



# 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.

X.—FISTS FLY.

By JOHN L. SULLIVAN. Illustrated by H. BOTTHOP.

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Baldwin's theatre was thronged with the beauty, wealth and fashion of San Francisco.

There was not a seat vacant, and even standing room was at a premium.

Henry Henshall, moody and discontented, occupied a proscenium box alone. His bride of a few days was at the hotel, forgotten by her husband.

It was to be the last appearance of his divinity, and although he had tried every possible and impossible way of meeting her, if only for a few minutes, he had failed.

That night he had determined to speak to her at all hazards.

Early in the evening he stationed himself at the stage entrance, and there patiently awaited her arrival.

It wanted but fifteen minutes to 8 o'clock when she drove up in a modest hansom. She stepped lightly out, and glancing neither right nor left bolted for the door. Her fame was so great that there was a crowd waiting on the sidewalk to catch a glimpse of her face, and no one paid any particular attention to the haggard young man in evening dress among them until he suddenly pushed forward and attempted to lay a detaining hand on the young lady's arm.

She did not notice the movement because, quick as he was, there was another quicker, and before he could touch her a big, well dressed man stepped quickly forward, and with no gentle hand dragged Henshall back into the crowd, saying gruffly and fiercely:

"Must not block the passageway. 'Gainst the rules, see?"

"What the devil—I say, let me go, will you? I must see that lady. I know her. Do you hear? Who the devil are you, anyway?" gasped Henshall struggling in the grasp of his captor.

The latter smiled sneeringly and held the young man easily until the fair violinist had passed through the stage door.

Then he released him, remarking: "I know you know her, you blackguard, and I know she left orders that she wished to see no one, and least of all you. If we could only induce her to make a complaint against you I would take the greatest delight in putting you behind the bars, you scoundrel. As you have asked for my name I will give you my card. Here it is," and he handed the artist a plain white piece of paste-board stamped:

Detective Police, Central Office.

To say that Henshall was surprised would be putting it mildly. He was so indignant and astonished by the big detective's tirade that he could only listen in helpless amazement.

He took the card mechanically and asked stupidly:

"She said she didn't want to see me? Why, she don't know me."

Burns laughed sarcastically as he turned away, saying:

"Remember, young fellow, I'll keep my eyes on you," and before Henshall could gather his wits sufficient to demand an explanation Burns had disappeared.

The young artist found himself in a ridiculous position, the center of a gazing mob, when he did recover himself.

"Get on to the Johnnie!" "Pipe de patent leathers!" "He would be a masher, would he?" and other such uncomplimentary allusions were showered on him, so he hastily went around to the front of the house and pushed his way to his box, determined at the first opportunity of having an explanation "with Mr. Jim Burns, detective."

Two minutes after he had gone away from the stage entrance a red headed messenger boy shoved his way through the crowd that still lingered there.

He rapped loudly at the door for admittance, while those around regarded him curiously, and many asked him, "What's up?"

"Nuthin'," was his nonchalant reply.

After a delay of several minutes the stage door was cautiously opened a few inches, and a portion of the good natured Teutonic countenance of Herr Opper became visible.

Seeing the boy in uniform he admitted him at once, asking: "Message? For whom?"

Without any undue haste, and making no reply, the lad unbuttoned his jacket, showed his left hand carefully into his inside coat pocket and pulled out a book.

Opening this carefully he took out a message addressed to "Miss Louise Neville, Baldwin's theatre, urgent," and handed it to the impatient manager.

As he saw the address the latter turned as if to hurry away, but the imperious messenger caught him by the coat tail, shoved his little black covered book in his face and said:

"Sign, please. And say, give a fellow a ticket, will yer?"

With a smothered execration the worthy Opper signed for the message, and never heeding the boy's other request rushed off with the telegram to his star's dressing room.

As he approached it he heard the low, sweet strains of "Home, Sweet Home" played with a touch on the violin which made it fairly seem to speak.

The music ceased abruptly as he knocked for admission, and the door

was opened by Miss Neville, who gazed at her manager in a startled way.

"Oh, Mr. Opper, is it time to go on? I had no idea that I was late."

"You are not late. The curtain will not go up for ten minutes yet, but this dispatch just arrived and I thought it best to bring it to you at once."

The girl's face turned deathly pale.

"Let me have it," she gasped.

He handed her the little yellow packet. She tore the envelope hurriedly, and it needed but a glance to master the contents:

"Come at once. Your father is dying."

"DR. WATSON."

She did not totter and fall, but like a thoroughbred she held her queenly little head up high and said, quite calmly:

"I am sorry to forfeit my engagement, Mr. Opper," she said, "but I must leave you now at once. My father is dying. Read," and she held out the message to him.

"Huh, ah!" remarked Opper.

Such as he admired his fair attraction he did not like to lose the night's money, even if he had already earned a big purse through her.

Still, in the presence of death he thought it best to throw up the sponge, hoping by agreeing amiably to arrange for her reappearance later on.

In addition he had conceived a sincere and fatherly interest in the lonely girl, and so he submitted to the inevitable and said quite cheerfully: "Well, I suppose you must go, my dear. But there is an awful big house. I don't know what we can do. You must go alone, I suppose. I could not get away to-night, and you would not wait until to-morrow. How long has your father been in Chicago?"

"I did not know he was there until I received this telegram, which is sent from there," she answered, as she began to collect her few belongings.

"Well, wait a minute," cried Opper, suddenly rushing out.

He found Jim Burns around in the lobby of the theatre and quickly explained matters to him.

"I am going to close the house and return the money to-night, but I want to get Miss Neville safely off first; and now, Jim, you must follow her. I don't know why, but I mistrust the telegram. Will you? Name your own terms."

"I'll go," said Burns, "but I must explain to the chief."

"There is no time. Leave that to me. He'll refuse me nothing. Get a cab and have it at the side door. First let the girl know you are following her. When she gets in the cab, you have another one ready and follow. A train goes in twenty minutes."

"That duck you told me to watch is inside. You'd better not say where the girl is going," said Burns.

"I won't," and with a hearty shaking of his hands the men parted.

Five minutes later, heavily veiled, Louise Neville emerged from the stage door and entered the cab awaiting her.

As she drove off Burns got into another cab, ordering the driver to follow the first.

Meantime Opper was going through the most difficult ordeal known to the theatrical manager, that of trying to account for the non-appearance of his star.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, glancing at the vast audience apprehensively, "Miss Neville cannot appear to-night. Illness in her family. Her father dying. Message from Chicago to-night."

Then he paused abruptly, remembering that he had given her destination away, and glanced at the box occupied by Henshall.

The latter had heard enough. He was leaving his box like a flash, so the good hearted manager concluded his apologies with a rush, saying, "Sorry to disappoint you, ladies and gentlemen, and sorry to lose the door money, but it will be all returned at the box office, and I hope never to disappoint you again, and believe me your true and personal friend, Opper."

Then he rushed off the stage, determined to foil Henshall at all hazards.

"Ass! dolt!" were the pet names he called himself as he rushed out and jumped into a hack, commanding the driver, "Union depot, triple fare."

As he had surmised, Henshall was driving the same way and just as fast in another conveyance.

He did not know if his ideal woman had already started for Chicago or not, but he was bound to go there and find her.

He rushed into the depot and bought a ticket, and was told that a train would leave in two minutes.

He jumped aboard and rushed hastily through the cars.

At last his heart gave a great jump and then nearly stopped beating.

He saw her in a forward car, her shapely head resting in a pathetic way on one little gloved hand.

Then indeed Henshall lost his reason, and knew that the woman before him was the woman he truly loved.

Forgetful alike of prudence and common sense he walked rapidly toward him and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Pardon me, Miss Neville. If you know how much I want to talk to you, how much I have to say to you? I know you are in danger!"

The last word he whispered, as there were others about.

The girl could not see his face distinctly.

She feared all strangers, so she arose and said icily: "Please go away. I do

not know you, sir."

She had no need to say any more. Burns had been just a little neglectful or else Henshall never would have got as near her as he had. But the big detective determined to atone for his neglect.

He applied fist, boot and his magnificent strength to the painter's anatomy, and rushed him through the car like a whirlwind, and out on the platform.

Henshall was not a coward.

Twice had he been baffled by this burly fellow, and now he determined to fight him.

The scrap ensued then and there.

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