

THE STROLLERS

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

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CHAPTER IV.

So well advertised in the village had been the theatrical company...

ment in the rear of the room, was...

"I don't exactly know, Ezekiel," replied the landlord regretfully...

"No; he ain't Louis Philippe," returned the doctor, with decision...

"Might be the dolphin, then," suggested the boniface...

"Dolphin?" retorted the other contemptuously...

"Oh, I didn't know but there might a' been," said the landlord sagely...

From mouth to mouth the information gleaned by the village doctor was...



Came forward and addressed the "good people."

circulated. Speculation had been rife ever since the demise of the last patron...

"Azeriah, who might he be?" The heir of the patron estate, Ezekiel...

"He calls 'em to, I guess, of he can." "Yes; of he can," significantly repeated the doctor...

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Finally, however, when the landlord's daughter had gazed what seemed to her an interminable period...

Kate was Volante—not Tobin's Volante, but one fashioned out of her own characteristics...

Conscious that his identity had been divined and relishing perhaps the effect of its discovery...

The light that burned within shone from her eyes, proud yet gay; it lurked in the corners of her mouth...

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passed shone in her glance, defiant though willing, lit by though humble, joyous though shy.

The play jogged on its blithesome course to its wonted end, and the well pleased audience were preparing to leave when Barnes, in a drab jacket...

"In the golden age," said the father of Juliana, "great men treated actors like servants, and if they offend'd, their ears were cut off..."

"I am not concerned about the ethics of art," he sturdily replied, "but the ladies of the company may count me among their devout admirers..."

"No actresses?" retorted the heir. "Then why did people go to the theater? However, without further argument, let me be the first contributor."

"The prodigal!" said the doctor in an aside to the landlord. "He's holding up a piece of gold. It's the first time ever patron was a spendthrift!"

But Mauville's words, on the whole, furthered the manager's project, and the audience remained in its integrity...

"Much, and as for the players," a gleam of humor stealing over his dark features, "peerless" was not too strong.

"Your approbation likes me most, my lord," quoth the manager, and passed quickly on with his tin net in a futile effort to evade the outstretched hand of his whimsical helper.

Thanking the audience for their generosity and complimenting them for their intelligence, the self constituted lord of the treasury vanished once more behind the curtain...

Jerusalem's shawl straightway fell from her shoulders, Hannah's bonnet was whisked from her head, Nathaniel paused on his way to the stable yard...

While "Twas Monnie Musk in busy feet and Monnie Musk in busy hands, fashioned "Monnie Musk" with "first couple join right hands and swing."

"In the parlor the younger lads and lasses were playing snip and catch 'em and similar games. The portly Dutch clock gazed down benignly on the scene...

"Here's to our better acquaintance," he said, placing his hand with little ceremony on the other's shoulder.

"A fair robbery," laughed Barnes, "as Dick Turpin said when he robbed the minister who robbed the king who robbed the people..."

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the minister who robbed the king who robbed the people. A happy thought that, turning the helmet into a collection box, it tided us over, it tided us over."

Saint-Prosper returned the manager's glance in kind. Barnes' candor and simplicity were apparent antidotes to the other's taciturnity and constraint.

But now in the face of the manager's impatience at the success of a more expedient, a hopefulness ill warranted by his short purse and the long future before him...

"Kiss her quick and let her go!" Amid the mad confusion he strove to obey the command, but a pating voice murmured "No, no!"...

"Let her go! ho! ho! one-two-three!" Three o'clock! Admonishingly rang out the hour, the jovial face of the clock looking sterner than was its wont.

"Good night, every one!" said a sweetly portly voice, as Constance passed calmly on with not a ruffle mussed.

"What can you mean?" she laughed. "There's many a slip 'twixt 'lip and lip!" exclaimed Susan.

With heightened color the young girl turned, and as she did so her look rested on the soldier. His glance was cold, almost stony, and, meeting it, she half started and then smiled, slowly mounting the stairs.

"Praise him above, ye heavenly hosts!" "One good turn deserves another," said Barnes to Saint-Prosper, when Susan and Kate had likewise retired.

"Follow me, sir—to the kitchen! No questions, but come!"

CHAPTER V. A KEEN observer might have noticed that the door of the inn kitchen had been kept swinging to and fro on certain days...

The cause of the schoolmaster's frolicsome deportment was apparent to the soldier when he followed Barnes into the kitchen, where in a secluded corner near the hospitable oven...

As the manager approached the bowl the trio, moved by some vague, impelling impulse, locked arms, walked toward the side door, crossed its threshold in some confusion...

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