.

This was a favorite game of the Maynards. Father Maynard had a knack of turning off verses, and they usually sang them to some well-known air, or perhaps made up a little crooning tune of their own.

So when the apples were finished and the cores flung away, Mr. Maynard lined out his little song, and the children quickly learned it.

After two or three attempts they were able to sing it correctly, and they stowed it away in their memory as one of their favorite songs, and at intervals throughout the day their young voices filled the air with these sentiments:

"Very happy the Maynards are;
Taking a tour in their motor car
Gaily to Grandma's lickety-split
Marjorie, Rosamond, Kingdon, and Kit
Mothery, fathery, also along,—
Gaily we sing our motor car song!
Hooray, hooray!
For our holiday
May for the Maynards!
Maynards for May!"

CHAPTER IV

VISITING A CAMP

Rockwell was soon left far behind, and the Maynards' car flew along the country road, now passing through a bit of woods, and now through a little town, or again crossing a picturesque brook.

The children were delighted with the new experience, and chatted all at once, about the roadside sights.

Pompton, the English chauffeur, though he said little or nothing, was secretly amazed at the gaiety and volubility of the young people. The children were allowed to take turns sitting in the front seat, and, as was their nature, they talked rapidly and steadily to the somewhat taciturn driver.

"What a funny name you have, Pompton," said Marjorie, as she sat beside him; "at least it seems funny to me, because I never heard it before."

"It's a good old English name, Miss," he returned, a little gruffly, "and never been dishonored, as I know of."

"Oh, I think it's a very nice name," said Marjorie, quickly, for she had had no intention of being unpleasantly critical, "only I think it's a funny name. You see Pompton sounds so much like pumpkin."

"Do you think so, Miss?"

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter about a name, anyway. Tell me about your people. Have you any little boys and girls?"

"No, Miss; I never was married, Miss. And I ain't overly fond of children."

"Really, aren't you, Pompton? Well, you'll have to begin being fond of them, because you see, us Maynard children just can't stand anybody around who isn't fond of us. Though of course we've never tried, for everybody who has lived with us has always been terribly fond of us."

"Maybe it'll be a pleasant change then, Miss, to try another sort." Pompton's eyes twinkled good-naturedly as he said this, and Marjorie instinctively recognized that he was trying to joke.

"Ah, you're fond of us already, Pompton, and you needn't say you're not! It's a funny thing," she went on, confidentially, "but everybody loves us Maynards,—and yet we're such a bad lot."

"A bad lot, Miss?"

"Well, full of the old scratch, you know; always cutting up jinks. Do you know what jinks are, Pompton?"

"No, Miss; what are they?"

"Why they're just jinks; something to cut up, you know."

"Cut up, Miss?"

"Oh, Pompton, you're just like a parrot! You just repeat what I say! Don't you know *anything*?"

"Very little, Miss."

But as they rode along, and Marjorie asked her interminable string of questions about the car, or about the trees or flowers they were passing, or about sundry roadside matters, she found that Pompton was a very well-informed man, indeed, as well as being kind and obliging in answering questions.

As they spun along a bit of straight road, Marjorie saw, some distance ahead, a girl sitting on a large stone by the roadside. The girl's face was so weary and pained-looking that Marjorie felt a sudden thrill of pity for her, and as a second glance showed that the girl was lame, she impulsively begged Pompton to stop a moment that they might speak to her.

The chauffeur turned around to see if the order were corroborated by the older people, and Mrs. Maynard said, "Yes, Pompton, let us stop and see what the poor girl wants."

So the car stopped, and Marjorie impetuously jumped out, and ran to speak to the girl, who seemed ill and suffering. Mr. Maynard joined them at once, and they listened to the girl's story.

She said her name was Minnie Meyer, and that she had to walk to the neighboring town to buy some provisions for her mother. But being lame she had become so tired that she sat down to rest by the way.

"How far have you to go, child?" asked Mr. Maynard, kindly.

"I have already walked a mile, sir, and it's two miles more to Pelton, where I must go. I have often walked the distance, but my foot is very bad just now, and it is hard going. I have been ill, and I am not yet very strong."

"I should think not!" exclaimed King, who had jumped out to see what was going on. "Look here, Father, we're going directly to Pelton; it is a straight road, and I can't miss the way. You let this girl take my place in the car, and I'll walk."

"Now that's good of you, King," said his father with an approving glance at the boy, "for this poor child is pretty well tired out. How can you get home again, Minnie?"

"Oh, sir, I shall have a ride home. A neighbor of ours will take me; but I have to walk over to Pelton and get my things by the time he's ready to start."

"And what time does he start for home?"

"About two o'clock, sir."

The child's face was very white, and her eyes were large and dark. Though probably no older than Marjorie, she looked careworn and troubled beyond her years.

"You are a good boy, King," his mother called out from the car, "and I think, Ed, we had better take the girl with us. Kingdon won't mind a two miles' walk, I know, when it is in such a good cause."

"I'm going with King," announced Marjorie; "I shan't mind the walk, either, and it will be fun for both of us to be together, while it would be awful lonesome for King all alone."

"Good for you, Mopsy Midget!" cried King, "you're a trump! Come on, we'll get there before the car does." King grasped his sister's hand, and they set off merrily at a good pace along the straight road to Pelton.

Meantime, Mr. Maynard had assisted the lame girl into the car, and Kitty tucked rugs and shawls around her to make her comfortable.

Minnie Meyer was both awestruck and delighted. She had never been in an automobile before, and it had all happened so quickly she scarcely realized her good fortune.

"I think you must all be angels," she said; "and I'm sorry the young lady and gentleman have to walk so far, and all just for me."

"But they're better able to walk than you are," said practical Kitty.

"That may be, Miss, but it seems queer for the likes of me to be riding in their place. My! But it goes fast!"

The car passed King and Marjorie, who waved their hands gaily, and watched it rapidly disappear along the road in front of them.

"I'm glad we're doing a deed of charity, Midget," said her brother, "for if we weren't I shouldn't relish this long walk very much."

"Now, King, don't go and spoil your noble deed by growling about it! It was lovely of you to let that girl ride in your place, but if you're going to kick about walking, you'll spoil it all."

"I'm not kicking. And anyway, Mops, you were the noble one yourself. You walked just so I shouldn't be lonesome."

"'Course I did! What's lots of fun for two is awful poky for one. Come on, I'll race you to that big sticking-out tree!"

They flew along the road with their heels kicking out behind, and though King reached the tree first, he was only a few steps ahead of Marjorie, who came up panting, and threw herself on the grass by his side.

"We mustn't do that again," she said, "it makes us too much out of breath, and we can't walk afterward. Now let's rest a minute, and then walk on just middling fast,—because it's a long way yet. What time do you suppose we'll get there?"

"Pomp said if we'd walk straight along we ought to get to the inn by half-past twelve. They won't have lunch till we get there."

"You bet they won't! Do you know where the inn is?"

"Well, I've never been there, but when we get to Pelton I rather guess we can find the inn! Come on, Mops, if you're rested, we'd better get a move on!"

Then they trudged on together, finding the way very pleasant, and many things to interest them as they passed along.

The road was a public highway, and there were many motor cars and much other traffic.

But as the children kept on a grassy path by the side of the road they were in no danger, and there was no possibility of losing their way.

"It's just a matter of keeping at it," said King, "but it does seem longer than I thought. We're not halfway yet."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause Pomp said when we came to the sign-board pointing to Mossville we'd be halfway, and we haven't come to that yet."

"What makes you call him Pomp?"

"Oh, just for short; and besides he's kind of pompous, you know,—sort of stuffy and English."

"Yes, he is. I like him, though, and I think he's going to like us, but he doesn't understand us yet. I hope Father will ask that lame girl to lunch with us. I think she looked hungry."

"She looked awful poor, and I s'pose poor folks are always hungry. It must be awful to be always hungry, Mops!"

"Well, I'm 'most always hungry myself."

"Oh, that isn't real hunger; that's just wanting something to eat. Hello, here's the Mossville sign now! See it?"

"Yes; so now we must be halfway. I'm not tired, are you?"

"No, not a bit. I'd like a drink of water, though. Perhaps we'll come to a brook."

But they walked on considerably further without seeing any brook, or even a farmhouse where they might stop for a drink of water. But when they were about half a mile from Pelton, King saw a little bridge off toward the right, and exclaimed, "That bridge must be over water of some sort. If you want to, Midget, we can go over and see if it's clean enough to drink."

"Come on, then; it won't take long, and I'm 'most choked to death."

They walked across an intervening field, and came to the little bridge which did cross a small but clear and sparkling brook.

"What can we drink out of?" asked Midget.

"Have to drink out of our hands, I guess; wish we had a cup or something.

Oh, look at that man!"

Midget looked in the direction King pointed, and saw a man seated on the ground, busily working at something which seemed to be made of long rushes of reeds.

"He's making a basket," cried King, greatly interested. "Let's go and look at him."

They trotted over to the man, and King said, politely, "Is that a basket you're making, sir?"

"Yes," came the answer in a gruff voice, and when the man looked up at them, they saw he was a strange-looking person indeed. His complexion was dark, his coarse black hair rather long, and his black eyes had a shrewd expression, but were without kindness. "What do you want?" he said, still in his gruff voice.

"We don't want anything p'ticular," said Marjorie, who did not wish to be intrusive; "we did want a drink of water out of the brook, but we had nothing to drink from, and then we saw you building a basket, and we just came over to look at you. You don't mind, do you?"

"No, I don't mind," and the man's voice was a little less gruff as he looked at Marjorie's pretty smiling face. Then he gave her another look, somewhat more scrutinizing, and then he looked again at King. "You want a drink of water, do you?" and the look of interest in his round black eyes seemed to become intensified. "Well, I'll tell you what to do; you go right straight along that little path through the grass, and after a few steps, you'll find some people, and they'll give you a drink of water with pleasure, and a nice cup to drink it out of."

"Is it far?" asked Marjorie, for she couldn't see any signs of habitation, and did not wish to delay too long.

"No; 'tain't a dozen steps. Just behind that clump of trees yonder; you can't miss it."

"A farmhouse, I suppose," said King.

"Well, not just exactly a farmhouse," said the man, "but you go on, you youngsters, and whoever you see when you get there, tell 'em Jim sent you."

"We will; and thank you, Jim," said Marjorie, suddenly remembering her manners.

"You're welcome," said the man, and again his voice was gruff as at first.

"Somehow I don't like it, Mops," said King, who had a troubled look on his face as they walked swiftly along the path indicated.

"Don't like what?"

"His sending us over here. And I don't like him; he didn't look right."

"I thought he was very kind to tell us about the farmhouse, and if his voice is sort of gruff, I s'pose he can't help that."

"It isn't that exactly; but I think he's a,—a—"

"A what?"

"Never mind; here we are at the place. Why, Mops, it isn't a house at all! It's a tent,—a lot of tents."

"So it is! It must be an encampment. Do you think there are soldiers here?"

"Soldiers? No! I only wish they *were* soldiers."

As King was speaking, a young woman came walking toward them, smiling in an ingratiating way. Like the man, Jim, she was dark-haired and dark-skinned. Her black eyes flashed, and her smiling red lips showed very white teeth as she spoke kindly to the children.

"Come in," she said, in a wheedling voice; "come in; I love little boys and girls. What do you want?"

Marjorie began to say, "We want a drink of water," when King pinched her elbow as a sign to be quiet, and he spoke to the woman himself. "We don't want anything," he said, "we're just passing by on our way to Pelton. Good-morning."

Grasping Marjorie's arm he turned to go away, but the woman stopped him, saying, "Oh, don't go so quickly; come in and rest a moment, and I will give you a drink of milk, and then you can go on to Pelton."

"Yes, let's do that, King," said Marjorie, looking at her brother, amazed at his ungracious actions.

But King persisted in his determination. "No, thank you," he said to the woman in a decided way; "you're very kind, but we don't care for any milk, and we must go right on to Pelton."

"And I say you must stay right here," said the woman, in much sterner tones than she had used before, and taking the children each by an arm, she pushed them ahead of her inside of the largest tent.

CHAPTER V

HELD CAPTIVE

Then King's fears were realized. He had suspected these people were gypsies, and now he discovered that they were. Inside the tent were three or four men and women, all of the dark, gypsy type, and wearing the strange, bright-colored garments characteristic of their tribe. They did not seem ill-disposed toward the visitors, but welcomed them cordially, and one of the women went at once for a pitcher of milk, and brought it, with two glasses, which she set on the table.

King was not exactly frightened, for they all seemed pleasant and kind enough, but he couldn't help remembering how gypsies were credited with the habit of stealing children, and holding them for ransom. "But only babies," he thought to himself; "I don't believe they ever steal such big kids as Marjorie and me."

King was fifteen, and tall for his age, and as he looked at Marjorie he realized that she was a big girl, too, and he felt sure they were beyond the age of being kidnapped. But as he noted the furtive glances which were cast at them by the gypsies, he again felt alarmed, and glanced at Marjorie to see if her thoughts were like his own.

But they were not. Marjorie was chatting gaily with the good-looking young woman who had brought her into the tent, and she was accepting an invitation to have a glass of milk and a cracker.

As an old gypsy woman poured the milk from the pitcher into the glass, she turned her back to Marjorie, but King's alert eyes could see her shaking a small portion of white powder into the milk.

Like a flash it came to King what it all meant! They were kidnappers, these wicked gypsies, and they meant to put some drug in the milk that the children drank, so they would go to sleep, and then the kidnappers would carry them away!

King thought rapidly. He couldn't let Marjorie drink that milk,—and yet if he made a fuss about it, they could easily overpower him. He determined to use strategy.

"Let me pass the glass to my sister," he said, jumping up, and going to take the glass from the old woman who had poured it. Unsuspectingly, she let him take it, but as he turned, he stumbled, purposely, against the table leg, and spilled all the milk on the ground.

"Oh, excuse me," he said, politely. "Now we shall have to go without a drink of milk! But we are just as much obliged, and we bid you good-morning. Come, Midget."

Marjorie was at a loss to understand King's actions, but she knew her brother well enough to know that his tone and his look meant that something very serious was the matter, and she was quite ready to obey him without knowing why.

But though he grasped her arm, and endeavored to lead her out of the tent, they were suddenly stopped. Two stalwart men who had been sitting in shadow at the back of the tent came forward, and grasping the children's shoulders, pushed them back into their seats rather roughly.

"You set down there!" said one of the men, "and don't you move till you're told to! We ain't decided just what to do with you yet, and when we see fit, we'll tell you, and not till then, so you just keep still!"

Marjorie suddenly sensed the situation. These people were enemies, not friends! She understood King's efforts to get her away, and she remembered, too, his misgivings as they were on their way across the field.

Moreover, it was she who had insisted on coming, and so she felt, in a way, responsible for what had happened to them. She jumped to her feet as soon as the man let go of her shoulder, and cried, with flashing eyes, "I will not keep still! What do you mean by treating me like that? Don't you know who I am? We're Maynards! We're Edward Maynard's children,—and everybody loves the Maynards!"

"Oh, they do, do they!" said the man who had spoken before. "Then that's a mighty good reason why we should keep you here a little while."

"Keep us here!" stormed Marjorie, not at all realizing that they were being kidnapped, but merely thinking these people were playing some sort of a joke upon them. "Why should you keep us here? We want to go on."

"You want to go on, do you?" And the man fairly snarled at them; "well, you can't go on, and you may as well understand that! Didn't Jim send you?"

"Yes, Jim sent us," said Marjorie, remembering what the man who was weaving the basket had said.

"Then if Jim sent you, you're here to stay. And as it's just impossible for you to get away, there's small use in your trying! So you may as well make the best of it, and if you don't want your bread and milk you needn't eat it, but if you do, you can have it. There, now, I'm speaking fair by you, and you may as well behave yourselves."

"Speaking fair by us!" exclaimed Marjorie, who was as yet more indignant than frightened. "Do you call it speaking fair by us to tell us that we must stay here when we want to go on! You are bad, wicked men!"

"Yes, little Miss," was the answer, with a shout of laughter, "*we are* bad, wicked men! Now what are you going to do about it? You don't fancy for a minute that you can get away, do you?"

This silenced Marjorie, for there was no answer to such a question. Her rage had spent itself in her impetuous speech, and she knew of course that two children could not get away from this band of villains if they were not allowed to do so. But she did not cry. Her feelings were too wrought up for that. She sat where they had placed her, and tried bravely to conceal the fright and fear that were every moment growing stronger within her. She gave one imploring glance at King, and he came over and sat beside her. He took her hand in a tight clasp, implying that whatever happened they would face it together.

"Keep 'em there for the present," growled the man who seemed to be the spokesman, and then he and the other man went away, leaving the children in care of the three gypsy women.

Although apparently the women paid little attention to their young prisoners, King and Midget could easily see that the eyes of their jailers were ever alert, and watching their slightest movement. Had they tried to cut and run, they would have been caught before they reached the door. But no heed was paid when they whispered together, and so they were able to hold a long conversation which was unheard, and even unnoticed by the others.

"You know, Mops, what has happened?" whispered King.

"No, I don't; what do they want of us?"

"Why, we're kidnapped and held for ransom. Those men have probably gone out now to send letters to Father about the ransom money."

"Oh, then Father'll pay it, and we'll get away."

"It isn't so easy as that. They have lots of fussing back and forth. We may be here a long time. I say, Mops, you're a brick not to cry."

"I'm too mad to cry. The idea of their keeping us here like this! It's outrageous! Why, King, by this time we would have been in Pelton. Just think how worried Father and Mother must be!"

"Don't think about that, Mops, or you will cry sure. And I will, too!"

Let's think how to get away."

But thinking was of little use, as there was no way to get away but to run out at the door, and an attempt at that would be such certain failure that it was not worth trying.

So the children sat there in dumb misery, silently watching the gypsy women as they moved about preparing the mid-day meal.

Occasionally they spoke, and their manner and words were kindly, but King and Midget could not bring themselves to respond in the same way.

"King," whispered Marjorie, "how far do you suppose we are from the road?"

"Too far to run there, if that's what you mean. We'd be caught before we started," was the whispered reply.

"That isn't what I mean; but how far are we?"

"Not very far, Midget; after we crossed the little bridge, the path to this place was sort of parallel to the road."

"Well, King, I've got an idea. Don't say anything, and don't stop me."

With a stretch and a yawn as of great weariness, Marjorie slowly rose. Immediately the three women started toward her. "You sit still!" said one, sharply.

"Mayn't I walk about the room, if I promise not to go out the door?" said Marjorie; "I'm so cramped sitting still."

"Move around if you want to," said the youngest of the women, a little more gently; "but there's no use your trying to run away," and she wagged her head ominously.

"Honest, I won't try to run away," and Marjorie's big, dark eyes looked gravely at her captor.

The women said nothing more, and Marjorie wandered about the tent in an apparently aimless manner. But after a time she came near to a small slit in the side of the tent that served as a sort of window, and here she paused and examined some beads that hung near by. Then choosing a moment when the women were most attentive to their household duties, she put her head out through the window and *yelled*. Now Marjorie Maynard's yell was something that a Comanche Indian might be proud of. Blessed with strong, healthy lungs, and being by nature fond of shouting, she possessed an ability to scream which was really unusual.

As her blood-curdling shouts rent the air, the three women were so stupefied that for a moment they could say or do nothing. This gave Marjorie additional time, and she made the most of it. Her entire lung power spent itself in successive shrieks more than a dozen times, before she was finally dragged away from the window by the infuriated gypsy women.

Marjorie turned upon them, unafraid.

"I told you I wouldn't try to run away," she said, "and neither I didn't. But I had a right to yell, and if anybody heard me, I hope he'll come right straight here! You are bad, wicked women!"

The child's righteous indignation had its effect on the women, and they hesitated, not knowing exactly what to do with this little termagant.

And strange to say, Marjorie's ruse had succeeded.

For when the Maynards reached Pelton, and had found the inn where they were to lunch, Pompton, the chauffeur, had expressed himself as unwilling to sit there quietly and await the arrival of King and Marjorie.

"The poor children will be done out," he said to Mr. Maynard, "and by your leave, sir, I'll just take the car, and run back a few rods and pick them up."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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