

A LOCK OF RED HAIR.

CHAPTER I.

The spring season was nearly over at Fastolfe, and Trickett's Boarding House almost empty, the visitors having left, with the exception of a few had no home attractions awaiting them.

Among those remaining were Mr. and Mrs. Enson, an ordinary young couple, well provided with the good things of this life, of which they had a thorough appreciation; Lucy Starr, a frank, unaffected, clever girl, with an unusual power of discerning character, and a habit of speaking her mind plainly and strongly; the only little spice of self-conceit in her nature being her consciousness of the talent she really possessed of character-reading—no human counterfeits need hope to escape her penetrating eye and rather severe animadversions. She was completely unselfish and a staunch friend, and at this time was on a visit to Mrs. Enson, an old schoolmate. Another visitor who was still staying at the boarding-house was Miss Hunt, a nervous, shy, very plain, deaf woman of about fifty, and the last, Mr. Edgar Richmond, a dashing, handsome, dark-moustached young man of thirty, who enjoyed the utmost popularity. He had been the life and soul of the boarding-house all the season, and had made hosts of friends—the Ensons being prominent among these; the secret of his success was that he was always in a good temper, and had a happy knack of appearing kind and thoughtful for the comfort of others. Thoughtfulness, however, was more apparent than real, though none of the boarders, with one exception, ever thought of questioning his good intentions.

A habit of his which delighted people was a way he had of appearing to think the most ordinary observations strikingly clever and sharp; it is doubtful whether he would have understood a really witty remark, or seen anything to applaud in it—for instance, a lady would say, "I'll take my umbrellas out with me, and then we shall be certain to have no rain." Richmond at once would break into his sweet musical laugh, repeating with an appearance of the most intense enjoyment, "That's really capital! I'll take my umbrellas out, and then there will be no rain." I say, really, you know, that's awfully good—my umbrellas out, no rain!" *et cetera*; or, again, some one would remark that pouring cats and dogs did not adequately describe the rain that had fallen in the night.

This not very original observation would convulse Mr. Richmond for a few minutes; and, when he could speak, he would be heard murmuring, "Cats and dogs didn't describe it. Awfully funny idea, really—cats and dogs!"—and so on. By this means, he put all his acquaintances on good terms with themselves—an infallible method of securing a popular position. He openly confessed that he was looking out for a rich wife; but people did not think the worse of him on that account; they only regretted he had not enough of his own to enable him to follow the dictates of his own kind heart.

"I must have money when I marry," he said to the Ensons almost immediately he made their acquaintance. "I have, on an average, a thousand a year, which I derive from several small vineyards in France and Italy; but what's that to a fellow who is fond of horses? Really nothing!"

He always took care that this should be distinctly understood whenever he made new friends, especially when, as in the case of the Ensons, any unmarried ladies were of the party. He was not a flirt; and, having a superlative notion of his own irresistible qualities, he thought it only fair to the unmoneyed young ladies that his intentions should be plainly understood. As to his unselfish good-nature, take the following instance:

During his stay, a young fellow of seventeen, sent alone by his parents to Trickett's, met with an accident, and sprained his ankle so severely that he was unable to move off the sofa for nearly a week. His only resource, in these circumstances, was chess. Richmond happened to be the one other chess-player staying in the house. The first day young Grant was laid up, there was an incessant downpour of rain, making it almost impossible to stir out. Here was an opportunity not to be neglected of playing the Good Samaritan, and amusing himself at the same time. With tender solicitude, Richmond devoted himself to Grant, and earned his everlasting gratitude. It was not noticed that the next five days the young fellow lay there, weary and dull, were fine, and consequently Richmond could find better entertainment elsewhere. Then, again, a very rich exclusive couple were staying at Trickett's, with two most unpleasant children. Richmond made up his mind, before the season was over, that he would get an invitation to the country-house; and, to attain this end, he paid most assiduous court to the children—took them out for walks and presented them with stores of toys. Every one thought how kind it was of him.

"Poor little beggars!" he would say, "None of you seem to care for them." The parents, who doted on their spoiled children, were easily won by this; and, before they left, Richmond was their invited guest. It did not occur to any one as being singular that, directly the parents had gone, the children, who stayed on a week or two with the governess, had no more of Richmond's attention.

The one person in the house who was not favorably impressed by Edgar Richmond was Lucy Starr. She declared his imperturbable good-temper was due, in a great measure, to the absence in him of proper pride.

"He does not care what anyone says or thinks of him," she cried in support of this theory in conversation with Mrs. Enson. "Through mixing in society he has acquired a certain amount of tact; but his good breeding is most superficial, and his sentiments are frequently vulgar in tone, though he does not murder the Queen's English in giving them expression. Everything about him is flippant and shallow; and this is combined with an intense self-appreciation that is most annoying. Altogether, he is the most egotistical, conceited man I have ever met!"

"Ah, Lucy, I don't see how even you can call him conceited!" replied Mrs. Enson. "Though you appear to think poor Edgar Richmond the embodiment of all the vices, you should be just to him; I never saw a man so alive to his own shortcomings; he is always talking about them."

"That is one of my principal reasons for considering him conceited; he thinks his miserable little weaknesses more interesting than the noble deeds of others. What particularly irritates me is his habit of crediting the whole world with every one of his own failings, reserving for himself alone the great virtues of truth and candor; and so, inferring that, instead of being worse, he is very much better than mankind in general."

"You can always beat me at argument, Lucy; but you need not think you have convinced me on that account; and, at any rate, you must allow he is good-tempered, for you say the most outrageously rude things to him sometimes, and he bears it like a lamb."

"I do not respect him for it; I should think far better of him if he turned round on me occasionally, when I tell him unpleasant truths."

"Well, if you are sufficiently unreasonable to object to a man because he is too gentlemanly to contradict or argue with a lady, there is an end of all further discussion, though I must say you do him great injustice. Of course nobody can be perfect; we all have our little faults, and I am sure his are all on the surface. Willie thinks, and I agree with him, that Edgar Richmond will settle down into a capital husband when he marries. I only wish you had more money."

"Why, you don't suppose that I would have him?" cried Lucy, indignantly. "Not if he were a millionaire! You surely must know that I detest him."

"You certainly say so often enough," replied Mrs. Enson, laughing. "Now don't look daggers at me—I believe you; but you might have felt very different if he had seemed to admire you more; and, even now, Willie thinks you admire him much better than you care to admit. He says these violent and unreasonable expressions of dislike are often adopted to conceal the real state of people's feelings, especially in cases where the person may be slightly disappointed. So I should keep my sentiments a little more to myself if I were you, or you may be misunderstood; for, you know, it really is hard to believe you object to him as much as you say; he is a man almost any girl would be glad to marry."

Lucy's outspoken criticisms annoyed her easy-going friend, who did not wish to appear wanting in discrimination, so occasionally she liked to have a little dig at her.

"I think it is shameful of your husband to insinuate such untrue things; I'll never mention Richmond's name again!" cried Lucy, boiling over with wrath and flouncing out of the room.

Mrs. Enson was not deceived by this however; Edgar Richmond's character was a most interesting study to Lucy, and very little encouragement would always start her on the subject.

Miss Hunt, on the other hand, had made herself as unpopular as Richmond had become popular; and, again, for purely social reasons. In this case also Lucy took a singular stand, for she declared that Miss Hunt was by no means disagreeable "when you know her a little," and had many really noble qualities; but she admitted she was a most difficult person to fathom. Her liking for Miss Hunt originated to some extent in a feeling of pity, for hers was a history calculated to arouse the sympathies of a warm-hearted girl; and, little by little, she had admitted Lucy into her confidence, having taken a great liking to her. To the rest of the boarders she had been cold and distant, almost to a repulsive degree. She made a slight exception however in the case of Edgar Richmond; he had been only moderately polite to her, and used to ridicule her peculiarities almost before her face in a low tone; but she had experienced so little attention from gentlemen that very small courtesies assumed in her eyes much more important proportions.

Her father had been a wealthy merchant, with a family of handsome daughters, she being the one exception. She was the eldest, and had been a very beautiful child; but, at the age of twelve, had had an attack of small-pox which had entirely destroyed her beauty and rendered her very deaf.

From this time she was almost completely overlooked and neglected by her very worldly-minded parents. She was sent to an inferior school, and came away at sixteen, having made no friends and with no accomplishments to speak of. Her affliction and the cold treatment of her family had soured her naturally amiable temper, and teachers and pupils found it so difficult to penetrate her barrier of reserve that at last they gave it up in despair, and left her to herself. Probably, had she been a pretty girl, things would have been very different.

When she returned home, the same cruel system was carried on. As they all grew up, her sisters went constantly into society; but she was never taken with

the others, and even at their own balls and parties did not appear.

Ultimately her parents were punished for their unnatural conduct; for an epidemic carried off three of her beautiful sisters, and the other died of consumption shortly after. Her father, broken-hearted, retired from business, and bought an estate in the country where he spent the remainder of his days, with his miserable wife and only daughter. There they lived a most unhappy unloving life for fifteen years, showing no hospitality and refusing all invitations. At the end of that time her father died suddenly, and her mother within a month of him, leaving Miss Hunt very rich, but with no friends, except among her servants and the cottagers on the estate, by whom she was much esteemed and commiserated.

For many months she remained alone in the desolate house; but at last a new clergyman came to the place, and his wife, feeling for her lonely position, determined to make her acquaintance, in spite of all opposition. So she called, under pretext of asking for subscriptions for one of her charities. Miss Hunt received her very coldly; but she, good soul, would not be repulsed, but felt it a duty to come again and again, until she succeeded in persuading her to emerge from her retirement and try to interest herself in the outer world. She often thought, in after years, how differently she would have acted, could she have had a glimpse of the future. Far better for the poor woman to have lived and died in her gloomy house.

It must have been a hard struggle to the deaf, middle-aged, self-contained woman to emerge from her seclusion; but she made the effort, and for the last six or seven years had been traveling about with a maid-servant in the vain search of amusement and pleasure.

She was charitable, and gave away a good deal of money; but her manner did not endear her to the recipients, so that her good deeds were seldom spoken of with gratitude, and people were quite unaware of the amount she thus spent. For this reason nobody supposed her to be nearly as rich as she was, for she dressed very plainly—indeed shabbily.

It was a great surprise therefore to Lucy to hear, during one of their conversations together, that Miss Hunt's income amounted to close upon ten thousand a year, and was entirely at her own disposal.

Going into the general sitting-room immediately after, Lucy found Mrs. Enson alone there, as she supposed; and, enjoying secrecy on her—Miss Hunt having said she did not wish her wealth to become a topic of conversation—she told her what she had just learnt. Mrs. Enson was loud in her astonishment, and during this, Mr. Richmond appeared from behind the curtains in the bay-window, and, saying unblushingly—"I could not find it in my heart to interrupt you, Miss Starr. Thank you for a most interesting piece of news"—left the room.

"What a disgraceful thing!" cried Lucy angrily. "The man has actually been listening. He is the meanest creature I've ever seen!"

"My dear, I don't suppose he heard half of what you said. I have no doubt he was asleep when you came in. I've been here for ten minutes, and he never moved."

"Well, I'll never say anything else, I don't want him to hear, without first looking under the sofas and tables to see if he is playing the spy."

The next general assembly of the occupants of the house was at the half-past seven o'clock dinner. The dining-table presented rather a mournful appearance; it was very large, capable of accommodating at least twenty visitors, and was not reducible. Those that remained still retained the seats they had occupied during the season; and in many cases there was a gap of two or three chairs between the diners. Miss Hunt was one of these isolated ones, having three chairs on her right and one on her left vacant. The Ensons, Lucy, and Mr. Richmond were together at the other end, and on the opposite side of the table. Sometimes Lucy gave up her chair, and went and sat by Miss Hunt; but at last she desisted, as her doing so only seemed to confuse and worry the nervous woman, who latterly had eaten her dinner quite unnoticed, and in complete silence.

It was a matter of astonishment therefore to every one, when, on this particular evening, directly they went into the dining-room, Mr. Richmond, smiling in his most winning manner the while, said to Miss Hunt—

"I should like to come and sit by you to-night, if you will allow me."

"Oh, certainly," she said nervously, and blushing high; "but I am afraid it will be rather dull for you! You see I am so much divided from the rest of the table."

"This is the very reason I am coming," he replied, laughing. "That long gap does make the table look so uncomfortable; I have been thinking so for the last week; now I cannot stand it any longer. Don't look tragic at me, Miss Starr," he continued, "for deserting your party. If we can't talk together at this distance quite so comfortably, we can look at each other more, which is something."

Certainly Lucy Starr's expression did call for some remark; it was perfectly unconscious, as all her expressions were; but it would be difficult to imagine a prettier face more full of angry contempt. Recalled to herself in this unpleasant manner, she grew crimson, and had not a word to say. Everybody laughed, Mr. Richmond gaily leading the chorus. All dinner-time he devoted himself to his interesting companion; and, his good humor being so infectious, at least he

succeeded in making her laugh heartily. Poor thing, she had never before felt so light-hearted!

Once only they came to a standstill. Mr. Richmond made a remark which Miss Hunt could not hear. She asked him to repeat it; he did so in a louder key; still she could not catch his meaning, and became quite flustered and unhappy.

"I'm afraid I am dreadfully disagreeable to talk to. Do go back to your friends. I cannot understand what you say."

"No, nor anybody else," thought Lucy indignantly.

That was one of Mr. Richmond's jokes. He had been talking a sort of heathenish gibberish, in order to provide amusement for the rest of the table at his companion's expense. Every one smiled, though several thought it was a little too bad.

Mr. Richmond hastened to reassure his companion, and declared he had not enjoyed a dinner and conversation so much for weeks. She really did not mind asking him to repeat what she did not catch, and he knew he spoke very indistinctly, he had often been told so by a dear friend of his who was slightly deaf; in fact, he had great difficulty in making her hear anything, whereas others had no trouble whatever in doing so.

"It's quite a standing joke just now," he said aidly. "Kate and I often laugh about it." Then he added quietly, "Not strictly true, but balm to the afflicted soul!"

"Oh, I think you speak very distinctly!" said Miss Hunt earnestly. "Only that once I failed to hear what you said."

After dinner Miss Hunt went at once to her room, looking a rangelly happier and brighter; and Richmond lounged into the drawing-room, where were the Enson and Lucy.

"Enson, come and have a stroll and a cigar for half an hour, there's a good fellow. I feel quite hoarse and worn out. Miss Starr can you tell me a good maker of ear-trumpets? I am afraid I shall have to recommend one to our interesting friend in a day or two."

Lucy, thrilling with anger, replied impulsively—

"If I could get poor Miss Hunt a pair of spectacles to enable her to see character more plainly, I would be only too delighted to do so."

"Ah, I suppose that's some sort of a dig at me! I don't understand it; but no doubt it is. Don't be so severe on one of your admirers, Miss Starr; it really is too bad. Come on Enson! Au revoir, ladies. We shall not be long; I am coming back to teach the Hunt beziqne. I shall go and get some voice-lozenges now."

With this he left the room, laughing gaily. The two men returned in a short time; and the lessons in beziqne lasted until it was time for the ladies to retire.

Lucy went into Mrs. Enson's room for a few minutes' chat—an invariable custom—and broke out with—

"Now what do you think of your favorite?"

"I think he is wonderfully good-natured, trying to amuse that poor stupid old woman."

"Doesn't it strike you as being rather strange that his kindness should only have developed since our conversation of this afternoon?"

"I don't see anything peculiar about it; everything must have a beginning. I am sure he acted with the most good-natured intention. Certainly it was a little too bad of him, talking that nonsense to her; but people with such very high spirits do occasionally go rather too far, without meaning to be unkind. And then she is such a disagreeable old thing that I was not at all sorry."

"Well, you are evidently quite blind on the subject of Mr. Richmond. I only hope your eyes will not be opened too suddenly. I'd better say 'good night' now, for I feel too cross to speak pleasantly."

With that, Lucy left the room and proceeded towards her own. She had to pass Miss Hunt's on the way. Usually all was quiet and dark; but to-night Miss Hunt was standing on the threshold waiting for her to pass, and, to her astonishment, invited her to come in for a few minutes.

"I feel so wakeful to-night, my dear, I am sure I shall not sleep, and yet I am not unwell. Will you come in for a little while? I want to ask your advice."

"If I can be of any service to you, Miss Hunt, I shall only be too glad," replied Lucy cordially.

"Well, the fact is," she said, hesitating and looking confused, "I have been thinking for some weeks past that I must replenish my wardrobe. I do not like being so very unfashionable; and I thought perhaps you would be so kind as to come with me to choose some new things."

"Oh, certainly!" agreed Lucy, with an inward start. "But don't you think it would be better to wait a few weeks, until we return to London? The season is almost over here, and the shops are decidedly not so good."

Miss Hunt's sensitive nature at once shrank back at this slight rebuff; and, looking cold and hurt, she replied—

"Oh, my dear, if it's any trouble to come, of course I can manage by myself! It was thoughtless of me to propose such an uninteresting task to you."

Lucy, who was genuinely sorry to have clouded her brightness, hastened to declare it would not be the slightest trouble, but a pleasure; and, before she said good night, it was arranged that the next day they would commence their shopping expedition. Miss Hunt pressed her hand warmly, and kissed her for the first time; and Lucy pursued her way, looking very grave and aching her head.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

INTERESTING ITEMS.

Death from Nicotinic-Paper. *Golden Eagle—Royal Authors, etc., etc.*
The *Medical Times* says that the solution of cocaine is being used by New York dentists to render the filling of teeth a painless operation.

Three deaths from hiccough have occurred within a year at Chattanooga, Tenn. The *Times* of that city states, and the serious cases more are being attended by physicians. There was no other special symptom.

The newest rose is the "William Francis Bennett," produced in England. It is said to be of as brilliant a crimson color as the Jacqueminot, the shape of a pheasant, the size of a Marechal Niel, and the fragrance of La France. It is very prolific.

The new paper bottles are said to withstand the action of water, wine, and alcohol. It is thought that druggists will be able to furnish them free of charge, just as they provide wrapping paper for dry drugs. The cementing material of the bottles is a mixture of blood, albumen, alum and lime.

Engineering in China has certainly achieved a notable triumph in the bridge at Legang, over an arm of the China Sea. This structure is five miles long, built entirely of stone, has 300 arches seventy feet high, the roadway is seventy feet wide, and the pillars are seventy-five feet apart.

It is not generally known that nutmegs are poisonous, but Dr. Palmer writes to the *American Journal of Pharmacy* detailing the case of a lady who nearly died from eating a nutmeg and a half, and he points out the fact that the toxic effects of the drug are described in both the National and United States Dispensatories.

A splendid golden eagle has been hovering over the northern half of the Isle of Wight during the last few weeks. It was about Osborne for several days, and Queen Victoria, observing it from the terrace, gave strict orders that it should not be molested, and expressed the hope that it would not be killed. The bird went away to the eastward, and was shot, near Ryde, by some mischievous idiot.

Dan Rice, the circus clown, is running a ten-cent circus in the French quarter of New Orleans. He talks sadly of the good old days when his Floating Palace was the sensation on the Father of Waters, and thousands upon thousands of people swarmed from far and near to see him. He gave an entertainment a few nights ago when not 300 persons were present, and about one-third of those were professional and other deadheads.

Two Paris schoolboys, one aged 14 and the other 15, fought a duel the other day in the Bois de Boulogne, with sharp foils. The combatants had their seconds on the ground in the orthodox manner, and it only needed the presence of a surgeon to make the affair complete. Unlike most of the duels which nowadays take place in the Bois, this encounter resulted in seven injuries on both sides. One boy was wounded in the thigh and the other under the fifth rib.

In the *Alcibiad and Neurologist* Dr. Hughes gives a curious instance of the beneficial effects which brain excitement may sometimes have in warding off disease. He says that "during the week of the great St. Louis fire, in 1849, the ravages of cholera, which up to that event had reached a mortality of over 200 a day out of a population of 50,000, almost entirely ceased, so stimulating and invigorating was the excitement of that week to the brains and nervous systems of the people, and the physical exaltation inseparable from the sudden necessity thrown upon so many business men for repairing the sudden damage and re-establishing their abruptly interrupted business."

Miss Sartorius, in her book on the Sudan and Egypt, says: "Every village has its pigeon houses, looking like great mud cones, and in the evening the owners go out and call them in. But when a man wants to get hold of extra pigeons, instead of calling them he frightens the pigeons away. They do not understand this, keep circling above, and swoop down and then toward their houses. Other pigeons, seeing this commotion, join them, and as soon as the man sees there are enough he hides. The whole of the birds, old and new, then go into the house, and the man returning shuts them in. This would be a fine business if it were not that all of them do the same thing, and, therefore, each gets caught in its turn. They know this perfectly well, but no Egyptian fellah could resist the temptation of cheating his neighbor."

There are just now an unusual number of royal authors in the world. Among reigning sovereigns and their consorts may be counted Queen Victoria, King Oscar II. of Sweden, Dom Luis of Portugal, the Shah Nasr-od-Deen of Persia, Queen Elizabeth of Roumania, Prince Nicolas of Montenegro, Don Pedro II. of Brazil, and so it is said, King Louis II. of Bavaria; and among other literary royalties are the Imperial Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria, the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Albert Victor, and Prince George of Wales, the Princess Christian, the Imperial Crown Princess of Germany, Princess Lucien Bonaparte, and several others. There are also many royal artists, musicians, and priests. There is probably, however, but one royal doctor, Duke Charles Theodore of Bavaria, at Munich, is a surgeon-oculist of high reputation. It must be a strange experience, after consulting this princely Asclepius, to press a 20-mark note into his hand; and in these days there are some princes who would not be above receiving an even smaller sum.