

Stranger Than Fiction

By Jessie Adelaide Middleton

The following gruesome story is one which was lately related to me as being perfectly true, and I have had pointed out to me the hairdresser's shop which is the scene of it, a shop which stands in the South-West district of London. The incident has not—so far as I know—ever been in print, and I give it here as it was told to me.

An American lady, visiting London, went into a hairdresser's shop to have her hair shampooed. The shop was very full of customers, and she was asked if she would mind waiting until one of the assistants was disengaged.

She said no; she was in no hurry. She was shown into one of the small cubicles partitioned off in the usual way and, sitting down in the armchair, she took down her hair and waited for somebody to attend to her.

Presently one of the assistants, a tall girl with auburn hair, came in and shampooed and dressed her hair very expeditiously and, after it was all over, the lady put on her hat, left the cubicle and went to the pay-desk in the shop to settle what she owed.

As she came into the shop, the proprietor came up to her and said—

“Oh, madam, please don't go away; there is some one at liberty now, who will shampoo your hair at once. I am so sorry you have been kept so long waiting.”

“That's all right,” said the lady; “I have had my hair shampooed—how much do I owe you?”

Instead of telling her, the proprietor turned as white as death and stared at her as if she had suddenly gone mad.

“Excuse me, madam,” he said, “that is quite impossible!”

“But your red-haired assistant did it,” she persisted.

“I think madam cannot be well,” he replied. “Feel my hair, then,” said the lady, not knowing whether to be angry or amused. “You see, it is still wet—feel it for yourself.”

He touched her hair and felt that it was damp and noticed that it had just been dressed, so, with many apologies, he told her how much she owed, and the lady left the shop.

Going into the street, she hailed a passing motor 'bus and got in. As she did so, another lady, who had evidently been in the hairdresser's shop too, followed her in and, sitting down opposite, leaned towards her across the 'bus and said impressively—

“The red-haired girl who did your hair cut her throat in that cubicle three weeks ago.”