

WELLS

CAROLYN

MARJORIE'S

NEW FRIEND

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CHAPTER I

A BOTHERSOME BAG

"Mother, are you there?"

"Yes, Marjorie; what is it, dear?"

"Nothing. I just wanted to know. Is Kitty there?"

"No; I'm alone, except for Baby Rosy. Are you bothered?"

"Yes, awfully. Please tell me the minute Kitty comes. I want to see her."

"Yes, dearie. I wish I could help you."

"Oh, I *wish* you could! You'd be just the one!"

This somewhat unintelligible conversation is explained by the fact that while Mrs. Maynard sat by a table in the large, well-lighted living-room, and Rosy Posy was playing near her on the floor, Marjorie was concealed behind a large folding screen in a distant corner.

The four Japanese panels of the screen were adjusted so that they enclosed the corner as a tiny room, and in it sat Marjorie, looking very much troubled, and staring blankly at a rather hopeless-looking mass of brocaded silk and light-green satin, on which she had been sewing. The more she looked at it, and the more she endeavored to pull it into shape, the more perplexed she became.

"I never saw such a thing!" she murmured, to herself. "You turn it straight, and then it's wrong side out,—and then you turn it back, and still it's wrong side out! I wish I could ask Mother about it!"

The exasperating silk affair was a fancy work-bag which Marjorie was trying to make for her mother's Christmas present. And that her mother should not know of the gift, which was to be a surprise, of course, Marjorie worked on it while sitting behind the screen. It was a most useful arrangement, for often Kitty, and, sometimes, even Kingdon, took refuge behind its concealing panels, when making or wrapping up gifts for each other that must not be seen until Christmas Day.

Indeed, at this hour, between dusk and dinner time, the screened off corner was rarely unoccupied.

It was a carefully-kept rule that no one was to intrude if any one else was in there, unless, of course, by invitation of the one in possession. Marjorie did not like to sew, and was not very adept at it, but she had tried very hard to make this bag neatly, that it might be presentable enough for her mother to carry when she went anywhere and carried her work.

So Midget had bought a lovely pattern of brocaded silk for the outside, and a dainty pale green satin for the lining. She had seamed up the two materials separately, and then had joined them at the top, thinking that when she turned them, the bag would be neatly lined, and ready for the introduction of a pretty ribbon that should gather it at the top. But, instead, when she sewed her two bags together, they did not turn into each other right at all. She had done her sewing with both bags wrong side out, thinking they would turn in such a way as to conceal all the seams. But instead of that, not only were all the seams on the outside, but only the wrong sides of the pretty materials showed, and turn and twist it as she would, Marjorie could not make it come right.

Her mother could have shown her where the trouble lay, but Marjorie couldn't consult her as to her own surprise, so she sat and stared at the exasperating bag until Kitty came.

"Come in here, Kit," called Midget, and Kitty carefully squeezed herself inside the screen.

"What's the matter, Mopsy? Oh, is it Mother's—"

"Sh!" said Marjorie warningly, for Kitty was apt to speak out thoughtlessly, and Mrs. Maynard was easily within hearing.

"I can't make it turn right," she whispered; "see if you can."

Kitty obligingly took the bag, but the more she turned and twisted it, the more obstinately it refused to get right side out.

"You've sewed it wrong," she whispered back.

"I know that,—but what's the way to sew it right. I can't see where I made the mistake."

"No, nor I. You'd think it would turn, wouldn't you?"

Kitty kept turning the bag, now brocaded side out, now lining side out, but always the seams were outside, and the right side of the materials invisible.

"I never saw anything so queer," said Kitty; "it's bewitched! Maybe King could help us."

Kingdon had just come in, so they called him to the consultation.

"It is queer," he said, after the situation was noiselessly explained to him. "It's just like my skatebag, that Mother made, only the seams of that don't show."

"Go get it, King," said Marjorie hopefully. "Maybe I can get this right then. Don't let Mother see it."

So King went for his skatebag, and with it stuffed inside his jacket, returned to his perplexed sisters.

"No; I don't see how she did it," declared Marjorie, at last, after a close inspection of the neatly-made bag, with all its seams properly out of sight, and its material and lining both showing their right sides. "I'll have to give it to her this way"

"You can't!" said Kitty, looking at the absurd thing.

"But what can I do, Kit? It's only a week till Christmas now, and I can't begin anything else for Mother. I've lots of things to finish yet."

"Here's Father," said Kitty, as she heard his voice outside; "perhaps he can fix it."

"Men don't know about fancy work," said Marjorie, but even as she spoke hope rose in her heart, for Mr. Maynard had often proved knowing in matters supposed to be outside his ken.

"Oh, Father, come in here, please; in behind the screen. You go out, King and Kitty, so there'll be room."

Those invited to leave did so, and Mr. Maynard came in and smiled at his eldest daughter's despairing face.

"What's the trouble, Mopsy midget? Oh, millinery? You don't expect me to hemstitch, do you? What's that you're making, a young sofa-cushion?"

"Don't speak so loud, Father. It's a Christmas present I'm making for Mother, and it won't go right. If you can't help me, I don't know what I'll do. I've tried every way, but it's always wrong side out!"

"What a hateful disposition it must have! But what *is* it?"

Marjorie put her lips to her father's ear, and whispered; "It's a bag; I mean it's meant to be one, for Mother to carry to sewing society. I can sew it well enough, but I can't make it get right side out!"

"Now, Mopsy, dear, you know I'd do anything in the world to help you that I possibly can; but I'm afraid this is a huckleberry above my persimmons!"

"But, Father, here's King's skatebag. Mother made it, and can't you see by that how it's to go?"

"H'm,—let me see. I suppose if I must pull you out of this slough of despond, I must. Now all these seams are turned in, and all yours are outside."

"Yes; and how can we get them inside? There's no place to turn them to."

Mr. Maynard examined both bags minutely.

"Aha!" he said at last; "do you know how they put the milk in the coconut, Marjorie?"

"No, sir."

"Well, neither do I. But I see a way to get these seams inside and let your pretty silks put their best face foremost. Have you a pair of scissors?"

"Yes, here they are."

Mr. Maynard deftly ripped a few stitches, leaving an opening of a couple of inches in one of the seams of the lining. Through this opening he carefully pulled the whole of both materials, thus reversing the whole thing. When it had all come through, he pulled and patted it smooth, and, behold! the bag was all as it should be, and there remained only the tiny opening he had ripped in the lining to be sewed up again.

"That you must cat-stitch, or whatever you call it," he said, "as neatly as you can. And it will never show, on a galloping horse on a dark night."

"Blindstitch, you mean," said Marjorie; "yes, I can do that. Oh, Father, how clever you are! How did you know how to do it?"

"Well, to be honest, I saw a similar place in the lining of the skate bag. So I concluded that was the most approved way to make bags. Can you finish it now?"

"Oh, yes; I've only to stitch a sort of casing and run a ribbon in for the strings. Thank you lots, Father dear. You always help me out. But I was afraid this was out of your line."

"It isn't exactly in my day's work, as a rule; but I'm always glad to assist a fair lady in distress. Any other orders, mademoiselle?"

"Not to-night, brave sir. But you might call in, any time you're passing."

"Suppose I should pop in when you're engaged on a token of regard and esteem for my noble self?"

"No danger! Your Christmas present is all done and put away. I had Mother's help on that."

"Well, then it's sure to be satisfactory. Then I will bid you adieu, trusting to meet you again at dinner."

"All right," said Marjorie, who had neatly; blindstitched the little ripped place, and was now making the casing for the ribbons.

By dinner time the bag was nearly done, and she went to the table with a light heart, knowing that she could finish her mother's present that evening.

"Who is the dinner for this year?" asked Mr. Maynard, as the family sat round their own dinner table.

"Oh, the Simpsons," said Marjorie, in a tone of decision. "You know Mr. Simpson is still in the hospital, and they're awfully poor."

It was the Maynards' habit to send, every Christmas, a generous dinner to some poor family in the town, and this year the children had decided on the Simpsons. In addition to the dinner, they always made up a box of toys, clothing, and gifts of all sorts. These were not always entirely new, but were none the less welcome for that.

"A large family, isn't it?" said Mr. Maynard.

"Loads of 'em," said King. "All ages and assorted sizes."

"Well, I'll give shoes and mittens all round, for my share. Mother, you must look out for the dinner and any necessities that they need. Children, you can make toys and candies for them! can't you?"

"Yes, indeed," said Marjorie; "we've lovely things planned. We're going to paste pictures on wood, and King is going to saw them up into picture-puzzles. And we're going to make scrap books, and dress dolls, and heaps of things."

"And when are you going to take these things to them?"

"I think we'd better take them the day before Christmas," said Mrs. Maynard. "Then Mrs. Simpson can prepare her turkey and such things over night if she wants to. I'm sure she'd like it better than to have all the things come upon her suddenly on Christmas morning."

"Yes, that's true," said Mr. Maynard. "And then we must find something to amuse ourselves all day Christmas."

"I rather guess we can!" said King. "Well have our own tree Christmas morning, and Grandma and Uncle Steve are coming, and if there's snow, we'll have a sleigh-ride, and if there's ice, we'll have skating,—oh, I just love Christmas!"

"So do I," said Marjorie. "And we'll have greens all over the house, and wreaths tied with red ribbon,—"

"And mince pie and ice cream, both!" interrupted Kitty; "oh, won't it be gorgeous!"

"And then no school for a whole week!" said Marjorie, rapturously. "More than a week, for Christmas is on Thursday, so New Year's Day's on Thursday, too, and we have vacation on that Friday, too."

"But Christmas and New Year's Day don't come on the same day of the week this year, Marjorie," said her father.

"They don't! Why, Father, they *always* do! It isn't leap year, is it?"

"Ho, Mops, leap year doesn't matter," cried King. "Of course, they always come on the same day of the week. What do you mean, Father?"

"I mean just what I say; that Christmas Day and New Year's Day do not fall on the same day of the week this year."

"Why, Daddy, you're crazy!" said Marjorie, "Isn't Christmas coming on Thursday?"

"Yes, my child."

"Well, isn't New Year's Day the following Thursday?"

"Yes, but that's *next* year. New Year's Day of *this* year was nearly twelve months ago and was on Wednesday."

"Oh, Father, what a sell! of course I meant this *winter*."

"Well, you didn't say so. You said this *year*."

"It's a good joke," said King, thinking it over. "I'll fool the boys with it, at school."

The Maynards were a busy crowd during the short week that intervened before Christmas.

From Mr. Maynard, who was superintending plans for his own family and for many beneficiaries, down to the cook, who was making whole shelves full of marvelous dainties, everybody was hurrying and skurrying from morning till night.

The children had completed their gifts for their parents and for each other, and most of them were already tied in dainty tissue papers and holly ribbons awaiting the festal day.

Now they were making gifts for the poor family of Simpsons, and they seemed to enjoy it quite as much as when making the more costly presents for each other.

Marjorie came home from school at one o'clock, and as Mrs. Maynard had said she needn't practise her music any more until after the holidays, she had all her afternoons and the early part of the evenings to work at the Christmas things.

She was especially clever with scissors and paste, and made lovely scrap-books by cutting large double leaves of heavy brown paper. On these she pasted post-cards or other colored pictures, also little verses or stories cut from the papers. Eight of these sheets were tied together by a bright ribbon at the back, and made a scrap-book acceptable to any child. Then, Marjorie loved to dress paper dolls. She bought a dozen of the pretty ones that have movable arms and feet, and dressed them most picturesquely in crinkled paper and lace paper. She made little hats, cloaks and muffs for them, and the dainty array was a fine addition to the Simpson's box.

Kitty, too, made worsted balls for the Simpson babies, and little lace stockings, worked around with worsted, which were to be filled with candies.

With Mrs. Maynard's help, they dressed a doll for each Simpson girl, and

King sawed out a picture puzzle for each Simpson boy.

Then, a few days before Christmas they all went to work and made candies. They loved to do this, and Mrs. Maynard thought home-made confectionery more wholesome than the bought kind. So they spent one afternoon, picking out nuts and seeding raisins, and making all possible beforehand preparations, and the next day they made the candy. As they wanted enough for their own family as well as the Simpsons, the quantity, when finished, was rather appalling.

Pan after pan of cream chocolates, coconut balls, caramels, cream dates, cream nuts, and chocolate-dipped dainties of many sorts filled the shelves in the cold pantry.

And Marjorie also made some old-fashioned molasses candy with peanuts in it, because it was a favorite with Uncle Steve.

The day before Christmas the children were all allowed to stay home from school, for in the morning they were to pack the Christmas box for the Simpsons and, in the afternoon, take it to them.

CHAPTER II

A WELCOME CHRISTMAS GIFT

The day before Christmas was a busy one in the Maynard household.

The delightful breakfast that Ellen sent to the table could scarcely be eaten, so busily talking were all the members of the family.

"Come home early, won't you, Father?" said Marjorie, as Mr. Maynard rose to go away to his business. "And don't forget to bring me that big holly-box I told you about."

"As I've only thirty-seven other things to remember, I won't forget that, chickadee. Any last orders, Helen?"

"No; only those I've already told you. Come home as early as you can, for there's lots to be done, and you know Steve and Grandma will arrive at six."

Away went Mr. Maynard, and then the children scattered to attend to their various duties.

Both James the gardener and Thomas the coachman were handy men of all work, and, superintended by Mrs. Maynard, they packed the more substantial portions of the Simpson's Christmas donations.

It took several large baskets to hold the dinner, for there was a big, fat turkey, a huge roast of beef, and also sausages and vegetables of many sorts.

Then other baskets held bread and pie and cake, and cranberry jelly and celery, and all the good things that go to make up a Christmassy sort of a feast. Another basket held nuts and raisins and oranges and figs, and in this was a big box of the candies the children had made. The baskets were all decked with evergreen and holly, and made an imposing looking row.

Meantime King and Midget and Kitty were packing into boxes the toys and pretty trifles that they had made or bought. They added many books and games of their own, which, though not quite new, were as good as new.

A barrel was packed full of clothing, mostly outgrown by the Maynard children, but containing, also, new warm caps, wraps and underwear for the little Simpsons.

Well, all the things together made a fair wagon-load, and when Mr. Maynard returned home about two o'clock that afternoon, he saw the well-filled and evergreen trimmed wagon on the drive, only waiting for his coming to have the horse put to its shafts.

"Hello, Maynard maids and men!" he cried, as he came in, laden with bundles, and found the children bustling about, getting ready to go.

"Oh, Father," exclaimed Kitty, "you do look so Santa Claus-y! What's in all those packages?"

"Mostly surprises for you to-morrow, Miss Curiosity; so you can scarcely expect to see in them now."

"I do love a bundly Christmas," said Marjorie. "I think half the fun is tying things up with holly ribbons, and sticking sprigs of holly in the knots."

"Well, are we all aboard now for the Simpsons?" asked her father, as he deposited his burdens in safe places.

"Yes, we'll get our hats, and start at once; come on, Kitty," and Marjorie danced away, drawing her slower sister along with her.

Nurse Nannie soon had little Rosamond ready, and the tot looked like a big snowball in her fleecy white coat and hood, and white leggings.

"Me go to Simpson's," she cried, in great excitement, and then Mrs. Maynard appeared, and they all crowded into the roomy station-wagon that could be made, at a pinch, to hold them all. James drove them, and Thomas followed with the wagon-load of gifts.

The visit was a total surprise to the Simpson family, and when the Maynards knocked vigorously at the shaky old door, half a dozen little faces looked wonderingly from the windows.

"What is it?" said Mrs. Simpson, coming to the door, with a baby in her arms, and other small children clinging to her dress.

"Merry Christmas!" cried Midget and King, who were ahead of the others. But the cry of "Merry Christmas" was repeated by all the Maynards, until an answering smile appeared on the faces of the Simpson family and most of them spoke up with a "Merry Christmas to you, too."

"We've brought you some Christmas cheer," said Mr. Maynard, as the whole six of them went in, thereby greatly crowding the small room where they were received. "Mr. Simpson is not well, yet, I understand."

"No, sir," said Mrs. Simpson. "They do say he'll be in the hospital for a month yet, and it's all I can do to keep the youngsters alive, let alone gettin' Christmas fixin's for 'em."

"That's what we thought," said Mr. Maynard, pleasantly; "and so my wife and children are bringing you some goodies to make a real Christmas feast for your little ones."

"Lord bless you, sir," said Mrs. Simpson, as the tears came to her eyes. "I didn't know how much I was missin' all the Christmas feelin', till I see you all come along, with your 'Merry Christmas,' and your evergreen trimmin's."

"Yes," said Mrs. Maynard, gently, "at this season, we should all have the 'Christmas feeling,' and though I'm sorry your husband can't be with you, I hope you and the children will have a happy day."

"What you got for us?" whispered a little Simpson, who was patting Mrs. Maynard's muff.

"Well, we'll soon show you," said Mr. Maynard, overhearing the child.

Then he opened the door and bade his two men bring in the things.

So James and Thomas brought them in, box after box and basket after basket, until the Simpsons were well-nigh speechless at the sight.

"How kin we pay for it, Ma?" said one of the boys, who was getting old enough to know what lack of funds meant.

"You're not to pay for it, my boy," said Mr. Maynard, "except by having a jolly, happy day to-morrow, and enjoying all the good things you find in these baskets." Then the Maynard children unwrapped some of the pretty things they had made, and gave them to the little Simpsons.

One little girl of about six received a doll with a cry of rapture, and held it close to her, as if she had never had a doll before. Then suddenly she said, "No, I'll give it to sister, she never had a doll. I did have one once, but a bad boy stole it."

"You're an unselfish little dear," cried Marjorie; "and here's another doll for you. There's one for each of you girls."

As there were four girls, this caused four outbursts of joy, and when Marjorie and Kitty saw the way the little girls loved the dollies, they felt more than repaid for the trouble it had been to dress them. The boys, too, were delighted with their gifts. Mr. Maynard had brought real boys' toys for them, such as small tool chests, and mechanical contrivances, not to mention trumpets and drums. And, indeed, the last-named ones needed no mention, for they were at once put to use and spoke for themselves.

"Land sakes, children! stop that hullabaloo-lam!" exclaimed Mrs. Simpson. "How can I thank these kind people if you keep up that noise! Indeed, I can't thank you, anyway," she added, as the drums were quiet for a moment. "It's so kind of you,—and so unexpected. We had almost nothing for,—for to-morrow's dinner, and I didn't know which way to turn."

Overcome by her emotion, Mrs. Simpson buried her face in her apron, but as Mrs. Maynard touched her shoulder and spoke to her gently, she looked up, smiling through her tears.

"I can't rightly thank you, ma'am," she went on, "but the Lord will bless you for your goodness. I'm to see Mr. Simpson for a few moments to-morrow, and when I tell him what you've done for

us he'll have the happiest Christmas of us all, though his sufferings is awful. But he was heartsick because of our poor Christmas here at home, and the news will cure him of that, anyway."

"I put in some jelly and grapes especially for him," said Mrs. Maynard, smiling, though there were tears in her own eyes. "So you take them to him, and give him Christmas greetings from us. And now we must go, and you can begin at once to make ready your feast."

"Oh, yes, ma'am. And may all Christmas blessing's light on you and yours."

"Merry Christmas!" cried all the Maynards as they trooped out, and the good wish was echoed by the happy Simpsons.

"My!" said King, "it makes a fellow feel sober to see people as poor as that!"

"It does, my boy," said his father; "and it's a pleasure to help those who are truly worthy and deserving. Simpson is an honest, hard-working man, and I think we must keep an eye on the family until he's about again. And now, my hearties, we've done all we can for them for the present; so let's turn our attention to the celebration of the Maynard's Christmastide. Who wants to go to the station with me to meet Grandma and Uncle Steve?"

"I!" declared the four children, as with one voice.

"Yes, but you can't all go; and, too, there must be some of the nicest ones at home to greet the travellers as they enter. I think I'll decide the question myself. I'll take Kitty and King with me, and I'll leave my eldest and youngest daughters at home with Motherdy to receive the guests when they come."

Mr. Maynard's word was always law, and though Marjorie wanted to go, she thought, too, it would be fun to be at home and receive them when they come.

So they all separated as agreed, and Mrs. Maynard said they must make haste to get dressed for the company.

Marjorie wore a light green cashmere, with a white embroidered *guimpe*, which was one of her favorite frocks. Her hair was tied with big white bows, and a sprig of holly was tucked in at one side.

She flew down to the living-room, to find baby Rosamond and her mother already there. Rosy Posy was a Christmas baby indeed, all in white, with holly ribbons tying up her curls, and a holly sprig tied in the bow. The whole house was decorated with ropes and loops of evergreen, and stars and wreaths, with big red bows on them, were in the windows and over the doorways.

The delicious fragrance of the evergreens pervaded the house, and the wood fires burned cheerily. Mrs. Maynard, in her pretty rose-colored house gown, looked about with the satisfied feeling that everything was in readiness, and nothing had been forgotten.

At last a commotion was heard at the door, and Marjorie flew to open it.

They all seemed to come in at once, and after an embrace from Grandma, Marjorie felt herself lifted up in Uncle Steve's strong arms.

"That's the last time, Midget," he said as he set her down again. "There's too much of you for me to toss about as I used to. My! what a big girl you are!"

"Toss me, Uncle Teve," said Rosy Posy, and she was immediately swung to Uncle Steve's shoulder.

"You're only a bit of thistle-down. I could toss you up in the sky, and you could sit on the edge of a star. How would you like that?"

"I'd ravver stay here," said Rosy Posy, nestling contentedly on her perch. "'Sides, I *must* be here for Kismus to-morrow."

"Oh, *is* Christmas to-morrow? How could I have forgotten that?"

"You didn't forget it, Uncle Steve," said Kitty, "for I see bundles sticking out of every one of your pockets!"

"Bless my soul! How odd! Santa Claus must have tucked them in, as I came through his street. Well, I'll put them away until to-morrow. They're of no use to-night."

"Put them in here, Steve," said Mrs. Maynard, opening a cupboard door, for there was a possibility that the good-natured gentleman might be persuaded to unwrap them at once.

Meantime Grandma was reviewing the small Maynards. Marjorie she had seen in the summer, but the others had been absent a longer time.

"You've all grown," she said, "but I do believe I like you just as well bigger."

"Good for you, Grandma!" cried King. "Most everybody says, 'Why, how you've grown!' as if we had done something wrong."

"No, the more there is of my grandchildren, the more I have to love, so go right on growing. Marjorie, Molly and Stella sent love to you, and they also sent some little gifts which I will give you to-morrow."

The Maynards did not follow the custom of having their tree on Christmas eve.

Mrs. Maynard thought it unwise, because the children often became so excited over their gifts and their frolic that it was difficult for them to settle down to sleep until "all hours."

So it was the rule to go to bed rather early on Christmas eve, and have a long happy day to follow.

But the dinner, on the night before Christmas, always assumed a little of the coming festivities. On this occasion, the table was decked with holly and flowers, and the dishes were a little more elaborate and festive than usual.

"Ice cream, oh, goody!" exclaimed Kitty, as dessert appeared. Kitty's fondness for ice cream was a family joke, but all welcomed the little Santa Clauses made of orange ice, and carrying trees of pistache cream.

After dinner a game of romps was allowed.

Mrs. Maynard, Grandma and Baby Rosy did not join in this, but went off by themselves, leaving the living-room to the more enthusiastic rompers.

"Fox and Geese" was a favorite game, and though there were scarcely enough of them to play it properly, yet that made it all the more fun, and Uncle Steve and Mr. Maynard seemed to be little, if any, older than Kingdon, as they scrambled about in the frolic. Then Kitty begged for just one round of Puss in the Corner.

Kingdon and Midget thought this rather a baby game, but they willingly deferred to Kitty's choice, and the grown up men were such foolish, funny pussies in their corners that everybody fell a-laughing, and the game broke up because they were too exhausted to play any more.

"Now to quiet down pleasantly, and then ho, for bed," said Mr. Maynard. So when they had recovered their breath, Mrs. Maynard and Grandma returned, Rosy Posy having already gone to her little crib. Mrs. Maynard sat at the piano, and they all gathered round and sang Christmas carols.

The children had clear, true voices, and the grown-ups sang really well, so it was sweet Christmas music that they made. They sang many of the old English carols, for the children had sung them every Christmas eve since they were old enough, and they knew them well.

Grandma loved to hear the music, and after it was over the three children were kindly but firmly requested to retire.

"We hate awfully to have you go, dear friends," said Mr. Maynard. "We shall be desolate, indeed, without your merry faces, but the time is ripe. It's nine o'clock, and Christmas morning comes apace. So flee, skip, skiddoo, vamoose, and exit! Hang up your stockings, and *perhaps* Santa Claus may observe them. But hasten, for I daresay he's already on his rounds."

Laughing at their father's nonsense, the children rather reluctantly backed out of the room and dawdled upstairs.

But there was still the fun of hanging up their stockings, and then, after that nothing more but to hurry to get to sleep that Christmas might come sooner.

Rosy Posy's tiny socks were already in place, and soon three more pairs of long, lank stockings were dangling emptily, and then, in a jiffy the Maynard children were all asleep, and Christmas Day was silently drawing nearer and nearer.

CHAPTER III

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

The sun waited just about as long as he could stand it on Christmas morning, and then he poked his yellow nose above the horizon to see what was going on. And everything that he saw was so merry and gay and full of Christmas spirit, that he pushed the rest of himself up, and beamed around in a glad smile of welcome and greeting. As he gave a flashing glance in at the Maynard girls' window, his rays struck Marjorie full in the face and wakened her at once. For a moment she blinked and winked and wondered what day it was. Then she remembered, and with one bound she was out of bed, and across the room to where Kitty was soundly sleeping.

It was a rule for the Maynard children never to waken one another, for Mrs. Maynard believed that people, both young and old, need all the sleep they can take, but Christmas morning was, of course, an exception, and patting Kitty rather vigorously on her shoulder, Marjorie called out, "Merry Christmas!"

"Who?" said Kitty, drowsily, rubbing her eyes, as she sat up. "Oh, Mops! you caught me! Merry Christmas, yourself! Let's go and catch King!"

Throwing on their dressing-gowns, and tucking their feet into bedroom slippers, they ran to their brother's room, but King, also huddled into a bath-robe, met them in the hall, and the gay greetings and laughter soon woke any one else in the house who might have been asleep. Nurse Nannie, with Rosy Posy, joined the group, and each clasping a pair of bulging, knobby stockings, flew to the nursery, where this Christmas morning ceremonial always took place.

A bright fire was blazing in the big fireplace, and in front of it, on a white fur rug, the four sat down, while Nannie hovered around, ready to inspect and admire, as she knew she would be called upon to do.

The big, light nursery was a delightful room, and with the morning sunshine, the shining yellow floor, white-painted woodwork, and bright fire-brasses, it seemed full of Christmas glow and warmth.

Grouped on the rug, the children immediately proceeded to the business of emptying their stockings, and as the various things were pulled out and exhibited, everybody oh'd and ah'd at everybody else, and they all began to nibble at candies, and at last Christmas had really begun.

The gifts in their stockings were always of a pretty, but trifling nature, as their more worth while presents were received later, from the tree.

But there were always lots of little toys and trinkets, and always oranges and nuts and candies, and always tin whistles and rattles, and other noise-producing contraptions, so that soon the four grew gay and noisy and Nurse was obliged to pick up Baby Rosamond, lest she should be inadvertently upset.

But perched in Nurse's lap, the little one waved a Christmas flag, and blew on a tiny tin trumpet, and quite made her share of the general hullabaloo. Marjorie had a new pencil-case, and some pretty handkerchiefs, and an inkstand, and a silver bangle, and a little diary, and some lovely hair-ribbons.

And King was rejoicing over a fountain pen, a pocket-knife, a silk muffler, a rubber-stamp outfit, and some new gloves.

Kitty had a little pocket-book, a silver shoe-buttoner, a blank-book, a pretty silk pincushion, and a bangle like Marjorie's.

Baby Rosy had dolls and toys, and what with the candies and other goodies, there was a distracting array of Christmas all about.

"And to think the day has scarcely begun!" said Marjorie, with a sigh of rapture, as she ate a cream date, at the same time twisting her wrist to catch the glitter of her new bangle.

"Yes, but it's 'most half-past eight," said King, "and breakfast's at nine. I'm going to skittle!"

He gathered up his new belongings, and with a sort of combination war-whoop and "Merry Christmas," he scampered away to his room. The two girls followed his example, and soon were busily dressing themselves and helping each other.

Marjorie put on a scarlet cashmere, which, with the big red bows on her hair, made her look very Christmassy, the effect being added to by holly sprigs pinned on here and there. Kitty's frock was a sort of electric blue, that suited her fair hair, and she, too, was holly-decked.

Then, after a hasty inspection of each other, to see that they were all right, the girls skipped downstairs.

So expeditious had they been that not a Maynard was ahead of them, except their father, who had just come down.

"Merry Christmas, girlies!" he cried, and just then everybody came down, almost all at once, and the greetings flew about, as thick as a snowstorm. Grandma Sherwood, in her soft grey breakfast-gown, beamed happily at her brood of grandchildren, and soon they all gathered round the table.

"I wish Christmas was seventy-two hours long, said Marjorie, whose candies had not taken away her appetite for the specially fine breakfast that was being served in honor of the day.

"But you'd fall asleep after twelve hours of it," said Uncle Steve; "so what good would it do you?"

"I wouldn't!" declared King. "I could spend twelve hours having our regular Christmas in the house; and then twelve more outdoors, skating or something; and then twelve more—"

"Eating," suggested his father, glancing at King's plate. "Well, since we can't have seventy-two hours of it, we must cram all the fun we can into twelve. Who's for a run out of doors before we have our Christmas tree?" The three older children agreed to this, and with Mr. Maynard and Uncle Steve they went out for a brisk walk.

"Wish we could snowball," said King, as they returned, and stood for a few moments on the verandah. "It's cold enough, but there no sign of snow."

"Pooh, you don't have to have snow to play a game of snowballs!" said his father. "Why didn't you say what you wanted sooner? You are such a diffident boy! Wait a minute."

Mr. Maynard disappeared into the house, and returned with a large paper bag filled with something, they did not know what.

"Come out on the lawn," he said, and soon they were all out on the brown, dry, winter grass.

"Catch!" and then Mr. Maynard threw to one and another, some swift, white balls. They were really white pop-corn balls, but at first they looked like snowballs.

The children caught on at once, and soon two or three dozen balls were whizzing from each to each, and they had the jolliest game! The balls were too light to hurt if they hit them, yet solid enough to throw well.

To be sure, they broke to bits after many tosses, but the game lasted a half hour, and then Mr. Maynard declared that it was tree time.

"Sounds like tea-time," said Kitty, as they trooped in.

"Sounds a whole lot better than that!" said King.

The tree was in the living-room. It had been brought in, and trimmed after the children went to bed the night before. So they had had no glimpse of it, and were now more than eager to see its glories.

"Are we all here?" asked Mr. Maynard, as he looked over the group in the hall, awaiting the opening of the doors.

"All but Uncle Steve," said Marjorie. "Why doesn't he come?"

"We won't wait for him," said Mr. Maynard, and he gave a loud knock on the double doors of the living-room.

Like magic the doors flew open, and waiting to receive them was Santa Claus himself!

His jolly, smiling face was very red-cheeked, and his white hair and beard streamed down over his red coat, which was of that belted round-about shape that seems to be Santa Claus's favorite fashion.

His red coat and trousers were trimmed with white fur and gold braid, and his high boots were covered with splashes of white that *looked* like snow. He wore a fur trimmed red cap, and big gold-rimmed spectacles. The latter, with the very red cheeks and long white beard, so changed Uncle Steve's appearance that at first no one seemed to recognize him.

But they knew in a moment, and Marjorie grasped one hand and Kitty the other, as they cried out:

"Hello, Uncle Santa Claus! how did you get so snowy?"

"I came down from the arctic regions, my dears," said the smiling saint, "and up there we have perpetual snow."

"It seems to be perpetual on your boots," observed King; "I'm sure it won't melt off at all!"

"Yes, it's first-class snow," agreed Santa Claus, looking at his boots, which were really splashed with white-wash. "And here's little Miss Rosy Posy," he continued, picking up the baby, who, at first, was a little shy of the strange-looking figure. "This is the very little girl I've come to see, and she must pick something off the tree!"

Rosy Posy recognized Uncle Steve's voice now, and contentedly nestled in his arms as he carried her to the tree. And such a tree as it was!

It reached to the ceiling, and its top boughs had been cut off to get it in the room at all.

The blinds had been closed, and the shades drawn, in order that the illuminations of the tree might shine out brightly, and the gorgeous sight quite took the children's breath away.

The big tree was in the end of the room, and not only did sparkling tinsel rope deck the green branches, but its strands also reached out to the wall on either side, so that the tree seemed to be caught in an immense silver spider-web. Sparkling ornaments decked every limb and twig, and shining among them were hundreds of tiny electric lights of different colors.

Many beautiful presents hung on the tree, without wrappings of any sort to hide their pretty effect, and many more gifts, tied in be-ribboned papers, lay on the floor beneath.

Altogether, it looked as if the whole end of the room were a sort of glittering fairyland, and the children promptly agreed it was the most beautiful tree they had ever had.

As Santa Claus held Baby Rosamond up to select for herself a gift from the tree, he held her so that she faced a big doll, almost as large as herself.

"Oh, that will be my dollie!" she announced, holding out her little arms.

The big doll was detached from its perch and handed to the child, who ran to nurse with her treasure, and would not be parted from it all day long.

Then said Santa Claus: "Marjorie, next, may come and choose anything she would like to use."

He offered his arm, and, with exaggerated ceremony, led Midget to the tree.

She was a little bewildered by the glitter, and the variety of gifts hanging about, but she spied a lovely muff and boa of fluffy white fur that she felt sure must be meant for her.

At any rate they were her choice, and Santa Claus gave them to her with hearty assurance that she had chosen well.

Then he announced: "Next, of course, is little Kitty. Choose, my dear!

Take something pretty!"

Kitty advanced slowly. She knew well what she wanted, but she didn't see it on or under the tree.

Santa Claus watched her roving eyes and then said: "If you don't like what you see, look around behind the tree!"

So Kitty peered around, and sure enough, almost hidden by the strands of tinsel, there stood a bookcase.

"I'll choose that!" she cried, in glee, and Mr. Maynard and Santa Claus pulled it out into view. It was the adjustable kind, with glass fronts, and Kitty had long desired just such a one for her room.

"Isn't it beautiful!" she exclaimed, sitting down on the floor to examine it, and to imagine how it would look filled with story books.

"Now, Sir Kingdon, approach," called out Santa Claus; "carefully scan the branches o'er, and help yourself from its ample store!"

King came toward the tree, eying it carefully in search of something he wanted very much, yet scarcely dared hope for.

But, half hidden by a paper fairy, he spied a gleam of gold, and pounced upon the dream of his heart, a gold watch!

"This will do me!" he said, beaming with delight, at the fine time-piece, with its neat fob. It was a handsome affair for a boy of fourteen; but King was careful of his belongings, and Mr. Maynard had decided he could be trusted with it.

Then the elder people received gifts from each other and from the children, and then everybody began to open bundles, and "thank you's" flew around like snowflakes, and tissue paper and gay ribbons were knee deep all over the floor.

"I didn't know there were so many presents in the world!" said Marjorie, who sat blissfully on an ottoman, with her lap full of lovely things, and more on the floor beside her. Grandma had brought her an unset pearl. This was not a surprise, for Grandma had given her a pearl every Christmas of her life, and when the time came for her to wear them, they were to be made into a necklace.

Uncle Steve had brought her a bureau set of ivory, with her monogram on the brushes, and the children gave her various trinkets.

Then Stella and Molly had sent gifts to her, and Gladys and some of the other school girls had also sent Christmas remembrances, with the result that Midget was fairly bewildered at her possessions. The others too, had quantities of things, and Uncle Steve declared that he really had spilled his whole sack at this house, and he must rescue some of the things to take to other children. But he didn't really do this, and the Maynards, as was their custom, arranged their gifts on separate tables, and spent the morning admiring and discussing them.

At two o'clock they had the Christmas feast.

Nurse Nannie played a gay march on the piano, and Mr. Maynard, offering his arm to Grandma, led the way to the dining-room. King, escorting Rosy Posy, walked next, followed by Midget and Kitty. Last of all came Mrs.

Maynard and Uncle Steve.

The dining-table was almost as beautiful as the Christmas tree. Indeed, in the centre of it was a small tree, filled with tiny, but exquisite decorations, and sparkling with electric lights. The windows had been darkened, and the shining tree blazed brilliantly.

The table was decorated with red ribbons and holly and red candles, and red candle shades and everybody had red favours and red paper bells.

"I feel like a Robin Redbreast," said Marjorie; "isn't it all beautiful!"

Did you do it, Mother?"

"Yes, with Sarah's help," said Mrs. Maynard, for her faithful and clever little waitress was of great assistance in such matters.

"It's like eating in an enchanted palace," said Kitty. "Everything is so bright and sparkly and gleaming; and, oh! I'm *so* hungry!"

"Me, too!" chimed in the other young Maynards, and then they proceeded to do ample justice to the good things Ellen sent in in abundance.

But at last even the young appetites were satisfied, and while the elders sipped their coffee in the library, the children were sent off to play by themselves.

The baby was turned over to Nurse Nannie, and the other three tumbled into their wraps and ran out of doors to play off some of their exuberant enthusiasm.

CHAPTER IV

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

"It's been a gay old week, hasn't it?" said Marjorie, on New Year's Eve.

"You bet!" cried King, who sometimes lapsed from the most approved diction. "Wish it was just beginning. We had fine skating till the snow came, and ever since, it's been bang-up sleighing. Well, only four more days, and then school, school, school!"

"Don't remind me of it!" said Marjorie with a groan. "I wish I was a Fiji or whatever doesn't have to go to school at all!"

"Oh, pshaw, Midge; it isn't so bad after you get started. Only holidays make you so jolly that it's hard to sit down and be quiet."

"It's always hard for me to sit down and be quiet," said Midge. "If they'd let me walk around, or sit on the tables or window-sills, I wouldn't mind school so much. It's being cramped into those old desks that I hate."

Poor little Marjorie, so active and restless, it was hard for her to endure the confinement of the schoolroom.

"Why don't you ask mother to let you go to boarding-school, Mops?" asked Kitty, with an air of having suggested a brilliant solution of her sister's difficulties.

Marjorie laughed. "No, thank you, Kitsie," she said. "What good would that do? In the school hours I s'pose I'd have to sit as still as I do here, and out of school hours I'd die of homesickness. Imagine being away off alone, without all of you!"

Kitty couldn't imagine anything like that, so she gave it up.

"Then I guess you'll have to go to school, same's you always have done."

"I guess I will," said Marjorie, sighing. "But there's a few more days' holiday yet, and I'm not going to think about it till I have to. What shall we do to-night? It's the last night of the old year, you know."

"I wonder if they'd let us sit up and see it out," said King.

"We never have," returned Marjorie; "I don't believe Mother'd say yes, though maybe Father would."

"If he does, Mother'll have to," said Kitty, with a knowledge born of experience. "Let's ask 'em."

"It's almost bed-time now," said King, glancing at the clock; "but I'm not a bit sleepy."

The others declared they were not, either, and they all went in search of their parents. They found them in the library, with Uncle Steve and Grandma, who were still visiting them.

"Sit the old year out!" exclaimed Mr. Maynard, when he heard their request. "Why, you're almost asleep now!"

"Oh, we're not a bit sleepy!" protested Marjorie. "Do, Daddy, dear, let us try it,—we never have, you know."

"Why, I've no objections, if Mother hasn't."

Mrs. Maynard looked as if she didn't think much of the plan, but Uncle

Steve broke in, saying:

"Oh, let them, of course! It can't do them any harm except to make them sleepy to-morrow, and they can nap all day if they like."

"Yes, let them do it," said Grandma, who was an indulgent old lady. "But I'm glad I don't have to sit up with them."

"I too," agreed Mr. Maynard. "I used to think it was fun, but I've seen so many New Years come sneaking in, that it's become an old, old story."

"That's just it, sir," said King, seeing a point of vantage. "We haven't, you know, and we'd like to see just how they come in."

"Well," said his father, "where will you hold this performance? I can't have you prowling all over the house, waking up honest people who are abed and asleep."

"You must take the nursery," said Mrs. Maynard. "I wouldn't let you stay downstairs alone, but you may stay in the nursery as late as you like. I daresay by ten or half-past, you'll be glad to give it up, and go to your beds."

"Not we," said King. "Thank you, heaps, for letting us do it. We're going to have a fine time. Come on, girls!"

"One minute, King; you're not to make any noise after ten-thirty. Grandma goes to her room then, and the rest of us soon after."

"All right, we won't. It isn't going to be a noisy party, anyhow."

"Then I don't see how it can be a Maynard party," said Uncle Steve, quizzically, but the children had run away.

"Now, we'll just have the time of our lives!" said King, as the three of them reached the nursery.

"Of course we will," agreed Marjorie. "What shall we do?"

"Let's see, it's nine o'clock. We can play anything till half-past ten; after that we can only do quiet things. Let's play Blind Man's Buff."

"All right, you be *it*."

So King was blindfolded, and he soon caught Kitty, who soon caught Midget, and then she caught King again. But it wasn't very much fun, and nobody quite knew why.

"It makes me too tired," said Kitty, throwing herself on the couch, and fanning her hot little face with her handkerchief. "Let's play a sit-down game."

"But we can play those after we have to be quiet," objected King. "Get up, Kit, you'll fall asleep if you lie there."

"No, I won't," said Kitty, opening her eyes very wide, but cuddling to the soft pillow.

"Yes, you will, too! Come on. Let's play 'animals.' That's noisy enough, and you can sit down too."

"Animals" was a card game where they sat round a table, and as occasion required assumed the voices of certain animals.

"All right," said Kitty, jumping up; "I'll be the Laughing Hyena."

"I'll be a Lion," said King, and Marjorie decided to be a Rooster.

Soon the game was in full swing, and as the roar of the lion, the crowing of the rooster, and the strange noise that represented Kitty's idea of the hyena's mirth, floated downstairs, the grown-ups smiled once more at the irrepressible spirits of the young Maynards. But after they had roared and crowed and laughed for what seemed like an interminable time, King looked at his Christmas watch and exclaimed:

"Goodness, girls! it's only half-past nine! I thought it was about eleven!"

"So did I," said Marjorie, trying to hide a yawn.

"Oh, I say, Mops, you're sleepy!"

"I am not, either! I just sort of—sort of choked."

"Well, don't do it again. What shall we play now?"

"Let's sing," said Kitty.

So Marjorie banged away on the nursery piano, and they sang everything they could think of.

"I can't play another note," said Midget, at last. "My fingers are perfectly numb. Isn't it nearly twelve?"

"Isn't ten," said King, closing his watch with a snap. "We've only a half-hour more before we've got to be quiet, so let's make the most of it."

"I'm hungry," said Kitty. "Can't we get something to eat?"

"Good idea!" said King. "Let's forage for some things, and bring them up here, but don't eat them until later. After half-past ten, you know."

So they all slipped down to the pantry, and returned with a collection of apples and cookies, which they carefully set aside for a later luncheon.

"Only twenty minutes left of our noisy time," said King, with a suspicious briskness in his tone. "Come on, girls, let's have a racket."

"There's no racket to me!" declared Kitty, throwing herself on the couch;

"I feel—quiet."

"Quiet!" exclaimed her brother. "Kit Maynard, if you're sleepy, you can go to bed! You're too young to sit up with Midge and me, anyhow!"

This touched Kitty in a sensitive spot, as he knew it would.

"I'm not!" she cried, indignantly; "I'm as old as you are, so there!"

King didn't contradict this, which would seem to prove them both a bit sleepy.

"You are, Kitty!" said Marjorie, laughing; "you're older than either of us! So you tell us what to do to keep awake!"

It was out! Marjorie had admitted that they were sleepy.

King grinned a little sheepishly. "Pooh," he said, "it'll pass over if we just get interested in something. Let's read aloud to each other."

"That always puts me to sleep," said Kitty, with a fearful and undisguised yawn.

"Kit! if you do that again, we'll put you out! Now, brace up,—or else go to bed!"

Kitty braced up. Indeed, Kitty had special powers in this direction, if she chose to exercise them.

"Pooh, I can brace up better than either of you," she said, confidently; "and here's how I'm going to do it."

She went over to the big nursery washstand, and turning the cold water faucet, ran the bowl full, and then plunged her face and hands in.

"Kit, you're a genius!" cried her brother, in admiration, as she came up, spluttering, and then made another dash. Soon Kitty's face was hidden in the folds of a rough towel, and the others successively followed her lead.

"My! how it freshens you!" said Marjorie, rubbing her rosy cheeks till they glowed. "I'm as wide awake as anything!"

"So'm I," said King. "Kit, I take off my hat to you! Now it's half-past ten. I move we eat our foods, and then we can have a good time playing parcheesi or jack-straws."

They drew up to the nursery table, and endeavored to enjoy the cookies and apples.

"How funny things taste at night," said Kitty. "I'm not hungry, after all."

"You'd better wash your face again," said Marjorie, looking at her sister's drooping eyelids.

"Do something to her," said King, in despair.

So Marjorie tickled Kitty, until she made her laugh, and that roused her a little.

"I won't go to sleep," she said, earnestly; "truly, I won't. I want to see the New Year come. Let's look out the window for it."

Kitty's plans were always good ones.

Drawing the curtains aside the three stood at the window, their arms about each other.

"Isn't it still?" whispered Marjorie, "and look at the moon!"

A yellow, dilapidated-looking, three-quarter sort of a moon was sinking in the west, and the bark branches of the trees stood out blackly in the half-light.

The roads gleamed white, and the shrubbery looked dark, the whole landscape was weird and unlike the sunny scenes they knew so well.

"I s'pose everybody in the house is abed now, but us," said King. He meant it exultantly, but his voice had a tone of awe, that found an echo in the girls' hearts.

"Come away from the window," said Midge; turning back to the brightly lighted room. "Let's think of something nice to do."

"I can think better here," said Kitty, dropping heavily on the couch, her head, by good luck; striking squarely in the middle of the pillow.

"Kit," said her brother,—"Kitty,—you,—you go to bed,—if you—if you can't—"

As King spoke, he came across a big armchair, and quite unintentionally he let himself fall into it. It felt very pleasant, somehow,—so much so, indeed, that he neglected to finish his admonition to Kitty, and she wouldn't have heard it if he had!

Marjorie, by a strange coincidence, also met a most friendly Morris chair, which held out inviting arms. It seemed a pity to refuse such cordiality, so Marjorie sat down in it a minute to do that thinking they had spoken about. What was it they were to think of? Something about the moon? No, that wasn't it. Her new furs? Not quite; school,—Gladys,—cookies?

These thoughts drifted confusedly about Marjorie's brain for a few moments, and then, with a little tired sigh, her curly head dropped back on the Morris chair's velvet cushion, and her eyes closed.

How those three children *did* sleep! The sound, hard sleep that only healthy, romping children know. When Mrs. Maynard softly opened the door a little later, she almost laughed aloud at the picturesque trio.

But stifling her mirth lest she awake them, she called her husband to her side. After a few whispered words, they went away, and returned with down quilts and steamer rugs, which they gently tucked about the vanquished heroes, and then lowering the lights left them asleep at their posts.

For an hour the children slept soundly, and then, at ten minutes before twelve the nursery door was softly opened again.

This time, Mr. and Mrs. Maynard, accompanied by Grandma Sherwood and Uncle Steve, came in, apparently with the intention of staying. Mr. Maynard snapped on the lights, and the grownups smiled as they gazed on the faces of the sleeping children.

"What time is it, Fred?" asked Mrs. Maynard.

"Seven minutes of twelve."

"Waken them, then. There isn't any too much time."

So Mr. Maynard sprung a small "watchman's rattle." It made a pleasant whirr, but he was obliged to hold it near each child's ear before those deep slumbers were disturbed.

"What is it?" said King, who first opened his eyes. "Kitty, you're asleep!"

His last waking thought possessed him as his eye fell on his sleeping sister, he spoke before he realized that he had been asleep himself.

"What's the matter?" he said, seeing all the people standing about, and noticing the rug over himself.

"Nothing's the matter," answered his father, blithely, "only the New Year is hurrying toward us, and we all want to greet it together."

"You bet we do!" cried King, now broad awake, and shaking himself out of his rug as he jumped up.

Mrs. Maynard was rousing Kitty, and sat beside the half-asleep child with her arm round her, while Grandma was treating Marjorie in the same way.

"It seems a shame," began Grandma, but Uncle Steve interrupted:

"A shame to wake them? Not a bit of it! It would be a shame to let them sleep through a chance that they won't get again for a year! Hello! chickabiddies! Hello! Wake up! Fire! Murder! Thieves! Fred, give me that rattle!"

Taking the noisy little toy, Uncle Steve sprang it vigorously, and was rewarded for his efforts by seeing the two girls at last on their feet and smiling broadly,—wide awake now, indeed.

"Five minutes grace," said Mr. Maynard. "Out with your watches, you who have them. The rest look on with somebody else."

Kitty ran to her father's side, and cuddled in his arm, as she looked at his watch. Marjorie saw Uncle Steve's smile inviting her, so she flew across the room to him; and King politely offered his watch to his mother and grandmother, saying the nursery clock would do for him.

Care was taken to have all the time-pieces set exactly alike, and then it was three minutes of midnight, and they waited.

"He'll come in at the window, the New Year will," said Mr. Maynard as he flung the casement wide open. "The old year is going. Bid him good-bye, children, you'll never see him again. Good-bye, old year, good-bye!"

"Good-bye, old year, good-bye!" they all said in concert, and murmured it again, as the last seconds flew steadily by.

"Happy New Year!" shouted Mr. Maynard, as his second-hand reached the mark, but he was no quicker than the others, and all the voices rang out a "Happy New Year" simultaneously.

Then the village clock began to strike twelve, all the bells in the little town began to ring, some firing was heard, and shouts from passers-by in the streets added to the general jubilee.

"Isn't it splendid!" cried Marjorie, as she leaned out of the window.

"The moon is gone, but see the bright, bright stars, all twinkling 'Happy New Year' to us!"

"May it indeed be a Happy New Year for you, my dear child," said her father, as he kissed her tenderly.

And then everybody was exchanging kisses and greetings, and good wishes, and Marjorie realized that at last, she had sat up to "see the New Year in."

"But I don't see how we happened to fall asleep," she said, looking puzzled.

"I, either," said King; "I was just bound I wouldn't, and then I did."

"You were bound I shouldn't, too," said Kitty, "but I did!"

"You all did!" said Mr. Maynard. "Such sleeping I never saw!"

"Well, it was lovely of you to wake us up," said Marjorie; "I wouldn't have missed all this for anything."

"All things come to him who waits," said her father, "and you certainly waited very quietly and patiently!"

"And now, skip to bed," said Mrs. Maynard, "and not until three hundred and sixty-five nights are passed, do we have such a performance as this again."

"All right," said the children, "good-night, and Happy New Year!"

"Good-night and Happy New Year!" echoed the grown-ups.

CHAPTER V

A TEARFUL TIME

The New Year was about a week old, and so far, had nobly fulfilled all hopes of happiness.

To be sure, Marjorie had been obliged to begin school again, but as she had the companionship of Gladys Fulton, who dearly loved to go to school, it helped her to bear the trial.

She had been to spend the afternoon with Gladys and was returning home at five o'clock, as was the rule for winter days.

She turned in at her own gate-way, and had there been any one to see her, it might have been noticed that her demeanor and expression were very unlike the usual appearance of gay, laughing Marjorie Maynard.

In fact, she looked the picture of utter despair and dejection. Her head hung down, her steps were slow, and yet she seemed filled with a riot of indignation.

Her face was flushed and her eyes red, and though not exactly crying, great shivering sobs now and then shook her whole body.

Once inside her own home grounds, she quickened her pace a little, and almost ran up the verandah steps and in at the door.

She slammed it behind her, and though, I am sorry to say, this was not an unusual proceeding for Midget, yet she was truly trying to break herself of the habit.

But this time she gave the door a hard, angry slam, and flinging her wraps anywhere, as she went along, she brushed hastily through the various rooms in search of her mother.

But Mrs. Maynard and Kitty had gone out driving, and King wasn't at home, either, so poor Marjorie, her eyes now blinded with surging tears, stumbled on to her own room, and threw herself, sobbing, on her little white bed.

She buried her face in the pillow and gave way to such tumultuous grief that the brass bedstead fairly shook in sympathy.

"I can't bear it!" she murmured, half aloud; "I *can't* bear it! It's a wicked shame! I don't want to live any more! Oh, I *wish* Mother would come home!"

For nearly half an hour Marjorie cried and cried. Now with big, bursting, heart-rending sobs, and at quieter intervals, with floods of hot tears.

Her little handkerchief became a useless, wet ball, and she dried her eyes, spasmodically, on various parts of the pillow-case.

At last, in one of her paroxysms of woe, she felt a little hand on her cheek, and Rosy Posy's little voice said, sweetly:

"What 'e matter, Middy? Wosy Posy loves 'oo!"

This was a crumb of comfort, and Marjorie drew the baby's cool cheek against her own hot one.

The child scrambled up on the bed, beside her sister, and petted her gently, saying:

"Don't ky, Middy; 'top kyin'."

"Oh, Rosy Posy, I'm so miserable! where is Mother?"

"Muvver dawn yidin'. Wosy take care of 'oo. Want Nannie?"

"No, I don't want Nannie. You stay here, little sister, till Mother comes."

"Ess. Wosy 'tay wiv Middy. Dear Middy."

The loving baby cuddled up to her sister, and smoothed back the tangled curls with her soft little hand, until exhausted Marjorie, quite worn out with her turbulent storm of tears, fell asleep.

And here Mrs. Maynard found them, as, coming in soon, she went in search of her eldest daughter.

"Why, Baby," she said; "what's the matter? Is Marjorie sick?"

"No," said Rosamond, holding up a tiny finger. "She's asleep. She kied and kied, Middy did, an' nen she went seepy-by, all herself."

"Cried!" exclaimed Mrs. Maynard, looking at Midget's swollen, tear-stained face. "What was she crying about?"

"I donno," answered Rosy, "but she feeled awful bad 'bout somefin'."

"I should think she did! You run away to Nurse, darling; you were good Baby to take care of Midget, but, now, run away and leave her to Mother."

Mrs. Maynard brought some cool water and bathed the flushed little face, and then sprinkling some violet water on a handkerchief she laid it lightly across Midget's brow. After a time the child woke, and found her mother sitting beside her.

"Oh, Mother!" she cried; "oh, Mother!"

"What is it, dearie?" said Mrs. Maynard, putting her arms round Marjorie.

"Tell Mother, and we'll make it all right, somehow."

She was quite sure Miss Mischief had been up to some prank, which had turned out disastrously. But it must have been a serious one, and perhaps there were grave consequences to be met.

"Oh, Mother, it's the most dreadful thing!" Here Marjorie's sobs broke out afresh, and she really couldn't speak coherently.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Maynard, gently, fearing the excitable child would fly into hysterics. "Never mind it to-night. Tell me about it to-morrow."

"N-no,—I w-want to tell you now,—only,—I c-can't talk. Oh, Mother, what shall I d-do? G-Gladys—"

"Yes, dear; Gladys,—what did she do? Or perhaps you and Gladys—"

Mrs. Maynard now surmised that the two girls were in some mischievous scrape, and she felt positive that Marjorie had been the instigator, as indeed she usually was.

"Oh, Mother, darling," as something in Mrs. Maynard's tone made Marjorie smile a little through her tears, "it isn't *mischief*! It's a thousand times worse than that!"

Middy was quieter now, with the physical calm that always follows a storm of tears.

"It's this; Gladys is going away! Forever! I mean, they're *all* going to move away,—out west, and I'll never see her again!"

Mrs. Maynard realized at once what this meant to Marjorie. The girls were such good friends, and neither of them cared so much for any one else, as for each other. The Fultons lived just across the street, and had always lived there, through both the little girls' lives. It was almost like losing her own brother or sister, for Marjorie and Gladys were as lovingly intimate as two sisters could be.

Also, it seemed a case where no word of comfort or cheer could be spoken.

So Mrs. Maynard gently caressed her troubled child, and said:

"My poor, darling Midget; I'm *so* sorry for you. Are you sure? Tell me all about it."

"Yes, Mother," went on Marjorie, helped already by her mother's loving sympathy; "they just told me this afternoon. I've been over there, you know, and Gladys and Mrs. Fulton told me all about it. Mr. Fulton isn't well, or something, and for his health, they're all going to California, to live there. And they're going right away! The doctor says they must hurry. And, oh, what *shall* I do without Gladys? I love her so!"

"Dear little girl, this is your first trouble; and it has come to you just in the beginning of this happy New Year. I can't tell you how sorry I am for you, and how I long to help you bear it. But there's no way I can help, except by sympathy and love."

"You *do* help, Mother. I thought I'd *die* before you came!"

"Yes, darling, I know my sympathy helps you, but I mean, I can't do anything to lessen your sorrow at losing Gladys."

"No,—and oh, Mother, isn't it awful? Why, I've *always* had Gladys."

"You'll have to play more with Kitty."

"Oh, of course I love Kit, to play with at home, and to be my sister. But Glad is my chum, my intimate friend, and we always sit together in school, and everything like that. Kitty's in another room, and besides, she has Dorothy Adams for her friend. You know the difference between friends and sisters, don't you, Mother?"

"Of course I do, Midget, dear. You and Kitty are two loving little sisters, but I quite understand how you each love your friends of your own age."

"And Kitty can keep Dorothy, but I must lose Gladys," and Marjorie's sobs broke out anew.

"Why, Mopsy Midget Maynard! Why are we having April showers in January?"

Mr. Maynard's cheery voice sounded in Marjorie's doorway, and his wife beckoned him to come in.

"See what you can do for our little girl," she said; "she is trying to bear her first real trouble, and I'm sure, after these first awful hours she's going to be brave about it."

"What is it, Mops?" said her father, taking the seat Mrs. Maynard vacated. "Tell your old father-chum all about it. You know your troubles are mine, too."

"Oh, Father," said Marjorie, brightening a little under the influence of his strong, helpful voice; "Gladys Fulton is going away from Rockwell to live; and I can't have her for my chum any more."

"Yes, I know; I saw Mr. Fulton and he told me. He's pretty ill, Marjorie."

"Yes, I know it; and I'm awful sorry for him, and for them. But I'm sorry for myself too; I don't want Gladys to go away."

"That's so; you will lose your chum, won't you? By jiminy! it *is* hard lines, little girl. How are you going to take it?"

Marjorie stopped crying, and stared at her father.

"How am I going to take it?" she said, in surprise.

"Yes; that's what I asked. Of course, it's a sorrow, and a deep one, and you'll be very lonely without Gladys, and though your mother and I, and all of us, will help you all we can, yet we can't help much. So, it's up to you. Are you going to give way, and mope around, and make yourself even more miserable than need be; or, are you going to be brave, and honestly try to bear this trouble nobly and patiently?"

Marjorie looked straight into her father's eyes, and realized that he was not scolding or lecturing her, he was looking at her with deep, loving sympathy that promised real help.

"I will try to bear it bravely," she said, slowly; "but, Father, that doesn't make it any easier to have Gladys go."

Mr. Maynard smiled at this very human sentiment, and said:

"No, Midget, dear, it doesn't, in one way; but in another way it does. You mustn't think that I don't appreciate fully your sorrow at losing Gladys. But troubles come into every life, and though this is your first, I cannot hope it will be your last. So, if you are to have more of them, you must begin to learn to bear them rightly, and so make them help your character-growth and not hinder it."

"But, Father, you see Gladys helps my character a lot. She loves to go to school, and I hate it. But if I go with her, and sit with her I don't mind it so much. But without her,—oh how *can* I go to school without her?"

Again Marjorie wept as one who could not be comforted, and Mr. Maynard realized it was truly a crisis in the little girl's life.

"Marjorie," he said, very tenderly, "it *is* a hard blow, and I don't wonder it is crushing you. Nor do I expect you to take a philosophical view of it at present. But, my child, we'll look at it practically, at least. Gladys *is* going; nothing can change that fact. Now, for my sake, as well as your own, I'm going to *ask* you to be my own brave daughter, and not disappoint me by showing a lack of cheerful courage to meet misfortune."

"I don't want to be babyish, Father," said Midget, suddenly feeling ashamed of herself.

"You're not babyish, dear; it's right and womanly to feel grief at losing Gladys; but since it has to be, I want you to conquer that grief, and not let it conquer you."

"I'll try," said Midge, wiping away some tears.

"You know, Marjorie, the old rhyme:

"For every evil under the sun,
There is a remedy, or there's none;
If there is one, try to find it,
And if there is none, never mind it."

"Now, I don't say 'never mind it' about this matter, but since there's no remedy, do the best you can to rise above it, as you will have to do many times in your future years."

"Father," said Marjorie, thoughtfully; "that sounds awful noble, but I don't believe I quite understand. What can I *do* to 'rise above it'?"

"Marjorie, you're a trump! I'd rather you'd be practical, than wise. And there's no better weapon with which to fight trouble than practicality. Now, I'll tell you what to do. And I don't mean today or tomorrow, for just at first, you wouldn't be a human little girl if you *didn't* nearly cry your eyes out at the loss of your friend. But soon,—say about next Tuesday,—if you could begin to smile a little, and though I know it will be hard, smile a little wider and wider each day—"

"Till the top of my head comes off?" said Marjorie, smiling already.

"Yes; theoretically. But make up your mind that since Gladys must go, you're not going to let the fact turn you into a sad, dolorous mope instead of Mops."

"That's all very well at home, Father dear, but I'll miss her so at school."

"Of course you will; but is there any remedy?"

"No, there isn't. I don't want any other seat-mate, and I don't want to sit alone."

"Oh! Well, I can't see any way out of that, unless I go and sit with you."

Marjorie had to laugh at this. "You couldn't squeeze in the space," she said.

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