

AUNT EDITH'S RUBAIYAT

A Story Written for Christmas Guardian Readers, by "Philo" And Published for Their Christmas Patrons by Moore & McLeod.



IT HAPPENED in this way, and all the other things Joan's contrived. Joan is my sister my only one, and besides being three years

younger than I am, is completely spoiled. Of course she is my especial care; but no matter how hard I try to reason with her and tell her she shouldn't have her own way in everything, she gets it just the same. The consequence is that I am always blamed for what Joan does, because I am older and ought to set her a better example, mother says. I don't think mother quite understands how hard it is for me to make Joan profit by the example I set her, or she would make more allowance for me when I fail so often.

But Aunt Edith understands, I am sure. Aunt Edith is mother's youngest sister, and has been with us for a long time now on a visit, and Joan and I love her dearly. Not quite as much as we love mother, but most as much. No matter how bad we are (and we are both naughty sometimes, for Aunt provokes me often until I lose all patience and shake her real hard and make her cry) mother takes us along side of her and talks to us in that dear sweet way of hers, and tells us how very wicked it is for a little brother and sister to quarrel and scold each other; then she gives us a kiss, and makes us kiss each other, and sends us off to our play. But Aunt Edith comes and sits down with us in the old nursery before the fire; tell us stories about some other little boy and girl who squabbled like Joan and I do, when one of them died and went to Heaven, and the other one never got over being sorry all the rest of his life.

There's one thing about it: perhaps if Aunt Edith were here all the time, she

would get tired of finding little boys and girls to tell us about who were bad to each other sometimes but loved each other in spite of it; and perhaps mother is busier than Aunt Edith and can't take so much time for us as she can. Aunt Edith kind of takes us off mother's hands, she says, most ever that means, and is with us most of the time 'cept when some one calls for her to go driving or to the opera or an evening.

The other night Aunt Edith was in the nursery making something awful pretty while she talked to us, when she was called away downstairs by somebody, and she looked so prett as she said good night to us, her eyes were so hard that Joan hugged us both so hard that Joan said after she had gone, "Guess that Joan said takes Aunt Edith out driving and to the Opera house evening's, down stairs."

"Little girls shouldn't speak of a gentleman like Mr. Dunbar in such a disrespectful way Joan," I said.

"Well, I don't care. He's a MAN, and he takes Aunt Edith out and he leans over her when she plays the piano just like—"

"Little girls should mind their own business and not talk about things which do not concern them, mother says."

"Boys too" was Joan's saucy answer, after which I felt that I had not much more to say just then. The next day Aunt Edith was with us after lessons were over and she brought a little book I used often to see her reading when she would be sitting in her room. I have heard her read little bits out of it, some thing about "wine, a loaf of bread, and 'THOU,' and couldn't see just how it could make her so happy looking; but perhaps I didn't quite understand the meaning of it, and it sounded different the way she read it to what it does when I say it over. So when Aunt Edith laid the little book down on the table I asked her the name of it and she told me:—

"The Rubaiyat."

"That's a funny name, Aunt Edith," I said. "And the book's prettier than its name."

"The name is very beautiful 'Froggie,' she said. My name is Russel, but for some reason I don't know, when mother wants to be lovelier than ever, and Aunt Edith wants to get me real good, they call me 'Froggie,' so I suppose it's a pet name, even if it isn't very pretty."

sounds nice when they say it that way so I don't mind. But as Joan calmly took possession of the pretty book with such a funny name Aunt Edith took it from her and said:—"I musn't have my book spoiled Joan. Some one whom I love very dearly gave me that. I am going out this afternoon, so I must go and put it away now. I will tell you a story to-night, after dinner is over." And when she came to us she looked just as pretty as ever she could look, and she sat down in the big chair before the fire, Joan perched up on one arm of it, and me on the other. She just seemed to talk straight ahead that evening, without waiting to think about anything. The story was all about how a girl who was awful lonely once, went to her sister's home where there was a little boy and girl whom she loved very much, and then she met some one else who was awful good to her, and used to take her out places and send her flowers and:—

"Lean over her when she played the piano, like Mr. Dunbar does when you play, Aunt Edith" interrupted Joan. But Aunt Edith didn't get a bit cross, she just hugged Joan close to her, kissed her curls and went on:—

"Perhaps so Joan. And one day he made her very, very happy, for he told her that he loved her so well that he wanted her to be with him always and to live with him in his own home forever."

And Aunt Edith's eyes were happier looking than ever when she said that it was time for us to go to bed, and then went down stairs to see Mr. Dunbar. The next day she went out for a drive with him, and that was the beginning of it. Joan's one glimpse of her pretty book made her want to see it again. So in she went to Aunt Edith's room and got it from where it laid on her little table. And she brought it in to the old nursery; or playroom, for we are too old to have a nursery, Joan is eight, and I am eleven. Then she and I read it all through. But we liked the outside of it best. It was the prettiest, soft white leather with big gold letters on it, and the name we made it out to be was "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam."

It was the silliest thing I ever read, but perhaps we thought so because we didn't know what it meant. And all over it there were little pencil marks which I suppose Aunt Edith put there, and on the white edge of one or two of the leaves there was a date written. One of them was only a few days ago. Joan made some remarks that I thought did not sound very respectful to Aunt Edith and I took her to task about it, so from one thing to another it went on, until I slapped Joan's ears and made her put the book away before anything would happen to it. Things went on very well for a week or two after that, and one evening mother told us that if we would be good, she would allow us to go down in the drawing room after dinner, as it was Aunt Edith's birthday. So we promised and crossed our hearts to make mother sure that we meant what we said, and when the time came we went down. We had lots of good things that night, and Mr. Dunbar said how much Joan looked like Aunt Edith. I said that she wasn't half so pretty; and he laughed and told Auntie



JOAN IS MY SISTER

that "children always told the truth." Then she asked him to sing something, and he sang the prettiest song, while she played for him. I remember some of it, it was so much more easy to remember than that business about the "Bough, and 'THOU'" that I heard Aunt Edith read. Didn't Mr. Dunbar sing that song just great? I couldn't help wondering if Aunt Edith had told us that story wrong, and that he was lonely instead of the girl. For he sang like as if he was just so awful lonely he wanted her and no one else in the world.

"Love, I am lonely, years are so long, I want you only, you and your song; Dark is life's shore love, night is so deep, Leave me no more love, sing me to sleep."

About a month after Aunt Edith's birthday she came into the nursery one evening, and her eyes were red and she cried when Joan put her arms around her neck, and Auntie hugged me so awful I almost cried.

And she told us an awful sad story, about how the little girl was never going to the nice man's house after all, that the nice man had changed his mind, and that they had a quarrel over something, and neither one would be the first to say they were sorry, and then Aunt Edith cried harder than ever. I couldn't say a word, I just hummed softly.

"Don't go to sleep love, you alone, Of all the world seem all mine own; Nothing is faithful, nothing true, In Heaven and earth but God and you." I don't know what made me do that, but Aunt Edith put her arms around me, and said something after she felt better that sounded like:—

"But he says I'm NOT true, Froggie. And I do love him well enough to die for him. And—he's wrong Froggie, and he's going away."

Very soon she went away for a day or two, and Mr. Dunbar never came near the house. But she had left her pretty book on the table, and just because I told Joan that she musn't touch it, she went and got it, laid it down on the floor to read it before the fire; and with her face between her hands and her heels kicking up in the air, took possession of the hearth rug. I don't exactly know how the rest happened but before many minutes there was a blot of ink ever so big on one of the pretty pages, and Joan began to yell at the top of her lungs.

"There now," she screamed "You've spoiled it, and I'll tell Aunt Edith that you did it."

"And I'll tell her that you stole it," I replied, but I really felt sorry for the poor kid, for I knew that she was crying more from fear than anything else. So I said, "Never mind Joan. We'll fix it. We'll blot it up and then we'll scrape it off. It'll never show."

"Wo't it?" asked Joan between her sobs. "Not a bit" bravely answered I, although I didn't believe it really.

"Well, we laid it on the table, and then we blotted it first and scraped it after and it didn't look so very bad. But I kind of think Aunt Edith would have noticed it. Just as we were going to put it away Joan reached out her hand for something, and over went the whole bottle of ink on the pretty pages, over the cover and everything and Joan just howled. I was pretty frightened myself, so I said:—

"We'll hide it Joan, and we'll buy her another for a Christmas present. And perhaps she wo't miss it till then."

That kind of quieted Joan, and she went and got her savings bank and mine, to see how much money we had saved for Christmas. We had two dollars between us, and, "I guess," said Joan, "we'll get a book like that for fifty cents." We didn't get a chance to buy it before Aunt Edith came back, and of course we thought she'd miss the book at once, but if she did she never said a word about it until she was back nearly a fortnight. Then she asked mother at breakfast one morning if she had seen it, but mother hadn't, and Joan and I looked so innocent I guess it never crossed Aunt Edith's mind that we knew anything about it. We didn't hear any more pretty stories after she came back; they were all as sad as they could be, and she used words I didn't quite understand about "hastily judging others" and "life long regrets" that sounded very sweet and sad, and I often caught her singing softly and in a voice which sounded as if there were tears in it:—

"I Love I am lonely, years are so long, I want you only, you and your song; Dark is life's shore love, night is so deep, Leave me no more love, sing me to sleep."

Well one day Joan and I got a chance to get out after the book. Aunt Edith and mother were away to some Christmas decorating, so we slipped out with our money and the old book so we would know what kind to get exactly. We went to ever so many stores but could not get one, until at last it was getting dark and the street lights were lit and we thought we had better go home. We had only one more place to go, and then we got what we had been looking for, and it was just the same as the one that Aunt Edith had. The same size, and same color, the same everything, and Joan and I felt awful glad that we found it. So we told the clerk to put it up for us, but when we asked her how much it was she told me that it was five dollars.

"It's a special edition of the Rubaiyat, bound for Christmas presents" she said. I scarcely knew what to do, so I explained

it all to her, told her how we had spoiled Aunt Edith's, and all the rest of it; but all she said was that she was very sorry, but we would have to give her the five dollars before she could let us have it.

Joan cried great big tears, but she didn't roar as she always does, and then a gentleman who had been standing down in the store with his back to us, came up to the counter where we were, and who was it but Mr. Dunbar.

"What's the matter Froggie?" he asked and then Joan and I told him all about it, showed him Aunt Edith's old book and asked him what we could do. He looked the spoiled book over and smiled a sad kind of smile at the page that had written on it "Lennox, Best Beloved," and the date of that evening she went down stairs so happy and smiling. Then he put it in his pocket and told us to never mind; that he would pay for the book, only we must never tell Aunt Edith.

"But you musn't tell her either" said I, "For we don't want her to know that this is not her very own."

"And couldn't you put the little marks on it, Mr. Dunbar?" Joan queried wistfully. Mr. Dunbar thought for a moment, and replied:—

"That'll be just the thing, you dear children. But you'll have to leave it with me until tomorrow."

"Tomorrow's Christmas Eve, Mr. Dunbar" said I.

"That's all right Froggie. It'll be in good time." And then he took us into the nearest confectionery store and bought us lots of good things. He said he would see us safely home, and on the way we told him all about Aunt Edith, and the stories she used to tell us, and how sad they were now, and of how often she sings that song he sang the night of her birthday, and of how she hugs us both and cries over us.

He didn't say very much until we got near home, and his voice sounded kind of stern and firm as he said:—

"Now Froggie, don't you tell her you saw me. Hush! Not another word" for we were at our own doorstep and he had left us.

Mother and Auntie were not in until after we were, and we never said a word of anything to them. But the next afternoon when they went out again, Mr. Dunbar came and gave me the book with those queer little marks all over it, only the writing on the pages didn't look a bit like hers. And I saw in one place the words "Am I forgiven?" I am sure those were not in Aunt Edith's book, but I didn't care much just as long as she got it safely.

"Now it that bears the message I want,



OVER WENT THE WHOLE BOTTLE



Aunt Edith.

it to safely, Froggie" said Mr. Dunbar "You and Joan can have anything in the world that I can buy you. Letters have failed. Perhaps the old Omar will work a spell."

"We want Aunt Edith to tell us pretty stories again, and her eyes to sparkle like they used to, before—"

"The bad man made her unhappy, was it Froggie?"

"Yes indeed Mr. Dunbar. We just love Aunt Edith—"

"There are more than you love her Frog. But I must go. Now don't forget where to put that book" and then he was gone.

So Joan and I took it and put it where the old one used to be, and we hid it in the shadows of the hall when she came and we heard her say as if she was speaking to some one:—

"Why there's my Rubaiyat! Where did it come from?"

Then she sat down in her cute little racking chair, and after she opened the book she checks got a rosy red, and she turned the pages over and over, her eyes looking like they used to, and the happy look bck in her face again. I don't know what she meant by that but Joan and I made up our minds that we would get Mr. Dunbar to tell her the truth about the book, since she didn't seem to be a bit cross about it. Aunt Edith was as happy as the next one that evening at dinner time, and her face flushed rosier than ever when the door bell rang. Mother hustled Joan and I off to the nursery, and

said she would be up in a little while to help us hang up our stockings, and it seemed to me that it was hours and hours afterwards that Aunt Edith came into my room, leaned over me in the bed, and kissed me over and over again, while I heard her say:—

"Dear, dear old Froggie. You and Joan have made me very happy, and I think I felt a tear fall on my face, but if Aunt Edith was crying it was a happy cry, not a sad one."

I guess there's not much more to tell. Christmas Day Mr. Dunbar had dinner with us in the evening, and when the gifts from the tree were given away I got the beautiful gold watch ever a boy could have, and a little card was with it that read:—

"For Froggie boy, with the compliments of Omar Khayam."

Joan got a girl's watch with her own name and the same words, and when Mr. Dunbar saw them he said:—"Long live Omar and the Rubaiyat."

Aunt Edith looked sweetly pretty as she leaned on his arm and smiled like her very own self at him as he asked her:—

"You will echo my wish dearest, will you not?" and her reply was:—

"With all my heart Lennox. I shall not soon forget the lesson I so bitterly learned. Oh! my beloved, but for those two children—"

"We might have been separated forever, dear heart. But I shall not soon forget my lesson either," he said, and then I do believe he kissed her; and I am positively certain that in the matter of the watches, Mr. Dunbar and nobody else was Omar Khayam.



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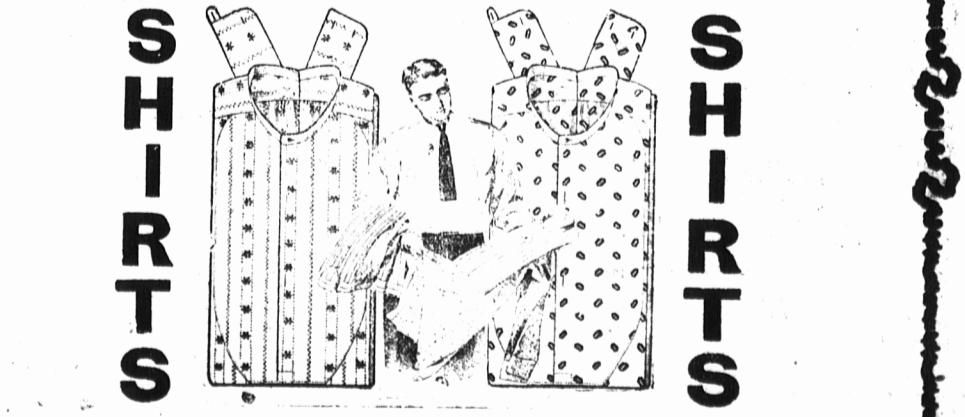


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