



HIS FLEETING IDEAL.

The Great Composite Novel.

THE JOINT WORK OF
W. H. Ballou, Ella Wheeler Wilcox,
Maj. Alfred C. Calhoun,
Alan Dale, Howe & Hummel,
Pauline Hall, Inspector Byrnes,
John L. Sullivan,
Nell Nelson, Mary Eastlake,
P. T. Barnum, Bill Nye.

VII.—ONE THREAD BREAKS.

By INSPECTOR BYRNES. Illustrated by REGINALD T. SPERRY.

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Henshall did not know whether to laugh or to swear when he reflected on the way in which he had been played by the singer. He felt glad that he had made sure of her number. He meant to see her the next day and find out if he could where Edna Lewis was living.

The interest which he had felt in this girl, who represented to him so fully his ideal, was quickened ten fold by the late occurrence. He had protected her from one whom he was convinced by many reasons she disliked and who boded her no good. The glance that had shot from her eye as she darted off when he had freed her from Dr. Watson had spoken of gratitude. He laughed at himself for being tempted to think there was any other feeling in that glance.

"Yet I had only seen her once," he said to himself, as if to defend the absurd thought that she would feel any deep interest in him. "I saw her only once, and she has lived in my brain and my heart ever since. What a soul she must have to play as she did! What could have made that woman play me like that?"

"That woman" was not the fascinating Edna, but the singer who had deceived him away from her.

He remembered that Edna at the concert had worn a white satin dress, and the singer had worn a pink one. Then they must have changed gowns! And the long cloak he was sure was the same as that he had seen upon the young girl at the time he had come to her rescue and freed her from Dr. Watson.

He recalled the singular change which he had remarked in her playing. He also remembered the strange fact that he had turned his eyes directly from her upon Dr. Watson.

The thought that he and the girl he was beginning to feel such an interest in could be swayed by a common sympathetic feeling was pleasant to him, but when he reflected that it was the odious doctor who had apparently swayed both their souls by some occult magnetism he was indignant.

He could have endured it for her, but that he, a strong man, should be drawn like a piece of iron filings to the magnet by this fellow, whom he hated and whom he knew to be a villain, mortified his pride.

"It was only a chance coincidence," he said angrily to himself. The next morning he called at the house where he had been the night before with the singer. He had lost his programme of the concert, and could not recall her name. But he trusted to his wit to find her.

A colored man answered his impatient ring at the bell.

"Is there a public singer living in this building?" Henshall asked.

"Yes, sir; there's two—Mrs. Bucks and Miss Dudley."

"Where is the man who was on duty last night at 11 o'clock?" he inquired.

"He doesn't come on till 6 this evening," was the answer.

"Well, you can take me to Miss Dudley's," he said impatiently at a venture.

The elevator boy took him up to the third floor and pointed to the door on the left. "That is Miss Dudley's," he said.

Henshall rang the bell. The door was opened after two or three minutes by a young woman whom he had never seen.

"Can I see Miss Dudley for a moment?" he asked.

"What do you want to see her for?" said the young woman.

"It is on a matter of private business," he replied.

The lady's face was not at all encouraging as she replied, "I do not know it."

"Have you any objections to telling me why you and Miss Neville exchanged dresses last night and why you led me on such a wild goose chase?"

The lady's eyes twinkled a little with merriment as she recalled the incident. Then she replied provokingly:

"Why, I thought the least I could do after your goodness in supplying me with a coupe to come home in was to allow you to accompany me—as far as the door. So you didn't mean to come with me at all," she went on ironically.

"How mortifying!"

"Miss Dudley, I've no doubt it was very amusing to hoodwink me as you did. But you have not told me why you changed dresses with Miss Neville and wore her cloak."

"Why, you see, she asked me to," said Miss Dudley, opening her eyes and looking very innocent.

"And why did she ask you to?"

repeated Henshall, showing a little irritation. "I don't suppose it is a common thing for young women who sing or take part in the same concert to change clothes with each other to go home in!"

Miss Dudley smiled again. Then, as if feeling that she had carried the matter far enough in this line, she said decidedly and with a serious countenance:

"I have told you all I have to say about the matter. If you wish to know more you will have to see Miss Neville herself, and I do not really know her address. So I can be of no service to you, and I must beg you to excuse me now."

"Miss Dudley," said Henshall, softening his tone, "you would not have acted as you have unless you were a friend to Miss Neville. Believe me, you would do her no harm by trusting me, as I am—

them!—a true friend to the young lady.

from a man who was annoying her with his attentions only last evening. I feel sure that it was the wish to escape him that led her to propose this extraordinary change of dress. Your being so nearly the same height and figure as Miss Neville made this an easy means of throwing him off the track. Am I not right?"

Miss Dudley's eyes had opened rather wide as he was speaking, and when he was through she exclaimed:

"Then you are not the man?"

"I am not the man, I swear to you," said Henshall.



"I am not the man, I swear to you."

The singer reflected for a moment and then said: "I do not see what harm it can do to tell you the truth in any case. Even if you are the man, nothing that I say would do any harm now. Who is the man?" she asked suddenly, fixing her eyes on the young fellow.

"He is an Italian mind reader whose real name is Leopardi. I know him to be a villain," replied Henshall at once.

"I only asked that to see if you would have an answer ready," Miss Dudley returned, smiling roguishly again. "Well, I will tell you the whole thing. After her last solo Miss Neville was strangely agitated. She came to me trembling and said: 'There is a man whom I greatly fear, because, although I detest him, he has an influence over me which I cannot resist. From the way I felt while I was playing I believe he was somewhere in the hall. I desire above all things to avoid meeting this man. My happiness in life may be destroyed if he should find where I am living. Will you not change dresses with me and wear my wrap? We are so nearly alike in figure that if you go out in these clothes and veil yourself well he can easily mistake you for me and will follow you. I feel as if he would wait until he sees me come out.'"

"She so impressed me," continued Miss Dudley, "that I consented. The fun of the thing tickled my fancy, too. Well, when I came out and you addressed me as Miss Neville and invited me into the coupe which you had engaged, I felt sure you were the man. I thought I was helping Miss Neville all the more by bringing you home with me. Then it was a satisfaction to show you how you had been fooled."

She laughed and then said earnestly, "And you are not the man at all, then?"

"No, I am not the man at all," replied Henshall. "You acted a friendly part. Now, you can act a still friendlier one if you will help me find this young woman. I believe she needs assistance and I shall gladly aid her."

Miss Dudley darted a keen glance at his handsome face as she answered: "I do not doubt it in the least. But I know nothing about Miss Neville more than I have told you. Still, when I see her I will tell her what you have said, and if you leave your address with me I will write to you what she says."

With this Henshall had to be content. He saw that the singer was sincere in what she said so far as he could judge. He went to Steinway hall and got Heinrich Neuberger's address. It was on Third avenue, far up town.

He decided to call at Miss Hartman's on his way up to tell Mrs. Smith that he had seen her villainous husband. This would help to cement the confidence between them which he wished to inspire.

When he rang the bell he told the servant to give his card to Mrs. Smith. He penciled on it: "Come down for a moment. Do not say I am here."

He entered the parlor and waited. In a very short time Mrs. Smith presented herself. She seemed hurried, but glad to see him.

"You came at a very opportune time. I can trust you implicitly, can I not?" she asked, looking at him fixedly.

"Certainly, I want you to do so. I want your help and will give you mine. I saw your husband last night," he added.

"Read that and see what it means," said Mrs. Smith, drawing a letter from her pocket. "Do not be afraid to do so because it is directed to Miss Hartman. I have read it," and her eyes flashed, "and I know he meant villainy by it."

Henshall hastily ran his eye over the letter. It was as follows:

"MISS LENA HARTMAN—If Mr. Henry Henshall has any relations to you which would make his compromising another young woman of interest to you ask him what he has to do with a girl who plays the violin in public and whose stage name is Louise Neville. He may deny that he knows her, but you are entitled to this warning from

"A FRIEND."

Henshall raised his eyes interrogatively to Mrs. Smith.

"That note came this morning," she said excitedly. "The handwriting is disguised, but I know the character of Leopardi's Italian letters too well not to detect it. I took the liberty of opening it, thinking I had a right as his wife," she said bitterly. "To know what he would write to a young lady engaged to a young gentleman. When I read it I decided not to let Miss Hartman know anything about it, and felt it was only fair to show it to you."

"It is only his devilish malice perhaps," said Henshall, "for he hates me. But I do not know how he could have found out my name and my engagement to Miss Hartman."

He then told Mrs. Smith the history of yesterday. When he was through she exclaimed: "That man seems to me devilish at times. Keep this letter at all events. It may come into play later."

When Henshall left her he went at once to Neuberger's. What was his astonishment when that gentleman said to him: "Miss Neville has accepted an engagement to appear in San Francisco with a manager named Rudolph Oppen. She started for there this morning."

"Beaten again!" said Henshall savagely to himself as he descended the stairs. "But I will find her if I have to follow her around the world."

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and to-morrow, if possible, we will take the same route. I have given old Mortality a powder to make him sleep for the next fifteen hours, and if you have any packing to do you needn't be afraid of disturbing him. You have been a very useful assistant, Martha, and you can make yourself indispensable to me now if you want to."

Miss Brown slowly raised herself, rubbed her eyes with both hands, and without looking at him asked, "In what way?"

"In the same old way,"

"No. I've done all I intend to do 'in the same old way'! When I leave this house I leave your service for good. I have enough on my conscience now to keep me as wide awake as the Macbeths, and I tell you I'm sick of it, and I intend to quit."

"You're never so good looking, Martha, as when you reflect the fire you absorb. If you were my wife I'd keep you angry all the time. Conscience? Bah! the thing went out of style before you were out of bibs. It's indigestion that's bothering you. I'll mix you a powder when I go to my room."

"Now, Miss Crawford, is expected in San Francisco Monday evening. She will stay at a private house, the name and number of which I will give you, and I want you to go to her with a letter her father has written and look after her. I am determined to marry her and you can help me."

"And what if I refuse?"

"I'm determined that you will not refuse, and the sooner you understand that the better. Do you hear what I am saying? Look at me!"

"Let me go!"

"Answer me first."

Unable to move a muscle under his grip Miss Brown felt her senses reeling beneath his hideous gaze and for an instant was overpowered.