

# Marjorie's Inspiration

It Brought About an Unexpected Climax.

By J. W. EVANS.

Marjorie was little more than fifteen. She called it a little less than sixteen, and, in keeping with that declaration, she surreptitiously lengthened her skirts so gradually that her unsuspecting mother never noticed it.

Also she read "His Heart's Queen" with the same circumspect privacy and tortured her tip tilted nose with strenuous massage till she found that her ardor to make it classic merely made it red. In a word, Marjorie was growing up.

Her present grievance as she looked from her window with a face as dismal as the sky was that her sister Rachel was to leave in a few hours to attend a house party in Philadelphia, from which she, forsooth, was excluded by reason of her tender years. And that horrid Tom Norris, who had laughed when she said she was near sixteen, was to go with Rachel.

Well, the papers predicted rain, and she hoped it would just pour. It was at that point that her thoughts took a turn by undoubted inspiration, and she suddenly darted downstairs with an expression from which the wrath had partially cleared. She'd show them!

A few hours later she escorted Rachel urbanely to the door. "Good-by, dear," she said sweetly. "Don't forget your umbrella. It's going to rain. You two look just like a bride and groom," she added maliciously as Norris picked up Rachel's suit case. She was pleased to observe that Rachel flushed with annoyance.

"I sent mine by express," said Tom apologetically.

"Pooh! You did it on purpose." "Marjorie!" said her sister severely. The only response as they departed was a derisive laugh.

"She's a little imp sometimes," said Rachel, "but she's growing up. I suppose I was just as bad."

When they emerged from the subway at Twenty-third street the rain was falling in a fine, business-like drizzle that had evidently come to stay. "Oh, dear, these plumes!" wailed Rachel. "I didn't think it would come so soon. No; don't put up the umbrella. The car is right here. It won't be worth the trouble, and you have the suit case."

A shadow of a smile flickered across his face, which she noted. "I believe you enjoyed her horrid joke," she scolded, shaking her head at him.

The car made its way west with exasperating delays, and at last, within a block of the ferry house, it came to a stop with a sudden jerk of finality. The conductor told the exasperated passengers that the line was blocked somewhere and that those in a hurry had better walk.

"Let's make the best of it," said Rachel. "And blessing on that child for reminding me to bring my umbrella."

When they stepped from the car platform a moment later Norris raised the umbrella hurriedly to protect her hat. A bewildering instant passed before they fully understood what had happened, but they were terribly aware of the roar of delighted laughter that went up from the damp crowd, which turned amused faces on them as if glad of anything cheery on so gloomy a day.

The ground where they stood had the appearance of a sudden snow-fall. Every corner and crevice of their clothing was white with a clinging shower that continued to patter to the ground with every move they made.

The rim of Rachel's wide brimmed hat caught a reserve supply that fell in a continual stream whether she looked up or down. The curved brim of Tom's derby made up in depth for what it lacked in area and contributed its mite to the seemingly endless supply. The crowd was in a second paroxysm of delight before the two victims

grasped the dreadful truth that it was rain.

"That awful child!" was all Rachel could gasp in her consternation.

Clearly it was a time for action. Tom seized the single suit case, and, with the interested crowd making way for them right and left, they hurried on, a gleeful procession of prospective fellow passengers trailing along in their river-strewn wake.

"Tom," the girl gasped, "it's perfectly horrid! Oh, oh, if only I hadn't come—if only I had that youngster here!"

Still attended by a grinning throng, Tom purchased the tickets, and they made the boat with half a minute to spare. Partly from the unwanted exertions and partly from her feelings Rachel's face was scarlet, seeing which Tom kept his own carefully impassive.

He remained silent as she talked, begging him half tearfully to brush away the grains from her collar. "Oh, and it's down inside my collar too!" she cried. Then she saw his eye twinkle, and her color flamed up again.

She congealed into frozen silence. "You're just as horrid as Marjorie," she said at last. "You enjoyed her mean joke about the suit case, and you haven't minded this one bit, and I'm not going to Philadelphia at all. I'm going right back on the next boat."

There were angry tears in her eyes as she finished, but they were quickly repressed when she saw the other eyes still turned on them from all quarters with interested amusement.

"That's better," he said dryly as he observed the change in expression. "We don't want to give them the idea that we are making for a divorce court. It's too soon to be conventional. You aren't supposed to weep for at least a month. Now, then," he went on, calmly unheeding the one withering glance she cast at him when she was sure no one would see it, "if you go back the kid will have the joke on you. You can't do a thing to her, and the more angry you are the better she'll be pleased. Furthermore, my dear girl!"

"I'm not your dear girl," she observed briefly.

"Oh, yes, you are. What I was going to say was that it seems to me you're a little rough on yours truly. I don't especially mind your apparently violent aversion to the idea of being married to me, but I've been intending to tell you for some time that I don't share in it. I think the whole idea is brilliant. I think that kid sister of yours is bright enough to be twenty, and I'm going to apologize for my former insult to her age the next time I see her." He waited impressively for his words to sink in. "Now, just reflect," he went on; "the rice throwing and the unpleasant part of getting married are over and done with. Why not finish it up? Let's do it now—and then there will be a bride and groom at the house party."

She looked at him in wonder. "There is nothing the matter with your imagination, Tom," she said, her calmness quite restored by the magnificent coolness of his suggestion.

"Of course there isn't," he smiled. "I'm not proposing it for a joke, dear. I love you. And it's reasonable because I know the license clerk in Philadelphia, so that here will be no trouble about that."

She began to shake her head, but he noticed that she did not resent the term he had used. "Let me think," she said at last. "I'll tell you when we get there. But, Tom—Tom—it would be insane."

"Not a bit of it," he said stoutly. "We'll both live to call your sister blessed."

They relapsed into a silence which he was careful to break as seldom as possible till they were nearing Philadelphia.

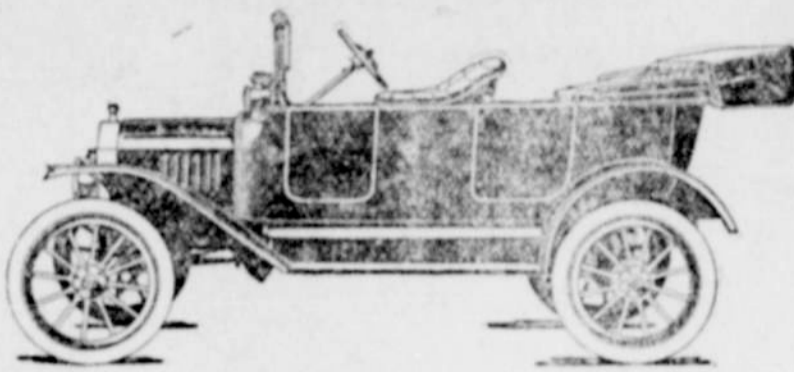
"Three minutes to the Broad street station," he said gravely as the train pulled in at West Philadelphia. "Just three minutes in which to decide if we are to avoid our well intentioned friends at the station."

She shook her head. "Oh, no—longer than that," she said as she smiled up at him. "It's taken me nearly three hours."

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