

FLORA'S HAIR.

It was the afternoon of a clear February day, bright sky above, capital sleighing beneath, and a keen, knife-like midway between, when Silas Montague's superb chestnut colored horses were checked in front of the plate-glass windows of a fashionable coiffeur's establishment, just out of the whirl and tumult of Broadway, and a young lady of about seventeen alighted from the chocolate colored coupe to enter the dominion of pomatum and frisettes.

The knight of comb and scissors advanced briskly from behind the counter to meet his pretty customer, who was dressed in velvets and sables that might have, and probably did, cost a small fortune.

'Don't let me interrupt you Mr. Macassar,' said the lady, carelessly sinking down on a crimson brocaded sofa, and glancing toward two women with whom the coiffeur had been in deep conversation at the moment of her entrance. 'I can wait a few minutes perfectly well.'

'You are very kind, Miss Montague, but our business is completed,' he added in a lower tone of voice. 'Only some women come to sell their hair. You see they have stepped inside for our cutter to take it off.'

'To sell their hair?' repeated Miss Montague.

'Certainly, ma'am. Its a very common thing, I assure you, more particularly since it has become usual to wear the hair short. And then hard times, you know.'

'But surely it is impossible to get enough to be any compensation for the loss of a fine head of hair,' said the young lady, earnestly.

'Oh, you are mistaken. For long, luxuriant hair of a good color—such hair, for instance, as yours, Miss Montague—we give as much as three dollars.'

'Three dollars!' repeated the girl, scornfully.

'Hair will soon grow again, Miss Montague,' said the hairdresser, shrugging his shoulders. 'In what way can I serve you to-day?'

'I came in to request you to send some one to arrange my hair to-morrow evening.'

'Mrs. Warren's ball?' smoothly interposed the man, who appeared to be au fait in fashionable intelligence. 'Certainly, to be sure. I will send Francois. What jewels do you wear?'

'Only a small wreath of netted pearls round the braids.'

'And Macassar bowed his fair young patroness out of the store with smiling complaisance. She stood a moment on the step, as if thinking, then spoke to the liveried servant on the box.'

'You may drive home, John. I shall not need you any more to-day,' she said quietly.

John touched first his gold banded hat and then his horses, and in a few moments was out of sight, very glad to be relieved.

Then, and not till then, Miss Montague walked briskly away; brushing the pavements of obscure streets with her costly silk as if she cared not for its lustrous splendor, treading narrow alleys, and at length ascended the uncarpeted stairs of a tenement house going to the third story.

The door was opened by a pale, shadowy-looking woman, scarce older in the calendar of years than Miss Montague herself, but alas! how much more aged in the record of care and grief.

'Flora, dearest, how kind this is of you.'

For Flora Montague had thrown her arms round the slender figure, and was showering kisses on the pale forehead with true girlish warmth of affection.

at this moment, without even the trifling formality of a warning knock, and a wiry head, with sharp terrer eyes to match, was thrust unceremoniously in.

'I say, missus, is that ere money ready?'

Lizzie turned very pale and clasped her wand fingers tightly together. 'I am sorry,' she stammered, 'but—'

The head and eyes now advanced entirely into the room, with the short, thick-set figure to which they belonged.

'Look here, marm,' said the man harshly, 'this is the third week you've had this 'ere two rooms, and not a red cent of rent have I set eyes on. Need'n't tell me your husband's sick; there's enough tenants I can get without sick husbands. I don't want to hear no excuses—they don't amount to nothing. I jest want you to understand this much: if them three dollars ain't paid down before the clock strikes five, out you go, bag and baggage, on the pavement. I've stood this kind of nonsense long enough.'

He disappeared, closing the door behind him with a bang that made the walls rattle. Flora had listened to the brief colloquy with paling cheek, which grew still whiter as Lizzie burst into a paroxysm of bitter tears, hindering her face in her hands. Flora arose and bent over the bowed form with a caressing touch.

'Dearest, are things really as bad as this?'

Lizzie replied only by sobs. 'Can't you contrive to raise the money to pay this man?'

'How can I?' moaned Lizzie. 'Everything we have, except the very best of our furniture, is sold or pawned. I am faint from lack of bread, and it is impossible to get even the most poorly paid work.'

Flora's lip quivered. She had never seen poverty in this ghastly guise before.

'Oh, if I could help you,' she sighed. 'But papa never gives me any money; he pays my bills cheerfully, but everything passes through his own hands.'

'It would kill Clement to be moved,' sobbed Lizzie. 'If I could but obtain the three dollars I would not care for aught else.'

As Flora bent over her cousin, one shining braid of glossy golden hair became detached from its fastening and fell from beneath her bonnet. She put her hand mechanically to replace it, and at that moment she remembered Mr. Macassar's words.

'Lizzie!' she exclaimed, impetuously, 'wait a few minutes and you shall have the money. I will be back in half an hour.'

And she hurried away with crimson cheeks and sparkling eyes.

Mr. Macassar was lounging over a newspaper when Miss Montague entered his luxurious room a second time.

'Sir,' she said, and advancing close to the counter, and speaking in a tremulous tone, 'I have concluded to have my hair cut off, will you give three dollars for it?'

The spruce coiffeur started. Was Miss Montague in earnest, or was this only a jest?'

'Why do you not answer me?' she asked, sharply.

'Certainly, Miss Montague,' stammered the hairdresser, recovering his tongue. 'I shall be most happy if you wish it. Please step this way.'

Poor Flora! Never had her golden waves of hair seemed half so lovely and lustrous as they did at the moment that the deft fingers of Francois unbraided them and passed the cruel, gleaming scissors among the bright strands. And when Mr. Macassar, with polite alacrity presented her with a bank note, the big "3" might as well have been an Egyptian hieroglyphic for all that her tear-swimming eyes could decipher of it.

although handsome face. He had bent eagerly forward at his companion's words.

'It can't be possible!' he exclaimed. 'And yet—it is—Miss Montague!'

'Faith, Gilroy, you're right!' ejaculated young Manvers, 'Flora Montague, and none else. But what on earth has the bewitching little fairy done with that glorious hair of hers? Cut it off to be in fashion, I'll be bound!'

'I do not think,' said Gilroy, contracting his eyebrows, 'that Miss Montague is one to enslave herself to all the idle freaks of the reigning mode.'

'I know you're a sworn admirer of the young lady, Gilroy,' returned his companion laughingly; 'but women are alike!'

'All women are alike!' The words fell like molten iron on Clarence Gilroy's heart. Was it indeed so? Had the idle dream that Flora was better and nobler than the rest of her sex, proved but a vanishing delusion, after all? He remembered the words he had heard her speak but an evening or two before:

'Nothing shall ever induce me to have my hair cut off in the absurd way that people call fashionable.'

She had not scrupled to perjure herself, then; she was unthinking and frivolous as the idle butterfly that ever fluttered around the flower gardens of society. He turned away silently; and when Flora Montague's innocent, violet blue eyes were raised smilingly toward his face, they encountered a cold repellent gaze that the fair young girl was unable entirely to comprehend.

The spray of the blue forget-me-nots had fallen from Miss Montague's hair, and she had gone into the comparative solitude of the conservatory with saucy Nellie Hyde, to rearrange them. One chandelier alone diffused its soft luster among acacias and tea-roses, from shades of crimson-tinted glass, and the two girls stood directly beneath its pink glow all unconscious that Clarence Gilroy leaned against the further door, a few steps beyond in the shadow of a blossoming tropical vine, whose fiery scarlet stars almost touched his forehead.

'Do you know, Clory,' said Nellie, as she adjusted the truant flowers, and stepped backward to observe the general effect, 'that everybody is wondering what in the world possessed you to cut off that splendid golden hair of yours?' Some lay it to the score of vanity—others to that of caprice and—

'Nellie!' said the soft serious voice of Flora, with a tremulous falter in its accents, 'I never meant to reveal the secret to any living soul, but I cannot bear that you, dearest, should imagine me capable of such frivolous folly. I will tell you just why it was cut off, if you will promise me to keep the secret within your bosom.'

'I promise,' said Nellie, passing her arm caressingly around Flora's waist. Clarence Gilroy moved uneasily amid the moving leaves and fiery dropping stars of his fragrant screen. But he could not well retreat now; and besides it is not a very dignified characteristic of record of such a stately individual as Mr. Clarence Gilroy, but there certainly was a keen impulse of curiosity to learn why Flora Montague had cut off the lovely tresses of which she well knew him to be such an enthusiastic admirer.

And so, not without a secret misgiving, he played the part of listener.

'You know,' resumed Flora, 'all about my poor Cousin Lizzie's misfortunate marriage with Clement Percy.'

And she went on to tell the simple story of her adventure the day before, with such pathos that Nellie Hyde was in tears ere the recital was finished. And there was another pair of eyes not very far off, slightly dimmed, also.

'I had no money,' pursued Flora. 'I felt that it would not be honorable to sell anything that papa had given me, knowing his feelings on the subject, and so— Was it very wrong to sell my hair Nellie? If you could have seen how welcome the money was to poor Lizzie.'

When at length the conservatory's perfumed aisles were vacant, and Clarence Gilroy left his nook among the vines he felt that one glimpse into Flora Montague's heart was worth half the fortune that made him the idol of maneuvering mammas and marriageable daughters. The eclipse upon his soul had passed away.

The next day Clement Percy was astonished very agreeably by the receipt of an anonymous letter con-

taining a banknote for fifty dollars. And the next day after that Flora stole around to tell her cousin that she was engaged to Clarence Gilroy.

'And when I have a home of my own, dearest,' she said, 'you and Clement shall share it. Clarence said so.'

Mrs. Gilroy kept the word that Flora Montague had pledged.

Kindness.

It cannot be too often remarked that kindness is one of the virtues that hardly ever fail to produce an effect; kindness "in season and out of season"; kindness which is in every one's power. How very much the wheels of life would be smoothed, how much every one would add to the sum of total human happiness if every one would take hold of any of the many opportunities which every situation offers to be kind, courteous, easy and agreeable toward the chance travelers that he meets on his journeys; towards the chance sufferers that he comes across! It is never forgotten. The boy at school never forgets the kindness of an elder school-fellow. The poor, solitary, and way-worn man or woman never forgets the pressure of a kind, feeling hand, the glance of a loving, sympathetic eye. A cup of cold water given unexpectedly at the moment will indeed not "lose its reward."—Dean Stanley.

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