A NEW YEAR'S STORY.

THE CHIVALROUS DEFENSE OF A RED SAIRED GIRL, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.



OME, uncle, spin us a "A New Year's yarn, of course. You can't expect us to be satisfied

with anything else on New Year's eve." "Shall I spin 'em a New Year's yarn, auntie?" asked the old gentleman of a white haired lady who was knitting by

the light on the center table, at the same time giving her a knowing look. "Of course not," she replied, half frowning and half smiling.

"There's only one thing ever happened to me on New Year's eve, and I've remembered that always." "Is it a love story?" asked one of the

"Well, a kind of one. Bring out some nuts and apples, and give us another stick of wood for the fire, and I'll see

what I can make of what happened to me on New Year's eve, 1851." The old gentleman's requirements having been attended to, the boys and girls ranged themselves round the fire and the story was begun. He looked straight at "Auntie" while he told it, evidently enjoying its effect upon her more than on the younger listeners.

She was the homeliest girl in the school; there can be no doubt about that. She was freckled, her hair was red, not a dark shade of red, but flery. She had struggled with whooping cough, and measles, and scarlet fever, and every other disease that childhood is heir to until she was little more than skin and bones. There were girls with faces more expressive of disagreeable disposi-tions, but for pure homeliness Reddie would have taken the prize in any honestly conducted show for ugly girls. Reddie was not her real name, but every one called her Reddie because her hair was so red.

We were all very young children-at least most of us were. I was 14. There was one boy who was still older-Dick McLean. Dick was a natural tormentor. He would abuse the girls as well as the boys. He respected dolls no more than hoops and kites. He would rush into a ring where the boys were playing mar bles, and pretending not to notice where he was treading, scatter the marbles with the toe of his boot, or poke his finger through a kite, or let the sawdust out of a doll; and he was so big and strong that no one dared punish him. I was the biggest boy in the school, but in strength I was greatly his inferior, and

kept out of his way.

One day Reddie was carrying her doll across the playground, a doll with hair as red as her own. Some one had given it her as a reflection on her own fiery locks; but Reddie, never seeing or never noticing the slight, took the red headed little monster into her heart, and nursed it with as much affection as if she had been a real mother. Dick McLean, seeing her with the doll in her arms, its red head standing out over her shoulder, went up behind her with a lighted match, and touching the flame to its hair, there was a bright halo around the doll's head for an instant, and then the cranium was as bald as if the little thing hadn't been in the world long enough to grow even red hair. Reddie, seeing what had happened, burst into tears.

I was a witness of this bit of ruffianism, and although at that age I had considerable contempt for girls in general and the prevailing contempt for Reddie, I was shocked.

"It seems to me, Dick," I said, "I'd take a boy for that sort o' thing if I were

"I'll take you, if you like," he retorted.

I was sorry I had said anything. knew if we quarreled I should get thrashed. Besides, if I fought about such a wizened little creature as Reddie, the whole school would ridicule me.

"Til teach you"- added Dick to his previous remark, and he came up to me and struck me. I saw I was in for it, and made up my mind to take a thrash ing. The children stood around, Reddie among them, with her baldheaded doll in her arms, her own hair making up in illuminating properties for what had been lost by the singeing of the doll's head. Throughout that brief struggle until I found myself unable to continue, it seemed to me that there was but one visible thing present, and that was Red-

die's head. I limped away from Dick and the circle, inwardly planning revenge on Dick McLean before the end of the term. Indeed, I at once told my father I desired to take boxing lessons, and receiving his assent, after three months' secret practice, went up behind my enemy with a lighted match and burned his back hair off up to the crown of his bat. Dick turned like a fury. His uncontrol-able anger and my skill gave me the day, and I left him with the injunction that if he wanted any more hair burning to come to me.

As I had expected, after my defeat on my first encounter, I was set down as

champion of the ugnest giri in the school. my old name," she said I did not recover from the beating I had received for a week. One day as I limped across the play ground Reddie came up to me and poked something at me folded her was alone enough to ruffle me; but to see her standing by me, shyly, with her hand stretched towards me and something in it, in sight of half a dozen



"Go 'way," I said, She didn't say anything, but continued to look up at me shyly, as though she knew it was a great presumption for her to offer me a gift.

"What is it?" I asked in no kindly tone, "Something I made for you."

"I don't want it," I said, turning away. "Please, Tom," she said, "won't you take it?"

I cast a glance at her; she was evidently full of some deep feeling. "What have you got?" I queried.

"It's only this." And she took the paper cover from about it and held it up, casting an anxious look at me to see if I admired the gift. It was a book mark such as children make, and on it, in letters in which many of the stitches were put in wrong, was "Tom Erven." "That's not my name, you little

"Isn't it spelled right?"

"No. It's I-r-w-i-n. She looked so stupefied and woebegone at her blunder that I pitied her. If we hadn't been in view of the other children, I think I could have spoken a kind word to her.

"Won't you take it, anyway?" she asked ruefully.

The quickest way to get rid of her was to accept it.

"Yes, I'll keep it. Now run along." Her face brightened up and I was surprised at so much expression. If she had not so many freckles and such red hair, and had more flesh on her bones she wouldn't be so ill looking after all, I thought. As she skipped away she turned and gave me a grateful look; such a look as a peasant might give a prince



"YOU SEEM SURPRISED."

That was the last I saw of Reddie at school. The next day she was taken with symptoms which developed into typhoid fever, and was kept at home. Her absence was a great relief to me, and I wished when she recovered, if she ever should, that she would go to some other

Between 14 and 24 years of age there comes a great change. When at 24 I looked back on my childhood and thought how careless I was of the feelings of others, I was surprised. Yet it must be confessed that what I had gained in one way I had lost in another. I had acquired polish and prevarication; I had earned to say pleasant things to young adies, and was considered quite an adept in this respect. Besides, I did not scorn to practice petty impositions, to flatter them to gain their favor.

I soon became tired of society, which was unfortunate for my mother and sisters, for whom I was the only available escort. Still, I was occasionally dragged by them into the gay whirl. One night I had been unwillingly appropriated to escort my sisters to a dancing party. It was Christmas night, 1851. I had given up dancing, and stood looking on with my arms folded.

"Tom," said my sister Mary, coming up to me with her cheeks all aglowshe had just finished a dance-"you look too blase for anything. I want to introduce you to a young lady."

I tried to beg off. "She's a beauty, and so unusual a beauty," Mary urged. She put her arm through mine and led me to the girl in question. After introducing me she

lipped away. If ever there was a case of love at first sight, it came to me at that moment. The girl was indeed a beauty; a graceful figure, fair complexion, eyes a dark liquid brown, hair a soft shade of Titien.

Her first remark startled me "It's a long while since we met, Mr. Irwin.

"It is indeed." I scrutinized her features; I didn't remember to have ever

seen her before. "That was a noble act of yours." I was not only surprised, I was amazed. I remembered no act of my life that

could be called "noble." "You don't know what I'm talking about or who I am at all." She laughed with keen enjoyment, while I was no

more enlightened than before. "How do you like the shade of my hair?" she asked.

"It's very beautiful." I spoke in dignified tone. I was becoming vexed with all this quizzing. "I wonder if you would know me by

"Try me and see."

"Reddie." "Upon my word!"

I looked at the beautiful creature bein a piece of brown paper. The sight of fore me with ill concealed astonish-"You seem surprised."

"Yes-at-at the singular fate that brings this meeting."

"At nothing else?" she asked, archly, I found no words to reply, so I remained silent. "You don't remember my singed doll,

suppose?"
"I have reason to especially remember hat doll. It makes me quite sore to

think of it. "You behaved very chivalrously. And the book mark I gave you. You have

treasured it, of course?" "Of course. She looked at me searchingly. It was evident that she knew I was prevaricat-

"In that whole school there was but one who was kind to me," she said, im-

pressively. "Perhaps some of them would be glad

to show you some attention now." "Only one was kind. And that onewhom do you think?"

"You.

"I can't tell."

"For heaven's sake, Red"-I stopped short.

"You fought for me." I blushed. I had never considered that I had fought for her, but that I was obliged to fight.

"I got thrashed." "The kindness was all the more ac-

ceptable. "I was not especially appreciative when ou offered me your gift.

"You fought for me." There was no one near. We were standing close together. I felt for her hand and gave it a quick pressure, then dropped it. In another moment she was whirled away in a waltz by a handsome fellow with a tawny mustache and blue

After the last dance and we were going home, I saw her again in her wraps in the hall. "May I go to see you?" I asked.

"Yes." Then, with her eyes snapping, she added: "Come and bring the book mark. Let me see; I'm engaged every night for a week. Come New Year's "And not without the book mark?"

She had just time before the door closed behind her to give me a mischiev ous look, and say, "No.

My position was embarrassing. I had permission to call with a book mark and no book mark to call with.

I had no intention whatever of foregoing my call for want of a souvenir. Nothing would be more easy than to duplicate the book mark, and as to practicing the deception of offering it as the original, I had no qualms of conscience whatever, having perpetrated many such sins of far greater enormity. I asked my sister to make a book mark for me, and warned her not to do the work too carefully, imitating the stitches of a child.

Armed with what I considered a fair imitation, I called and sent it in with my card. When she entered the drawing room I scrutinized her face to see if there were any signs of her having discovered that the token was spurious. She held my card and the book mark in her hand, and as we seated ourselves she tossed them on to the table. So far as I could discover, she believed the book mark to be genuine.

"It is very good of you to have kept that souvenir so long," she remarked, fixing her beautiful eyes on mine.

"Don't mention it," I observed, in clining my head deferentially. "How carefully you must have kept

it. It's not the least dingy." "It was very good of you to give it to me, you know. Then, when a bookmark is kept in a book it doesn't get dingy."

"I never thought of that."

Dear creature. How innocent. Just then I glanced at the book mark lying beside my card on the table. It looked as fresh as the card. A girl will swallow anything in shape of a compliment, I thought.

"I really think it is more perfect than when I gave it to you. The spelling is certainly improved. If I remember



A REFLECTION IN THE MIRROR.

aright, I spelled your name incorrectly.' I glanced again at the book mark. Something in her manner caused me to scent danger. Suddenly it broke in upon me like a flash. The original had been misspelled.

"The n-n-n-ame is written a great many ways," I stammered.

"I spelled it E-r-v-e-n." "You couldn't have done that." "O, yes, I did: I remember it perfectly. Little girls are sensitive. At least 1 was, and I felt your rebake at my blun-

der very keenly.' I was wiping the perspiration from my brow. It seemed to me I had never seen so stern, so contemptuous an expression

on any woman's face.

"That's a g-g-good way to spell it," ! remarked wildly. She took the book mark and the visiting card from the table. "You see they

agree," she said.

"Isn't it odd?" "Very odd."

"I must have made a mistake." She concentrated her gaze upon me in what seemed to me one glance of withering contempt.

"You are very much mistaken if you think to impose that brand new bookmark on me for the one I gave you." Oh for an earthquake, a cyclone, anything to change the situation!

"How ridiculous!" I muttered, trying to force a laugh and put a humorous view on it all."

She declined to see anything ludicrous in the act. She became more grave, if

possible, than ever. I picked up the bookmark and bent my hot face down over it to hide my confusion. I had lost all presence of mind. My ideas were in a state of chaos. What to say I didn't know, and didn't

know what I said. "I see," I stammered, "the one you g-gave me was w-w-worked in red Steam and Hot Water

A peal of laughter brought me to my senses. My discomfiture was complete. I fell back in my chair and covered my

face with my hands. "You do that just like a girl," I heard her cry delightedly. "It's exactly what I did when you left me that day in the school yard, and I thought about my blunder in spelling. Only I covered my face with my apron.'

Presently I mustered courage to look

"Who made that book mark?" she asked, resuming a serious expression. "My sister."

"What made you do such a thing?" "My admiration for you."

"Nonsense!" "There is a tide in the affairs of men," I muttered, " 'which, taken at

the flood' "-"I have admired you," I said, humbly,

"ever since"— I hesitated.
"I was a red headed little imp." "No," I went on, profiting by the lesson I had learned and speaking frankly. "Then, to thoughtless, unreasoning children you were not attractive."

"Now you are speaking manfully. Please don't ever attempt to impose on me again.

"Indeed, I never will, if you will forgive me for this. "You are forgiven," she said, kindly.

"But you haven't told me when this admiration for me bloomed." "When I met you on Christmas night

at the dancing party.' "In other words, you have admired me for a whole week.

I looked at her frankly, honestly, and meant every word I spoke when I replied: "In those three days have been crowded enough admiration to offset ten years of indifference.'

She blushed and lowered her eyes. "It has not been only admiration," I went on. "For three whole days I have been madly in love with you." She leaned back in her chair and drew

a long, long sigh. "You know that I speak the truth."

"By your past record?" "No, by my sincerity. You can see it in every feature; my voice, my eyes, my whole being."

She sat with her eyes fixed on a spot in the carpet, occasionally raising them to mine as though wondering whether I was worthy of credence.

"I don't believe a word you say." But I saw that the tide had turned: that she was wavering. My want of reputation with her for truthfulness was Call and See Us. certainly a great barrier in the way of my convincing her of my sincerity, but I did not despair, for I knew that what I said was only too true. For half an hour I continued the attack, she parrying every thrust, and continually reminding me of my recent deception; but the quickest way to convince is to be really in earnest, and this gave me the

victory. "It's so sudden," she said. "We have loved each other for a

week." I urged. "Yours may have been since then, mine"-"Yours?

"Has lasted ever since you fought for Then I knew why I had won so sudden

a victory. Before I took my leave that evening I caught sight of a reflection in the mirror. What do you suppose it was? It was Reddie and I, she lovingly resting in my arms, with her head on my shoulder, her back to the mirror, I with my face toward it.

"Ah," I said to myself, not even speaking the words in a whisper-my lips were too near her ear. "It is due to the generosity and gratitude of that freckled, red headed child you spurned ten years ago, that you are not getting your just deserts now."

"Why uncle," said a lass of 17, "I didn't know you were that kind of a young man ever."

"Why didn't you marry Reddie?" asked another. "Perhaps she resumed her common sense and thought better of it after all,"

said the white haired lady at the center table, her head bent down low over her work. "Pshaw," said a matter of fact girl of

10. "I know who Reddie was. "Who?" asked a chorus of voices. "Auntie."

"How could that be, you little goose," said her uncle, "when auntie has white hair and Reddie's was red?" "He's made most of it out of whole cloth," said the old lady. "That about the mirror is ridiculous. If I had sup-

posed he'd talk about such things wouldn't"-The old lady stopped short, and the oys and girls all burst into a laugh.

Hope for Him Yet.

F. A. MITCHEL.

Young Mother-Don't you think baby looks like his father! Visitor-Ye-es, but I wouldn't worry: be may outgrow it.-Texas Siftings.

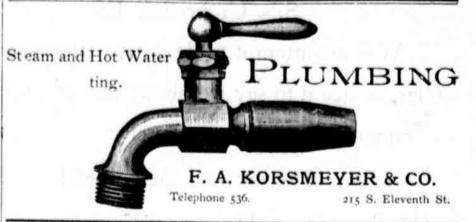
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