

STRANGER THAN EVER.

"Out you go!" cried Mr. Snipps to his only child, a youth of some twenty summers. "Out you go, William Snipps! I disown you! I'll harbour no play-actors beneath my roof. Your refusal to enter my—your father's—office, augmented by your wild desire to don the sock and buskin, leaves me no alternative."

So saying, the outraged father projected his offspring into the street. The latter picked himself up, and, standing outside the window of his parent's room, exclaimed:

"All right, Samuel Snipps! The day will come when I, the outcast, will pass you by with the smile of supercilious scorn." And the banished heir of the house of Snipps walked proudly away.

The night was cold, and the moon looked watery. With a slight shiver—he had reached the street minus his top-coat—he stood beneath a lamp-post, and proceeded to investigate the contents of his pockets. First came a letter. "Ah, an invitation to Bungley's fancy ball on Friday next! No use now," And he tore it up. His purse contained a five-pound note and some silver. His watch, ring, and scarf-pin he calculated to be worth about twenty pounds.

"Over twenty-five pounds to start my career on!" he cried. "Why, thousands of fellows have started on nothing!"

Cheered by these thoughts, he walked along briskly until he found himself in the neighbourhood of the Strand. Here his eye caught sight of a card in the window of a tavern, which stated that all the theatrical and sporting papers were "taken."

William determined upon entering, having a look at the *Era*, a smoke, and then seeking a bed in one of the numerous adjacent hotels.

And presently he might have been seen sitting at a little round table gloating over the *Era*. Suddenly, on looking up, he discovered a man seated opposite to him—a smooth faced, sharp-nosed, bead-eyed man.

"Pardon me, sir," said the stranger—"but after you with the *Era*. Oh, no hurry! Pray continue your perusal—I can see you are deeply interested in it. You—ah—belong to *our* profession?"

"No, indeed, sir," answered William; "but I hope soon to."

"Ah," exclaimed the man, drawing closer, "it is a noble profession! I have introduced some hundreds of my pupils to it. I am a dramatic instructor."

"Are you indeed?" cried William, gazing on the man with reverence. "May I ask you to join me in a drink?"

The dramatic instructor said he wouldn't mind having a brandy and soda. When the liquor was placed before him, he continued:

"Yes, I am Kemble Kean, the great dramatic instructor. My terms are five pounds for ten lessons. Now, I should say that your genius is for tragedy—Hamlet, Othello, and such parts."

"Yes," William confessed, "and 'The Stranger.'"

"Ah, a splendid character!" declared Mr. Kemble Kean. "'The Stranger' might have been written to suit your cast of countenance. I could coach you up in it in ten lessons. 'Yes, and if you were *very* promising, perhaps I could get up a *matinée*.'"

William rose like a spring trout. There and then he agreed to take ten lessons from Mr. Kemble Kean.

"I am changing my studio just now," said the latter; "but meet me here to-morrow evening, and I'll give you my address."

Two days afterwards William drove up to the door of a very gloomy-looking house, in a very retired sort of street. He had with him a large carpet-bag and a band-box. These contained a "Stranger" costume which he had hired—just to see how he would look in it—from a costumier in Long Acre.

He was admitted by a stout, florid landlady, and in another moment he was seated in a shabby sitting-room with Mr. Kemble Kean. After handing the latter five pounds, he asked where he could dress. Whereupon Mr. K. K. conducted him to a small musty bed room. In half an hour he was dressed in the full traditional "Stranger" costume, down to the Hessian boots with

red tassels, and up to the black hat with sable plumes. Indeed, the costume was very handsome, and William looked right well in it.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Mr. K. K., when "The Stranger" returned to the sitting-room. "Now to give you your first lesson. But wait until I order some refreshments."

So saying, he left the room, and—never returned.

In about half an hour the landlady appeared, and wanted to know if he wished to engage her room.

"What do you mean, woman?" cried William. "Where is Mr. Kean?"

"Gone off this 'alf-hour in a cab with his box. Only just 'card it from the parlour floor, who seed him go," answered the landlady. "An' 'e only came a day ago, an' owes me for his breakfast."

With a bound William rushed to the bedroom. All his clothes were gone, and with them his purse and watch. He had parted with ring and pin.

"Great heavens, woman, I have been robbed!" cried William.

What was he to do? He couldn't go out into the street dressed in a "Stranger" costume; and where was he to go? After much entreaty, the woman consented to allow him to remain until it was dark.

Suddenly a thought flashed through his brain. This was the night of the Bungley's fancy ball, and all were expected to wear masks until supper-time. Supper-time? William was so hungry!

When night came, he boldly entered the street and hailed a hansom.

"First drive to Koke's, the costumier, in Long Acre," he said.

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The ball is at its height, when suddenly a figure, masked like the rest, enters, and arrests every one's attention—a tall figure, wearing a beautiful black velvet costume, with Hessian boots and sable-plumed hat. There is nothing approaching him in the room, all the other male guests being either disguised as sailors, soldiers, or other conventional characters. Even Mr. and Mrs. Bungley are in ignorance as to who the stranger is, for he appeared quite suddenly in the room.

Now, among the guests is a lady dressed in a costume consisting of stars and stripes. She is neat in figure, and her eyes flash through her mask like diamonds. The stranger walks straight towards her and offers her his arm, which she is not slow to accept, and together the pair walk towards the conservatory.

"There!" muttered old Mr. Snipps. "There's the sort of fellow to win a rich wife. That mysterious chap will get that Boston heiress for a wife, if he has a mind to. Ah, if my son only had sense! But"—

Here the old fellow stopped short.

Meanwhile "The Stranger" is seated with the Boston heiress in a shady nook, and is telling her, in his simple way, the whole story of his appearance.

"What a shame!" she cries. "Your father must be a real brute, and as for the one that robbed you, I reckon he ought to be hanged!"

But supper is announced, and the pair come from their hiding-place and join the rest at the table. At a given signal all the masks are removed. All eyes are turned towards "The Stranger."

"Heavens, it's my William!" cries Mr. Snipps, in astonishment and delight.

"Well, I declare, I suspected who it was all along!" exclaims the hostess. "You are certainly the success of the evening, William."

"Do you say so?" whispers William to the little Bostonian.

"Yes," she whispers back.

And—well, the fact is, William and his father are better friends than ever. William has given up all thoughts of going on the stage. He marries the heiress next week.