

# FOR EVERY BOY AND GIRL

## A Little American Girl at Court

By LOUISE BRADFORD VARNUM.



IN FRONT OF THE FIRE WAS AN OLD GENTLEMAN FAST ASLEEP

THE President of the United States had appointed a new American representative at the court of Elbstadt-Saxhausen, and in the course of a few weeks the minister arrived in the old German city, bringing with him his wife and two daughters. Belle, the eldest, was nineteen, and "our" Marjorie, the heroine of my story, was but five years old.

Marjorie was a pretty child, with big brown eyes, a merry little mouth, and a tangle of golden hair, that stood out like a halo about her head, and cost Babette, her nurse, an infinite amount of trouble and patience to keep it in order. Babette was a blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked German girl, and from the first moment of her entrance into this American household she devoted herself especially to Marjorie. Marjorie was a well-behaved little girl, usually, but rather headless. She received much good advice from her mother on heedless ways—advice that was needed. She often replied: "I do try to remember what you say, mama, but it won't stay remembered!"

The American legation, or house and office of the American minister, was situated in a beautiful shady street called the Königstrasse. Down the whole length of the avenue ran a broad strip of turf, adorned at intervals with beds of brilliant flowers; and just in front of the legation this widened into a little park, in the center of which was a fountain playing day and night. Throughout the summer it cooled the air about it, and pleased the ear and eye with the splash and sparkle of the falling water.

The house in which Marjorie lived was in a large garden with winding walks, flower-beds, fountains, shady trees overhanging the smooth shaven lawns, and a broad gravelled drive leading under the porte-cochere up to the great front door, over which hung the arms of the United States.

Marjorie and Babette spent a happy summer wandering in the garden, or resting beneath the trees, when Babette would bring out an unfinished blue woollen stocking—she was never without her knitting—and worked diligently, while she told Marjorie wonderful German tales—fairy stories, or stories of the war which cost the Fatherland so many noble lives. But, of all things, Marjorie loved best to hear of the King and Queen of that country; and Babette never wearied of dilating upon the reported magnificence of her sovereign—his many palaces, carriages, horses, and his rich robes of state.

Marjorie had seen one of the palaces, the one which the King inhabited in the winter; but its external appearance certainly did not promise such delights as Babette assured her existed within, could one but pass its somewhat forbidding portals. If Babette's stories were true, however, no king in fairyland ever lived in greater state and splendor than did his Majesty of Elbstadt.

The long summer days passed all too quickly to Marjorie, and then came autumn, bringing with it renewed life and activity to the old town, which had hitherto seemed so sleepy and dull. The King and court returned from the palace on the river; the streets and parks were gay with gorgeous equipages and brilliant uniforms; and at last, one night, Marjorie had the delight of seeing her father, mother, and sister attired for the first ball at the court. The festivities of the winter had begun.

"Tell me all about it to-morrow," were her last words, as her parents descended the steps to the carriage. "I want to know how the King was dressed, and the Queen, too; and what they said, and everything! Please don't forget!"

Many were the questions she asked on the following day—questions which her mother and sister could not answer, having been too much occupied at the ball to notice the details for which Marjorie's soul longed.

"Well, I wish I could go to court and see the King for myself!" she exclaimed somewhat impatiently in her disappointment.

of the old town until they came to the great church, which stood near the bank of the river.

The King's palace was close by the church, being separated from it only by a narrow street, and yet connected with it, too, for an inclosed passageway, or bridge, extended from the second story of the palace to the gallery of the church, so that the royal family might attend the services without descending to the street and mounting the stairs again to reach their Loge, or box, where they sat overlooking priest and people, more as if in a theater than in a church.

Herr Mayer was the King's organist, and, as a special mark of favor, he allowed his best pupils to take an occasional lesson upon that wonderful organ, which, although it was built so many years ago, is still considered one of the finest in Europe. He met our little party at the door, greeting his pupil with a profound bow, and then led the way into the church and up a steep and winding stair to the organ-loft.

It seemed very dark and gloomy in the church, after the brilliant sunshine of the streets, for the only light came from two candles, one at each side of the organ, which shed their feeble rays upon the keys, leaving the rest of the gallery darker by contrast.

Belle seated herself upon the high wooden bench before the organ, and placed her fingers on the worn and yellow keys, and her feet on the pedals.

"Blow, Johann!" roared Herr Mayer; and the invisible Johann began to blow the organ, and the young girl to play, while Marjorie stood enraptured to hear the wonderful tones peal out through the old church, and along the lofty arches, under the touch of those soft white hands.

Herr Mayer remained standing near, waving his hand, and saying from time to time: "More slower, mein Fräulein—zoi! it is better." Or, "More loudly! yet more loudly! Ah! dat is vell! Now zoi! again—zoi quiet, zoi still! It shall be like a zigh!" And then Herr Mayer would sigh, as if at some tender thought awakened in his sentimental breast.

After looking and listening for a few moments, Marjorie strolled with Babette along the gallery of the church, her eyes gradually becoming accustomed to the subdued light which fell through the painted windows. There were many pictures of saints and angels upon the walls and she plied Babette with questions about them until at last they reached the farther end of the gallery, just overlooking the high altar, and were stopped by the partition-wall which inclosed the King's Loge. There was a door in this wall, but in front of it a sentry was slowly pacing, carrying his rifle, and looking very much bored.

At sight of Babette he grinned delightedly, and gave her a nod, accompanied by a suppressed "Guten Tag" for a sentry is not permitted to speak when on duty; and then Marjorie recognized him as "Cook's son Hans," whom she had often seen in the kitchen when he came to visit his mother.

No one being at hand to see, or to report him to his superior officer, Hans and Babette soon fell into conversation; and then Babette sat down on one of the gallery benches, and the soldier walked up and down the narrow aisle behind her, talking to her as he walked, and sometimes stopping to say a few words in a lower tone as she looked up at him over her shoulder.

Seeing them both so busy, Marjorie speedily pushed her investigations as far as the door leading into the royal box.

On the floor stood a basket containing tools, of which she did not know the use; but it took only an instant for her sharp little eyes to discover that the lock of the door had been removed. No doubt it was for the purpose of preventing intrusion during the repairs that the sentry had been stationed in the gallery of the church; but Marjorie never stopped to reason about the matter. She pushed the door. To her delight, it yielded, and in another moment she stood within the King's Loge, and immediately began a minute examination of all that it contained.

The furniture consisted of large gilt arm-chairs, upholstered in crimson velvet, on the backs of which were emblazoned the arms of Elbstadt-Saxhausen.

On a velvet shelf under the window there were several large prayer-books and hymnals, all with the royal arms in gold upon their covers; and upon the floor were soft kneeling-benches for the royal knees.

Marjorie seated herself in the largest of the arm-chairs, and then in each of the others in succession. "I feel like Little Golden-hair," she said. "I wonder if, the next time the King comes to church, he will say, 'who's been sitting in my chair?' like the Big Bear? Oh, I do wish he would come in now!"

As Marjorie continued her voyage of discovery, she saw at the back of the box a velvet curtain, trimmed like the rest of the hangings with gold fringe, and upon raising a corner of this, she found that it concealed a door. She laboriously turned the knob, opened the door, and entered the corridor connecting the church with the palace.

A slight sound near at hand causing Marjorie to turn her head, she saw the door at the palace end of the corridor open, and a man entered, dressed as a workman, carrying in his hand a basket of tools, similar to that which she had seen in the church. He set his basket on the floor, and kneeling beside it, took up a screwdriver, with which he began to loosen the screws holding the lock of the door in place.

"All the locks seem to be out of order to-day," thought Marjorie. "I'll go and talk to the man while he works. It will be much better than trying to amuse myself."

Accordingly she approached the workman, and was about to enter into conversation with him when the man, dropping his tools, rose to his feet, and, pulling off his cap, said, with a low bow:

"Your humble servant, little Princess! Allow me to open the door for your Royal Highness!" And saying the action to the words, he opened the door; and Marjorie, without hesitation, passed through the doorway, and actually stood in the great hall of the palace.

If you were to ask her what she saw, she could give but a confused account of paintings, statues, marble pillars, and waving palms; for she paused but a moment to glance about her.

"Sister Belle said I could not go to court until I was grown; but I'm in the King's palace now, and I'm going to see the King if I can," was her thought. "Away she sped on nimble feet, her steps falling noiselessly on the thick carpet, down the hall, around a corner, when, bump! she fell against an unexpected door. The door flew open, and in rolled Marjorie upon the parquet floor."

She was a little frightened, but not hurt, and picking herself up, she stood still and listened. The room was empty. A hasty glance convinced her that it was used as a library or reading-room, for on both sides of it were great bookcases filled with large volumes, and a table in the center of it was strewn thickly with pamphlets and loaded with books of every size.

Between the bookcases on one side hung a silken curtain, and having been fortunate thus far in her discoveries, she drew it aside, and stood spellbound by the scene before her. Was it fairyland? At first she really thought so. For where, except in fairyland, could one find such a bower of roses? Roses everywhere!—white, pink, yellow, crimson, growing in masses and clusters upon light arched trellises, through which one might look up to the blue sky above, while about this airy structure hovered birds and butterflies of such wondrous colors as she had never imagined birds and butterflies to be. On a spray near her rested a beautiful bright creature with wings half spread, ready for flight.

Marjorie cautiously stretched out her hand to touch it, and uttered an exclamation of surprise on finding bird and spray to be painted upon the wall.

Yes, roses, birds, sky, and all were but an imitation of nature, but so skillfully done as to deceive, at first sight, a more experienced eye than Marjorie's.

Marjorie walked as in a dream of delight through this scene of enchantment. She studied the strange figures upon the screen, and on passing behind it to see what the other side had to offer, she found that it concealed a white-and-gold fireplace, where a fire was burning on the hearth—this certainly was not what one would expect to find in a rose bower.

Marjorie did not give much attention to this, however, for she was startled and somewhat dismayed to see sitting in front of the fire in a great arm-chair an old gentleman, fast asleep, with a silk handkerchief over his head. She gazed at him in silent surprise, when suddenly she sneezed twice, very loud: "Atchoo! Atchoo!"

The old gentleman jumped as if he had received an electric shock, sat upright, pulling the handkerchief from his head, and stared at Marjorie in great amazement and with evident consternation.

For a moment he believed he thought she was part of a dream; he rubbed his eyes as if he could not trust his sight; and then, realizing that the little visitor was made of flesh and blood, he smiled ("the kindest,

dearest smile," she said afterward), and asked in a pleasant voice: "Little girl, where did you come from?"

Marjorie hurriedly explained her presence in the palace, and told the story of her entering from the church.

"But how did it happen that the doors were unfastened?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Well, I think," explained Marjorie, "that the locks are out of order, and the workman is mending them. He thought I was a princess." At this she laughed. "And when he opened the door for me, it just popped into my head to go and see the King, and so I came. Do you think I can see him, please?"

"Why do you wish to see the King, my child?"

"Oh, because papa and mama and sister Belle go to court, and they have told me how good he is, and how kind to the poor, and ever so many other splendid things. Can you tell me where he is, please?"

"My child, who is your papa? If he comes to our court, I should know him."

"My papa is the American minister," answered Marjorie, proudly.

"Ah, so! Well, my little girl, we must let your friends know where you are, for they will be troubled."

"Oh, but please, please don't send me away before I've seen the King," pleaded Marjorie. "I've wanted to see him so long!"—with a sigh.

"Why, my little one, I am the King."

To say that Marjorie was not disappointed at this unlooked for announcement would be anything but the truth. Her ideas of royal state had received a severe shock. But after looking at him fixedly for a moment, she slowly remarked, in what she supposed to be the proper form of address:

"Well, O King, I was never so astonished in all my life; but I am so glad to see you, I really can't s'press myself."

The old King laughed heartily at this frank avowal, as well as at the wording of it, and taking the little girl upon his knee, he talked to her for a while, answering most kindly and patiently her many questions, each question beginning or ending "O King," according to her idea of the proper manner of speaking to one of his exalted rank. In the Old Testament stories the courtiers, in speaking to the King, always began, "O King, live forever!" and the Bible, of course, was right.

"O King, this is such a lovely room," she said. "Can you walk right out into that beautiful garden?"

The old King explained that the garden was but a mirror, an astrolabe, "I thought it was a 'true' garden. I can hardly believe it is only pretend!"

"I spend much time here," he continued, "for although I am an old man, I am still fond of birds and flowers—and children," he added, with a smile. "But we must send word to your friends, my dear."

So saying, he touched a silver bell on the table, and a man in black appeared in the doorway, making a low bow as he entered. "Tell Herr von Rabensheim I desire to speak with him."

The attendant bowed again and retired, and immediately a young officer dressed in the uniform of the King's guard entered the Rose Bower. His blue eyes opened in surprise when they fell upon the little runaway, for he knew her well, having been a frequent visitor at the American legation, and had always made a pet of the little girl, often telling her delightful tales of his young brothers and sisters, and of their life at his father's castle of Rabensheim.

Marjorie's surprise was equally great, and running toward her friend, she was about to enter into an explanation of her presence in the King's private apartment when he checked her by a motion of his hand, for the King was speaking:

"Max, the little one says she left her friends in the church. See that some one goes to inform them that she is in safe hands."

"I will go myself, sire," said the young man, and, clicking his heels together, he bowed and left the apartment, but soon returned, saying that the church was empty, the little girl's sister and maid having thought, no doubt, that she had wandered from the building into the street.

"We must send her some at once. They will be anxious to see her," he said. "And ringing the silver bell again, the King said to the attendant who appeared: 'My carriage immediately.' And when its arrival was announced he stooped and kissed the little girl, saying: 'God keep thee, my child!'"

Marjorie flung her arms around his neck, and giving him a hearty kiss, said:

"Good-by, you dear, dear King! I've had such a beautiful visit!"

"And so have I," said his Majesty. "Tell your mama that you have made an old man very happy, and that he hopes for the pleasure of another visit from his little friend."

Max took Marjorie's hand in his, and together they passed down the great staircase between rows of palms and statues, to the door of the palace, before which stood the King's own carriage. The four horses, postillions, and footmen were there; only the outrider was wanting; but to make up for this, "there were two in-riders," as Marjorie said.

In the meantime, the household in the Königstrasse was in a state of agitation. When Belle returned from her lesson, followed by the weeping Babette, and told the sorrowful tale of Marjorie's disappearance, for which Babette could offer no explanation, though she knew it was in some way due to her carelessness, Marjorie's mother burst into tears, and sank down upon the sofa, giving herself up to the most horrible forebodings regarding the fate of the missing child. Papa, leaving her to the care of her daughter and the frightened maid, seized his hat, and hastened to the police-station to send out a description of the lost little girl. Poor Belle tried to reassure her mother, but walked the floor, saying to herself: "I should not have taken her unless I was able to watch her! I am sure we shall never see her again!" So great was their anxiety and distress that the clattering of hoofs and rolling of wheels on the drive fell unheeded upon their ears, and it was only the sound of little feet on the steps, and a merry little voice in the hall, which assured them that the truant had returned.

The door was flung open, and in rushed the impetuous Marjorie, eager to recount her adventures. But she stopped short on the threshold, appalled by the melancholy scene before her: mama, sister Belle and Babette with red eyes and unmistakable signs of distress visible on their countenances! What could it mean?

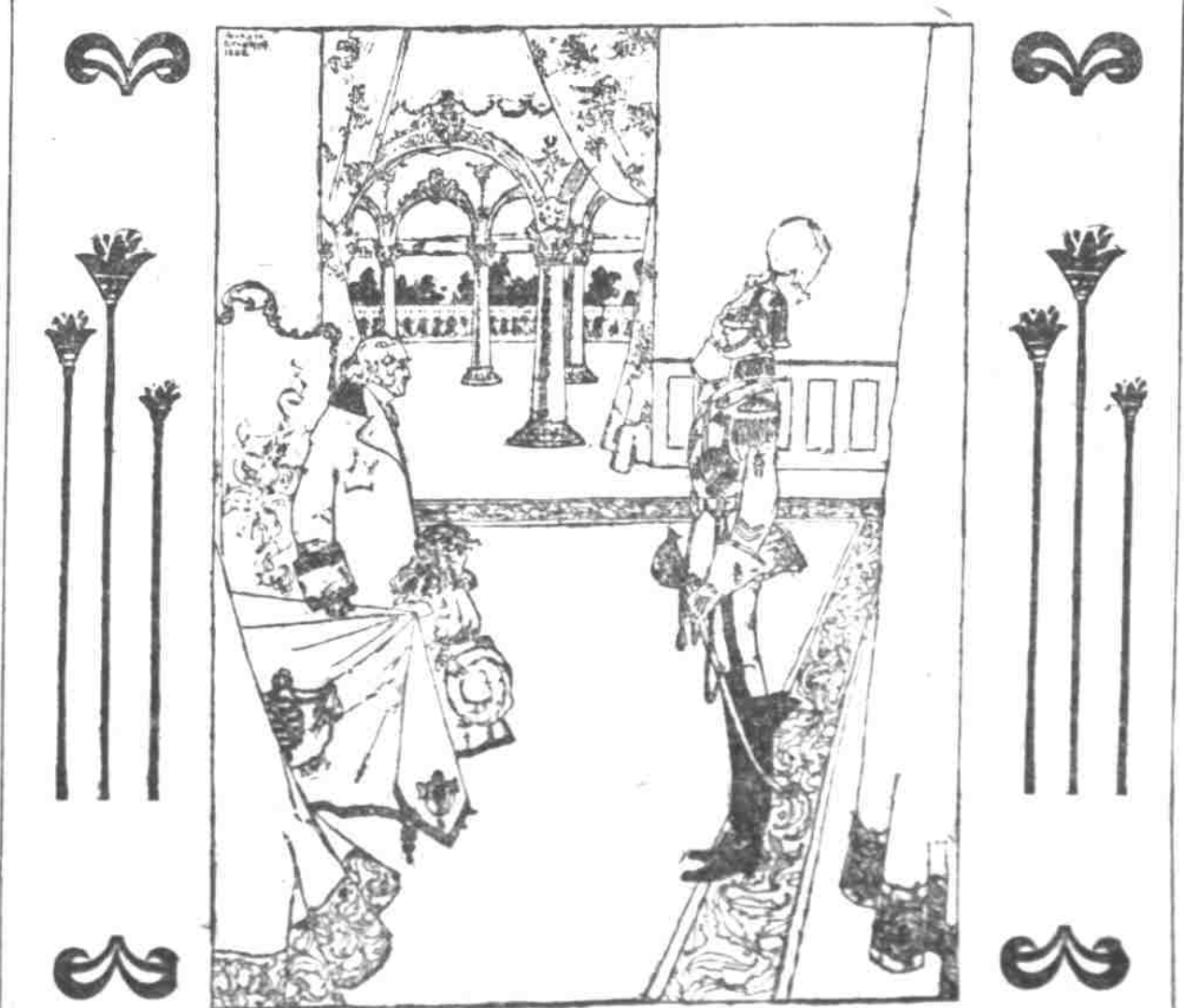
"Dear mama," she exclaimed, "what is the matter? Why do you all look so sad?"

"But now no one looks sad. With one accord they flew toward the little girl, all talking at once, and all so eager to welcome her they could scarcely wait to take her in turn.

"You'll pull me to pieces," she said. "Why are you all so glad to see me?"

"Why are we glad?" exclaimed her mama, laughing and trying and kissing her all at once. "Why should we not be glad to welcome back our lost little girl?"

"Lost!" exclaimed Marjorie. "Did you think I was lost? I would not be so foolish! I was n't lost—I've been to court!"



THE KING ORDERED HER ESCORTED HOME.