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Richard Dowling**

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**THE LAST CALL.**

**THE LAST CALL.**

**A Romance.**

**BY**

**RICHARD DOWLING,**

**AUTHOR OF "THE MYSTERY OF KILLARD," "THE WEIRD SISTERS,"  
"SWEET INISFAIL," ETC.**

***IN THREE VOLUMES.***

**VOL. III.**

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## **THE LAST CALL.**

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**THE LAST CALL.**

## CHAPTER IX.

At half-past six a train left Rathclare for Dublin. The evenings were now cold and short. It was getting near winter, the end of autumn. As the train was about to start from the platform, a man with the collar of a large boat-cloak turned up about his ears, and a soft felt hat pressed low over his brows, stepped into an unoccupied first-class compartment, and took his seat. He did not speak to the guard who checked his ticket, nor had the guard any opportunity of seeing his face, as the man in the cloak kept his face carefully averted. He sat muffled up in the corner without moving, hour after hour, as the train sped on through the darkness. Every time the speed slackened and they drew near a station at which they were to stop, he shook himself slightly, straightened his hat down over his eyes, and pushed up the collar of his cloak. All the way from Rathclare to Dublin fortune favoured him, if he desired to be alone. For, although they stopped several times, and came to a junction where he had to change, he succeeded in making his journey in solitude. On three occasions the door of the compartment in which he sat had been opened, and a passenger was about to step in. On each occasion that passenger drew back, repelled by the motionless, dark figure, and by a sense of solitude surrounding that figure. Not one of the three passengers knew what it was which gave the air of this solitude, and yet each had felt that around that motionless figure were gloom and loneliness which startled and repelled. Yet the reason was very simple. Between that muffled form and the surrounding world there was no link, no band of union, however slight. There was an absolute figure, set in the absolute vacuity of the compartment. Beside, above, or beneath that figure was no article such as is usually seen by a traveller. No baggage of any kind; no stick; no umbrella; no newspaper; no rug; no book; no bag. Nothing but the bare figure and the bare compartment. Under that hat and cloak a form of terror or of danger might lie hidden, and it would not be pleasant to sit there, when practically beyond human aid, speculating on what that hat and that cloak hid. It would be still less pleasant if suddenly that cloak and that hat revealed what they hid, and it was found to be a figure of menace or of danger. At the Kingsbridge Terminus, Dublin, the solitary man got into a cab, and said briefly to the driver: "Westland Row Station." When he arrived there he learned he was a couple of hours too soon for the Holyhead mail. He paid the cabman, and went to a hotel close by, where travellers may wait up for the mail, and have food and drink while they wait. Here he ordered some light refreshment, and getting into a corner of the large coffee-room, and turning his back to the room, he ate and drank without removing his cloak or hat. When it was announced that it was time to be stirring for the mail, the cloaked man rose, walked rapidly to the station, and took a first-class single ticket to Euston. When he got on board the boat he secured a berth, lay down, and did not move until the passengers were summoned for landing. Late in the forenoon he got into the train at Holyhead. Here he was not so fortunate as he had been in his Irish journey. He had to share a compartment with three others. Still he remained muffled up, silent, motionless. Hour after hour went by, and he never moved, beyond occasionally adjusting the collar of his cloak or his soft felt hat. On his arrival in London he seemed undecided for a while as to what he should do, for he walked up and down the platform at Euston until all the other passengers had left. He spoke to no one. He did not answer any of the porters who asked him if he wanted a cab, and, finally, he left the terminus on foot, and, taking a southerly direction, walked straight on for half-an-hour. It was now quite dark, and had been dark for some time. He did not look to the right or the left, but kept straight on through a line of dingy third-class streets. Then, coming out on a busy thoroughfare, he took a hansom and gave the address of a quiet hotel in the City. When he arrived at his destination he said he needed no refreshment, and desired to be shown at once to a bedroom. Had the gentleman no luggage? No luggage. The man seemed to hesitate. At this the traveller held out a handful of gold, saying: "Take some of this; I shall be here a few days." The man still seemed to waver. "Be good enough to keep five pounds for me until I want them, and let me have a bed at once." He was then shown to a room. He bolted and locked the door on the inside, and no more was heard of him till morning. Then he rang his bell, and asked if he could have breakfast in a private room. He was told he could. He ordered his breakfast, and came down at the time he was told it would be ready for him. He remained in all that day, and passed the time in reading newspapers of the current day and of a few days back. When it was night he went out, drove to a street off the Strand, and asked at a house there if Mr. Dominique Lavirotte was in. Mr. Lavirotte was not in. He was still in the hospital, and would not be home until the third day from that. The traveller, still wearing the cloak and hat, drove back to his hotel, and spent the remaining three days indoors reading the newspapers. In the meantime, the inquest on the body of Lionel Crawford had taken place. The jury had returned an open verdict, and the mortal remains of Lionel Crawford had been committed to earth under the management of Mr. John Cassidy. Lavirotte had been brought from the hospital to where the inquest was held, and told his story. The medical evidence was that there was no sign of violence before death on the body. The cuts and bruises discovered were consistent with Lavirotte's story--that is to say, they might have been inflicted after death by the falling stones and wood. But the police were not quite satisfied. They had ascertained from the

police at Glengowra the particulars of the case in which Lavirotte had played a part some months ago. They shook their heads, deplored the fact that the medical evidence was in accord with Lavirotte's story, and had grave suspicions that what the medical evidence called syncope might have been the result of a drug and not of mere unaided nature. In fact, the police inclined to the belief there had been foul play. At about seven o'clock on the evening of the fourth, day after the traveller called first at Lavirotte's lodgings he once more drove there, and without sending up a name asked if he might see Mr. Dominique Lavirotte. Word came down that the gentleman was to be shown up. When he was shown into the room, where Lavirotte sat alone in an easy-chair, he threw aside his hat and cloak and said: "Dominique Lavirotte, you are suspected of murdering Lionel Crawford, as you are suspected of having attempted to murder my son. As I came along this street, and while I was delayed at the door, I saw two men idling about--I took them for detectives." "For God's sake, what do you mean, Mr. O'Donnell?" "That the police are watching you; that in all likelihood you will swing for the murder of that old man in that lonely tower; and that you deserve to swing for your attempt to murder my son, and your deliberate trifling with me in my cruel necessity." "I never trifled with you, Mr. O'Donnell," cried Lavirotte feebly. "You lie, sir!" cried the old man, suddenly flushing up, drawing his right hand from his back pocket and placing the muzzle of a revolver within three feet of Lavirotte's breast.

## CHAPTER X.

For a while neither James O'Donnell nor Dominique Lavirotte moved. At last the old man said: "Whether I shoot you or not is a matter of perfect indifference to me. There would be no pity, no shame in doing so. I look on myself as a dead man, and I am not only dead in my own eyes, but also dishonoured. I do not say you were the cause of my dishonour, but you are a criminal with regard to my son, and an unprincipled liar with regard to myself. I do not know why I am talking to you. The sight of your dead body would be better for me than those shaking limbs and that craven face. Shall I put you out of your pain? Shall I fire?" "For God's sake, Mr. O'Donnell, put down that dreadful thing, and let us talk like men." "You a man!" cried the old man, in a low, scoffing voice. "Who, in the darkness of the night, sprang upon an unarmed man, who had never done you any harm, and sought to stab him to death without giving him one chance for his life! You, who not only did this, but did this to your greatest friend, call yourself a man! You are a low, mean, cowardly hound, and shooting is too good for you!" A queer look came into Lavirotte's eyes. "If you put down that revolver," he said more collectedly, and with a ghastly smile, "I will tell you how all that thing happened. How is it that, although, as you say--to my shame I confess it--I made a murderous assault upon my dear good friend Eugene----" "If you wish to live a few minutes longer," said James O'Donnell, "you had better give up that horrible, lying slang of dear good friend Eugene. I am in no humour to dry the crocodile's tears of an arch-blasphemous hypocrite like you." Lavirotte seemed gaining courage. With a wave of his hand he put aside the old man's violent interruption and proceeded: "How is it that, after an occurrence such as you describe, Eugene forgave me?" "Because he is too noble and good a fellow for a cowardly wretch like you to know." Lavirotte now smiled a smile of self-assurance and ease. "Mr. O'Donnell," he said, making a motion towards a chair, "have the goodness to sit down. This house is not all my own. I rent only two rooms, this one and the one behind. I do not think it would be fair of you to disturb the quiet of this house with anything so rude as a pistol-shot, or to shock the susceptibilities of my good friends here with anything so revolting as a murder. But if you will drop that revolver I'll tell you something about that affair with your son you never heard before, and which, perhaps, even to your blind and bigoted mind, may put a new aspect on the matter." The old man dropped his arm in mute amazement at this attack. He had come there with the intention of shooting Lavirotte, after reproaching him violently for the injuries he had inflicted and the hopes he had betrayed. And now, here was Lavirotte coolly turning on him, abusing him instead of sitting mutely under his reproaches, and smiling with as much assurance as though he were the person with the grievance who was about to extend mercy. "It would be," said Lavirotte, "more convenient and comfortable if you sat down. I am scarcely strong enough to stand. You say you are a dead man. I am a man only very slightly alive." "I will never, sir," said the old man, "sit down in the presence of a scoundrel such as you, again." "I was never very intimate with you, Mr. O'Donnell----" "Never, thank Heaven, sir." "Because I always had a natural aversion from fools." "Fool, sir! Fool! Do you mean to say I am a fool?" "Yes, a pitiable fool. Who but a pitiable fool would entrust the savings of a lifetime to a sanctimonious old swindler like Vernon? I never yet met a man who made a parade of his religion that was not as great a villain as his courage would allow. But I am getting away from the point. I was saying a little while ago does it not seem strange to you that Eugene should forgive me utterly after I had attempted to murder him?" "I said no, sir. The boy was always distinguished by his generosity." "Does it not seem strange to you that I, being Eugene's great friend, should have made a murderous attack upon him without any cause known to you?" "No, sir; it does not seem strange. It would seem strange to me if you had acted according to any ordinary principle of honour or honesty." "But why, in the name of

reason, should I attack Eugene, my dearest and best friend?" "Because he was your dearest and best friend, and it satisfied the demands of your vile nature that you should sacrifice the man who was your most intimate friend." "No; that was not the reason. That is what a shallow-pated fool might think. Something of greater moment than the virtues or vices I possess was the cause of it." "Ay, some foolish quarrel between two young men. Perhaps you were both heated in argument; perhaps you had both been too free with liquor. But, however you put it, or however high the anger of you both may have gone, only a coward and scoundrel would take a man unawares and attempt to stab him. Young men may have their quarrels; but in these countries, sir, young men do not in their quarrels use the knife!" The old man was still standing a few feet distant from the chair in which Lavirotte sat. His left hand was clenched behind his back. His right hung down by his side, holding the revolver. "There was no quarrel of any kind. We had not even been together that night. I waited for him. I lay in hiding for him, and as he was passing by I sprang at him and tried to kill him without a word of warning." "Infamous monster," cried the old man, shaking with rage. "Do you mean to tell his father this?" James O'Donnell's hand tightened on the revolver, and without raising his wrist he threw the muzzle slightly upward. "Keep your hand still, sir. Keep your hand still. You came here to shoot me because I had failed to keep a promise which I had every reason to hope I could keep. You came here to shoot me, because, through no fault of mine, but through your own stupid wrong-headedness, you, in the decline of life, found yourself commercially a ruined man. You have had a long and prosperous career. I have had nothing but struggles and difficulties and disappointments all my life, short as it is. Suppose for a moment that Eugene, without knowing it, ruined all my life, all my future." "I can suppose nothing so absolutely absurd." "Then, sir, your want of imagination in this thing only confirms my former opinion of you--you are a fool. Keep your hand quiet. It might be a satisfaction for you to murder me when you came in first, and when your faith in my wickedness was without a flaw. But it will not do now, and you would have no more comfort in shooting me at this moment than you would in facing all the widows and orphans made by that bank, that rotten concern which you in your infatuation believed to be sound, which paid you heavy dividends for your money and your consent to be stupid, and which in the end reduced thousands of simple, thrifty folk to penury. Sir, will you put that pistol down on the table and take a chair?" This was even a still more unexpected attack than the former one. Mr. O'Donnell's mind was thrown into some confusion by finding that he was not only opposed in the field where he had made sure of success, but that his flanks were turned while he had been announcing victory to himself. Never in the whole course of his life had anyone before seriously questioned even his judgment, not to say the foundations of his honesty. And here was the very man for whom he entertained the greatest contempt and loathing, calmly assuming a superior tone and impugning the honesty of one who had hitherto been regarded as impeccable. In a dazed, stupid way he put the revolver on the table and took the chair, as he had been asked. "Now, sir, it is time you knew all. Your son is now happily married to a woman I once madly loved. Remember, I am not using the word 'madly' in any figurative or poetic sense; I am talking the commonest and most ordinary prose. I loved her madly, notwithstanding the fact that I was engaged to be married to another woman. And without knowing that he did it, and to tell the truth, after I had been rejected by her, he made love to her and succeeded. Then it was that something rose within me, which you have to-night called by a variety of names, which others would call hate, jealousy, revenge, but perhaps which might be called insanity more truly than anything else. I am sure I must have been mad at the time. I remember nothing of it but a hurry in my head, a tumult in my blood, a wild desire to do something that I knew was not right, and yet which I knew I must do. Then I remember no more until I awoke healed of the fever of madness and hurt in the encounter with Eugene." He rose from his chair heavily as he spoke, crossed to the table where the revolver lay, took up the weapon, and said: "A capital revolver--a splendid revolver, sir--a six-chamber one. According to our own showing neither of us has much to live for; and according to your showing the hangman would be the only person seriously injured if I committed suicide. If you are disposed to have half of this I promise to take the other half, and then we shall both be quits." "Are you mad again?" "Not yet; but I feel it coming on."

## **CHAPTER XI.**

"Personally," continued Lavirotte, "I have no desire to shoot you. You are at perfect liberty to live. But as you were so sure a little while ago that you were a dead man, and I was one also, it doesn't make much difference who pulls the trigger. Yet I think, before we take our final leave of the world, it would be just as well we had a quiet little chat." "You don't mean to say," cried James O'Donnell, "that you would murder me in cold blood?" "How can I murder you in cold blood, or in heat, since you say you are already dead? When a man is dead to the law, as in the case of a man sentenced to death, no one ever thinks of calling the hangman's office that of a murderer. Viewing your case from my point, I cannot see that death would be any grievous harm to you. By your stupid folly you have ruined yourself, your family, and been accessory to the ruin

of hundreds. You are old, and have no reason to hope for any great prolongation of life. Outside your own business you never have been remarkable for any quality which could now bring you bread. Candidly, Mr. O'Donnell, I don't see any reason why you shouldn't die, and why I shouldn't shoot you." The old man was paralysed with horror, and did not speak. In the fury of his disappointment and despair it was easy for him to think he would come to London and kill Lavirotte and then himself, but since he had entered that room, and Lavirotte had spoken, a change had come over the whole aspect of affairs. He was no longer quite sure that he would be justified, morally or humanly, in killing Lavirotte. He was no longer quite sure that he had any grievance at all against Lavirotte. An hour before he was quite sure. He felt fortified by ten thousand reasons in the opinion that he was called upon to kill the man who had attempted to kill his son, and who had led him himself into a fool's paradise. Now the notion of death was hateful to him. Although every penny of his fortune might be lost in the gulf of Vernon and Son, and although his mill and other places of business would inevitably be sold, he might be appointed manager of the business; for no doubt it would be carried on by someone, and no one could be so fitted to manage it as he who had created it. The thought of his wife and his son came strongly back upon him, now that he found himself face to face with an armed man who had owned he was subject to fits of insanity, an armed madman towards whom he had, a few moments ago, used the strongest language. He now felt, for the first time, that what he had contemplated towards Lavirotte would have been a crime, and serious doubts began to arise in his mind as to whether his own life was in reality ended. The first shock caused by the news Eugene gave him had now passed away, and he was able to see with clearer vision what had been, what was, and what might be. At last he mustered courage enough to say: "Whatever may have occurred before, Mr. Lavirotte, supposing you were justified in your attack upon my son, and in the promise you made to me of material help in my great difficulty, there could not be the shadow of a justification for your taking my life." "I don't seek for justification," said Lavirotte. "You have no reason to suppose I desire justification. A while ago you used the vilest language towards me. It may suit me to take ample revenge for such language, when I may do so with safety." "Safety!" cried the old man; "safety! How can you talk of safety? You told me a few minutes ago that there were other people in the house. If you fired they would hear the shot----" "Shot," said Lavirotte, with a sinister smile, "there are six here;" tapping the revolver, which he held in his right, with the forefinger of his left hand. "Shots!" repeated the old man with a shudder. "Good God! you don't mean to say you could shoot a man with that smile on your face!" "That is a question quite apart from the matter we are discussing," said Lavirotte, smiling still more. "Yes, they would hear the shots." "Then there are the men I saw outside watching the place. They also would hear, and knowing that you and I were not friends----" "How should they know we are not friends? We have been friends up to this. Your secret designs upon my life have not been, I assume, communicated to anyone." "Yes, but they would come then and find me wounded, perhaps dead. They would find you here. They would know that you have had some unaccountable connection with the assault upon my son, were found in the vault with the dead body of that man Crawford, and are now found here with another injured man, and with a revolver in your hand. All this would be strong enough, I am sure, to convince people that I had been the victim of foul play." "Up to a certain point, sir, I quite agree with you; and if the facts were to be exactly as you have described them, I have no doubt whatever that an intelligent jury would string me up. But there is a slight difference between what you fancy would occur and what seems to me likely to happen. I will describe to you briefly what, to my mind, would occur. I would hold this revolver thus and pull twice, sending one bullet through the head to insure instant insensibility, sending a second through the cavity of the chest to secure ultimate death. Then I would take this revolver and put it in your hand." Lavirotte held the weapon in his right hand, and pointed at James O'Donnell's head. With his left hand he touched the barrel as he spoke. "For God's sake put that thing down!" Lavirotte laughed. "You have not yet been so long under the magic ordeal of its glance as I was a little while ago. Within a minute some persons would be in this room. They would find me in a state of terrible excitement. They would find me calling for help at the door and at the window. They would find me a man absolutely distracted. They would find you either sitting in that chair dead or dying, or lying on the floor. They would find this revolver--your own revolver--in your hand, or close by, where you let it fall after committing suicide." "Suicide!" "They would hear from me how you received news that I could not help you, although I had hoped to be able to do so; that you came over here to learn from me personally if there were not some chance of my being able to aid you, and that upon my telling you there was not, you, to my grief and horror, put an end to yourself. You see, sir," said Lavirotte, lowering the revolver and throwing himself back in his chair, "your story could not be heard. Mine would be the only one forthcoming, and on each of the six sides of the cube of my story is the hall-mark of truth." "But surely, Mr. Lavirotte," said the merchant, "anything I may have said or done would not be a sufficient excuse for your committing so terrible a crime as making away with an old man who had never done you any serious injury. I may have said violent, unjustifiable things; I own I have. But I said them in heat and in ignorance. You can understand that I spoke under tremendous excitement, and in the belief that you had, without provocation, assailed my son, and that you had, for no reason known to me, promised me aid in my great trial and forsaken me in the moment of peril." "Then, sir, am I to assume that you hold me at my word, and that you believe when I attacked your son I was suffering under extreme excitement and not responsible for my actions?" "I believe what you say." "And that when I promised to help you out of the money I made certain I was about to receive, I was sincere?" "That," said the old man, with some hesitancy, "is a question I am not yet qualified to answer." "Will you, sir, say that you are now as open to believe I was in good faith when I promised to help you as you were to believe I had committed an unprovoked assault upon your son when you came in here?" "I see no reason why I should not say so." "Then, sir, we may take it that we have arrived at the end of what might have been a fatal talk. Let us put an end to

any further chances of fatality thus." He cocked the revolver, placed the butt of the weapon on the floor, held the barrel in his left hand, and placing the heel of his right foot on the hammer, he tore it out from its place, and flung the weapon on the table, saying: "Now, sir, a child may play with it in safety." The old man rose up in supreme relief, and said: "I have often thought hard things of you. I shall never think them again. When I came in I believed I had matters all my own way, and that I should shoot you like a dog. I had the merciless intention of shooting you as you were. You then got the upper hand of me and had me at your mercy. I cannot now but believe all you have told me. Will you shake hands?" "Very gladly indeed," said Lavirotte, with the tears in his eyes. "This is one of the happiest moments of my life. Now it is only fair I should tell you upon what I grounded my hopes of being able to help you." Lavirotte told James O'Donnell the whole history of the treasure and St. Prisca's Tower. When it was over, the old man said: "Why, in the name of goodness, did you not get twenty men to dig instead of risking both your lives in such a silly way?" "We did not wish that anyone beyond ourselves should know. We did not want to share our good luck with the Crown." "There was no need to share your luck with the Crown. The law of Treasure Trove has lately been altered." "Good Heavens!" cried Lavirotte. "To think it is so, and that poor old Crawford should have lived all his life and died the death he did, without knowing this!"

## **CHAPTER XII.**

The crash at last came on the firm of O'Donnell. The business was sold; but the creditors would not be as severe on the old man as he would be on himself. They refused to leave him absolutely penniless; and when the whole affair was wound up he found he had a sum of money which, if carefully invested, would secure the declining years of his wife and himself against absolute want. Eugene was offered the managership of the old business, but would not take it, saying, with words of gratitude for the offer, that he would rather seek his fortune in another field, and that Rathclare would always in his mind be haunted by the ghost of their more prosperous years. He told his personal friends that while he was abroad on his honeymoon he had had his voice tried, and competent judges told him that, with study, he could make a living by it. He had always a desire to go on the stage. He was not too old to begin now. He intended selling up all his immediate personal belongings, and on the proceeds of the sale he calculated that he and his wife could, with great thrift, manage to live until he was able to earn money by singing. Three months after the last call, James O'Donnell and his wife had given up their large house in Rathclare, and taken a modest cottage in Glengowra, where they purposed passing the remainder of their days, and Eugene O'Donnell and his wife were settled in lodgings in London. By this time, all that had hitherto been concealed by Lavirotte was revealed. He had anticipated Cassidy's story by himself telling Dora of the infatuation he had once experienced for Nellie Creagh; and having explained to her that this condition of mind or heart had immediately preceded the onslaught he made on O'Donnell, she adopted his view, namely, that the whole thing was the outcome of an abnormal mental condition likely to arise once in the lifetime of the average man. He explained to her that upon certain occasions the sanest and greatest of men had behaved like idiots or poltroons, and that the very desperation of his circumstances at the time had left him to drift into a flirtation, which had never gone beyond a dozen civil words on one particular occasion. She believed all he said; and once she got over the first shock of the affair, banished it for ever from her mind, as though it had no longer any more existence than the moonlight of last month. Lavirotte and O'Donnell were now as inseparable as ever. They attended the same lessons together, and Dora waited for Lavirotte with Nellie at Eugene's lodgings, where the two unmarried lovers now met, when they met indoors. Lavirotte had still some of the money Lionel Crawford gave him, and when the affairs of the dead man were investigated it was found that he had some money left. This naturally became Dora's. Eugene's reverse of fortune arose at a time when his father believed matters would still come right, and that there would be no risk in his son's marrying. But the reverse of fortune, or rather the disappointment of expectations, had come upon Lavirotte before he was married, and while there was yet time to prevent a headlong plunge of their two lives into an uncertain future. He had put the whole matter cogently to Dora. He had told her that both he and Eugene were advised by the best judges to study music in Italy for about two years before appearing on the stage. To ensure success this was essential. Would it not then be wiser that they should wait as they now were, until he came back from Italy fully qualified to take his place in the front rank of tenors? Everyone said his voice was excellent. Everyone said it required training. He proposed to go to Italy with the O'Donnells, and he suggested that she should stay where she was, in the lodgings she now occupied, until his return. Eugene approved of this he said. Nellie thought it hard on her, Dora. Dora smiled faintly, and sighed and said: "No doubt the men knew best. They were sure to be wiser over the affair than she." He said they were both very young still, and could afford to wait in order to be sure of success. When he was gone she wept to think that her life seemed destined to be one of delays in love. After all had been settled between her and Dominique, he had been compelled to leave her,



to leave London, and to live hundreds of miles away. The sea, and weary leagues of miles, had separated them long; and often in those early days of dereliction she had imagined that the space was bridgeless, and that he would never stand by her side again, take her hand in his, call her his own. Then he had come to London, and that tyranny of search for the treasure had come between them and parted them again. Before she knew, in that London period, what absorbed Dominique's time, she had taken it for granted that it was something upon which there was little or no need to fear the risks. Now, this separation between her and Dominique, which would necessitate his going to Italy, seemed of greater import than any which had occurred before. Ireland was a portion of these kingdoms in which people spoke the same language as she did. She had the average knowledge of school-girl French, and could speak to him, after a fashion, in his own tongue. Now he was to go among people of whom she knew little, and be subject to conditions with which she was wholly unfamiliar. What could be harder on a girl than that she should love as she loved, and be so constantly, so completely denied? It seemed to her that, notwithstanding his professions of unmixed devotion, there was always something which occupied more of his attention than thoughts of her. This was a cruel reflection for her, who could think of nothing but him all day, all night. He was the sun, the moon, of her existence. How could he, if she were to take his words literally, love her as she loved him, when he could say he loved her above all other things on earth, and yet could neglect her for the ordinary pursuits of material advancement? She did not understand such matters. She heard that love in woman was an essence, in man an accident. This she believed now. But why could not the accident of his love be complete, even for a while? Why could not his regard for her be so all-absorbing as to make everything else seem small; her love for him dwarfed all other things when brought into comparison with it? But there was now no use in thinking, no use in even mental protest. He, being a man, was naturally wiser than she, being a woman, and there could be no doubt this going of his to Italy was approved of by all other men, who were also wiser than she. It was in sorrowful mood she parted from him. The slenderness of their means, and the great distance between London and Milan, made it unlikely he should return more than once or twice during the two years or so. He, however, promised faithfully to come back at the end of the first year, if not before, and on this understanding they parted; he, Eugene O'Donnell, and Nellie getting into the train at Charing Cross, with brave words and encouraging gestures; she weeping a little there and then, and much after. They had arranged between them that each was to write to the other once a week. He was much better than this, for during the first two or three months he wrote her always twice, and sometimes thrice a week. Then his letters dropped to once a week, and after that to once a fortnight. He playfully explained to her that as during the earlier portion of their separation he had exceeded his promise, he was persuaded she would now allow him a little latitude out of consideration of that. To this she answered in a cheerful letter that she was quite willing to adopt his suggestion. She wept in writing her cheerful letter, and cried in posting it. "If he wrote me twenty times a week," she cried, "when he first went away, I want to hear forty times a week from him now." As time went on, the letters from Dominique to her decreased in frequency. A whole month passed without a line. Then six weeks. Then two months, and by the end of the first year he had not written to her for three whole months, although during that time she had never failed to write to him every week. At the end of the first year, Eugene O'Donnell said to his wife one day: "I don't think the godfather of our boy"--they had now a little son, a few months old--"is quite as attentive as he should be to Dora, and I greatly fear he has got entangled, in some other affair. You know Luigia?" "What!" cried Mrs. O'Donnell, in astonishment. "You don't mean that handsome flower-girl?" "Yes," said Eugene, "that handsome flower-girl to whom we took such a liking." For a moment Mrs. O'Donnell looked perplexed. "It would hurt me to the heart," she said, "to think that poor Dora should have any further reason to suspect him. I do not like him, you know. How can it be that he who made love to Dora, who is dark, should care for this handsome Italian girl, who is fair-skinned and light-haired?" "The unusualness, partly," said Eugene, "and partly, Nellie, that she----" He paused, and did not finish the sentence. "That she what?" said the young wife, with a perplexed look upon her face. "That she resembles you." "Good Heavens, Eugene! what a horrible thought! I shall never be able to look with patience at Lavirotte again. Who is this coming here?" "I don't know; I will go and see." After a few moments, Eugene returned. "A telegram," he said, "with bad news, Nellie." "My mother? Your father? Your mother? Who is it?" she cried. "I know someone is dead." "Yes," he said quietly, "but none of those." "Then, in God's name, who?" "Dora." She had come out of the sunlight, which pierced the windows of that tower, and had fallen swiftly beneath the shadow of the old man's arms.

### **CHAPTER XIII.**

The news of Dora's death was a great shock to the O'Donnells. The girl's landlady had telegraphed to them in order that they might break it to Lavirotte. Of late, O'Donnell had begun to think that Lavirotte was not treating Dora very well, and Nellie was distinctly of opinion that his conduct towards the poor girl was very far from what it ought to be. Neither knew exactly to

what extent his neglect had gone. He spoke little of Dora of late. They knew she wrote to him regularly every week, and in palliation of the tone which he took when speaking of her, O'Donnell said: "Smooth water runs deep. He may be fonder of her than ever. It may be only his way of trying her constancy." At this Mrs. O'Donnell would become very wroth, and cry out: "Trying her constancy indeed! That is an odd way for you who know everything about him to put it. Whether is it he or she is more likely to be inconstant?" If Lavirotte had had any notice that Dora was ill, he had kept it to himself. The telegram was very brief. It simply stated that the girl died after a few days' illness, and that they were to break the news to Lavirotte. In the face of her sad end, both their hearts softened towards the Frenchman. Whatever may have been his past, even if he had been a little careless of her, and had carried on an undignified flirtation with the flower-girl, Luigia, it never occurred to either of them he had the faintest notion of finally abandoning Dora. Now there was but one thing to be thought of, and that was how they could best break the sad news. They sent for him, and it was agreed before he came that O'Donnell should speak to him alone. "Something wrong?" said Lavirotte, on entering the room where he found Eugene. "I wanted to see you particularly," said the other. "Are you prepared for any unpleasant news?" Lavirotte started and coloured, and looked uneasily about the room. "Has anyone come from London? I swear to you, Eugene, there is nothing in that Luigia affair. I know I shouldn't have started even a flirtation. I am sure you did not tell Dora. She has come to Milan, and is with your wife? Am I not right?" "No, Dominique. No, my dear Dominique. I wish she were." "Then, the girl is dead?" cried Lavirotte. "My Dora is dead! Tell me so at once, and put me out of pain, Eugene!" "I had a telegram, Dominique." "Yes, yes. I know. You need say no more," said the Frenchman, as he threw himself on a chair. "I am accursed! Poor girl! Poor child!" He covered his face with his hands and sobbed. Eugene put his hand softly on the shoulder of his friend as a token of his sympathy, and then stole quietly out through the window into the little garden behind the house. He thought he would leave Lavirotte alone in the first burst of his grief. In a few minutes O'Donnell came back to the room and found it empty. He consulted for a short time with his wife, and they came to the conclusion that it was better not to follow Lavirotte, but to leave him in solitude and grief. The afternoon passed away, and it was late in the evening before they decided that Eugene should look him up at his lodgings. Here again the Irishman drew a blank. The Signor had left that day for his country, for England, and would be away for example, a day for every finger--one, two, three, four, five. The Signor had not said why he was going. He had taken nothing whatever with him but his purse, out of which he had given her, the landlady, before the Signor went away, this gold piece, which was over and above the money due to her. He seemed in great grief and spoke to himself, not in Italian, and it seemed to her, who now spoke English somewhat, not in English. It may have been French. It seemed as though he cursed and threatened, for he ground his teeth and shook his fists, thus, and thus, and again in this manner, the last greatly terrifying her, the landlady. And she left the room, fearing he might, without reason, take vengeance on her, who had done nothing. For he seemed as one distraught, as one mad, who might easily strike one who had done no harm. Ah! Was it so? His sweetheart dead! In that far-away country! Then, perhaps, when he recovered from this he would marry Luigia, who had the most wonderful hair in the world, and was so fair, as to seem as though she had come from the place where his, Signor O'Donnell's, wife had come from. Luigia was a good girl, and not like others, and if the Signor did marry her, she would make him a good wife; for having been poor she would know the value of his money. But the poor Signor who had gone away that day was in no humour to think of marriage now. Only of death and the grave. Did Signor O'Donnell know of the sweetheart of the other? Yes. And she was also fair, like the Signora and Luigia? No; dark. Ah, how strange. How incomprehensible. Here in this country they were nearly all dark, and when a fair woman came among them, no dark woman had a chance against her. But if what people said was true, there were the dark and the fair in the place from which the Signora came, and a man could choose, after his liking, the dark or the fair. Yet the poor Signor, who had lost his sweetheart, had chosen, in his own country, a dark woman for a sweetheart, and here, for a sweetheart, a fair woman. He was fickle in love. Had Signor O'Donnell noticed that Luigia had a strong resemblance to the Signora? Luigia was a good girl. God keep her from harm. Eugene came back and told Nellie that Lavirotte had suddenly left for London, without, as far as he knew, saying a word to anyone. According to what his landlady had said, Lavirotte must have gone straight home, and gone from his lodgings to the railway station. What an odd fellow he was, not to say a word, not to take a portmanteau or even hand-bag with him, but dash off across Europe just as they had seen him last. "You know, Nellie," said Eugene, putting his arm round his wife's waist, "I often told you I thought there was a screw loose in Lavirotte, and every day that goes over confirms me more and more in this belief. It is a curious fact that some great-great-grandfather or other had a mania for mania, and wrote a book about something or other connected with the mind. Of late Lavirotte has said a lot to me about the injudiciousness of trusting to a voice for a living. He has told me, what is quite true, that until a voice has been tested on the stage and in front of an audience, no one can tell what it is going to be. It is just like an unacted play. It may be worth five pounds a week, or it may be worth five hundred. Then he has said to me that he thinks his natural bent was towards medicine, and only that he had given up so much time now to the cultivation of his voice, he would certainly, if he had the money, become a doctor. "Eugene," said Nellie, "you have told me something of this before. All this talk about the impossibility of deciding the value of a voice until it is tested in front of an audience, seems to me to have a good deal to do with the fact that people, both here and in England, say your voice is better than his. Whatever may be on the surface of his talk about his voice, I am sure at the bottom of it there is jealousy of yours." "Nonsense, Nellie!" cried Eugene, good-naturedly. "You know what you are saying is absurd. Such jealousy as you speak of is a lost art. As Uncle Toby said to the fly, Lavirotte might say to me: 'Go, go, poor devil! Get thee gone--why should I hurt thee? This world is surely wide enough to hold both thee and me.' How could two

men of second or third-rate voices, such as we have, even clash. There are hundreds of towns which want third-class tenors, and once we have taken to the boards there is no more likelihood of our meeting and clashing than of two twenty-fifth-rate comets meeting in space." "He is jealous by nature, Eugene; and he is jealous of you." "If he is jealous of me, darling, it must be in regard to you." He pressed her to him, and kissed her forehead as he spoke. "You may put it what way you will, Eugene, but you are a truer friend to him than he is to you." "God bless my soul!" cried her husband, "how *can* you say so? Did he not nearly lose his life in trying to get that treasure, with a view to saving our house?" "I suppose *I* must believe that he believed he would get that money, and so be able to do you a service, but I do not know anything harder to credit." "Why, he not only nearly lost his life, but he certainly injured his health in some way in that unfortunate undertaking at St. Prisca's Tower. The day he got the letter from me about the money for the last call, he fell asleep or fainted in a chair at his lodgings, and he tells me that ever since, his chest now and then feels strange." "According to what your father told us afterwards, it is very wonderful that neither of these men should have known anything about the law. For my part, Eugene, I believe poor old Mr. Crawford was a sincere, half-witted man, and that Lavirotte seemed to adopt the delusion of the old man in order that he might pose as your patron or benefactor, to balance the injury he had done you that dreadful night at the cove." "Nonsense!" cried her husband. "Men do not carry farces so far as to injure their health permanently." "If you were to talk till morning," said she, decisively, "you could not convince me he is not jealous." "Of my voice?" "I don't say of that only." "Of you?" "I don't say that either." "In the name of Heaven, then, what is he jealous of? Of baby?" laughed the husband. "Do you think he is jealous of our having little Mark?" At that moment the door opened, and a young Italian girl entered, carrying the baby. "You needn't be so absurd, Eugene," said the young mother, fondly taking her infant from the girl. "And yet," she added, kissing the child, "anyone might well be jealous of us about you, darling." "Nellie, dear, you have capped the climax of absurdity."

## **CHAPTER XIV.**

Before leaving Milan, Lavirotte had telegraphed to London, saying he would be over for the funeral. When he got to London he drove straight to Charterhouse Square. The landlady thought he looked wild, and two or three other sympathetic people who lived in the house said he ought to be looked after. But his words were sane, and he made only one request, which, under the circumstances, was reasonable--namely, that he might be allowed some time in the room alone with her. He went into that silent room where the dead girl lay, and closed the door softly behind him. It was broad daylight, and although Charterhouse Square is, at the busiest time of the day, comparatively quiet for a place in the City, he could hear the great muffled rumble of traffic that overhung the whole place, like a cloud that lay around on all sides, like a soft cushion against which silence beat. He drew down the lid and looked at the dead, the lovely dead. So like, and so absolutely unlike. All was here, and yet nothing. Here was a mask, the pallid mask of his dearest love, his sweetest girl. Here was the sleeping form round which his arms had often clung lovingly, tenderly, hopefully, with joyous anticipation of long years full of happiness, spent by them together. Now all the charm was gone; all the sacredness had departed. There was nothing more worthy of his regard in these still, silent features, than in the wooden box which was to be the mute and viewless partner of their decay. Here was the hair with which he had so often played, the unwrinkled brow which he had so often, with supererogatory fingers, smoothed. The eyes were closed; there was no longer any light in them. The light had gone out for ever. There was here a cessation of light, such as had occurred in that vault when the lantern failed. In those veiled eyes lay the darkness of the tomb, as in that vault, veiled from the light of heaven, had lain the darkness of the nether deep. The lips were closed and bloodless and placid. Those were the lips that he had loved to kiss, that he had hoped to think were his for ever. The sculptor would have seen little change, the painter much, the poet more, the lover all. Nothing was that had been. What had happened to the trustful spirit, quiet laughter, the quick irritability to smiles, the joyous movements of approach, when he was there, the sweet confidence, the gentle voice, the hand that came forth, anxious to be clasped, the yielding form? All, all the qualities, which had in time to him stood as divine expression of a beautiful decree, had passed into nothingness, had left no more behind than the wind leaves on the rock. All that was sweet and pure, guileless and joyous, vital and fresh, had gone away for ever, and left nothing. Why should he call this Dora? It could not hear him. It could not answer him. He might as well throw up his arms and plead his piteous grief into the vacant air. Dora was dead, and this thing here was no more than the mask of Dora. Only the mask of Dora, and yet a mask which he could not preserve. To-morrow they would take this coffin away and put it somewhere or other, he knew not, he cared not where. There would be a ceremony, at which people would look solemn, out of a general sense of fitness, rather than because of individual grief. They would lower that coffin down nine feet or so into the solid earth, and cover it up, and then come away. And the men whose business it was to attend to the material portions of the burial would stop at the first public-house and have a drink, after

they had buried his Dora. Buried his Dora! No, they could not. They could never bury her. They might bury this thing here--this phantom--this mask--this statue. They might put this away for ever, and in the inviolate darkness of the tomb it might crumble away and be no more to the future than a few old bones of an unknown woman. But for him they could never bury Dora. They could never bury his darling Dora! What! Could it be that these pallid lips now lying smooth and close together had moulded his name, had whispered into his ear, had taken his kisses as the rich guerdon offered there for admission to the citadel of her heart, as the supreme offer of a subdued nature at the final barrier of an opulent town? Those the lips, those the material lips, those the substantial lips which his lips had touched, and which, with such excellent flattery to his love, allowed themselves to be touched by his, not shrinking from his, not even seeming to shrink from his, but even slowly and modestly advancing to his with the whole head, the whole neck, the whole form---- Were they now going to bury these lips, this head, this neck, this form? Darling, where are you? I am here. Is there any place but here, where you may be? You have left something behind you as you went away. They have put it in a coffin. It is no good to me. Why did it not go with you? Why am I here? Where am I? Who am I that am here? I am not he that loved you once any more than this here is what I once loved. I shall wait until I go away before I love again. And when I have gone away as you have gone away I will love only you. And here upon the lips that are not yours, but which are the likest yours I ever saw, I swear this oath. So help me, God. When he left that room, when he had taken farewell of his dead sweetheart, he left the house, saying no more words than were absolutely necessary to the occasion. The funeral was to be the next morning. He said he would be there in time, but gave no other indication of his future actions. Out of Charterhouse Square, he struck in a southerly direction until he reached Porter Street. Into this he turned, and, walking rapidly, did not pause until he came to St. Prisca's Tower, the new door of which he opened. He entered the tower. Little had as yet been done to the interior since last he saw it. Above him yawned the vacant space which had formerly been cut in two by the fallen loft. That loft, in its fall, had carried with it the ladder which had run round the walls, and it was no longer possible to gain the second loft by the old means. But an ordinary slater's ladder had been used by Crawford and him of old, to descend into the pit, and this would be long enough, if placed upon a projecting mass of masonry on a level with the street, to reach the second loft. He had brought a candle with him, had lit it, and stuck it against the wall. The light from this was, however, feeble. It reached but a short distance into the pit below; but a short distance into the vault above. How was he to drag up this heavy ladder from its position against the wall, into which it had been thrust by the falling loft? He caught the sides of the ladder, and with all his force sought to move it. In vain. It would not stir. He tried again and again. It resisted him implacably. Then he descended it, finding in so doing that a few of the rungs had been knocked out of it by the falling loft. When he got down he stood on some of the wreckage, caught a rung close to his feet with both his hands, and threw the whole force of his body into one fierce, upward strain. The ladder still remained immovable. He let go the rung, drew himself up, and leaned against the ladder, panting hard. "My strength is gone," he said. "My strength is buried in this accursed hole. May the place be for ever accursed! I must get help." He mounted the ladder, opened the door of the tower, and accosted two men who were leaning against the opposite wall. They were willing to help, and followed him into the tower. One of them caught hold of the ladder, and shook it easily in its place, drawing it upward a foot or so. "I could have done that once," thought Lavirotte. "I shall be able to do anything like that no more." Under Lavirotte's instructions, the two porters placed the ladder in the position he desired. He paid them and they left. Then he ascended the ladder, and, following the upward way of the remaining stairs, reached what had been formerly his room. He felt greatly fatigued. The long journey from Milan, the anxiety of mind, the vigil by the side of the dead Dora, had all, no doubt, he thought, been too much for him. He looked around. The humble furniture of the place was all covered thick with dust. With a brush he removed the accumulation of months from the couch, and lay down. Yes, he was very tired, and there was that dull, dead pain in his side--in his chest, here. He wondered what it could be. In the old days he must have strained himself when working in this place. And yet he did not remember any particular strain. This pain might really be nothing more than the result of the overwork he endured here more than a year ago. This was the first time he had rested since he had last spoken to O'Donnell. It was very pleasant to rest here, secure from the sound and bustle of this tumultuous city. But Dora was resting even more quietly than he. There was no comparison between the blessed quiet of her beautiful young face and the harassed quiet he now endured. Oh, God! what a pain! What was that? For a moment he thought it might be death.

## **CHAPTER XV.**

The pain in Lavirotte's chest did not last long, but when it had passed away he felt weak and dispirited. A while ago he had thought how good it was to be here, remote from the bustle and noise of the town below. Now he felt oppressed by the thought that he was feeble, had suffered

from some acute and paralysing pain, and was practically out of the reach of human aid. This tower seemed indeed fated to take a prominent if not a final part in his career. He had, more than a year ago, narrowly escaped death in the vault beneath. Was he now threatened with death in this loft above? for he felt spent and broken, and as though the effort of getting down once more would be more than he ever would accomplish. It was plain to him something serious was the matter with him. Three or four times before this he had felt the same pain, followed by the same prostration of body and depression of mind. He had never consulted anyone about it. If it was serious, let it kill him. If it was not serious, why should he care? Why should he care about anything now? Dora was dead and his life was in ashes. True, he had not been as faithful to Dora as he might have been, but then who was perfect? And he had meant to marry Dora; and he would have married Dora only that Dora had died. He was too weary to take off his clothes. It was better for him to lie thus than to run the risk of again experiencing that terrible pain. The lassitude now was tolerable, and gradually the despondency was lifting. He would sleep, and upon waking should be refreshed. When it was day, no doubt he would wake, or a little after day. There was no great hurry. They were not going to bury Dora until noon; and he had come a long way, was overwrought, ill, and might indulge himself in a long, peaceful rest. It was the beginning of autumn, and he did not need, while sleeping, much, if any more covering. There was a rug on a chair hard by. He would just take off his boots, draw that rug over him, and go to sleep. Laviotte rose carefully from the couch, took off his boots, stretched out his arm, and seized the rug, shook the dust out of it, and drawing it up under his chin, sank back again upon the couch and was soon asleep. For a while he slept so soundly, so softly, one might have supposed he was dead. He did not move a muscle, and his breathing was so quiet it could not be heard by anyone standing near. The hours went by, and still he slept calmly, dreamlessly. Towards dawn he turned slightly on his left side, and then, as though by magic, the vacant spaces of unconscious sleep became filled with images, at first confused and incoherent, with no more rational dependence upon one another than the inarticulate sounds produced by a deaf mute and organised arbitrary speech. First he was conscious of great peril, which threatened him, he knew not from where. It was an old enemy, someone he had once wronged, someone who had promised him forgiveness, and now withdrew that promise. Was it a man or a nation, or some great law of nature, or some element of the supernatural that he had once outraged and that now threatened him, that now assailed him with fears, choked full of horror? Choked--choked--choked full of horrors. No, not choked full of horrors. Full of choking horrors. Full of deprivation of breath. Full of rigidity of lung. Full of the smell of stifling brass and unutterable pains of sulphureous obstruction. This was better. This was an open prairie, and he, weary-limbed and sodden with fatigue, having accomplished innumerable miles of travel, had innumerable miles of travel still to accomplish through the rank, tall, tangled grass that pressed against his steps, up to his knees, and held back his feet as a shallow rapid might hold back the feet of one standing in it. Overhead the sky was blue and pitiless; without a cloud, without the faintest promise of rain, which would refresh and cheer him. The grass at his feet was too bright for wholesomeness and hurt his eyes, as the sun above his head was too bright for wholesomeness and hurt his head, his neck, his back, seemed to parch and dry up the very essence of his spirits. It would be better if he could lie down; for, although the grass was too green with light, it was softer than this toil forward, and it would soothe the fiery heat of his muscles to stretch in delicious ease, even under that fierce sun. But he was powerless to do his will. He was powerless even to bend his back; he was powerless to bend to one side or the other. In no way could he alter the strain on the muscles of his legs. They burned him as though they were of red-hot steel; and yet onward and onward he must go, supported and projected by them. It was not now leagues that threatened him ahead, but infinity. For eternity he was destined to plod on over this fiercely hot, breathless plain, with the current of those tangled grasses always against his feet, on his head the furious heat of the sun, and in the muscles of his legs the fire of hell. Hell! Ah, yes! Now he knew all. This was his punishment for what he had done. But what had he done? There was the bitterness of this great punishment. He did not know. But it was something so terrible that the angels above durst not breathe it lest they might pollute Heaven, nor the demons in hell utter even its name, lest the Plutonian fires might be raised to rages such as the damned had never known. What was this after all? A change in the aspect of affairs which a while ago had seemed immutable, eternal. No longer was the plain a solitude, yet still no human figure but his own was in view. Yet he heard a sound behind him, and, turning, saw, a tall, lean, hungry-looking dog behind him. Any companionship seemed better than the solitude of the green plain, the empty sky, and the pitiless sun. The dog was coming after him faster than he was walking. The dog would overtake him in time. No doubt the brute felt the loneliness as he did, and yearned for companionship of any kind. What was this? All at once the resistance to the progress of his feet seemed to have broken down. All at once the fiery agony had left his muscles. All at once the hurtful brightness of the green had deserted the grass. All at once the mad fervour had been withdrawn from the rays of the sun, and in its place had come a jocund, sprightly warmth, which surrounded the body like a soothing vapour, and drew upwards from the grasses healing balms. The solitude of the prairie was broken by the presence of the dog. The impediment in his progress had been laid. The fever had departed from his body, and he felt refreshed, invigorated. Now he cared not how far he had to journey forward. He had the companionship of the dog, the vigour of youth, a soft and level way, and the freshness of an early summer morning around him. Out of a life of hideous and useless labour he had been lifted into a life of vernal joyousness. He did not care now whether the toil of his march should finish with the day. In so far as he was, he was absolutely happy, and when the dog overtook him, and he could speak to and fondle it, he should desire no more. He looked over his shoulder. The dog was still a long way in the rear, but seemed to be overhauling him foot by foot. He called to the brute. It did not bark or look up. It seemed to take no notice of his voice, but kept on slowly, now diverging a little to one side, now to the other, but mainly keeping in a right line with him. What was there

about this dog which seemed, now that it was closer, disconcerting? The brute came forward, hanging its head low, and as he swayed out of the right line of approach he snapped as though flies were attacking him, although no flies were on the plain. Then there was something wrong about his eyes and mouth. Although Lavirotte called him he did not look up, and the jaws of his mouth were not closed, and the teeth of his mouth were visible, and in the angles of the jaws there was foam. The brute was now within fifty yards of him, and just at the moment when Lavirotte's uneasiness at the unusual appearance of the dog had gained its height, something strange happened to the ground upon which Lavirotte was walking. It grew soft, spongy, lutulent. His feet, which a few moments before had been full of springy vigour, were now clogged with the heavy mud into which, as he went onward, he at every step sank more and more, until at last he found he could make no further progress and was held immovably fixed. Moment by moment he sank deeper. The mud now reached his knees, his hips, his waist, his ribs. Only his head and shoulders rose above this devouring quicksand. Then, as he believed all was lost, and when the mud had reached his arm-pits, the dog overtook him, and moving slowly, stood in front of him. With a wild shriek Lavirotte thrust forth his arms and seized the huge ears of the bloodhound, crying: "He is mad! The dog is mad! I know it. We have always known this kind of thing, we Lavirottes." The dog snapped at both his arms. With superhuman efforts, Lavirotte avoided the fangs. All at once, with a wild growl and incredible strength, the bloodhound thrust his head forward and drove his long yellow fangs into Lavirotte's chin. The eyes of the man and the eyes of the beast were now fixed on one another, and the eyes of the man saw that the eyes of the beast were those of Eugene O'Donnell. With a scream Lavirotte started to his feet--awake. This was the morning of Dora's funeral.

## **CHAPTER XVI.**

When Lavirotte got to Charterhouse Square there was little time to lose. Already the hearse and two mourning coaches were there. To himself he seemed not more than half awake. He went about the place like a man in a dream. He saw certain things occur, and he knew they were incidental to a funeral, but he made no connection between them and Dora, between them and his own heart. He was a shadow attending the obsequies of a wraith. He was now connected with nothing material, and nothing connected with matter was now going forth. There was in his mind a formula which he adopted from others--namely, Dora Harrington was about to be buried, but this had no relation to his past, his present, or his future. The events of all that day were to him, afterwards, no more than a half-forgotten dream. He was conscious of having felt weary, tired, worn out. He was conscious of being in a kind of vicarious way, on his own behalf, present at a gloomy ceremonial. He was conscious that sadness was the leading characteristic of that ceremonial, and he was conscious of little else. When all was over he remembered getting back to the tower, clambering up with difficulty, mounting into the loft which had been his sleeping room, taking off his clothes (the first time for days), and lying down in an unmade bed. He remembered the sense of peace and quiet which had come over him in that bed, and the gradual approach of sleep, until at last all was blank. And then he remembered nothing until he saw the early light of the next day. He lay a long time looking at the light as it slowly descended on the wall. His mind became a sluggish whirlpool of memory. He could now see clearly all the events which had marked recent years. It may be said his life had not begun until he had met Dora Harrington in London; and from that point downward, to the hurry and whirl and abysm of today, he saw everything clearly, sharply. "I meant to be faithful to her," he thought. "I swore it, and I meant it, my dear, dead Dora. What first made me miss a letter to you? Let me see. Ah, yes! I remember. I was to have written from Glengowra on Saturday, and on Friday Eugene O'Donnell asked me to go for a long walk with him next day. We went inland, towards the mountains, and in the mountains we lost ourselves and did not get home until midnight, when it was too late to keep my promise to you, my darling. "That was the first letter I ever missed. Ah, how many have I missed since? "Then what happened? She who is now O'Donnell's wife came between me and Dora. Her beauty carried me away. I was infatuated, fascinated, mad, and I forgot my dear girl for an empty dream; an idle, empty dream that no sane man would have heeded for a moment. Then came Eugene; and she who could not love me could love him, and I felt that I had lost both. This made me worse. I lost all command of reason, and tried to kill him. "Then came that time at Glengowra when we were both lying hurt, and the old man, her grandfather, came and induced me to take an interest in that phantom treasure; and all at once it occurred to me that if this treasure were found, I could be of the greatest service to the O'Donnells, whom I had so deeply injured. "I came to London, to this very place, with the sole object of getting money to relieve the O'Donnells. All was now right with Dora. We were on as affectionate terms as ever we had been. But as time went on, and the days between the O'Donnells and ruin became fewer, I gradually became more deeply absorbed in the work here, I gradually visited Dora less frequently. I almost deserted her, for a second time, and although no estrangement ever arose between her and me, I felt guilty towards her. But I was carried away headlong by my passionate desire to rescue the

O'Donnells. "Often as I worked, I knew I was overstraining my constitution; and when the supreme moment arrived, the urgent letter from Eugene, and the absolute necessity for immediate success or failure, I broke down in my lodgings and returned here, only to find that I had been wasting my time and risking my life in a wild-goose chase. "Then came the climax, and the narrow escape from sudden death. "All this seems strangely mixed up with the O'Donnells--all my misfortune! Then I go away; I go south with the O'Donnells. I go south to study for the career which would enable me to marry Dora, and I go south with the O'Donnells. It appears I was fated never to be free from their presence, from their influence, once I met them, and that the presence and the influence were to have disastrous effects on my life. "I am awhile in Milan when I meet Luigia, who is light-haired, and red-cheeked, and blue-eyed, and tall and slender and lithe, like the other, who is now his wife. And first, out of a mere surprise, and a desire to know how far this likeness went, I took an interest in the child; an interest, a perfectly innocent interest, I swear to heaven. "I found her like the other in many ways--in gait, in carriage, in the bright liveliness of her expression, in the clear simplicity of her nature, in the straightforward unsuspectingness of her regard. "At first I had merely stopped and spoken to the girl, and bought the flowers she had to sell. Then I began a little chat now and then, until at last we met alone. But still there was nothing but a kind of Bohemian friendship between us. I never said any words of love to her beyond the endearing words of her country, which have no meaning of love. Still, in some way, the memory of that old infatuation I had for her who is now his wife came back upon me, and dulled the thought of Dora; until at last, I do not know how, owing to some queer twist or turn of the brain, I seemed to think Dora would not miss my letters, and that it was only a kind of puerile foolishness to write. And so my letters dropped. And so my girl, my Dora, my darling, died. "Here again is the inextricable thread, held by the O'Donnells, bound up in my fate. There must be something in it. All this cannot be for nothing. I think it would be wisest for me to sever this connection with the O'Donnells for ever. So far it has brought no good to either side. "For a long time I have been thinking of giving up all idea of singing in public, and turning to medicine. Medicine is a fascinating study, and I'm sure I have a speciality that way. It runs in my blood; I was born with it. My celebrated ancestor, Louis Anne Lavirotte, born at Nolay, in the diocese of Autun, founded what I may call our house, in so far as it has been distinguished by familiarity with great cerebral questions. It is true that none of his immediate relatives has proved as great as he, but still several have devoted themselves to medicine, and several have made a mark in mental pathology. His 'Observations on Symptoms of Hydrophobia, following the Mania,' may not be the greatest work of the kind, but it deserves a prominent place on the shelves of anyone investigating this mysterious form of disease, which has baffled man from the earliest records down to now. "I think I am myself peculiarly qualified to take up inquiry into particular forms of mental callousness or intensity, for I have what I believe to be a peculiar faculty of thrusting forth a portion of my mind into certain and limited psychological regions, into which I can find no one able to follow me. "I have often thought that in these moments of uncontrollable, mental crassness, I am suffering from merely an undue prolongation of a portion of my mind into unfamiliar regions, where it is surrounded by isolated and combined images, invisible to others, and to me at normal times, and then and there illumined by lights and affected by considerations which have no place in my own normal state, or in the regard of others. "The question of the difference between mind and mind, between the sane and the insane, the man with a fad and the man with a delusion, the man with a hallucination and the idiot, admits of such subtleties of thought and delicacies of definition, that I know of nothing more fascinating to the psychologist. "The study of the sane mind is in itself an unexplored continent, of which only the coast line is known. But when we reach the region of insanity, we are on the confines of an unexplored universe, from which, as yet, no light has reached us but nebulous blurs of doubt. "Ay, upon the whole, I think it would be better to abandon all thought of the glitter and glory of the stage, which is but the glitter and glory compassable within four walls built by human hands. Whereas, the glories of research in mental pathology are as infinite as the flight of thought itself, as incompassable as the fields of reason. "I'll do it. I am yet young enough, and now there is no hurry; no hurry, for she is dead. I have my life now before me. It is, after all, a paltry thing for a man to devote all the years of his manhood to posturing on a stage, and uttering notes which, once uttered, will be lost for ever. The voice of the poet is immortal. The voice of the singer dies with the breath that leaves him. The fame of one is momentarily recreated; the fame of the other momentarily dies for eternity. What man of ambition would pause to choose between the two? I will not. I will not abandon the substance for the shadow, the actual for the dream. My resolve is taken, and I will abide by it, come what may." Lavirotte rose and went out. He had no fixed purpose as to what he should do with himself that day. He had no address in London. He had said nothing to O'Donnell about leaving. When he found himself in the busy streets he felt lonely, desolate, derelict. There was not now even the dead to visit and despair over. No one in the world now had any interest in him. He was as much alone as any man ever on desert island. No point of contact connected him with the world around him, with the world abroad. He had told his landlady at Milan that he was coming to London. That was all. No one else knew from him whither he had fled. She would not think of him. And yet it would be a ray in the dark vault of his solitude if one soul should think of him, and address him by name, followed by the most commonplace of words. It would be like touching the hand of a friend if his Milanese landlady had written him a letter. He turned his steps towards the Post Office. He entered the place for strangers' letters. He advanced towards the counter. Then, with a sardonic smile, he remembered that his Milanese landlady was illiterate. Never mind. She might have got someone to write for her. He asked if there were any letters for him. He was handed one. Ah, she had. No, this was from O'Donnell.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"MY DEAR LAVIROTTE,

"I cannot tell you how deeply grieved we both were to hear the occasion of your flight from Milan. Your landlady, Maria, told me the sad news. I was, indeed, greatly shocked and grieved to hear it. We can easily understand how it was, in the first terrible moment of your affliction, you should not care to come near even us. But I cannot help wishing that by some accident or another it had so chanced I left Milan by the train that took you away, though I might not be allowed to intrude upon you in the journey. "My dear Lavirotte, I know as well as anyone that under occasions of this kind words of consolation are generally outrages. My whole object in writing this letter is simply to say how sorry I am that I am not with you, and how sorry we both are for the cause which took you away. "I am *sure* the best thing you can do, under the circumstances, is to come back here as quickly as ever you can. Do not lose a moment. I am altogether thinking of you, and not of the desire either of us has to see you. To show you I am in earnest in this, if you tell me you will come, I will promise never to go near you until you give me leave. It is the commonest of commonplaces, but it is one of the truest, that hard work is the best way of occupying time, when time is bitter or heavy. My dear Lavirotte, come back and plunge headlong into work. We will not trouble you. When you wish to see us you know where to find us. I will not now say any more, except what you well know already, that our hearts are, and always will be, with you.

"Yours as ever,

"EUGENE O'DONNELL."

When Lavirotte finished reading this letter he fell into a long reverie. With head depressed and slow steps, he passed down Cheapside, Newgate Street, and over the Viaduct. A couple of hours ago it seemed to him his mind was made up beyond the possibility of change. And now he was not thinking of change. He was not thinking at all, but allowing to drift slowly across his imagination a long panorama of that future which he had resolved to abandon. He saw once more the life at Milan, the life he had been leading, the life Eugene would continue to lead for a while longer. He saw the moment when Eugene would finally take leave of that city and come northward, perfected in his art. He saw Eugene's arrival in London, with such good words for heralds as made him sought after in his profession. He saw obsequious managers with Eugene, flattering him, coaxing him, pressing him to accept splendid engagements. He saw the admiring faces at the private trial of Eugene's voice. He saw the smiles of delight, the hands that applauded. He saw the flush of triumph upon Eugene's face, Eugene's bows of acknowledgment. And behind all, he saw Nellie. He saw her radiant, transfigured, divine, sitting apart, isolated from all by the exquisite delicacy of her beauty, the exquisite delicacy of her love, the exquisite delicacy of her spirit. He saw the glance that shot from Eugene's faithful eyes to hers. He saw that in that room, that hall, the only thought between these two people was the thought of their love, the high and holy love of perfect faith, in which there is no more room for desire in the heart, in which the two spirits are not one in essence, but one in form, wherein neither exists apart, and each is complementary to the other. He saw these two married lovers had no need for words. They were with each other. That was enough. Each of them knew what this meant, how much it meant, down to the utmost limit of their joint happiness. Ah, what happiness was this! What joy, what unutterable rapture! To love thus wholly and without guile and without thought, without even consciousness of loving. What could be more! What could be more than this rich completion of spirit! What were all the gross, material ambitions of the world compared to such love as this! This was not the love of line and colour, the love of form and voice, the love of youth and sprightliness, the love of device or trick. Time would be powerless against this. The line and colour, the form and voice had been to this but the prelude to the imperial theme. These two spirits were now commingling to the perfect tones of the most glorious anthem, chanted by the angels for the accord of man on earth. He saw the crowded theatre, the blaze of light, the circles of wealth, and youth, and beauty, and fashion, of title and distinction, hushed for the great moment. He heard the orchestra pick up a thread of silver melody. He listened as the orchestra seemed, in carelessness, to lose that hint of melody. He heard that hint again, from a single string, and then to a note of sonorous undertone, he saw the great tenor step forth. He heard that voice begin farther away than the most delicate breathing of the instruments below, like a murmur coming from mid-air, under the stars. The sound descended, broadening and mellowing as it came, until it touched the earth in notes of resonant manhood, and then burst forth, complaining loud. Complaining of love denied, of true love lost for ever. He heard the song go on to the melodious climax of its final woe, and then he heard a mighty crash like the sound of an avalanche shot from a giddy, frozen cliff down a precipitous way to the valley below. He looked,



he saw men on their feet cheering and clapping their hands, and women waving their handkerchiefs. Women flung their bouquets, their bracelets, their rings upon the stage--these women drunk on a human voice. He heard the "bravos," the "encores," cried by thousands of throats, by those people who were at once the slaves and tyrants of Eugene. Then, again, he heard the orchestra pick up that silver thread of melody---- He threw up his head. Where was this? Had he got so far? and how had he wandered here? Ah! Lincoln's Inn Fields! The College of Surgeons! Surgery, pain, disease, death! What a contrast to that great vision he had just seen! Good God, what a contrast! He turned hastily out of Lincoln's Inn Fields. He could not endure the dingy, decayed look of that rusty old square. He had once been told that the area of this square corresponded with the area of the base of the great Pyramid. Surgeons and embalmers, the Great Pyramid and mummies, Lincoln's Inn Fields and ghouls! These were ghastly subjects. He had never noticed before how stark and bleak and cold, how skeleton-like the houses in Lincoln's Inn Fields were. It was a horrible place at this time of year, when the leaves were dropping, when the leaves already down had begun to rot. The youth and manhood of the year were gone. It was in the sere, the yellow leaf. No wholesomeness or joy could now be hoped for until the spring was rife once more. The earth had ceased to aspire to heaven, and all the glorious and beautiful efflorescence of earth towards the sun was falling back once more to the dun clay from which, by the aid of silver rains and violet and ruby dews, the sun of spring had stolen such verdant marvels. The dun clay, the dun earth, surgeons and mummies, pyramids and ghouls; ah, there was no cheerfulness, no wholesomeness in any of them! Think of an English river with willows and swans, and the light of summer, and the blue sky, and the delicate, slender, upward-pointing reflections in the water, and the music of the bees, and the inextricably-mingled odour of innumerable flowers, and the songs of birds, surprising the mellow shades of inner woods. And then the beauty of woman, and the strength and glory of youth in man, and the triumph and glory of song in man, and then the voice of song that made the birds seem but the lifting of one leaf amid the tuneful murmurs of a mighty wood, and the voice of woman answering to love in the accents of the song---- Surgeons and mummies, pyramids and ghouls. God made none of these for man. But all the others had the touch of his great handicraft, the imperial fashion of his august design, the tones of sound and colour, half hidden from the heedless, but revealed in their exquisite perfection to the poetic sense. Surgeons and mummies, pyramids and ghouls. Bah! Overhead, what a gloomy sky! The sun was now shining on all the squares and streets of Milan!

## **CHAPTER XVIII.**

It was hard for Lavirotte, after his life of aspiration after musical distinction, his devotion to the art, his study of it, his year at Milan, to drop all this and take up a subject which, although it had, now and then, occurred to his mind as one likely to enthral him, had so little in consonance with that which he was about to lay down. It was hard for him, at one cast of the die, to turn his face away from all the bright, luxuriant pageantry that waits upon the gifted and cultivated human voice, and give his thoughts to bones, and the immediate clothing of bones; to disorders of the human frame, and the immediate occasion of these disorders; to the coarse familiarity of the dissecting-room, and the function of inquiry which must be attuned to callous sentiment. In the art of the singer, when the rudiments of his art are his, perception, sympathy, sentiment, exaltation of emotional ideas, are the basis upon which his success must rest. In the art of the doctor, rigid, frigid examination, and mathematical deductions must lead to the only results which he desires. Lavirotte was torn anew with the conflict which years ago had raged within him. His resolution of that morning, although it then seemed firm as the solid earth on which he stood, now wavered and swayed as though it were no more than an instable ship upon an unstable sea. Eugene's letter had brought back to him vividly all his dreams of the past, and in that vision of Eugene's future he had done little more than reproduce the dreams in which he had himself indulged as to his own career. His heart, as far as love was concerned, lay in the tomb, and to judge by his present frame of mind, there was no likelihood the sight of woman would ever again move him as it had when Dora was the guiding star of his existence. Yet he knew that with time the acuteness of his present suffering would pass away. He felt at that moment it would be cruel that his woe should leave him. But his reason told him it would. He knew that as years went by these love troubles of man's early life grew less and less until they seemed insignificant, paltry, ludicrous. But in this, the very height of his affliction, the notion his sorrow might die was an additional cause of torture to him. He knew that in his present state of mind the future was sure to display a gloomy and forbidding aspect. He knew that people, in the presence of great personal grief, were usually indifferent to any considerations but those of their grief. He knew that when a man loses all his fortune, it is no great additional blow to that man to hear that a horse of his is killed. He was quite prepared that the whirligig of time would, to some extent, set him right in the main affairs of life. But now he was in no humour to discount his present situation. His woe seemed to soothe him. It was the only consolation he had. Still he could not banish from his mind the influence of that glorified vision. He could not get out of his mind the

fact that some day, soon, the voice of Eugene O'Donnell would burst upon English ears and take them captive. To be a great tenor was one of the most glorious privileges given to man during his lifetime. The general, the statesman, the painter, had all during their lifetime periods of great triumph. There was no period when, like the statesman, he was out of power; when, like the general, his sword was sheathed in the days of peace; or when, like the painter, he was busy at his easel at the work which, when completed, would bring him applause. Every time a popular tenor sang, the public testified to the utmost their enjoyment and appreciation. The tenor was not bound to any land. He needed no majority, no army, no colour-box. He was the only man who could make a fortune with absolutely no stock-in-trade except what nature and art had given him. He was equally effective by the Tiber or the Neva, in Buda-Pesth or Chicago. Climates or tongues had no power of limiting him. English, Italian, French, German, it did not matter what his nationality, or what his language, he appealed to all hearts, to all peoples. In the face of this universality of tenors in power, what a limited hole-and-corner thing the art of medicine seemed. It was all locked up in crooked words, in dreary books. Its terminology was supplied by the inarticulated bones of dead languages. The greatest glory it afforded was an article in a learned magazine, a reference to one's labour by some distinguished fellow-worker. How had he ever come to think of this as a career? It was no livelier than living in a vault, spending one's life in a charnel-house. Bah! He would get away from this gloomy climate, and this still more gloomy idea of medicine. He would change his mind again. A man had a perfect right to change his mind. He would go south once more, to the land of colour and song, and devote himself anew to the glorious art he had long ago selected. He would be a singer--a tenor, a glorious tenor, an unrivalled tenor. He would be a head and shoulders taller than any of the pigmy tenors now on the boards. He would be town talk, world talk. He would be a second and a greater Mario. Everything was in his favour. He had a fine voice, fine manner, good stage presence, and he felt sure he could act. He would be greater than Eugene. He had more go and dash about him than Eugene, and there was not much to choose between their voices. Some people said Eugene's voice was more sympathetic and tender than his, and that he never could approach the Irishman in *cantabile* singing. But, after all, who cared much about *cantabile* singing? What people liked most was to hear the whole organ, the full chest; and in the higher register of the chest he could walk away from Eugene. He would not deny to himself that the quality of Eugene's voice was superior. It might be Eugene would never fail to melt his audience, but he, Lavirotte, could rouse them, and in martial music would make Eugene seem a tame and somewhat faded hero. What was this? Here was O'Donnell once more occupying all his thoughts, absorbing all his attention! It was only that morning he had fully considered his relation with the O'Donnells, and traced their hand in every misfortune which had befallen him of late. Taken in this regard, it seemed as though Eugene was going to dominate the future. One of his reasons for thinking of taking up mental pathology as a career, was in order that he might escape from the circle in which Eugene moved. If he had really adopted that gloomy art as a profession, and if, when he was finally committed to it and could not think of going back to singing, Eugene made a great reputation on the boards, how should he feel? There was no doubt whatever he should feel extraordinarily jealous. There is no doubt whatever he could not endure to see Eugene's triumphs. He could not go near the theatre, he could not read the reports in the newspaper, he could not hear with patience those praises of Eugene. It would have been a fatal mistake for him to take to medicine and give up his present profession. It would have embittered all his life and made him feel an undying enmity towards Eugene. Yes, it would be much better for him to go on and qualify himself for opera, and spend the remainder of his life in friendly rivalry with Eugene, rather than breed hatred of his friend by abandoning his beloved career. Where was he now! Ay, this was Covent Garden. This was to be the scene of his future triumphs. He and Eugene were to be the leading tenors. They were to sing alternately, and public favour was to be slightly on the side of him, Lavirotte. Just slightly in his favour. Enough to gratify him without hurting Eugene. He would not like to hurt Eugene. He would let no man hurt him. But he himself had little desire to play second fiddle. On the lyric stage he should be first, and Eugene second. He did not want more money than his friend. They should each have a hundred a night, say, and he a little more popularity, a little more fame. He would not stop in this dingy, murky climate any longer. He would start at once for Italy. He would be in Milan before the end of the week. He would embrace his old friend Eugene, take up his old studies, and fall once more into his old ways. Lavirotte hailed a cab and drove back to Porter Street. He had little or no preparations to make for his departure, and that evening he was on the way to Italy. He lost no time in calling on his friends. He found Eugene and Nellie at home. He shook hands cordially with both, and said: "Of course, Eugene, the minute I got back I came to see you and your wife." "And the boy?" said Mrs. O'Donnell with a smile, as the door opened and the child was carried into the room by its little Italian nurse. "And the boy," said Lavirotte, echoing her words, and touching the plump cheek of the child with the forefinger of his right hand.

## CHAPTER XIX.

It was decided in less than a year from the death of Dora Harrington, that the *Scala* had done all it could for Lavirotte. Eugene O'Donnell was to tarry still a month or so, and Lavirotte decided not to leave Milan until his friend was ready to go. During these twelve months Lavirotte had been studiously quiet. He had given all his attention to his business, and if there ever had been any weakness on his part towards Luigia, the death of Dora and his visit to London seemed to have put an end to it. Daily he had seen the O'Donnells. Daily he had shaken the hands of Eugene and Nellie. Daily he had seen their boy, and danced him in his arms, or played with him, or sung to him. He had said privately to Eugene: "Once upon a time, when I was mad, I was in love with your wife. Now I think I am in love with your boy. You know I am the last living member of my race. I am still a young man, it is true, but I shall never marry. My heart is in the grave with Dora. Still I cannot help feeling that I should like to leave behind me someone with my name. It was never a great name, as you know; yet once upon a time a Lavirotte did something, and if the blood were continued, it might do something again. But all is over now, and my race is at an end. All is over, and there will be no more of mine." To such speeches as these, O'Donnell had replied jestingly, saying: "You will be a widower twice before you die. Mind, I shall be godfather to your eldest boy." Lavirotte would simply shake his head sadly, and say: "Ay, you shall be godfather, if ever there is need of one." Then he would shake his head again, and sigh, and change the subject of conversation, as though it were distasteful to him. So the time slipped away, until at last it was decided that Eugene should leave. Neither he nor Lavirotte had by this time much money left, and each felt the necessity of procuring immediate employment. When they reached London they took lodgings in Percy Street, Fitzroy Square. It was pleasant to be back once more within the sound of the familiar tongue. Italy, with its blue skies and melodious language, was a thing "to dream of, not to see." Not as in the weird poem, a thing of terror, but a thing of joy in memory, rather than of joy in experience. For, Frenchman though Lavirotte was by descent and birth, he was now more familiar with the northern idiom, and all his thoughts were framed in that tongue. Both to him and O'Donnell it was a relief to cease translating. When they were at Milan, no matter how familiar the idea which presented itself, it had to be shifted from the accustomed words into other words. Now each could listen at leisure, and drink in meanings without effort, and communicate ideas with, as it were, the primitive effort of the mere tongue. Here was luxurious ease compared to toilful effort. Here was a privilege greater than all the consciousness of having overcome an unaccustomed dialect. To think as freely as one who thinks in dreams, and utter one's thoughts as unsuspectingly as the rudest peasant who has never contemplated the possibility of error in his speech, was a new luxury, an unexpected, a seemingly undeserved boon, presented every morning at waking, and not withdrawn when the curtains of the night were closed. It was pleasant to get back once more to the familiar living, the familiar cooking, even the familiar dulness of the atmosphere. The evenings were already getting short, and more than one fog had visited London that season. But although Eugene and Lavirotte found themselves once more in London, fully equipped for the ocean in which each meant to launch himself, to neither did it seem there was any immediate chance of employment; and, in fact, all arrangements had been made for the remainder of that season. Each found it necessary to practise the strictest economy. Lavirotte had still something left, and only that Eugene's father was able to spare, out of the little which remained to him from the wreck of his fortune, something for his son, Eugene, his wife and child might have known what absolute hunger was. Eugene had two rooms, and Lavirotte one. They did not live in the same house, but they met daily, Lavirotte coming to Eugene's place, and spending an hour or so in the evening with his friend. "I shall not be able to hold out," said Lavirotte on one occasion, "more than a couple or three months, if something doesn't turn up." "I should not have been able to hold out so long," said Eugene, "only that my father was able to lend me a hand." "It's weary work, waiting," said Lavirotte. "But still, I do not despair." "Not only do I not despair," said Eugene, "but I mean to succeed. Neither of us is a fool, and there are worse men, at our business, making a living in London. Why should we starve?" These were gallant words, but facts were hard upon the two. Lavirotte was the first to meet with a piece of luck. It was not much. In some remote kind of way, through Cassidy's agency, he was asked to sing at a concert in Islington, and got a guinea for the night. When the expenses of gloves and a cab were taken out of this guinea, very little remained as remuneration to the singer. But still it was better to do something than nothing, and Lavirotte was a few shillings less poor by the transaction. Although he had not even yet abandoned hope of getting a hundred pounds a night, he no longer thought it likely he would reach such an El Dorado soon. He would have been very glad to take ten pounds a night; ay, to take ten pounds a week. He would have been glad to take a pound a night. Eugene had told him that he, Eugene, would be glad to sing for nothing if he could only get an "appearance." Each assured the other that he was worth half-a-dozen of those in the ruck of singers. Each told the other, with perfect candour, he estimated his friend's value at not a penny less than fifty pounds a week. And yet each would there and then have been glad to sign an agreement at five pounds a week. Mr. John Cassidy had no longer any great interest in either of the pair. There was no longer anything to be found out about them. Cassidy was not, in grain, unprincipled or immoral. He did not love mischief for mischief sake. He was simply a feeble, crawling thing. He could not help crawling. But he felt very much pleased at being able to befriend Lavirotte. He owed no grudge to either man. In fact, he felt a certain kind of gratitude to Lavirotte for having once supplied him with a matter in which he took a deep interest. He was still employed at the railway; and the concert, in which Lavirotte sang, was one got up with a view to supplying means of presenting a testimonial to a superannuated servant of the company. There was, of course, no chance of a similar engagement coming Lavirotte's way. Eugene was present that night, and heard his friend sing. In all likelihood there never yet was a tenor absolutely free from jealousy, and Eugene felt he would like to be in Lavirotte's shoes, and he was certain he could have done at least as well as his friend. Nay, if the truth must be told, he was certain he could do better. Lavirotte, on his side, was haunted by an uneasy feeling of the

same kind. His success was undoubted; but he knew very well that it was acquired by what Eugene would call noise. He got as much applause as the heart of man could desire. He got two "encores." He was congratulated by the secretary and treasurer to the fund, and at the supper which followed the concert, he sang the "Bay of Biscay" with tremendous power and effect. Eugene was at that supper also, and in response to the chairman's invitation, an invitation suggested by Lavirotte, he sang. Eugene sang "My pretty Jane;" and then, partly because Eugene's tender rendering of the ballad came upon those present as a surprise, and partly because Lavirotte's public performance had prepared them, and partly because Lavirotte's singing was so ill-proportioned to the room in which the supper was given that it hurt, almost, they did not encore Lavirotte, and they did encore Eugene. And then Eugene, with great discretion and modesty, sang no new song, but repeated the last stanza of "My pretty Jane," and sang it gentler than he had at first, singing as though it were a thing of no matter, no effort, as though he could not keep the melody back, but must, in good-humoured ease, let it float from him as a man lets pleasant talk float from him when he is in a careless mood. Then, when Eugene was done there was no tumult of applause. There was just only a murmur, which showed that men's hearts, and not their admiration, were stirred. Two men who were not near him came and shook hands with him silently. No one had shaken hands with Lavirotte. That night, Eugene O'Donnell told his wife that his song at that supper had been more successful than Lavirotte's. That night, Lavirotte told his heart the same story.

## CHAPTER XX.

Although the immediate result of Lavirotte's first engagement in London was so modest, still he had gained a start, and that, in his profession, was a great deal. O'Donnell was not impatient. His position was grave, even serious. But still he did not give way. Like Lavirotte, he had now abandoned all extravagant pretensions, and would have been very glad to take the most modest salary. Neither he nor Lavirotte would even yet accept any subsidiary part. Either would have gladly gone to the provinces for six guineas a week, but neither would take second part. Lavirotte was offered the leadership of the tenors in a chorus. This he flatly refused, and with heat. He came to Eugene and told him what he had been offered, and Eugene agreed with him in thinking there was more affront than flattery in the offer. "Let them," cried Eugene, indignantly, "keep their five guineas a week. I'd rather see you, Dominique, back at the old work again than degrade yourself by accepting such a position." From time to time Eugene received small sums from Glengowra. Lavirotte had no such resources, and one day he came in to Eugene and said: "I am paying eight shillings a week for my room, and there's St. Prisca's Tower idle all this time. I am not, you know, as rich as Rothschild, and what is the good of throwing away money! I'm going to live in the tower again." "For heaven's sake, don't do anything of the kind!" said Eugene. "Why not?" asked Lavirotte. "Because the place is haunted," said O'Donnell, with a shudder. "You are not such a fool," said Lavirotte, "as to believe anything so superstitious." "I don't mean what I say literally, but poor Mr. Crawford lost his life there. You were very near losing your life there, and upon the sad occasion of your last visit to London you put up there. To say the least of it, that tower must have a very gloomy aspect in your mind." "Gloom or no gloom," said Lavirotte bitterly, "eight shillings a week are eight shillings a week. Besides," he added, changing his tone and adopting a lighter manner, "I know they don't care for my caterwauling in the house I'm living in now, and St. Prisca's Tower is a splendid place for practising in. You might shout your voice away there, and not a soul would hear you. Eugene, you must come and practise with me there. I haven't got a piano, that's true, and the way up is a very rough-and-ready one. But anyway you'll know you're welcome, and we can puzzle along with a fork." He took the fork out of his waistcoat pocket, struck it, sang the note, and then took the octave above. "True, isn't it, Eugene?" he cried, laughingly. "As the tone of the steel itself," cried Eugene. "Let us try the garden bit in unison. Here's 'Faust.'" "Damn 'Faust'!" said Lavirotte. "Come on, I'll set you going:

"The bright stars fade, the morn is breaking,  
The dew-drops pearl each bud and leaf,  
When I of thee my leave am taking,  
With bliss too brief."

"No," said Eugene. "Not that. I remember----" "And do you think I forget?"

## CHAPTER XXI.

This was the first note of discord which had been struck between the two since the memorable night of the encounter near the cove. It was struck deliberately by Lavirotte; O'Donnell could not guess why. "I will not sing," said Eugene. "What is the matter with you, Dominique? You seem to be in rather a brimstone humour to-day." "Ah," said Lavirotte, shaking his head grimly, "the treacle period has passed." "Nonsense," said Eugene, "a young man like you! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. A young man like you ought to be ashamed to give way to such gloomy fancies. Look at me. I have not got even one chance yet, and I have a wife and child depending on me." "Ay," said Lavirotte, "a wife and a child! And I have no wife, no child. I have earned a guinea, it is true, and you have earned nothing, since we came to London. It doesn't make much difference whether I ever earn another sovereign or not. What have I to live for? What do a hundred days mean to me? In a hundred days, even if I go and live at the tower, I shall be penniless." "And I," said O'Donnell, "long before a hundred days, shall be a pauper with my wife and child looking to me in vain for food. What would you do, Dominique, if you found yourself without money, and a wife and child asking you for bread?" "Cut my throat." "What? And leave them to starve?" "Well, cut their throats, and hang for them." "Men who talk about cutting their throats never do it." "I own I don't think it's worth doing in my case. When a man has no other way of making a stir in the world, he may get his name prominently before the public by committing a great crime against his neighbour, or a folly against himself. Eugene, I candidly own to you I am no hero. I am, in fact, a bit of a coward, as you may know; for, once upon a time, I did an unpardonably cowardly thing by you." "Hush, man!" cried Eugene, "have we not agreed to banish that subject for ever?" "To banish it from our talk, ay. To banish it from our minds, never." "I swear to you I never think of it, and it is ungenerous of you to assume I ever think of it. Let us get away from these subjects, which are even more gloomy than St. Prisca's Tower. Life is too short, and the destroying influences of time too great, for such criminal amusements as you are giving way to, Dominique. As sure as you go back to that hideous tower you will fall into a melancholy. My dear old friend, I can't afford to have you ill----" "My dear old friend, you must afford to have me die." "Upon my word, Dominique, you are intolerable. I will have no more of your nonsense. When a man is in such infamous humour as you are now, there is nothing so good for him as the sight of youth and beauty." Eugene arose, opened the door, and called, "Nellie, bring the boy. Here is Dominique in the blues." In a minute in came the young mother, carrying the boy in her arms. "Dominique in the blues!" she cried, laughing and shaking her rich hair about her shoulders. "Do you hear that?" she said to her child. "Uncle Dominique in a bad temper, Mark. What do you think of that?" she said, as she handed the blue-eyed, curly-haired, sturdy child to the Frenchman. "It is a bad example for a godfather to give his godson. What! In the blues, Dominique! Must I go back and tidy my hair? Eugene, how could you be so inconsiderate? You forget that when a mother is engaged in minding a great big child like Mark, she can't be as tidy as she would wish to be." The boy went freely to Lavirotte, and put his arms round him and clung to him, and called him "Dom," and told him his mother was very naughty since she would not give him sweeties. "Eugene," said Lavirotte, suddenly, "I once knew a man who had a child about the age of this boy in my arms, and he was playing with the child in a perfectly friendly way, as I am now playing with your boy, and owing, mind you, to mere awkwardness, he let the child's back--just here, the small of his back--somewhat rudely touch the edge of a table, and the child lost the use of his lower limbs, and in time, a hunch appeared upon his back. Amiable as you are, Eugene, I wonder what you would say to me if, by accident, I hurt your boy so?" "Dominique," cried the mother, hastily snatching her child from his arms, "what do you mean? There is something queer about you. Your eyes are too quiet for your words." Lavirotte laughed. "My eyes are too quiet for my words," he said "There is a good deal in that, and my mind may be too quiet for my eyes or--the other way." Again he laughed. "I cannot make you out to-day," said Eugene. "Nor can I," said Mrs. O'Donnell. "Mark, what is the matter with godfather?" The child had but one thought. His godfather was ill. He stretched out his hands to go to him. Lavirotte shook his head sadly, and said: "You are safer where you are." Within a week Lavirotte once more took up his residence in St. Prisca's Tower. For some days Eugene thought that the change had been absolutely beneficial to his friend. Lavirotte's spirits seemed more equable; he made no further allusion to the gloomy subjects which had, for some time previous, haunted him. He told Eugene that he had no notion how much more comfortable it was to practise alone, and in the tower, than in the old Percy Street lodgings. "In the first place," he said, "there is one of the lofts with nothing on it, and you can hear much better in an empty room all that is undesirable. I do four to six hours a day. Come and visit me in my new diggings. You must come. Of course, it's out of the way. No one but carters and fish-salesmen ever trouble Porter Street. But all so much the better. You might shout loud enough to stop a clock, and not a soul would hear. Come, you will come; you must come." "I can't, go very well," said Eugene. "Nellie is out, and has left me in charge of the boy." "Let us take Mark with us," said Lavirotte. "We can get an omnibus at the end of the street. It will amuse the child. Mark, wouldn't you like to come in an omnibus?" "Yes," cried the boy. "There you are, Eugene. Just leave a line or word with the landlady, and let us take the boy with us. He will be no trouble, and it is sure to amuse him. An hour's practice with me will do you no harm, and you have never yet been in my tower." Eugene was persuaded, and went. The inside of St. Prisca's was in exactly the same condition as when Lavirotte had last lived there. In order to get from the ground floor to the second loft it was

still necessary to ascend by means of the slater's ladder. "I know the place better than you," said Lavirotte. "I'll carry the child and lead the way." When he was about to step from the ladder to the floor of the second loft, he said, with a strange laugh: "It's upwards of thirty feet from this to the top of the vault below. An awkward fall that would be. It would be worse for Mark than even striking his back against the edge of a table. Eh, Eugene?" "In heaven's name, Dominique, what's the matter with you? This place must have an unwholesome influence on you." "Doubtless it has," laughed Lavirotte, "but we're up safe at last, Mark." "Yes, Uncle Dom," said the child. And that was his first experience of St. Prisca's Tower.

## CHAPTER XXII.

About this time Lavirotte made the acquaintance of Edward Fraser, a composer of music. Fraser took a great liking to the volatile Frenchman. He had him at his house frequently, and introduced him to many professional musicians. "You know," said he to Lavirotte, "I'd be delighted to do anything I could for you; but the fact is, all engagements are made, and beyond a few concerts I don't think I can help you much. You see, you want leading business, and that's not easy to be got, at the best of times. I don't exactly know what I'm going to do with my opera yet. But if I decide to produce it this season, I'll certainly give you the refusal of the tenor part." This was a great hope for Lavirotte. He hastened with it to Eugene. Eugene shook his hand, and congratulated him upon even a remote chance of such good luck. "It's a long way off, you know, even if it ever comes to anything. I wish to goodness, Eugene, you had something of the kind to look forward to." "I wish to goodness I had," said the other. "But one must learn to wait patiently. I suppose I shall get a turn sometime." "I wish there was room for two of us in the new opera," said Lavirotte dubiously. "You see, Eugene, as Fraser said, it's not easy to pick up leading business, and of course, nothing else would suit you." O'Donnell shook his head and laughed. "Beggars can't be choosers," he said gaily. "We wanted a hundred a night, you know, before we started from Milan; and now I'd be glad to go on at a pound a night. I would not then have thought of taking anything less than the first part. I would not now care to be tempted very much with an offer of a second part, supposing the part was any good. What is the second part in the new opera like?" "From what I heard of it," said Lavirotte, "it's the very thing for you, if you would take it--in fact, they are two excellent parts. I heard two very taking solos and a lot of the concerted parts. If you would entertain the notion, I'd speak to Fraser and introduce you. "To tell you the truth, Dominique, I'd be glad to get anything to do now. It's disgraceful that a fellow of my years should be taking money out of my father's very narrow means. "I'd be glad to earn four or five pounds a week anyway now. I suppose Fraser would give as much as that." "I'm sure he would," said Lavirotte. "More, I think. I have a notion he'd give his leading man ten pounds a week, and his second, six." "Well, if you could get me six, Dominique, I'd be delighted to take it." "I'll go back to him at once," said the Frenchman. "I won't lose a moment, Eugene. Come, put on your hat. We may as well go together. Chances like this don't grow on the hedge bushes. Between you and me, I think Fraser would hurry his share of the work if he were satisfied of being able to get good voices at this awkward time of the year. He tells me he knows where to get an excellent soprano, but that until he met me he was in despair about a tenor. A good contralto is, of course, not to be hoped for, and a sufficiently good baritone and bass will turn up, as a matter of course." By this time the two friends were in the street, hurrying off towards Fraser's house. They found the composer at home. "This is my friend O'Donnell, Fraser. You have often heard me speak of him. We were rival tenors in Glengowra and Rathclare. We were fellow-students at the *Scala*, and now we're going to be rival tenors in your opera, 'The Maid of Athens.'" Fraser laughed good-humouredly, and said: "All right. If, Mr. O'Donnell, you sing as well as our friend Lavirotte, we shall be very lucky in our tenors." "He sings better," said Lavirotte, with a slight darkening of the face. "There is one thing I cannot rival him in, certainly," said O'Donnell, "and that is generosity. I have no desire to compete with my dear friend as a tenor. He said there was a second part in your opera which I might suit. I haven't an engagement of any kind, and I am most anxious to get something to do. I'd rather lead the chorus than do nothing." "Oh," said Fraser, "if you sing anything like as well as Lavirotte, you must not think of leading a chorus." "Sing him something, Eugene, and then he'll be able to tell whether you sing better than I or not." "I won't sing if you put it that way, Dominique," said O'Donnell, colouring slightly. "You know very well I do not want to go into rivalry with you." "There is no rivalry at all, Mr. O'Donnell. Lavirotte is in one of his perverse moods. If I produce my opera this season, he shall have the refusal of the leading part. I have no one in my mind as the second tenor. Now, if you'll sing me something, please, I shall be able to tell you whether I think the music would suit you." "What would you like," asked Eugene, standing up to the piano. Fraser was sitting in front of it, running his fingers over the keys. "Whatever you think best. Whatever suits you best." "What shall I sing, Dominique?" "Oh, a ballad," said Lavirotte. "Shall I start you?" "Ay, give him a lead," said Fraser.

"The bright stars fade, the morn is breaking!"

"Damn it, Lavirotte, are you mad or possessed by devils!" Fraser had begun the accompaniment. He turned round in astonishment. "What on earth is the matter?" he said. "It's a good song, Mr. O'Donnell." Lavirotte was laughing slyly, stealthily, behind his hand. O'Donnell looked furiously at Lavirotte. He was thoroughly roused. He pointed at Lavirotte, and said: "He knows I do not sing that song. He knows it puts me out to speak of that song." The composer looked in amazement from one to the other. "Perhaps," he said, "you will sing something else, Mr. O'Donnell? If you had a breakdown on it once I don't think it kind of Lavirotte to remind you of it." "I never had a breakdown on it, Mr. Fraser," said Eugene, taking his eyes off Lavirotte, and fixing them on the composer. Then he spoke with enormous distinctness, "But, Mr. Fraser, whenever I hear that song it pains me cruelly. It pains me as though you thrust a knife into me." Lavirotte ceased to laugh. His hand fell from before his face. He turned ashy pale. "Eugene!" he cried, "you hit below the belt." "No, sir, I did not," said Eugene, indignantly. "You hit me unawares." "Gentlemen," said Fraser, "I am sure I am sorry any unpleasantness has arisen." "I beg your pardon, Mr. Fraser," said O'Donnell, "I forgot myself for a moment. I forgot where I was. Try to forgive me if you can, and to show you I have dismissed the thing from my mind, Dominique, will you forget and forgive?" he held out his hand to the Frenchman. Lavirotte took the hand slowly, pressed it between both his, kissed it, and said: "Eugene, I was wrong, you were right. That blow was delivered unawares, as another blow you remember." "That's right!" cried Fraser heartily. "That's right, men! Sit down, O'Donnell, you're not fit to sing for a while. Stop, I'll play you the overture to 'The Maid of Athens.' I have arranged it for the piano.... Well, what do you think of it?" he cried when he had finished. "I fancy I can hear some of the melodies on the street organs, and to get my stuff on the street organs is the height of my ambition. That is fame. That is glory. Now, O'Donnell, what will you sing?" "My pretty Jane," said Lavirotte. "Sing 'My pretty Jane,' Eugene." "All right," said Eugene. And Fraser played the introduction. When O'Donnell had ceased to sing, Fraser turned round, caught him enthusiastically by the hand, and said: "Positively lovely, my dear fellow! The quality is perfection. Have you much of it? Enough for the Grand?" "I'm afraid not," said O'Donnell, shaking his head. "I could manage in a small house very well. I haven't as much, you know, as Dominique here." "But the quality, my dear fellow, the quality is exquisite. It's a bit of Guigliani." O'Donnell coloured with pleasure. Lavirotte said: "You never sang that song better, Eugene." "It couldn't be sung better. Sims Reeves himself might be proud of such an art. Tenors are hard enough to get, but to get a tenor with brains and a heart is about the rarest thing in the world. You have brains, and a heart, O'Donnell, and of course I needn't say that I'd rather have a song delivered as you sang now than the biggest shout of a forty-six-inch chested Italian *robusto*." Lavirotte put his hand quickly up to his left breast. Again he turned ashy white. He seemed to gasp for breath. "Are you not well, Dominique?" cried Eugene, placing his hand on him. "Ah!" sighed Lavirotte, "it's gone. For an instant the pain was great, and I thought I should suffocate. It is gone now. Let us think no more of it. You are in splendid voice to-day, Eugene. It was stupid of me to get ill just at that moment when I should have been applauding your success. Fraser, I told you he could sing." "Sing! I should think he can. Try something else, O'Donnell; something a little stronger." "Very well," said O'Donnell, "I'll give you one of the melodies, 'The Bard's Legacy.'" Lavirotte shuddered. "I don't know it," said Fraser. "Hum it for me." Then O'Donnell began.

"When in death I shall calm recline,  
Oh, hear my heart to its mistress dear."

"Don't sing it, Eugene," said Lavirotte. "It's a gloomy beast of a song. When a fellow has just recovered from suffocation, it's not a good way to cheer him to shake shrouds before his eyes. Sing 'La donna e mobile.'" O'Donnell lifted his eyes slowly, and stared in a puzzled way at Lavirotte. "Are you ill still," he said, "or are you peculiarly dull to-day?" For the third time Lavirotte's face paled. "This time, I swear to you, Eugene, I am only dull. 'Pon my soul, I am only dull."

## **CHAPTER XXIII.**

"Mr. O'Donnell," said Fraser, "I hope you will not forget us now that you have once come. My wife is out, but I am sure she will be delighted to meet Mrs. O'Donnell. Remember, you are to bring your wife with you, too, when you come next time." These were the composer's last words as he stood at the hall door, bidding good-bye to Lavirotte and Eugene. When Mrs. Fraser returned, he said to her in his enthusiastic way: "My dear Harriet, you have missed a treat. Lavirotte's friend, O'Donnell, has been here. He has got a lovely voice, and sings exquisitely. He

came to know if I would give him the second tenor part. I promised before I heard him sing, and now, by gad, Harriet, I'm in a deuce of a mess." "Why? You say he has a good voice, and sings well." "Yes, yes. But, you see, I have promised the leading part to Lavirotte. Now Lavirotte's voice is not to be compared with O'Donnell's, and, by gad, I don't know how to get out of the fix." "If," said Mrs. Fraser, "this new man is better for the part, why not give him the part?" "But you see, they are bosom friends. They have been friends for years, been at the *Scala* together, and so on. Why, while they were here there was very near being a scene between them. In fact there was a scene, in which Lavirotte did something that enraged O'Donnell, and O'Donnell said something that made Lavirotte grovel. I don't know what it was about, of course, but it looked very ugly while it lasted. I should not be at all surprised if Lavirotte is a bit jealous of O'Donnell's voice. I'm sure I don't know what to do. It would be a pity to throw away a voice like O'Donnell's in the second part; and how am I to get rid of Lavirotte?" "Then you are resolved to produce the opera soon?" "Oh, yes, if I can put O'Donnell in the leading part. You see, I was only half satisfied with Lavirotte. He is so hard, unsympathetic, metallic. I don't know how to manage it at all. You see, Harriet, I want to make a success with this 'Maid of Athens.' I am sure if O'Donnell sang it would be a success." "But can he not make a success in the second part?" "No, no," cried Fraser, excitedly "That would be impossible. Besides, the public would not stand it. They would grieve the thing if they found the better man in the inferior part. Oh, what a misfortune I ever promised Lavirotte!" "Surely there is some way or other out of it," said Mrs. Fraser. "I can't see it, Harriet. I am in despair. It is the best chance there has been in London for years. At least I think so. Of course you can never tell really until you have tested the thing practically in the theatre, with the lights up and your audience in front. But I'm game to put down the last penny I have in the world, and my reputation, that O'Donnell could do the trick." "I cannot believe, Edward," said Mrs. Fraser hopefully, "that there is not some way of managing the matter. Could not Mr. Lavirotte understudy the leading part?" "Eh? Say that again, little woman," said the composer, sitting down to the piano and improvising a fantasia. He always quieted his mind in this way. "There may be something in what you say, Harriet. An understudy! But would Lavirotte consent? You know we couldn't ask him to sing in any other but the leading part, once it was offered to him. And then, to take a practical view of it, even if he would consent to understudy, he would be eating his head off the whole time. The management wouldn't get the least value for their money. In any case, I don't think Lavirotte would consent. You know, those new men are always dying to get an 'appearance,' and I'm sure Lavirotte would rather take a situation down a coal mine than cool his heels in the wings, while O'Donnell had the boards." "Well, but if you say there is a great chance of O'Donnell making a success of the opera, it would be a thousand pities you lost that chance because of any hasty promise you made to Lavirotte." "I don't think Lavirotte has a particularly sweet temper; and, to tell you the truth, there is something in the man's eye which I do not like--something which makes me distrust him. I asked him to-day to give O'Donnell a lead, and he started 'Good-bye, Sweetheart,' and, by gad, I thought for a minute that O'Donnell would throttle him." "It seems to me," said the little woman, "that you are somewhat unfortunate in having come across this pair. A moment ago you appeared to think there was something dangerous about Lavirotte, and now you say that O'Donnell looked as if he wanted to do something dreadful to the other." "Throttle him, my dear. Throttle him was the word I used. A capital word, but not a woman's word, I own." "But surely it would be no harm for you to try if Lavirotte would consent to understudy, if you are certain that the difference between the two men is so great. Aren't they both very anxious to get engagements? and don't both want to earn money?" "Yes, but everyone wants to earn money, and I have no doubt that Lavirotte would rather take two guineas a week and sing the part than ten for walking about. Stop," cried the composer. "Something might be done with that." "Pray, what is *that*? I have not the gift of second sight." The composer rose from the piano, approached his wife, put his arm round her, kissed her, and said: "You're not half as stupid as you look, Harriet. You sometimes get hold of a capital idea. But you require the great male intellect"--tapping his forehead--"to shape it for you. Lavirotte, when he was here, nearly fainted. I have heard him complain before of certain attacks of this kind which he is subject to. You see, it would never do to have a man in such a position as first tenor, if that man were liable to faint. Why, the very excitement of a first night sometimes knocks over strong men who have had years of experience. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll throw myself on Lavirotte's generosity, and say that what I saw here to-day has so disquieted me that, etc. You understand. I'll put it as nicely as I can. It isn't very easy to put such a thing nicely, but I shall do my best." Here the matter dropped between husband and wife. That evening Fraser wrote a note to Lavirotte, asking him to call next day. In the gentlest and most considerate way, Fraser explained to Lavirotte that a first night of a new piece was most trying on the singers, and that to ensure success, it was essential all taking prominent parts in it should be, as near as possible, in perfect health. "I noticed here yesterday," said the composer, "that you almost fainted under the excitement of something which occurred between you and O'Donnell. I think, too, I heard you say before you have now and then been seized with physical weakness. We have not spoken of business terms in connection with the opera. Of course you know I am not finding the money. But I shall make all the engagements. Now, if you like I'll give you your engagement at once, ten pounds a week for the run, on one condition." "What is that?" cried Lavirotte eagerly. "That you allow some other man to create the part and sing until you have become so accustomed to it that there will be no fear of your suffering from this little ailment, whatever it is." Lavirotte's lips got suddenly dry. He drew them backward over his teeth, and breathed a few hard breaths. "You mean," said he, in a low voice, "to let O'Donnell create the part?" "I have said nothing to him about it, as yet, nor should I say anything to him without first speaking to you. I gave you my word you were to create the part if the opera was produced. After seeing what occurred yesterday, and knowing the great excitement of a first night, I would rather have the opera in that drawer than risk it if there were the least chance of a breakdown." "And you think," said Lavirotte, "that I could consent to take



the money, when my health did not allow me to earn it?" "Now, my dear Lavirotte, you must not be offended where no offence is meant. The first night is what I dread. You shall understudy the part, or, rather, the part shall be yours, and O'Donnell, the understudy, run on at the last moment. Stop, I have it. I shall engage you to create the part. I shall engage O'Donnell if he will consent to understudy the part. We shall go on rehearsing on these lines, and if, three days before the first night, a first-class medical man says you are fit to go on, you shall go on. This need not be embodied in the agreement. We can keep our words, as men of honour, and we can keep this arrangement secret. Even O'Donnell shall not know; and his salary shall be six guineas a week, whether he sings or not. Come, you can't ask me to do more than that. O'Donnell has a wife and child to keep." "Damn his wife and child," thought Lavirotte. Fraser was firm, and although it took an hour to get Lavirotte to consent, he at length consented. And there and then the agreement was drawn up and signed. "Now," thought Fraser, "it's neck or nothing with me. I am sure it would be dangerous to let him go on the first night, and if I can only secure O'Donnell, 'The Maid of Athens' will be the foundation of my fortune." When Lavirotte got back to the tower, he threw himself, in a rage, on his bed. "This thing may kill me," he said, "but I'll sing the part as sure as heaven is above and hell beneath. Damn O'Donnell, his wife, and child."

## **CHAPTER XXIV.**

Edward Fraser was not the man to let grass grow under his feet. He set about the production with the utmost vigilance and despatch. The first thing he did was to call on O'Donnell. He was introduced to Mrs. O'Donnell. He found her simply divine, he said, the greatest beauty in London, by gad. And, as to the boy (he himself was childless) he afterwards declared to his wife, that it was the handsomest, the most engaging, the most endearing little fellow in Europe. As soon as he was free to talk about business he said: "O'Donnell, I have firmly made up my mind to produce 'The Maid of Athens' with the least possible delay. Before I had seen you I had, of course, arranged with Lavirotte. Will you understudy Lavirotte's part at six guineas a week? Of course, if there is a chance of your singing it, you shall go on, and I could not think of putting you second. But you know what our climate is like, and that a fellow may get a cold any minute." "You know," said Eugene, colouring with pleasure, "I want an engagement, and I am not in a position to refuse one if I could possibly take it. But Dominique and I have been such great friends all our lives, I could not think of taking any position which might seem to undermine his." "But, you see, that is the very thing I offer you--a position which will not seem to undermine his. So long as he is singing, of course you will not sing. But if he gets a cold, or anything of that kind, you take his place and keep it warm for him until he is quite well again. What can be more friendly than that?" "Men are always jealous of those who understudy them, for they think that the understudies are always wishing for some accident to the men who are singing the parts. Have you spoken of the matter to Dominique?" "Oh, yes! I have arranged it all with him. He agrees to what I suggest. I am sorry I cannot offer you as good terms as he is getting; but we could not afford more than six to one in such a position as yours. Lavirotte's agreement is all drawn up and signed on the understanding that if I can secure you I will do so." After some more talk, Eugene agreed to accept Fraser's offer, and the composer went home greatly delighted with the day's work and the new acquaintance he had made. "Harriet," he said when he got home, "I have fallen in love with Mrs. O'Donnell, and you must fall in love with her too. She is simply perfect. You must worship the boy. I know, if you saw him, you would never let him out of your arms." Mrs. Fraser simply shook her head, and sighed to think she had no boy of her own. The preparations for the production of the new opera were hastened, the Oberon Theatre secured, the rest of the company engaged, and the opera put in rehearsal. Everyone who was privileged to hear the music agreed that the opera ought to be a great success, and most of the people thought that Lavirotte would make a hit in his part. Fraser was to conduct the opera himself, and he took the minutest care that nothing should be left undone to court success. About a month before the day fixed for the first appearance, O'Donnell came to Fraser's private room at the theatre, and said: "I want to ask you a question about my own business." "Fire away, my dear fellow!" cried the hearty composer. "Anything you like." "I am, as you know, Fraser, at present in lodgings with my wife and child. We were thinking of taking a small house, and what I want you to tell me is, do you think I would be justified in doing so? Do you think my engagement with you will be worth anything like six pounds a week for a considerable portion of the year?" "My dear O'Donnell, I'm very glad you spoke to me upon the subject. Take a small house, by all means; get what furniture is just necessary. I'll be guarantee for it. And, I'll tell you what I'm game to do this minute: I'll undertake, if you like, in writing, that you shall not average less than six pounds a week for the next twelve months. Under existing circumstances, I cannot, at present, offer you more money than is in your agreement, but you can have the engagement, if you like, about the twelve months." O'Donnell was delighted. "You really don't say so, my dear Fraser!" "I do," he said. "You need not speak of this matter to anyone. I mean to stick to you. You are sure to make a mark. You are sure to make money. And, look here, I say, you know it isn't my money that's going into this

speculation, and I have a little money of my own. Never be hard up for a fiver. We like your wife, your boy, and yourself; and by gad, sir, we mean that you shall be a success." O'Donnell went home in the highest spirits. That very day he and his wife set out house-hunting, and within a week they were settled in a little semi-detached house in Cecil Street, Hoxton. Among the furniture there was, of course, a piano, and O'Donnell felt unexpectedly relieved to be able, as he expressed it, to shout and hammer the keys against the detached wall of his own house, where there was no fear of disturbing lodgers or neighbours. Here, with his wife and child, and the old and faithful nurse who had looked after him when he was a child, he felt as though life was opening afresh to him, and as if there was more sunshine in the air than ever he had noticed before. "The first thing we have to do, Nellie, is to get the Frasers and Dominique here to dinner, on the earliest day possible. Of course I should never have known Fraser but for Dominique; and, indeed, half my good luck at the Oberon, or more than half, is due to Lavirotte." So it was arranged that on the first Saturday after the O'Donnells were settled in their home, the Frasers and Lavirotte should dine with them. The dinner passed off in the pleasantest manner. Mark dined at the table, and Lavirotte insisted on attending to the boy and giving him all the delicacies he could filch, to the great jealousy of Mrs. Fraser, who had taken an extraordinary liking to the mother and child. Lavirotte seemed in better spirits and health than of late. He was quite cheerful, quite amusing. He made pretty compliments to the women, said good-humoured, whimsical, blunt things to the men, and when dinner was over and the men were alone, he threw himself into a chair and declared he had not enjoyed any little dinner so much, for a century. "You know, Eugene, I was best man at your marriage, and godfather to your boy, and I really think I have forgotten my duty towards him. I never gave him a knife and fork, or even a mug. It was beastly neglectful of me. I feel in the best of spirits to-day. Wasn't I in good voice at the rehearsal?" "Capital!" said both men. "Nothing could have been better." "You'll bring down the house, Lavirotte," cried Eugene. "I shall do my very best," said Lavirotte. "I think my health has greatly improved within the past fortnight or so. I have not felt that old sensation of faintness, and going up and down the stairs to my eyrie does not distress me as it used. By Jove, Eugene, I feel as well as before that terrible time in the tower. No, I won't have any more. I'll go and look after my boy." Lavirotte left the room. Fraser shifted uneasily in his chair. "Are you perfect in the part?" he said to Eugene. "I think so," said the latter. "Because," said Fraser, "although Lavirotte seems in better health than he was some time ago, no one knows what may happen." Lavirotte did not go straight to the small drawing-room where the two women were seated. He went out to the little kitchen, and said to old Bridget, the servant: "Is the boy in bed?" "Yes, he is, sir, and asleep," said the old woman. "Let me go up and look at him before I join the ladies." "Certainly, sir. I'll show you the room." She led the way upstairs. The boy was sleeping in a cot, his rosy cheek resting on his pink arm, his yellow hair hanging all about his head. There was another bed in the room. "That is yours, no doubt," said Lavirotte, pointing to the second bed. "Yes," she said, "I sleep here to mind him in the night; but he's no trouble." "And this window looks into what?" "The side passage." The old woman had turned up the paraffin lamp, and was holding it over the sleeping child. "You have no gas in the house?" "No; the master does not like gas." "You ought to be very careful with that lamp. Many a sad thing happens owing to the use of paraffin lamps, where children are." He stooped over the sleeping child, kissed the boy's cheek, and then descended to the little drawing-room where the two wives sat.

## **CHAPTER XXV.**

From the day of that dinner forward, Lavirotte seemed anxious to make up for what he then spoke of as the neglect of his little godson. One day he came and brought the mug with the boy's name and the date of his birth on it. Another day he brought a spoon, a knife and fork. "You know, Dominique," said Eugene, "this is too much. We are not rich enough to take such presents." "Ah!" said Lavirotte. "You mean also that I am not rich enough to make them. But you see I was not quite at the end of my resources when this engagement turned up, and I shall be in receipt of what I must consider a handsome salary in a couple of weeks." "By Jove, yes," said Eugene. "I do not object to your being guilty of this extravagance if it does not inconvenience you at the moment. I know you will be comparatively well off. I am delighted you are in such good health." At this Lavirotte looked strangely at his friend. "Yes," he said, "I am all right now. But will it last? Has Fraser said anything to you about it?" "He has said to me, simply, what we all know--that a tenor, and particularly a tenor in this climate, is liable to be knocked up at any minute. Beyond that he said nothing, I think, and all you have to do is to be careful of yourself, and see that you don't take cold. If you keep in only your present form, you are bound to make a great hit." "Well, Eugene, at least you are encouraging. My notion is, Fraser thinks I shall never sing the part. But I will, if I died for it. My heart is set on it, and I would rather die than not go on." "Nonsense!" said Eugene. "You're talking in an exaggerated way. You will sing, and sing admirably. The audience will rise to you as one man, and next morning the newspapers won't know where to get words of praise for your performance." Again a queer look came into

Lavirotte's eye. "I think, Eugene, you are a very simple man." "I see no need for anything but simplicity in this matter. You know, Dominique, I shall be greatly delighted to be understudy when the opera is started. Of course, I'd rather have anything to do than look on, but there's no help for that." "No," said Lavirotte, with an uncomfortable laugh, "there's no help for it unless fate steps in." "Oh, confound it, Dominique! Give up your 'ifs.' I'm tired of them. Here are Nellie and the boy. Let us drop shop." Lavirotte rose quickly, went to Mrs. O'Donnell, took her hand and shook it tenderly. Then, having lifted the boy in his arms, he kissed him and pressed him to his breast, and carried him about the room' saying: "You will grow to be a fine generous fellow, Mark, like your father; and you will always be as good and gentle as your mother, although you never can be as beautiful. Mark, dear, kiss your godfather, who has no wife, no son of his own. You'll always be fond of Dominique, won't you, boy?" "Of course he will," said Eugene, taking the boy out of Lavirotte's arms and fondling him tenderly. Ever since the boy had come to Eugene until now, there had always hung over the father's mind a certain cloud of gloom. For while he said to himself that Nellie had come to him in the full light of her reason, and with the knowledge that his house had suffered great commercial disaster, between her coming and the birth of the boy greater disaster still had fallen upon them--ruin in fact--and when the boy was born he seemed to be the despairing leader of a forlorn hope. He had often looked at that boy, and wondered whether or not he should be able to find bread for him. The love he had for Nellie was of a different character. It was more robust and less intimate. Supposing his supplies failed absolutely, he could tell her there was no bread, and she would understand. But the little fellow could not understand. He would think that bread came, like the daylight, to all living things alike. He would simply know that he was hungry, and that heretofore when he was hungry he got food. And being hungry again, he would ask for food, and expect it. And if he (the father) had to tell him there was no food, had to try to quiet him with mere words and caresses, how should he, Eugene, feel? And then, although the little fellow might be quieted for a while, he could not be for long, and he would cry piteously for food. And there would be none to give him. The boy would gradually weaken from hour to hour, until he ceased to cry, until he had no strength to cry. Gradually the weakness would increase. His face would become pallid. His rounded pink limbs wasted. His breath short and faint. He would lie exactly as placed, without power to move his body, without power to move his limbs. The little eyes would remain half open. The little fingers could no longer close around the finger of father or mother. The pale lips, parted, would no longer have strength to close at the familiar kiss. Then would come a moment when the eyes would open, the little nose become pinched, the little face haggard, and--- It was too horrible to think of. God in his mercy had spared him that sight, and given him instead a comfortable, if small, home, sufficient simple food, and the assurance of the continuance of all these. Now, more than ever, Eugene's heart went forth to his wife and child. They were no longer threatened by want. They should now lack nothing needful for comfort. The little fellow was sturdy and able to walk, and it was the father's delight to go out with Nellie and him, and walk along the streets of shops and see his wife buy the things needful for their small household, and some cheap luxury or toy for their child. It was to him a sensation of great delight that he might spend a few pence, ay, even a few shillings, without mortgaging the future heavily. He seemed suddenly to have shaken off a whole inheritance of care. He laughed frequently, and made light-hearted jokes. He sang to Nellie and his boy for mere amusement, and he made humorously extravagant promises of what he should do for both when the full tide of his good fortune set in. "Dominique and I," said he, "shall draw a line on the map, from London to Constantinople, and we will toss as to who shall go east and who west, and thus we shall take the capitals of Europe by storm. Whichever goes east the first year, goes west the second. This will be fair, and thus we shall never clash. And you shall see all the capitals of Europe, Nellie, and the boy shall be poisoned with every possible sweetmeat that Europe can devise. And I shall get awfully vain of my success, and wear the most extraordinary clothes tailors can invent. And like Napoleon crossing the Alps, in the peepshows, I shall always ride a white horse. And when I go into a new town all the people shall come out and do me homage, and we'll put up at the best hotels. And they will never ask me to pay a bill. I shall simply sing a song in the morning, and kiss my hand and go. A fine life ours will be. And there you are now, Mark. There's a first-class chance for your getting a Bath bun with the legal allowance of clinker in it." Almost every evening now, Lavirotte came. He said one evening: "I am thinking of taking a house in this neighbourhood, and I like yours very well." "You will be a richer man than I am," said Eugene. "If you follow my advice you won't take a house in this street. They are all wretchedly built. Look here," he said. "None of the doors fit. Few of the latches shoot into the jambs or hasps." "That must be a great nuisance," said Lavirotte. "And how about the locks and bolts?" "Most of the locks and bolts are all right. But I am often uneasy when there is no one in the kitchen, and the bolts are not shot; for the spring-lock there enters the hasp so slightly that a good push would send the door in." "That is a pity," said Lavirotte. "But, I suppose, you are not afraid of burglars here." "Burglars! Not I! It would not be worth the while of any burglar to make a set on a house such as this. But a petty thief, a hearth-stone boy, or a degraded old clothes-man might make a raid, and carry off a few shillings' worth." "Quite true," said Lavirotte. "But I think the danger is slight. By-the-way, Eugene, I shall know the day after tomorrow something of the greatest importance, but which I may not now reveal. Something in connection with the first night at the Oberon. You will be there, of course, Mrs. O'Donnell?" "Certainly. I am most anxious to witness your *début*." "I suppose you won't take Mark?" "Oh, dear, no!" she said. "Mark is always in bed at six o'clock." "That's right," he said. "All children should be in bed early."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

The morning of the second day after that visit of Lavirotte to O'Donnell, he was in a state of great excitement. That was the day his fate was to be sealed, as far as the medical certificate went. Fraser and he had arranged that he should consult one of the most eminent West End physicians. He had been taking the greatest possible care of himself for some time. This morning he felt better than ever. He was determined that nothing should impair his chance of success. He rose early and had a light breakfast, which was the only meal he ever took in the tower. Then he descended the tower slowly, and walked gently along Porter Street. It was still early; much too early to call on a great West End doctor. When he got to the end of Porter Street he hailed a hansom, and told the man to drive to Hyde Park. When he got there it was about ten o'clock. The day was fine for that time of year, and he thought a walk up and down in the fresh, clear air of the Park would brace him, and make him more fit for the examination he had to undergo. "I must get my mind quiet," he thought. "I must pretend to myself this is a matter of no moment. I must not even let my mind dwell upon what my business is to-day. If I pass the examination I shall have three days for the excitement to wear off. And, no matter what the result of the examination is, I mean to sing the part. It is all very well for Fraser to say I might suffer from stage fright, but no stage fright could be equal to the anxiety I should now be suffering if I gave way to it. If I can control myself now, I could control myself then. And see, I am as calm now as the idlest man that passes me by. "It would not be fair, it would be villainously unfair, for Fraser not to let me sing the part after promising it to me. O'Donnell was promised the second part before the trial of his voice. I know the first part perfectly, every note of it, and now it would be snatching the chance of fame from me to make me stand aside because of a wretched medical certificate." At last it was time to go; and, almost as though he had passed from the Park to the great doctor's waiting-room in a dream, he found himself there, without any clear notion of any circumstances or thoughts by the way. He was fortunate this morning, and found the great man disengaged at the very moment he had appointed. The doctor was an old, good-natured, flabby, gouty-looking man. He was cheerful in his manner, and received Lavirotte as though he knew instinctively there was nothing the matter with him beyond a little hypochondriasis. In a perfectly calm and collected manner Lavirotte explained his case, and told the old physician of the business in which he was engaged, and the fact that his fitness would be put to the test three days hence. "I know," said the doctor, "I know. Your profession is one which at the outset makes great demand on the nerves." Then he asked him some questions about these slight seizures, and proceeded to his examination. He spent at least half-an-hour over the case, during which time Lavirotte's pulse did not vary. Then the old physician sat back in his chair, and looked at his visitor, still with a pleasant expression of countenance. "Of course," he said, "men of your profession are naturally very anxious to fulfil all their engagements, and it is the source of great pecuniary loss to them when they fail to do so. But you know," he added, smiling pleasantly, "we must often think of something besides money. Come, now," he said, "I am not able to give you a complete opinion of your case to-day. What would the pecuniary loss to you be, supposing you did not sing?" "Nothing," said Lavirotte. "I am paid whether I sing or do not sing. Am I not to sing?" "I won't say that to-day. Tell the manager. Let me see, this is Thursday--I would like to have till Saturday morning before finally deciding." "Then," said Lavirotte, perfectly unmoved, "you think there is some likelihood of my not being able to sing?" "Now, now, now," said the doctor, cheerfully. "Have I not told you I would like to wait till Saturday before forming an opinion?" "But my agreement is that I shall have a certificate from you three days before Saturday. That is to-day." "Let me see what can be done," said the old man, stroking his face. "I will give you a letter to the manager saying I would not like to decide finally until Saturday. But that if this delay would break your engagement, I shall give you the certificate to-day. You can drive to the theatre, and if you do not return here within two hours, I shall assume that all is well, and that I shall see you on Saturday." To this Lavirotte consented, in the same unmoved way that had characterised him during the whole interview. He took the note and drove to the Oberon. He sought Fraser and handed him the letter. At first the composer looked disconcerted. "You see, Lavirotte," he said, "there is some doubt." "Give me the benefit of that doubt till Saturday. That can do no harm. Eugene is ready to take my part if the decision is against me." "Very good," said Fraser, reluctantly. "Let us wait till Saturday." All that day and all Friday Lavirotte preserved an imperturbable calm. All that day and all Friday Fraser was in a state of feverish anxiety. "It must be a touch-and-go affair with him," he thought, "if the doctors cannot say yes at once. The least error on the part of the doctor might lead to a terrible disaster, and I have risked my reputation on this opera. If he fainted on the stage, or behind, there might be a dreadful hitch. One thing I'm determined on, that O'Donnell shall be dressed and made up for the part, and in the theatre half-an-hour before the curtain goes up." There was a full-dress rehearsal on Friday, in which Lavirotte went through his part with a calmness and certainty he had never displayed before. Of all the performers, he betrayed the least hesitancy. He took every note with perfect ease. Even Fraser was surprised, and O'Donnell congratulated him warmly when the rehearsal was over. Lavirotte left the theatre soon, and went straight to St. Prisca's Tower. "Did not Dominique sing excellently today?" said O'Donnell to Fraser. "Yes, he did," said Fraser, constrainedly. "But you know, O'Donnell, there is no trusting the future; and remember I tell you, in the most impressive

way I can, that I may have to call upon you at the last moment to go on and sing the part. I am aware you know it perfectly, but I shall want to see you at the theatre not later than eleven o'clock on Saturday. And again half-an-hour before the curtain goes up you must be ready in every respect to go on. Mind, in every respect." When O'Donnell got home that evening, he told Nellie he thought there was something strange in Lavirotte's manner, and that Fraser seemed unnaturally anxious about the other's health. He then told her that Lavirotte had gone through the part admirably that day, and that everyone noticed an improvement in his style. Even Fraser himself had to admit this. "I am to be at the theatre not later than eleven to-morrow, and all ready to go on half-an-hour before the curtain rises. That is, I must be dressed and made up at half-past seven. So that you will come into town with me when I am going in the morning, and wait about somewhere. I will be with you part of the time, of course, and we will be home together after the opera. We can get whatever we want in some restaurant." "And what about the boy?" "Oh, as we arranged," said Eugene, "he is to remain here. I'm sure Bridget will take care of him, and put him to bed at the usual time. As you know, Nellie, I should be very sorry that Lavirotte's health prevented him; but still, suppose at the last moment he did not sing, would it not be a glorious thing if I got a chance and succeeded?"

## **CHAPTER XXVII.**

Next morning, Lavirotte was stirring betimes. He followed the same plan as on the Thursday, getting quietly to the Park and there lounging about for a while, until it was time to call at the doctor's. Then, with a slow step and imperturbed face, he strode along, got to the house of the great man at the precise time agreed, and was instantly admitted to the study, where the doctor sat. "Ah!" said the physician, rising. "My letter was effective. That is a good omen, let us hope." To-day there was no need for explanation. Nor did it seem the great man had need to make so extended an examination. In a very short time he put down the stethoscope, rubbed his hands encouragingly, and said: "You told me the other day, when you were here, you would not lose any money by not singing to-night, and that you would, under your agreement, be entitled to draw your salary as though you had sung. Now, you see, you are a young man, and I am an old one, and if I were in your shoes, instead of exciting myself at a stuffy theatre, I'd go to some nice quiet place, say some seaside place, and spend a while there." "I know," said Lavirotte, rising quietly. "I understand what you mean." The doctor rose also, and putting his hand on the young man's shoulder, said: "Now, you mustn't be too hasty. I am accustomed to say what I want to say." "And you do not find yourself in a position to give me the certificate I require." "I would most certainly recommend you not to put any undue strain upon yourself just now. Come to me in a fortnight, suppose. We will then see what the rest has done you." "Thank you," said Lavirotte. "I am a ruined man." "Nonsense!" said the doctor. "Talk of being a ruined man, when you can say you will lose nothing!" "But you think there is something very bad the matter with me?" "I think any unusual excitement would be exceedingly injurious to you, and perhaps dangerous." Lavirotte bowed and withdrew. He drove to the Oberon, and went directly to Fraser. "It is as I feared," he said calmly, deliberately, coldly. "He will not allow me to sing. I am very sorry for my own sake. From what he told me, I do not think I have long to live. Fraser, you have done your best to be a good friend to me. It would be folly that a man in my condition should go on, when you have a better man in splendid health as a substitute. I won't come near the theatre to-night, but I'll look you up to-morrow. O'Donnell will sing the part better than I could. I suppose, Fraser, you don't mind keeping the thing open for me for a fortnight?" Fraser was moved. At the first moment he was rejoiced to find that O'Donnell was to sing the part. Then he suddenly reflected that this must be a terrible blow to Lavirotte, and that, moreover, these faintings must indicate something very serious. It was indeed hard that a young man, in the flower of his youth, should be stopped at the very threshold of his career by an affection which might incapacitate him from ever following that career. He assured Lavirotte in the most cordial and emphatic manner that he was sincerely sorry; and upon hearing what the doctor had recommended with regard to the seaside, he insisted upon Lavirotte taking a cheque for two weeks' salary, and then bade him begone, without a moment's notice, to some place calculated to improve his health. "Is O'Donnell here?" asked Lavirotte. "I'd like to see him before I go." Fraser sent for Eugene. "You are to sing my part, old fellow," said Lavirotte, when the other entered. "The doctor says I must not. I know you will do it better than I. I will not come near the theatre to-night. This is the important news I thought I should have to tell you. I must now say good-bye. You are all too busy for me to stop." O'Donnell was quite overwhelmed. He took Lavirotte's right hand in his, put his left on the shoulder of the other, and looked at him fixedly. "You're not ill; you're not really ill, my dear Dominique! I can't believe it, and you will sing the part." Lavirotte shook his head quietly. "Ask Fraser. He will tell you. He has suspected all along I might not be able for the part." "But you are able for it, better able for it than I am," said Eugene, generously. "No, Eugene," said Lavirotte quietly. "My health, it appears, is not equal to the excitement, and your voice is more suited to the music. I am going away to the seaside, somewhere. I don't know or care where--to Glengowra

perhaps. I'm sorry I ever left Glengowra. If I go there I shall call upon your father and mother, and tell them of the success you are sure to make to-night. Give my love to your wife, Eugene, and kiss your boy for me." "Will you not come and see Nellie?" said Eugene, the tears standing in his eyes. "She is in town, and we can find her in a few minutes." "No, no, Eugene. I cannot. I had better go away straight to my eyrie. Good-bye, Eugene. Kiss the boy for me when you go home. You told me you would not bring him in to-day. The only thing I would like to see before setting out is your wife's face when you have sung in the trio and the solo, at the end of the second act. God bless you, my dear boy. Thank you, a thousand times, Fraser," and he was gone. The two men in the manager's room looked at one another strangely when they were alone. "Did you ever think," said Fraser, "that Lavirotte was a little mad?" "He's sometimes queer," said Eugene, guardedly. "Now, O'Donnell," said the other briskly, "you'll have to do the very best you can in the part." "I am sincerely sorry for the occasion of my taking it, but of course I will do my best." Lavirotte went straight to the bank on which the cheque was drawn, got his money, and betook himself to his lonely chamber in the tower. O'Donnell went straight to where he had left his wife, and told her the turn which events had taken. "What can be the matter with him?" asked Nellie, her first thought being for the man whose health was threatened. "I don't know. He did not say," answered Eugene, "and I did not care to ask. It must be something serious. And now I must run away, Nellie, and you may not hope to see me again until the evening. I shall be very busy until then. Go and amuse yourself somewhere, darling. Come about half-past six to the theatre, stage door. I must be off now." Time sped so quickly at the theatre that day, that Eugene O'Donnell could scarcely believe an hour had passed from the time he had seen his wife, until it was time for him to begin to dress. He had told his wife to come to him at half-past six. The curtain would not go up for an hour-and-a-half after this. At the time she arrived at the theatre he was engaged, and she had to wait for him. The doors were already open. As soon as the lights were turned up, she had been shown into a box, as everything was in confusion behind. Here she sat, with the curtains drawn, expecting him every moment. Suddenly he burst into the box, in the costume of a Greek brigand. Although she had seen him in the dress--he had put it on at home to amuse her and their boy--she did not at first recognise him, and started and rose in a fright. At last she cried out in a suppressed voice: "Eugene, I did not know you. How splendid you look." "How can I tell her?" he said. "What!" she said. "What is the matter? Has anything happened to Lavirotte?" "No," he said, "but our house--Nellie, bear up--has met a misfortune." "Be quick." "And is in flames." "Great God! And our boy, our child!" "Is safe, no doubt." "Who brought the news?" "Lavirotte; come, we must go at once." "You are not certain about our boy? Oh, Eugene, you are not sure of the worst?" "No; I pledge you my word, I am not." "And when we find him safe with the nurse, who would die for him, will you be able to get back here in time?" "No; even if I could, I durst not try to sing to-night, after this." "And who is to sing the part?" "Dominique." "Dominique!" "Dominique Lavirotte."

## **CHAPTER XXVIII.**

O'Donnell and his wife drove furiously to Hoxton. Neither spoke the whole way. Each was mute with terror, hope, and fear, all beating wildly about in their minds. When they reached Cecil Street there was no longer any doubt of the truth of Lavirotte's story. The house was all in a blaze. A double line of police kept back the crowd, and several engines were busily at work. The cab drew up just outside the line of police. O'Donnell told his wife to sit where she was. He had snatched up an overcoat and hat on his way from the theatre, and in the cab removed as much of the make-up as possible from his face, so that there was little or nothing unusual in his appearance. He was about to rush through the line of police when one of them caught him. O'Donnell shook off the hand, and said: "It is my house. Is my boy safe?" "Beg pardon, sir. There's the inspector," said the policeman. O'Donnell went up to the inspector, and cried excitedly: "This is my house. Can you tell me if my boy is safe?" The inspector turned round and looked steadily at O'Donnell for a second or two. "Are you sure the boy was in the house?" "Yes, quite sure; and an old servant. Bridget is her name." "Oh," said the inspector, looking at O'Donnell again, "I think you may make your mind easy. We did not know there was anyone in the house. We heard it was Mr. O'Donnell's house." "My name is O'Donnell, and my boy and servant were in the house when we left. The boy is between two and three years old." "You are quite sure the boy and woman were there at the time the fire broke out?" "When did it break out?" asked O'Donnell. "At about half-past six; between that and seven." "Oh, yes," said O'Donnell. "They are sure to have been both there at that time. The boy always went to bed at six, and the servant never stirred out. She did not know a soul in the neighbourhood." "Then, sir, I think you may make your mind quite easy. It is almost certain that upon the first alarm of fire she fled with the child from the house." "But where can she have fled to? I tell you she had no friends in the neighbourhood. We are only newly come here." "Perhaps she might have known where you were." "Oh, yes, she knew where I was. She knew I was to be at the Oberon Theatre tonight, and that my wife was to be with me. I was to have sung there to-night, but had to let a friend take my part when I got this news. Do you

really think, inspector, the boy is safe?" "Well, you see, the chances are a thousand to one the servant is safe, because it isn't likely she was asleep at such an hour, and just after putting the child to bed; and 'twould be quite easy for any grown-up person to get out of a small house like that." "Do you know where the fire broke out?" "In that room there, looking into the side passage." "Why, that's where the boy and the servant slept." "Then, sir, that makes me all the surer they are both safe, for the chances are that by some accident she set fire to the room and then ran away with the child." "I thank God," cried O'Donnell fervently. "I will run and tell my wife; she is in a cab near." O'Donnell ran back to the hansom. "Good news!" he cried, "good news! The inspector tells me the boy and Bridget are safe." Mrs. O'Donnell merely clasped her hands. She did not speak. Her hands fell in her lap. Her head dropped back. She had fainted. "Policeman," cried O'Donnell, "where is the nearest hotel?" The policeman told him. O'Donnell jumped into the cab and drove to it. Restoratives were applied, and in a short time she recovered consciousness. The people at the hotel had heard of the fire, and were willing to lend all the assistance in their power. A room was prepared for Mrs. O'Donnell, and when he had seen that everything was done for her comfort, Eugene left her, promising to return soon. "You will bring him to me the moment you find him?" said the poor mother feebly. "I should be quite well if Mark were here. I do not want you to leave me, but you must go and find our boy. If he and Bridget are not at the theatre, you are sure to find him in some neighbour's house. Anyone would take them in!" O'Donnell assured his wife he would not lose a moment in bringing the boy, kissed her tenderly, and left her. As he returned to the fire, he thought: "I need not lose time going to the theatre. Lavirotte and Fraser know I am here and am likely to stay here, and they will be sure to send someone with news of the boy and nurse if they should turn up at the theatre." When he got back to the fire, he sought the inspector and asked him if any message had come from the Oberon. The inspector replied in the negative. Then O'Donnell told him he was sure a messenger would come if Bridget and the boy got there. Then he asked the inspector: "Wasn't it likely if Bridget ran to any of the neighbours they would take her and the boy in?" "Of course, they would be only too glad of the chance," said the inspector. "Is there nothing can be done?" said O'Donnell. "Can I do nothing?" The inspector waved his hand towards the fire: "That's all in the hands of the firemen now. They had given up trying to save any of the furniture before you arrived. Since you left me I have been making inquiries, and I find that before anyone entered the house the room over the passage was burnt out, and that nothing is known up to this of the child or the servant. I got a description of both the nurse and the boy from your next-door neighbour, and sent it to the office. Word will be sent round from there, and the moment they have any news they are to forward it to me." "What had I better do, then?" said O'Donnell, who was in a state of feverish restlessness. "If you will take my advice," said the inspector, "you will go back to Mrs. O'Donnell, and stay with her. We shall certainly have the first news, and I will send it on to you." "I can't," he said; "I can't go back until I have the boy with me. I told her I would go to her the moment I found him, and if I went without him she would get a great shock, for her first impression would be that I had bad news about him, and I should be unable to get that idea out of her mind for a long time, if at all, before he was brought to us. I cannot, I will not go back without him," said O'Donnell, frantically. He now for the first time realised the fact that his boy might be lost to them for ever. "It will kill his mother," he added, "if anything happens to our child." Then he put his hand before his eyes, and turned away from the inspector. The inspector turned away from him, issued some unnecessary orders in a loud voice, and walked off. O'Donnell could not leave the spot. If good news were to come, that would be the first place it would reach. If it was his cruel fate that he should have to learn bad news, it should be extracted from the ashes of that blazing fire. No, he could not leave this spot. He could not return to his wife; and to go inquiring of neighbour after neighbour if he had seen Mark, would be triple pain upon pain, disappointment upon disappointment, suspense unhappily resolved on suspense unhappily renewed. By this time it was growing late. The fire had spent its fury. There was no danger of its spreading, and the roof of the doomed house was expected every moment to fall in. O'Donnell paced up and down restlessly inside the lines of police where the firemen were busy. Now and then he spoke a few words to the inspector. Now and then the inspector spoke a few cheering words to him. Still no message came from the theatre. Still no message came from the police-station. Another hour dragged its weary length along; and still no message, no news, no tidings of any kind. Gradually the inspector had seemed to lose hopefulness. He had begun to admit to Eugene it was strange they heard nothing of the woman or the boy. He looked at his watch. "Half-past eleven," he said. "I am surprised. And yet, I cannot but believe they have both escaped." Suddenly there was a movement in the crowd outside the line of police. A sergeant came to the inspector, who was standing with O'Donnell, and told him that a woman representing herself as the child's nurse was in the crowd. The inspector and O'Donnell hastened to the spot where she stood. O'Donnell was not able to speak. He saw she had not the boy with her. "When did you leave the house?" said the inspector. "At about half-past six." "You took the boy with you?" "No, sir. I left him in the house." "My God!" cried O'Donnell. "Then there is no hope?" This question, addressed to the inspector by O'Donnell, was not answered. The policeman turned away, and, addressing one of the sergeants, said: "The crowd must stand farther back." O'Donnell seized the railing of the house opposite his burning home, and said quietly to himself: "Our little boy! our little Mark is dead! We shall never see him again, never!" Then he placed both his arms on the railings, and leaned his head on his arms, and the inspector led the woman away, and the sergeant kept the crowd farther back, and the people who had been looking at the fire through the windows facing where he leant, went away from their windows, drew down the blinds, and lowered the gas. They knew O'Donnell by sight. They had watched what had passed, and they guessed that the father had been overwhelmed by the certainty of his child's death.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

Meanwhile the inspector had taken the nurse aside, and said to her: "This is a dreadful thing, that a man's house and his child should be burned." The woman was weeping and wailing bitterly. "I was deceived!" she said. "I was cruelly deceived. I don't know why they deceived me. I don't know why that woman deceived me. My beautiful boy! My beautiful child! It will kill his mother, and his father will never look at me again." "I don't ask you to tell me," said the inspector, "anything you don't like. Don't tell me anything that's against yourself. If you get into any trouble over this matter I might find it my duty to tell all you told me. But if you like I will listen to anything you have to say." "I'll tell you all I know about the matter, and you may do what you like with me. You couldn't do anything to me I don't deserve. I should never have left the house. I would never have left the house only for the lie that was told me." "Well, I will listen to what you have to say now, if you wish," said the inspector. The following is the story told by Bridget, the nurse: "My master and mistress left the house early to-day, between ten and eleven o'clock. They said they would not be back till after the play was over. They left me everything the boy and myself should want, and told me I was to get his dinner and my own at the usual time, and his supper between five and six, and that I was to put him to bed at six, as usual. I am an old servant in the O'Donnell family. I brought up Mr. Eugene himself, and they knew they could trust me. "I did everything they told me. I had nothing else to do all day but look after the boy, and get his dinner and my own, and his supper and my tea. I got his dinner and my own between one and two, and then he was with me about the house when I was tidying up, until it was time to get his supper and my tea, between five and six. "I hadn't much to do. There was no knock at the front door, and only a few at the side door, and no one was in the house from the time the master and mistress left, until that ragged boy called in the evening. "I had given the child his supper and put him to bed a little while, and was taking my tea in the kitchen, when there was a single knock at the side door. "I was just done my tea, so I let the knock wait for a minute or so, while I was finishing. Then I got up and opened the side door, and I saw standing there, in the passage, a dirty, ragged boy, of about fourteen or fifteen years of age. "I did not like the look of him at all, and I asked him what he wanted. He said he wanted Mr. O'Donnell's house. "I told him this was it, and asked him what he wanted at Mr. O'Donnell's house. "He said he wanted to see Mr. O'Donnell's nurse, he had a message for her. "I said I was Mr. O'Donnell's nurse, and asked him what his business with me was. "He said he had a private message for me, that he was to give to nobody else. "I could make nothing of him. I didn't expect a message from anyone. He looked a bad boy, a common street boy that had no good bringing up. I did not ask him across the threshold. I said to him: 'Well, if you have any message for Mr. O'Donnell's nurse, give it to me. There is no one near to hear.' "'Are you the nurse?' said the boy,--after my telling him twice I was. "'Yes,' said I, 'I am Mr. O'Donnell's nurse.' "'Then,' said he, 'a woman told me to come and fetch you.' "'What woman, and where does she want me to go to?' I asked. "'Oh, she's a most respectable woman; and she said she'd tell you her business when she saw you, and that she would not tell it to anyone but yourself.' "I thought all this very queer. He wouldn't tell anyone but me what his message was, and when I came to hear what it was, there was nothing in it he mightn't tell anyone. For what harm could there be in my going to see a woman, or in his asking me to go to see her? Then I thought to myself, I won't stir a step with this bad-looking boy, and I said: 'Tell the woman that sent you I don't know her. If she knew me she'd have told you her name, and why couldn't she have come herself?' "'I don't know any of these things. She certainly did tell me one thing that I forgot, and it was that if you came and heard what she had to say, it would do a whole lot of good to your master and mistress.' "When he said this I began to think: 'Maybe 'tis some secret about the bank my old master lost all his money in, and no matter how ragged or dirty the boy may be, it is not my place to throw away any chance there may be of my master or his son getting back some of their money.' "So I said to the boy: 'Wait here till I get my bonnet and shawl,' and with that I went upstairs to the room in which the child lay. He was wide awake. He would always go to sleep by himself, but never in the dark. So when I came down to my tea I left the lamp alight on the table. "I told the child I was going out, and if he'd be a good boy and promise not to get out of bed or go near the lamp, I'd turn it up higher. He promised not to stir. I took my shawl and bonnet, and came down. "When I got to the kitchen the ragged boy was sitting on one of the chairs, although I had told him to stay where he was. "I turned down the kitchen lamp, took the key out of the door, and pulled the door after me. The door shuts with a spring-latch, and there was no occasion to lock it. "The woman's messenger brought me along some streets I was never in before, until he came to a cross-road where there was a great deal of light and a lot of public-houses. "He pointed out one, and said it was there the woman was. I said I wouldn't go in, that I did not go into public-houses, and he said: 'Well, wait a minute, and I'll tell her you're here.' "He ran in, and in a moment came out with a woman as dirty and as ill-looking as himself, and she said: 'Why, Bridget, won't you come in and have a glass?' "I said: 'No, I won't; I never go into such places.' I did not know her voice or her looks. And I didn't like her voice or her looks, and I wanted to have nothing to do with her. But when I heard her call me Bridget as if she knew me all her life, and when I thought of the master and the mistress and their money that



was lost, I felt I must anyway listen to what she had to say. I saw her give the boy some money. Then he ran away. "Then she asked me if I'd walk down a bit of the street with her, and I said I would, but that she must be quick in saying all she had to say to me. "By this time we had got out of the broad road and were in a kind of lane, with walls, and trees growing over the walls on each side. "She said she heard I was in a good situation, and that my old master had been very kind to me and had given me many presents. And with that we came under a lamp, and she said: 'I know you're in a hurry back. What I have to say to you won't take a minute, and I'll show you a short cut home. But while we're near the light, would you mind telling me the time?' "I took out my watch, which was one of the presents the old master had given me, and looked at it. There were two lanes crossing here. When I looked at my watch it was a quarter past seven. I got a great start to think I was out so long. I told her the hour, and said: 'Show me the short cut, and tell me what you have to say at once.' ""That's the short cut," said she, pointing straight on, and before I knew what was happening, she made a snatch at my watch, and ran down the cross lane as fast as she could. "The chain did not break. She was a younger and lighter woman than I am, and I knew I could not overtake her if I tried, and before I could think of anything, I lost sight of her in the darkness. "When I got back, which wasn't for more than an hour, I saw the house was on fire, and remembering all about the lamp and the child, I thought he must have turned it over, and set fire to the place. I hadn't the courage to stay, knowing what I had done. So I went away as fast as I could, and stopped away until now." When the nurse had ceased speaking, the inspector said nothing beyond: "The whole thing seems to have been a clumsy dodge to steal your watch." This explanation did not fully satisfy the inspector's mind, and he resolved to put the woman's story aside until he had more opportunity of thinking over it. O'Donnell was once more pacing up and down. The flames were almost subdued. It was now past midnight, and the crowd, which had collected to see the fire, had gradually melted away. O'Donnell, seeing that the inspector had turned from the nurse, approached him, and said: "There can no longer be the faintest hope. There can no longer be an excuse for hope. Do you not think so?" "In all cases of the kind," said the inspector, softly and sadly, "it is impossible to be sure until we have positive evidence. The nurse has told me her story, and if it is true, I am afraid we must be prepared for the worst." "Then my boy is dead!" cried O'Donnell, in anguish. "For I am sure old Bridget would not tell a lie to save her life. My boy! My little boy! This will kill his mother! My only fear is that it will not kill me." At that moment a man stepped quickly through the line of policemen, which was no longer very strictly kept. He put his hand on O'Donnell's shoulder and said softly: "I recognised your voice, Eugene. I heard what you said." "Fraser, this is awful!" "It is a dreadful blow, my dear fellow, a dreadful blow! I went home. I have been greatly excited since, and in my excitement, I am ashamed to say I forgot you for a moment, and told the man to drive me home. My wife was not at the theatre; and, until she said something to me about you, I did not realise the fact that you might have worse news than the burning down of your house." "Ay, I have the worst that we could have expected from the news Lavirotte brought." "Has anyone been here from the theatre?" "No. I have seen no one I knew since I left." "Then you have not heard what has happened?" "No." "In the second act Lavirotte fell insensible on the stage, and we had to drop the curtain and stop the piece." "Good heavens! What a night of disasters! How is he?" "He recovered in a short time, and in spite of all we could do, and all the doctor could say to the contrary, insisted on being driven to Porter Street. He would allow no one of the company but Jephson to go with him. As you say, it was a night of disasters; but, my dear Eugene, yours is far the worst." "Mr. Fraser," said a new voice, "do you know anything of O'Donnell?" "Yes, Jephson. He is here." "Where?" said Jephson. "Here," repeated Fraser, putting his hand on O'Donnell. "I did not recognise you. I suppose you have told him what has happened, Fraser?" "Yes," said O'Donnell. "How is Lavirotte?" "Dying," answered Jephson. "He cannot last till daylight, and he says he cannot die without seeing you. Can you come with me to him?" O'Donnell moved over to the inspector, and asked: "When can we be quite certain of the worst?" "Not until after daylight," answered the inspector. "Then I will go with you, Jephson. He is the dearest friend I have in the world, and I will not see my wife again until the evidence is complete."

## CHAPTER XXX.

When Jephson and O'Donnell were in the cab, the latter said: "Dying! dying! Dominique dying! And Mark dead! My little Mark dead! Good God, what a night! Today, Jephson, this morning when I set out for the theatre there was no thought of grief in my mind, no forethought of misfortune. And now, here are misfortunes so thick upon us, that one cannot see them altogether. I suppose Fraser is ruined? I thought of that at the time I was speaking to him. But it seemed to me it would be no kindness to mention the matter to him just then." "I don't think, O'Donnell, to-night's misfortunes at the theatre will seriously hurt Fraser. Of course, under the circumstances of you and Lavirotte being disqualified, the opera must be postponed for some time, until you, at all events, have recovered to-night's shock sufficiently to sing the part." "I shall never sing the part," said O'Donnell, "that cost me my little child." Then the two men were silent for a long time,

until they reached Porter Street. Here Jephson said: "It is as well you should be prepared for a great change in Lavirotte. You will hardly know him. I never saw such a change come over a man in a few hours. At the theatre he went through what he did of the part with the greatest dash and go. He never sang better; he never acted better at any rehearsal. The whole thing was going capitally. We were in the highest spirits. The audience were enthusiastic. Everyone was called after the first act. If Lavirotte had only got through that heavy scene in the second act, I do not believe he would have broken down. But it was too much for him. When he came back to consciousness he behaved like a lunatic. When he was told that the audience had to be dismissed he tore his hair, and swore and stamped like a man possessed. He would not go to any place but that hideous old tower of his. He would not let anyone go with him but me, not even the doctor, who said he was in an exceedingly dangerous condition. "When we got to the tower, he had to rest twenty times in getting to the horrible place where he sleeps. And when at last we reached the loft, he fainted again; and when he came quickly back to consciousness he would not let me put him to bed, but threw himself in his stage dress on the couch, and seemed to concentrate all his attention on listening. He was very quiet now, but still I think his reason is gone, for although there was not a sound, he kept leaning up on his elbow now and then, asking me: 'Did you hear the boy's voice? Did you hear him call?' "He meant, you see, the call-boy's voice. I tried to soothe him, and told him that we were no longer at the theatre, and not to worry himself with thinking of the call-boy's voice. At this he smiled, but said nothing. He did this five or six times. Then, when after a long time he asked me to go for you, I reminded him that you were in great trouble, that your house was on fire, and that the last we knew of you was what he himself told us, of the possible loss or danger of your boy. "Then again he asked me: 'Did you hear the boy call?' And I said: 'No. You will not hear the boy call again to-night.' At this he not only smiled, but laughed, and said: 'You will go for Eugene at once. He will not think me mad. He is my dearest friend.'" "My poor, poor Dominique!" cried Eugene. "He was godfather to my little boy that's gone." "I was afraid to leave him alone, but there was something in his manner I could not resist. This is the tower. I have taken the key with me. There is a lantern alight inside. Get in. Mind yourself there. Wait till I lock the door on the inside. Let me go first. There. Can you see the rungs? Stop, you will never be able to get up the ladder in that overcoat. Take it off, and put it down on those boards." "But I, too, have my stage dress on." "Never mind. So has he. Take off the overcoat. There, that is better. This is the loft. Lavirotte, are you awake?" "Yes, more wakeful than I have been for many a day. God bless you, Eugene, for coming. I have not much time now. I am waiting for the call. Eugene, do you hear the boy call?" "No, no, Dominique, my dear friend. Keep yourself quiet, and you will hear the boy call when you have had a few days' rest, when you come back from the sea." Eugene, in his stage costume, crossed the floor, and bending over his old friend, who lay pallid on the couch, in his stage costume, sat by his side and took Dominique's hand in his. "I am not going to the sea, Eugene. I am going to the Ocean. Bear with me a little while." Jephson drew back, and stood beside the ladder which led to the loft above. "Bear with me, Eugene. I have a confession to make. Do not interrupt me. Excitement gives me pain now. You have come to me in the deepest depth of your own affliction to say a kind word to me in my last moments. You have lost your boy." "All hope is not yet gone." "You have lost your boy, and you have come to touch the hand of Dominique, while yet it can be conscious of that touch. You have come to close my eyes for ever." "My dear, dear Dominique!" "Do not interrupt me. I have a confession to make. I have been jealous of you all my life, ever since I knew you. I need not tell you all that you already know. I have plotted against you with devilish cunning, cunning too deep and despicable for you ever to suspect. I could not bear that you should sing the part. I swore you never should. I took care you should not sing the part. Let me tell you what happened after I left the theatre. I came here. I then looked calm. But I was mad. I had money in my pocket, and I bribed a wretch even almost as vile as myself to decoy the nurse of your child away from your house. "I was close by when this was done. A few minutes after, your house was discovered in flames. I brought you word at the theatre that your house was burning, and nothing was known of your boy." "Oh God! Oh God! Dominique! And while the woman was away the child overturned the lamp, and he is dead!" "Yes, Eugene, I do not wonder at your starting away from me. But hear me out. Hear me to the end. The boy did not overturn the lamp.... *I* overturned the lamp." "*You! You!* Which of us is mad? If I am sane, why should I not strangle you as you lie?" Eugene was now at the other side of the table, leaning on it, and looking stupidly at the prostrate man. "Because, Eugene, I asked you to hear me out, and the last wish of a dying man is sacred." "Dying *man!* Dying monster! Dying murderer! Where is my child?" For an instant Lavirotte's hand moved under the couch on which he lay. He suddenly raised it. There was a flash, a loud report, that seemed to shake the walls of the tower. Jephson sprang from where he stood. O'Donnell never moved. The pistol fell from Lavirotte's hand to the ground. He rose quickly from the couch, and, drawing himself up to his full height, stood on the other side of the table, facing Eugene. O'Donnell, too, drew himself up to his full height, and stared across the table at the other. Lavirotte raised his right hand on high, and, pointing with his finger aloft, said: "Did you hear the boy call?" Jephson, who still stood close to the foot of the ladder, whispered in a thick voice: "Don't touch him. He is only mad." Lavirotte still stood, drawn up to his full height, in his stage costume, with his right hand thrust upward, and his forefinger pointing aloft. There was a silence which no mind could measure, and then a sound that made the cold sweat break out on Jephson and O'Donnell. "Did you hear the boy call?" whispered Lavirotte. Suddenly the right arm relaxed and fell to Lavirotte's side. His eyes left O'Donnell's face, and were fixed on a corner of the tower to the left. "Did you hear the boy call?" he repeated. "I would not let you sing that song the other day, Eugene, but you have heard the boy call, and I must answer." Almost imperceptibly he began lifting his left arm towards the left corner of the tower, where his eyes were fixed, and through which the ladder passed into the floor above. "I must answer this call. I must sing. I did not murder your boy. I stole him, that I might have the first call to-night. You heard The Last Call. I

must answer the last call." Then in a voice which had never been firmer or truer, he sang the first line and a half of the "Bard's Legacy:"

"When in death I shall calm recline,  
Oh, bear my heart----"

He placed his right hand upon his left breast, still keeping his left hand rigid. "I can sing no more. Look." Turning their eyes in the direction he indicated, they saw descending from the loft above the figure of a small child, in white. "The bank is broken," said Laviotte, "but the treasure has been found here. Take him back to her, Eugene. Close my eyes. This is all I can do towards answering The Last Call." Before he fell, Eugene caught him in his arms, laid him gently on the couch, and closed the eyes.

**THE END.**

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