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THE CHILDREN OF THE SNOW.

A CARNIVAL STORY.

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It is a wild afternoon in early February. The last rays of the sun are shining faintly upon a wild stretch of bare, level land—bare and level but for one solitary tree which stands alone, gaunt and grim, flinging out its naked branches to the eastern wind in seeming mute protestation of its loneliness. The sky, save in the west, where it is still blue and open, is of a dull leaden hue; it frowns down upon this open level, desolation frowning upon desolation. The sun's rays throw some little relief upon the nether gloom, but even their light is wild and weird, the light of a stormy sunset, and as it dips below the western rim, the shadowy form of the twilight steals apace over the scene, while her coming is heralded by a sudden dropping of the heavens in feathery flakes, which, falling in many swaying motions, lend to the last gleams of the dying day a pensive beauty. Softly fall these pretty messengers of the sky, eddying about in an elfin dance, as they find their way wearily to the dull gray earth and charm it into sudden beauty. Faster, thicker they fall, gathering strength of number with the nearing twilight, till the solitary desolation becomes beautiful with the radiant wedding garment of winter.

Solitary desolation! Is there not a sound of silvery laughter upon the silent air? And who are these that walk along this tract of desolation? One would think they had come with the snow—

dropped down gently from above—from some twinkling star of a fairer clime. Hand in hand they walk—a little lass, clothed all in white—a little lad, his black coat shining with snow drops.

The girl is as beautiful of face as of dress. From her hair, rising in rich luxuriance over her forehead and falling in wavy masses below her shoulders, there sparkles a precious jewel—it sparkles bright and beautiful—but in a manner beauty in comparison with the light that shines from her eyes, beautiful, deep, dark eyes, that look out upon the world in all the sweet innocence of a life made up of love and goodness and undoubting confidence. Her face is of a rich olive tint, and every feature is delicate, regular and noble. About her shoulders is thrown a cloak, soft and white as the frolicking snow; her dress, too, is of snowy white, varied by no other color than the pearl necklace about her throat.

Singularly like the girl is the boy—his complexion a shade deeper, his eyes a shade darker, and he is taller by several inches. His great coat, spangled by snow drops, is thrown back, revealing his ruffled shirt, from the bosom of which gleam two jeweled studs, and a bright colored silk handkerchief about his neck.

The incongruity of their situation does not seem to dawn upon them, for they are laughing and chatting, in silvery tones, which should charm even the silence.

"Aren't they nice, these pretty snowflakes?" says the little one, speaking in Italian.