

# THE STROLLERS

By **FREDERIC S. ISHAM**,  
Author of "Under the Rose"

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"He is playing the hero of a romance," said the land baron modestly. "I confess he has excellent taste. Though the figure of a Juno, eyes the stars on an August night, features as Diana, the voice of a siren—a word picture to yourself your fairest conquest, M. le Marquis, and you will have a worthy counterpart of this rose of the wilderness."

"My fairest conquest!" piped the listener. "With lackluster eyes he resembled motionless, like a traveler in the desert who gazes upon a mirage. You have described her well. The features of Diana! It was at a revival of Vanbrugh's 'Relapse' I first met her. Dressed after the fashion of the Countess of Osborn. Who would not worshipfully before the figure of Loly?"

"He half closed his eyes, as though gazing in fancy upon the glossy tresses and rosy flesh of those voluptuous court beauties."

"The wooing, begun in a retired, walled-in ivy covered villa, a wined room, solitary walks by day, nightingales and moonshine by night. It was a pleasing romance while it lasted, but for all that, Nature abhors sameness. The heart is like Mother Earth—ever varying. I wearied of this surfeit of paradise and left her!"

"A mere incident in an eventful life," said his companion thoughtfully.

"Yes, only an incident," repeated the marquis. "Only an incident. I had almost forgotten it, but your conversation about players and your description of the actress brought it to mind. It had quite passed away, it had quite passed away. But the cards, M. Mauville, the cards!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

FOR several days after rehearsal were over the strollers were free to amuse themselves as they pleased. Their engagement at the theater did not begin for about a week, and meanwhile they managed to combine recreation with labor in nearly equal proportions. Assiduously they devoted themselves to a round of drives and rambles through pastures and woodland to Carleton; along the shell road to Lake Pontchartrain; to Hilo, the first settlement of the French, and to the little grounds once known as the plantation of Chalmette, where volunteer soldiers were once encamped awaiting orders to go to the front in the Mexican campaign. For those who craved greater excitement the three race courses—the Louisiana, the Metairie and the Carrollton—offered stimulating diversion.

Within sight of the Metairie were the old dwelling grounds, under the oaks, where, it is related, on one Sunday in 1839 two duels occurred; where the contestants, frequently fought on horseback with sabers and where the cowards, says a chronicler, became so accustomed to seeing honor established in this manner that they paid little attention to these meetings, pursuing their own humble duties indifferent to the follies of fashionable society. The fencing schools flourished. What strange scenes ensued that odd, strange master of the blade, Speddie, a melancholy enigma of a man, whose art embodied much of the finest shading and phrasing peculiar to himself, from whom even many of Bonaparte's discarded veterans were not above acquiring new technique and temperament!

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Shortly after the players' arrival began the celebrated Loly matches, attracting noted men and women from all over the south. The hotels were crowded, the lodging houses filled, while many of the large homes hospitably opened their doors to visiting friends. The afternoons found the city almost deserted. The bar-owners contentedly smoked in solitude, the legion of waiters in the hotels and resorts because reduced to a thin skeleton array, while even the street vendors had "folded their tents" and silently strolled to the races. On one such memorable occasion most of the members of the Barnes company repaired to the Metairie.

Below the grand stand, brilliant with color, strutted the dandies attending to their bets; above, they played a winning or losing game with the fair sex. Intrigue and lovelornaking were the order of the hour, and these daughters of the south beguiled time—and mortals—in a heyday of pleasure. In that mixed gathering buried cotton plantations from the country rubbed elbows with aristocratic creoles, whose attire was distinguishable by enormous ruffles and light boots of cloth. The professional follower of these events, the importunate tout, also mingled with the crowd, plainly in evidence by the pronounced character of his dress, the size of his diamond studs or cravat pins and the massive dimensions of his finger rings. No paltry, scruffy tradesman, but a well-dressed gentleman, and a picturesque rogue, with impudence as pronounced as his jewels.

Surrounded by a bevy of admirers, Susan, sprightly and sparkling, was an example of that "frivolous one of her sex is made up with, a pasticcio of gauzes, pins and ribbons that go to compound that multifarious thing, a well-dressed woman." Ever ready with a quick retort, she bestowed her favors generously, to the evident discomfort of a young officer in her retinue whom she had met several days before and who ever since had coveted a full harvest of smiles, liking not a little the first smile he had gathered. However, it was not Susan's way to intrust herself fully to any one. It was all very interesting to play one against another, to intercept angry gleams, to hold in check clashing suitors—this was exciting and diverting—but she exercised care not to transgress those bounds where she ceased to be mistress of the situation. Perhaps her limits in coquetry were further set than most women would have ventured to place them, but without this temperate and daring the pastime would have lost its charm for her. She might play with edged tools, but she also knew how to use them.

Near her was seated Kate, indolent as of yore, now watching her sister with an indolent, enigmatic expression, soon permitting a scornful glance to stray toward Adonis, who, for his part, had eyes only for his companion, a distinct change from country boldness, tavern demureness and dainty wenchery with their rough hands and rosy cheeks. This lady's hands were like milk, her cheeks ivory, and Adonis in bestowing his attentions upon her had a twofold purpose—to return tit for tat, Kate's flouting ways and to gratify his own ever feeble fancy.

In a box, half the length of the grand stand removed, some distance back and to the left of Susan's gay party, Constance, Mrs. Adams and the soldier were also observers of this scene of animation.

Since the manager's successful flight from the landlord and the constables the relations of the young girl and Saint-Prosper had undergone little change. At first, it is true, with the memory of the wild ride to the river fresh in her mind and the more or less disturbing recollections of that strange, dark night, a certain reticence had marked her manner toward the soldier, but as time went by this touch of reserve wore off and was succeeded by her usual frankness or gaiety. In her eyes appeared at times a new thoughtfulness, but for no longer period than the quick passing of a summer cloud over a sunny meadow. This half light of brief conjecture or vague retrospection only mellowed the depths of her gaze, and Barnes alone noted and wondered.

But today no partial shadows lay under the black, shading lashes. The exhilarating scene, the rapidly succeeding events, the turbulence and flutter around her, were calculated to dispel the most pronounced abstraction. Beneath a protecting parasol—for the sun shot below the roof at the back and touched that part of the grand stand—a faint glow warmed her cheeks, while her eyes shone with the gladness of the moment. Many of the dandies, regarding her with marked persistency, asked who she was, and none knew until finally Editor-Rhymester Striwa was appealed to. Striwa, informed on all matters, was able to satisfy his questioners.

"She is an actress," said Striwa. "So we are told. We shall find out next week. She is a beauty. We can tell that now."

Standing near the rhymester, story writer and journalist was a tall young man dressed in creole fashion. He

followed the glances of Striwa's questioners, and a pallor overspread his dark complexion as he looked at the object of their attention.

"The stroller!" he exclaimed half audibly. "Her counterpart doesn't exist!"

He stepped back where he could see her more plainly. In that sea of faces her features alone shone before him clearly, insistently.

"Do you know her, Mr. Mauville?" asked the rhymester, observing that steadfast glance.

"Know her?" repeated the land baron, starting. "Oh, I've seen her act."

Without definite purpose the patron, who had listened with scant attention to the poet, began to move slowly toward the actress, and at that moment the eyes of the soldier, turning to the sizzling paddock, where the horses were being led out, fell upon the figure drawing near, recognizing in him the help to the manor, Edward Mauville. Construing in his approach a deliberate intention, a flush of quick anger overspread Saint-Prosper's face, and he



"You are blocking my way, monster," glanced at the girl by his side. But her manner assured him she had not observed the land baron, for at that moment she was looking in the opposite direction, endeavoring to discover Barnes or the others of the company in the immense throng.

Murmuring some excuse to his unconcerned companion and cutting short the wiry old lady's reminiscences of the first public trotting race in 1818, the soldier left the box and, moving with some difficulty through the crowd, met Mauville in the aisle near the stairway. The latter's face expressed surprise, not altogether of an agreeable nature, at the encounter, but he immediately regained his composure.

"Ah, M. Saint-Prosper," he observed easily. "I little thought to see you here."

"Nor I you!" said the other bluntly. The patron gazed in seeming carelessness from the soldier to the young girl. Saint-Prosper's presence in New Orleans could be accounted for. He had followed her from the Shadegrove valley across the continent. The drive begun at the country inn, he looking down from the dormer window to witness the start, had been a long one, very different from his own brief flight, with its wretched end. These thoughts coursed rapidly through the land baron's brain; his appearance rekindled the ashes of the past; the fire in his breast flamed from his eyes, but otherwise he made no display of feeling. He glanced out upon the many faces below him, bowing to one woman and smiling at another.

"Oh, I could not stand a winter in the north," resumed the patron, turning once more to the soldier, "although the barn burners promised to make it warm for me!"

Offering no reply to this sally, Saint-Prosper's gaze continued to rest coldly and expectantly upon the other. Goaded by that arbitrary regard, an implied barrier between him and the young girl, the land baron sought to press forward. His glittering eyes met the other's. The glances they exchanged were like the thrust and parry of swords. Without wishing to address the actress, and thereby risk a public rebuff, it was nevertheless impossible for the hot blooded restraint to submit to pre-emptory restraint. Who had made the soldier his taskmaster? He read Saint-Prosper's purpose and was not slow to retaliate.

"If I am not mistaken, you are our deity of the lane," said the patron softly. "Permit me." And he strove to pass.

The soldier did not move.

"You are blocking my way, monster," continued the other sharply. "Not if I like the other way."

"This way or that way, how does it concern you?" retorted the land baron.

"If you seek further to annoy a lady whom you have already sufficiently wronged it is my man's concern."

"Especially if he has followed her across the country," sneered Mauville. "Besides, since when have actresses become so chary of their favors?" In his anger the land baron threw out intonations he would have challenged from other lips. "Has the stage then become a holy convent?"

"You stamped yourself a second-rate some time ago," said the soldier shortly, as though weighing each word, "and now show yourself a coward when you malign a young girl without father, brother—"

"Or lover," interrupted the land baron. "Perhaps, however, you were only traveling to see the country."

"If you anything further with me?" interjected Saint-Prosper curiously. "The patron's blood, consoled, hurrying through his veins. The other's contemptuous manner stung him more sorely than language.

"Yes," he said meaningly, his eyes challenging Saint-Prosper's. "Have

you been at Speddie's fencing room? Are you in practice?"

Saint-Prosper hesitated a moment, and the land baron's face fell. Was it possible the other would refuse to meet him? But he would not let him off easily. There were ways to force, and suddenly the words of the marquis recurring to him, he surveyed the soldier disdainfully.

"God, you must come of a family of cowards and traitors! But you shall fight or—the public becomes arbiter!" And he half raised his arm threateningly.

The soldier's tanned cheek was now as pale as a moment before it had been flushed. His mouth set resolutely, as though fighting back some weakness. With lowering brows and darkening glance he regarded the land baron.

"I was thinking," he said at length, with an effort, "that if I killed you people would want to know the reason."

The patron laughed. "How solicitous you are for her welfare and mine! Do you then measure skill only by prizes? If so, I confess you would stand a fair chance of dispatching me. But your address? The St. Charles, I presume?"

The soldier nodded curtly, and, having accomplished his purpose, Mauville had turned to leave when loud voices in a front box near the right aisle attracted general attention from those occupying that part of the grand stand. The young officer who had accompanied Susan to the races was angrily confronting a thickset man, the latest recruit to her corps of willing captives. The lad had assumed the arduous task of guarding the object of his fancy from all comers simply because she had been kind. And why should she not have been? He was only a boy. She was old enough to be—well, an adviser. When after a brief but pointed altercation, he flung himself away with a last reproachful look in the direction of his enslaver, Susan looked hurt. That was her reward for being nice to a child!

"A fractious young cub!" said the thickset man complacently.

"Well, I like cub better than bears!" retorted Susan pointedly, draped by the hoary invalids, and from the somber depths of foliage came the chirp of the tree crickets and the note of the swamp owl. Faint music, in measured rhythm, a foil to disconnected wood sound, was wafted from a distant plantation.

"Well, said Constance.

"How did you enjoy it, my dear?" asked Barnes, suddenly reappearing at Constance's box. "A grand heat, that though I did bet on the wrong horse! But don't wait for us, Saint-Prosper. Mrs. Adams and I will take our time getting through the crowd. I will see you at the hotel, my dear," he added as the soldier and Constance moved away with the desultory tag end of the procession. On either side of the road lay the mournful cypress, draped by the hoary invalids, and from the somber depths of foliage came the chirp of the tree crickets and the note of the swamp owl. Faint music, in measured rhythm, a foil to disconnected wood sound, was wafted from a distant plantation.

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"Am I interrupting you?" asked the soldier, glancing at the littered table.

"Not at all," answered the manager, recovering himself and settling back in his chair. "Make yourself at home. You'll find some cigars on the mantel, or if you prefer your pipe there's a jar of tobacco on the trunk. Do you find it? I haven't had time yet to bring order out of chaos. A manager's trunks are like a junk shop, with everything from a needle to an anchor."

Filing his pipe from the receptacle indicated, which lay among old costumes and wigs, the soldier seated himself near an open window. "I looked out upon a balcony. Through a light stream from a chandelier a flight, playing upon the balustrade. Once the figure of the young actress stepped forward to lean upon the balcony. She leaned upon the balustrade, looked across the city, breathed the perfume of the flowers and then quickly vanished."

To be Continued.

"A thousand details pass through my mind, reminiscences of her girlhood, lightning of sunshine in a secluded wood; memories of her mother and the old days when she played in my New York theater, for Barnes, the stroller, was once a metropolitan manager! Her fame had preceded her, and every admirer of histrionic art eagerly awaited her arrival. Then this incomparable woman fell ill.

"You see? I have ruined you," she said sadly.

"I am honored, madam," was all I could reply.

"She placed her hand softly on mine and let her luminous eyes rest on me. "Dear old friend," she murmured.

"Then she closed her eyes, and I thought she was sleeping. Some time elapsed when she again opened them.

"Death will break our contract, Mr. Barnes," she said softly.

"My life has been sad, as you know. I should not regret giving it up. Nor should I fear to die. My child—what will the old—poor, motherless, fatherless girl—all alone, all alone?"

"Madam, if I may—I will permit me to care for her? If I might regard her as my child?"

"How tightly she held my hand at that! Her eyes seemed to blaze with heavenly fire. But let me not dwell further upon the sad events that led to the end of her noble career. Something of her life I had heard; something I surmised. Unhappy as a woman, she was majestic as an actress. The fire of her voice struck every ear. Its sweetness had a charm never to be forgotten."

A knock at the door rudely dispelled these memories. For a moment the manager looked startled, as one abruptly called back to his immediate surroundings; then the pen fell from his hand, and he pushed the book from him to the center of the table.

"Come in," he said.

The door opened, and Saint-Prosper entered.

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**STRAY THOUGHTS**  
The Workingman's Paper.  
We are told that the new District Trades and Labour Council represents 15,000 organized workmen. It would be a great help to the labor movement if the officers could persuade every member to subscribe for and read The Weekly Toller.

**Which Will It Be?**  
The employer owns the workshop, the employee makes the goods and the people use them. The employer has a right to close his workshop. The employee has a right to refuse to work. Why should not the people have the right to open workshops and employ the people and run the industry for the benefit of the people?

**Men Are Funny.**  
We are told that when we have Socialism we will have no millionaires, yet we are asked all the time to listen to millionaire Socialists to-day.

**Men of Principle.**  
If voters cast their ballots for principles instead of money, men of principles would be elected and then this fair city of Toronto would be governed by principles instead of being governed by money.

**A Workingman.**  
Because a man's a workingman, Why the need to sneer? Is it not through work alone From death we can steer clear?

**As I listened to the service.**  
And I wondered if he was there?— And I thought of God's great mercy And compassion beyond compare.

**As I wandered out of the churchyard**  
And I thought of the solemn sight, All heaven bright before me In a radiant most bright.

**As I thought of the final judgment,**  
I thought of the soul now before Him, And I said in Christ's love I'll abide. —Paul Lincoln. Jan. 30th, 1904.

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