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Neil Nelson, Mary Eastlake,
P. T. Barnum, Bill Nye.

X—FIRSTS FLY

By JOHN L. SULLIVAN Illustrated by H. BOTTHOF

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Haldwin'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 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 nine 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, any way?" 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 pasteboard stamped:

JIM BURNS,
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 didn'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?"

"Nothin'," 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 Oppor 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, Haldwin'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 imperturbable messenger caught him by the coat tail, showed 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 Oppor 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 admittance, and the door was opened by Miss Neville, who gazed at her manager in a startled way.

"Oh, Mr. Oppor, 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."

"Dik, Watson."

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

"I am sorry to forfeit my engagement, Mr. Oppor, but I must leave you now at

once. My father is dying, read," and she held out the message to him.

"Hum, ah!" remarked Oppor.

Much 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 Oppor, and then he rushed 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 go? 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 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 Oppor 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, Oppor."

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 stooped 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 knew 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 idly: "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 so near her as he had. But the big detective determined to atone for his neglect.

He applied first, 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.

The scrap ensued then and there.

Henshall knew how to use his dukes, and he did valiantly.

Burns, although a powerful man, knew little of the science of boxing, so his lighter antagonist pummeled him well with three or four straight from the shoulder before he got a chance to close with him and overpower him.

Just then, Oppor, hot and indignant, pushed through the crowd pell-mell, shouting:

"Hold him! Hold the scoundrel! Arrest him!"

During the excitement the train rolled away and the girl was gone alone, with no one of the three men, all so anxiously desirous of aiding her, near her.

Burns was savage. To several policemen who gathered he displayed his badge, and then, summoning a cab and accompanied by Oppor, he took Henshall a prisoner to police headquarters.

There Oppor told the chief that the painter was a scoundrel who had been pursuing and annoying his star.

The charge was so ridiculous that Henshall laughed aloud.

Then, in bitter tones, he turned to Oppor and said: "You fool, if you had only come to me like a man I would have cleared up your unjust suspicion."

He then explained the case in full, claiming only a chivalrous interest in the girl.

He had no little trouble in proving the truth of his statement, but he finally did, with the assistance of Mrs. Smith.

Mutual explanations ensued, and he and Burns shook hands and were friends, fighting for the same cause.

"I start for Chicago to-night," said Henshall, careless of everything.

"And I am with you," said Burns.

By the midnight train Burns and Henshall were speeding toward Chicago, determined to aid Louise Neville to the utmost of their power.

XI.—LENA MAKES A DISCOVERY

By P. T. BARNUM. Illustrated by H. C. COULTAUS.

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There came a crisis in the lives of most people when sorrows crowd so thick and fast that there is a dreary satisfaction in the thought that "things cannot be much worse."

So felt Edna Crawford, sitting with bowed head and shaken nerves, on the train that is bearing her onward to the bedside of her dying father. She bitterly regrets ever having left him, and tortures herself with wild pictures of the sufferings he may have endured at the unscrupulous hands of Dr. Watson.

For this man, so inextricably entangled with the sorrow and disgrace that are connected with her past life, she feels a deep and relentless loathing. It was through his prosecutions she was forced to leave her father's side, and remembering this, her young face wears an expression of such intense hatred that it attracts the attention of the lady occupying the opposite chair.

This lady had quietly entered the car by one door as Henry Henshall, powerless in the grasp of Detective Burns, was ejected through the other.



So felt Edna Crawford, sitting with bowed head.

She was dressed in an elaborate light silk gown, totally inappropriate for traveling, and over a dainty little theatre bonnet was pinned a heavy dark veil that completely covered her face.

Beneath the veil was the tear-stained countenance of Lena Henshall, who had been aroused by the tragic expression of Edna Crawford's face into thinking there was perhaps some one else as unhappy as herself.

Two hours before, when Henry Henshall left his young wife for the pursuit of his fascinating ideal, Lena had wandered aimlessly up and down her little parlor, a prey to bitter meditations. Sick at heart from brooding over her husband's neglect and thoughts of a lonely and loveless future, she called Mrs. Smith and announced her intention of passing the evening at the theatre. At the sight of the girl's tear-stained face Mrs. Smith wisely held her tongue, but the cynical smile that played about her thin lips caused young Mrs. Henshall to feel for her trusted companion a sudden hot dislike.

When Mrs. Smith left to make some preparation for accompanying her, Lena threw herself on the bed in a paroxysm of bitter weeping. Her thoughts turned longingly toward her father, to whom she had always gone for advice and sympathy, and with these thoughts came the sudden determination to go to him without delay. She knew that Banker Hartman was then in Chicago on an important financial mission, and summoning a bell-boy she procured a time table, and found that with haste she could catch the 8:30 Chicago express.

She thrust a few articles into a valise, and leaving a brief message for Mrs. Smith to the effect "that she had decided to go out alone and not to wait up for her," she stepped into a cab and was soon at the Union depot. She purchased her ticket, securing the only remaining section on the train, and before she had time to realize the importance of the step she had taken she was whirling away en route for Chicago.

Lena was suddenly brought back to the consciousness of her position by the porter, who was collecting the compartment tickets preparatory to making up the berths for the night.

Edna, who in the haste of her departure and neglected to secure any sleeping section, now found that everything had been previously engaged, and that the only alternative to sitting up all night was an uninviting lounge at the end of the car.

Mrs. Henshall, who had been attracted by the girl's despairing face, stepped forward and offered her the other berth in her own compartment.

Edna accepted gratefully, and warmly thanked her unknown companion for her courtesy.

As she moved from the seat her foot touched a small, dark object lying on the floor close to her chair. It was a leather case, stamped with the initials "H. R. H."

With a view to discovering the owner Edna opened it, and extracting one of the bits of pasteboard read aloud: "Mr. Henry Rowan Henshall, New York city."

"Why this must have been dropped by the gentleman who spoke to me just as the train was leaving San Francisco," she said.

Lena had grown deadly pale. "The gentleman who spoke to you?" she questioned faintly.

"Yes," replied Edna hesitatingly, "a tall, blonde gentleman who has followed me on several previous occasions. This evening he spoke to me and I resented it. A stranger present at the time came to my assistance, and in the disturbance that followed this card case was probably lost."

Lena Henshall remained silent. Crushed and humiliated by this proof of her husband's duplicity she had not the courage to further question her companion.

Her love for her husband was the first grand emotion of her life, and the discovery she had just made filled her with a mad, wild jealousy. When she finally retired for the night it was with the pleasing knowledge that in the berth above her, by her own invitation, lay the girl who was the cause of her husband's indifference, and probably the possessor of her husband's love.

How long she tossed about in her narrow berth, wakeful and miserable, Lena never knew.

Just as merciful sleep was closing her weary eyelids there came a sudden jar, then a horrid crash, a shriek that rent the air, a blow upon her head that made a hideous glare of light, and then darkness absolute and blessed unconsciousness.

The papers of the following day were filled with the ghastly details of the awful railway accident near B—

The names of the surviving passengers, together with a list of the killed and wounded, were published, but the name of Edna Crawford, alias Louise Neville, did not appear in any of these accounts, nor did the strictest and most diligent inquiries throw any light on the complete and mysterious disappearance of this young woman.

Last Chapter will appear next week. This is by Bill Nye, is nearly four columns in length and contains a large number of illustrations. Don't miss it.

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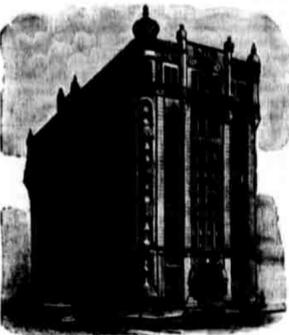
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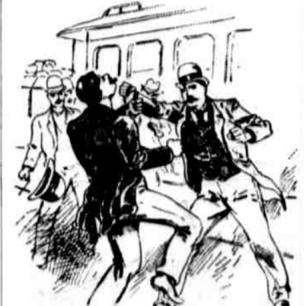
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