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**THE STROLLERS**

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

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"Said Chloe to Strophon, 'For a kiss I'll return thee the choice of your flock.' Said Strophon to Chloe, 'What bliss! With it I'll buy Phyllis a new frock,'"

she concluded, throwing a glance over her shoulder.

A sudden distaste for the festal ferment, the laughter and merriment, a desire to escape from the very exuberance of high spirits and cheer led the soldier to make his way slowly from the ballroom to the balcony, where, although not removed from the echoes of liveliness within, he looked out upon the quietude of the night. Overhead stretched the sky, a measureless ocean, with here and there a silvery star like the light on a distant ship; an unfathomable sea of ether that beat down upon him. Radiant and serene in the boundless calm of the heavens the splendid lanterns seemed suspended on stationary craft peacefully rocked at anchor. Longings, suppressed through months of absence, once more found full sway. Susan's words were recalled by the presence of the count.

Suddenly the song of "Die Schonbrunner" ceased within, and as its pulsations became hushed many of the dancers, an elate, buoyant throng, sought the balcony. Standing in the shadow near the entrance, aroused from a train of reflections by this abrupt exodus, the soldier saw among the other merry-makers Constance and the count, who passed through the door, so near he could almost have touched her.

"Here she is," said the count as they approached an elderly lady seated near the edge of the balcony. "Ah, madam," he continued to the latter, "if you would only use your good offices in my behalf! Miss Carew is cruelly itself."

"Why, what has she done?" asked the good gentleman.

"Insisted upon deserting the ballroom!"

"In my day," said the elderly ally of the nobleman, "you could not drag the young ladies from cotillon or minuet, and the men would stay till the dawn to toast them!"

"And I've no doubt, madam, your name was often on their lips," returned the count gallantly, who evidently believed in the Spanish proverb:

Woo the duenna, not the maid; Then in love the game's well played.

The ally in his cause made some laughing response which the soldier did not hear. Himself unseen, Saint-Prosper bent his eyes upon the figure of the young girl, shadowy but obvious in the reflected light of the bright constellations. Even as he gazed her hand removed the mask, revealing the face he knew so well. In the silence below the fountain tinkled ever so loudly as she stood, half turned toward the garden, a silken head covering around her shoulders, the head outlined without adornment save the poppies in her hair.

Her presence recalled scenes of other days—the drive from the races when her eyes had beamed so softly beneath the starry luster. Did she remember? He dared not hope so; he did not. To him it brought also harsher memories, yet his mind was filled most with her beauty, which appeared to glow over all else and hold him, a not impassive spectator, to the place where she was standing. She seemed again Juliet, the Juliet of the schoolhouse stages, the Juliet he had known before she had come to New Orleans, whose genius had transformed the barren stage into a garden of her own creation.

And yet something made her different. An indefinable new quality appeared to rest upon her. He felt his heart beating faster. He was glad he had come. For the moment he forgot his jealousy in watching her, as with new wealth of perfume the languid breeze stirred the tresses above her pallid, immovable features. But the expression of confidence with which the count was regarding her, although ostensibly devoting himself to her companion, renewed his inquietude.

Had she allowed herself to be drawn into a promised alliance with that titled rove? Involuntarily the soldier's face grew hard and stern. The count's tactics were so apparent—flattering attention to the elderly gentleman and a devoted but reserved bearing toward the young girl in which he would rely upon patience and perseverance for the consummation of his wishes. But certainly Constance did not exhibit marked preference for his society. On the contrary, she had hardly spoken to him, since they had left the ballroom. Now, clasping the iron railing of the balcony, she leaned farther out. The towers of the vine clambering up one of the supports swayed gently around her, and she started at the moist caress on her bare arm.

"It is cold here," she said, drawing back.

"Allow me—your wrap!" exclaimed the count, springing to her side with great solicitude.

But she adjusted the garment without his assistance.

"You must be careful of your health for the sake of your friends," accompanying the words with a significant glance.

"The count is right," interposed the elderly gentleman, "as he usually is," she added, laughing.

"Oh, madam," he said, bowing. "Miss Carew does not agree with you, I am sure," turning to the girl.

"I haven't given the matter any thought," she replied coldly. She shivered slightly, nervously, and looked around.

At that moment the lights were turned on in the garden—another surprise arranged by the Mistick Krewe—illuminating trees and shrubbery and casting a sudden glare upon the balcony.

"Bravo!" said the count. "It's like a fete champetre! And hear the mandolins! Tra-la-la-la! Why, what is it?"

She had given a sudden cry and stood staring toward the right at the back of the balcony. Within, the orchestra once more began to play, and, as the strains of music were wafted to them, a host of masqueraders started toward the ballroom. When the inflow of merry-makers had ceased, bewildered, trembling, she looked with blanched face toward the spot where the soldier had been standing, but he was gone.

At that moment the cathedral clock began to strike—twelve times it sounded, and at the last stroke the Mistick Krewe, one by one, began to disappear, vanishing as mysteriously as they had come. Pluto, Proserpine, the fates, fairies and harpies; Satan, Beelzebub, the dwellers in pandemonium, the aids to appetite, all took their quick departure, leaving the musicians and the guests of the evening, including the visiting military, to their own pleasures and devices. The first carnival had come to a close.

CHAPTER XXXV.  
"ARE you the clerk?" A well modulated voice, a silvery crown of hair leaning over the counter of the St. Charles, blue eyes, lighted with unobtrusive inquiry.

The small, quiet looking man addressed glanced up. "No," he said. "I am the proprietor. This"—waving his hand to a resplendent appearing person—"is the clerk."

Whereupon the bediamonded individual indicated (about whom an entire chapter has been written by an observing English traveler) came forward leisurely. A Brummel in attire, an Aristarchus for taste! Since his period—or reign—there have been many imitators, but he was the first—indeed, created the office, and is deserving of a permanent place in American annals.

"His formality just bordered on stiffness," wrote the interested Briton, as though he were studying some new example of the human species; "his conversation was elegant, but pointed, as he was gifted with a cultured economy of language. He accomplished by indirection what many people can only attain through volubility."

"Yes?" he interrogatively remarked, gazing down at the caller in the present instance.

"Is Colonel Saint-Prosper stopping here?"

"Yes."

"Send this card to his room."

"Yes?" doubtfully.

"Is there any reason why you should not?"

"There was a military banquet last night," interposed the quiet, little man. "Patriotism bubbled over until morning."

"Ah, yes," commented Culver, for it was he. "Fought their battles over again. Some of them in the hospital today. Well, well, they suffered in a glorious cause, toasting the president and the army and the flag and the girls they left behind them. I read the account of it in the papers this morning. Grand speech of the bishop; glorious response of Old Rough and Ready. You are right to protect sleeping heroes, but I'm afraid I must run the guard, as my business is urgent."

A few moments later the lawyer, breathing heavily, followed a colored lad down a crimson carpeted corridor, pausing before a door upon which his guide knocked vigorously and then vanished.

"Colonel Saint-Prosper" said the lawyer, as he obeyed the voice within and entered the room, where a tall young man in civilian attire was engaged in packing a small trunk. "One moment, pray—let me catch my breath. That lad accomplished the ascent two steps at a time, and I fear, the spectacle stimulated me to unusual expedition. We're apt to forget we are old and can't keep up with boys and monkeys!"

During this somewhat playful introduction the attorney was studying the occupant of the room with keen, bright gaze—a glance which, without being offensive, was sufficiently penetrating and comprehensive to convey a definite impression of the other's face and figure. The soldier returned the look of his visitor deliberately, but with no surprise.

"Won't you sit down?" he said.

Culver availed himself of the invitation. "I am not disturbing you? I have long known of you, although this is our first meeting."

"You have then the advantage of me," returned Saint-Prosper, "for I—"

"You never heard of me?" laughed the lawyer. "Exactly! We attorneys are always getting our fingers in every one's affairs. I am acquainted with

you, as it were, from the cradle to the present!"

"I am unexpectedly honored!" remarked the listener satirically.

"First, I knew you through the Marquis de Ligne."

Saint-Prosper started and regarded his visitor more closely.

"I was the humble instrument of making a fortune for you. It was also my lot to draw up the papers depriving you of the same!" Culver laughed amiably. "Of expectation fails where most it promises." Pardon my levity.

There were two wills, the first in your favor, the last in your daughter's. I presume—with a sudden sharp look—"you have no intention of contesting the final disposition? The paternity of the child is established beyond doubt."

Artful Culver was not by any means so sure in his own mind that if the other were disposed to make trouble the legal proofs of Constance's identity would be so easily forthcoming. Barnes was dead; her mother had passed away many years before; the child had been born in London—where?—the marquis' rationality just before his demise was a debatable question. In fact, since he had learned Saint-Prosper was in the city the attorney's mind had been soaring among a cloud of vague possibilities, and now, regarding his companion with a most kindly, ingratiating smile, he added:

"Besides, when the marquis took you as a child into his household there were, I understood, no legal papers drawn!"

"I don't see what your visit portends," said Saint-Prosper, "unless there is some other matter."

"Just so," returned Culver, his doubts vanishing. "There was a small matter—a slight commission. Miss Carew requested me to hand you this message."

The visitor now detected a marked change in the soldier's imperturbable bearing as the latter took the envelope which the attorney offered him. "The young lady saw you at the Mistick Krewe ball last night and, recognizing an old friend"—with a slight accent—"pressed me into her service. And now, having completed my errand, I will wish you good morning." And the lawyer briskly departed.

The young man's hand trembled as he tore open the envelope, but he surveyed the contents of the brief message with tolerable firmness:

Colonel Saint-Prosper—Will you kindly call this morning to see me?  
CONSTANCE CAREW.

That was all; nothing more save the address and the date. How long he remained staring at it with mingled feelings he never knew, but finally with a start he looked at his watch, thoughtfully regarded the half filled trunk, donned his coat and left the room. Several fellow officers, the first of the slugs to appear, spoke to him as he crossed the hall below, but what they said or what he replied he could not afterward remember. Some one detained him at the steps, a gentleman with a longing for juleps, but finally he



"I wronged you!" she cried. "I wronged you!"

found himself in a carriage, driving somewhere, presumably to the address given in the letter. How long the drive seemed! And yet when the carriage finally stopped and he had paid his fare he mentally determined it had been too short.

The driver gazed in surprise after the gentleman who did not wait for his change, but, forbearing injudicious comment, gathered up the reins and drove to the nearest cafe.

From the carriage the house was some distance, and yet it appeared very near the gate to the soldier, who dimly realized he was passing through a garden where were many flowering plants and where the air was unusual heavy with perfume. Many other details—the construction of the house, the size of the verandas—passed without attracting his notice. Soon, however, he was seated in a great room, an apartment of old fashioned height and breadth. He felt his heart beating fast. How long did he sit there? No inconsiderable period surely. He examined everything carefully without carrying a definite impression of anything to his mind. The large carved

mirror, the quaint decoration of walls and frieze, the soft colors of the rug that covered the floor, the hundred and one odd little things in the cabinet near the chair where he was seated, trines in ivory, old silver and china; the pictures, a Vandyke, Claude and a few modern masters. After this interminable but confused scrutiny of inanimate things his heart beat faster still as a tall figure robed in white entered the room.

He rose. They regarded each other with mutual constraint. Her face had a bit of color, like the tinge of a rose leaf. Her eyes seemed agitated beneath the sweeping lashes, a sentiment in ill accord with the staidness of her presence. She gave him her hand. He held it he knew not how long, probably for the conventional moment. They found themselves, each in a chair, at ease, yet not at ease, he studying her face furively, yet eagerly, she turning in her fancy the first strong impression of how gaunt and haggard were his features, bearing the traces of recent illness.

"I am glad you came," she began, their eyes meeting once more.

He bowed. "Mr. Culver brought me your message."

"I heard that you—it was reported you were dead."

"I was wounded; that was all, and soon took to the field again."

The suspense that fell between them was oppressive.

"You should have let your friends know," she said at length.

He looked at her curiously, vivid memories of their last interview returning to him. Indecisively she interlarded her fingers, and he, watching her, wondered why she had sent for him. Suddenly she rose, walked to the window and stood, looking out, in a maze of sitting in the dim light, in a maze of uncertainty, was vaguely conscious of her figure outlined against the brightness without, of the waving, yellow flowers of the vines shading the broad veranda.

"It is long since we have met," he said awkwardly.

She did not answer. Had she heard? yet he did not resent her silence. If he had ever felt anger for her it had all vanished now. He was only conscious of regarding her more attentively, as she still remained, gazing out into the sunlight garden.

"Much has happened since I saw you," he continued.

She turned, her eyes were moist; her hand trembled a little against her dress, but she held her head proudly, as she had always done, and it was the aspect of this weakness set against strength that appealed swiftly to him, softening his heart so that he longed to spring to her side.

"Yes, much," she replied.

Was her voice tremulous, or was it but the thrill of his own heart which made it seem so?

"You have been here long?" she asked, still holding back what was on her mind or blindly endeavoring to approach the subject.

"Only since yesterday."

"And you remain some time?"

"I am leaving today—for France."

At that a touch of color left her face, or was it that a darkening shadow fell upon the house and garden, momentarily chastening the outlook?

"For France?" she repeated.

Her lips quivered. Something seemed to still the beating of his heart.

"Constance—what is it?" he half whispered.

She stepped forward suddenly, her hands outstretched.

"I wronged you!" she cried. "I wronged you! I thought the disgrace was yours! Oh, do not speak!" she added passionately. "I have suffered for it—and now, would you mind—please—leaving me?"

"You thought the disgrace was mine?" he repeated slowly. "Not my— He broke off abruptly. "And you suffered for it?" he said wonderingly. "Then you"—He arose quickly and approached her, a new expression transfiguring his bronzed and worn young face.

Swiftly he sought her glance. Her eyes gave irrefutable answer. Unrelingly she abandoned herself to his arms, and he felt her bosom rise and fall with conflicting emotions. Closely he held her in the surprise and surpassing pleasure of the moment; then, bending, he kissed her lips. A wave of color flooded her face, though her eyes still sought his. But even as he regarded her the clear, open look gradually changed, replaced by one of half perplexity, half reproach.

"That night you went away—why did you not defend yourself?" she asked finally.

"I never imagined any mistake. Besides, what had I to offer? Your future was bright, your name on every one's lips."

"Did you think you were responsible for your brother's sins?"

She half hung her head. "But then—then?"

"It became a memory, bitter sweet, yet more sweet than bitter!"

"And now?"

He did not answer immediately.

The figure of the count, as he had seen him the night before, had abruptly entered his mind. Did she understand? She smiled.

"And now?"

At her question he dismissed all thought of jealousy. Looking into her clear, half laughing eyes, he read of no entangling alliances. Without words from her he understood.

"Shall we go into the garden?" she said, and, opening the window, they stepped out upon the veranda.

In the sky a single large cloud stretched itself in a dreamy torpor, too sluggish apparently to move, while a brood of little clouds nestled and slept around it. From the window the count's ally watched them among the plants and vines, pausing now and then, their interest more in themselves than in the liveliest hues or forms that nature offered. He stood still, regarding his shadow on the path seriously.

"Nearly noon by the soldier's dial," he said.

She pushed back the hair the wind had blown about her brow.

"My boat sails in an hour," he continued.

"But you are not—going—now?"

"If I stay, it must be—"

"Forever!" she said. "Forever!"

THE END.

**Eddystone Lighthouse.**

The famous Eddystone lighthouse stands fourteen miles off the coast of Land's End and is perhaps the most celebrated in the world. It has often been used as an illustration by poets and preachers, for no other lighthouse is in such a loneliness or dangerous place, and none costs so much money and trouble. There are three keepers, and who live there with their families, and two of them are always on duty, while the third is on the main coast enjoying a vacation. They relieve one another each month, so that none of the keepers remain on duty more than two months at a time. The change and rest are said to be absolutely necessary to preserve the nerves of the keepers. The lighthouse is 135 feet high, was erected in 1882 at a cost of \$400,000, and rises from a submerged rock. The first lighthouse was erected on this rock as long ago as 1697, but was washed away six years after and was not replaced for a long time. The second was burned down in 1775; the third stood from 1767 to 1882 and was famous in history.

**"The" O'Gorman Mahon.**

The last of the Irish duellists, O'Gorman Mahon, was indignant at the number of his colleagues in the Irish party who claimed the prefix and by way of ridiculing their pretensions to chieftainship assured the house there were only three personages properly entitled to it—the pope, the devil and the O'Gorman Mahon. The O'Conor Don, the McDermott, the O'Donoghue, the McGillicuddy of the Reeks, the O'Grady and the O'Sullivan are regarded as entitled to the distinction as heads of old Irish families, clans or sept. There are also some in Scotland, notably "The McNab," whose ancestor had a boat of his own at the time of the flood, being too proud to accept the hospitality of Noah.

**Seidl's Silent Tongue.**

One of the most striking anecdotes told in Hermann Klein's "Thirty Years of Musical Life in London" relates to Anton Seidl's first interview with Wagner in the library at Wahnfried. Seidl found the room dark, and, imagining nobody was there, he pulled out his letter of introduction and began silently rehearsing the speech he had prepared. Suddenly from out of the gloomy corner Wagner appeared, and Seidl was so nervous that he could not bring out a sentence of his speech. This proved to be his salvation, for Wagner, declaring, "If you can work as well as you can hold your tongue, you will do," engaged him on the spot.

**Still Innocent.**

"Senator, what was the nearest you ever came to being bribed?" asked the girl who always blurs everything right out.

"It was the time I voted for the post-office bill and received 7,000 shares of stock in the concern that was to make the boxes when the bill gave it a monopoly of the business."

"I should think that was a clear case against you."

"No. The measure didn't go through, and the stock never amounted to anything."

**One Description of It.**

"What," asked the teacher, "do you understand by 'a conscious life'?"

"Does it convey any meaning to you?"

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