

Dowling Richard

The Last Call: A Romance (Vol. 1 of 3)



Richard Dowling

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Romance (Vol. 1 of 3)**

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Part I.

THE LAST CALL

CHAPTER I

The sun was low behind a bank of leaden cloud which stood like a wall upon the western horizon. In front of a horse-shoe cove lay a placid bay, and to the westward, but invisible from the cove, the plains of the Atlantic. It was low water, and summer. The air of the cove was soft with exhalations from the weed-clad rocks stretching in green and brown furrows from the ridge of blue shingle in the cove to the violet levels of the sea. On the ridge of shingle lay a young man, whose eyes rested on the sea. He was of the middle height and figure. Twenty-seven or twenty-eight seemed to be his age. He had a neat, compact forehead, dark gray eyes, ruddy, full cheeks, a prominent nose, full lips, and a square chin. The face looked honest, good-humoured, manly. The moustaches were brown; the brown hair curled under the hat. The young man wore a gray tweed suit and a straw hat. He lay resting on his elbow. In the line of his sight far out in the bay a small dot moved almost imperceptibly. The lounge knew this dot was a boat: distance prevented his seeing it contained a man and a woman. Dominique Lavirotte, the man in the boat, was of the middle height and figure, twenty-four years of age, looking like a Greek, but French by descent and birth. The eyes and skin were dark, the beard and moustaches black. The men of Rathclare, a town ten miles off, declared he was the handsomest man they had ever seen, and yet felt their candour ill-requited when their sweethearts and wives concurred. With Dominique Lavirotte in the boat was Ellen Creagh. She was not a native of Rathclare, but of Glengowra, the small seaside and fishing town situate on Glengowra Bay, over which the boat was now lazily gliding in the cool blue light of the afternoon. Ellen Creagh was tall and slender, above the average height of women, and very fair. She had light golden-brown hair, bright lustrous blue eyes, and lips of delicate red. The upper lip was short. Even in repose her face always suggested a smile. One of the great charms of the head was the fluent ease with which it moved. The greatest charm of the face was the sweet susceptibility it had to smile. It seemed, when unmoved, to wait in placid faith, the advent of pleasant things. During its moments of quiet there was no suggestion of doubt or anxiety in it. To it the world was fair and pleasant and the face was pleasant and wonderfully fair. Pleasant people are less degraded by affectation than solemn people. Your solemn man is generally a swindler of some kind, and nearly always selfish and insincere. Ellen Creagh looked the embodiment of good-humoured candour, and the ideal of health and beauty. She was as blithe and wholesome as the end of May; she was a northern Hebe, a goddess of youth and joy. The name of the young man lying on the shingles was Eugene O'Donnell. He lived in the important seaport of Rathclare, where his father was the richest and most respected merchant and shipowner. There had James O'Donnell been established in business for many years, and they now said he was not worth less than a quarter of a million sterling. Mrs. O'Donnell was a hale, brisk, bright-minded woman of fifty-seven, being three years her husband's junior. The pair had but one child, Eugene, and to him in due time all the old man's money was to go. The O'Donnells were wealthy and popular. The father had a slow, methodical way, which did not win upon strangers, but among those who knew him no one was more highly respected. Without any trace of extravagance, James O'Donnell was liberal with his money. He was a good

husband, a good father, and a good employer. He had only one source of permanent uneasiness—his son Eugene was not married, and showed no inclination towards marriage. The old man held that every young man who could support a wife should take one. He himself had married young, had prospered amazingly, and never for a moment regretted his marriage. He was prepared to give his son a share in his business, and a thousand a year out of the interest of his savings, if the young man would only settle. But although Eugene O'Donnell was as good-humoured and good-hearted a young fellow as the town of Rathclare, or the next town to it, could show, and although there was not in the whole town one girl who would be likely to refuse him, and although there were plenty of handsome girls in Rathclare, Eugene O'Donnell remained obdurate. It was lamentable, but what could anyone do? The young man would not make love, the father would not insist upon his marrying whether he loved or no, and there being at Rathclare little faith in leap-year, no widow or maiden of the town was bold enough to ask him to wed her. While the young man lying on the shingle was idly watching the boat, the young man in the boat was by no means idle. The sculls he was pulling occupied none of his attention. He swung himself mechanically backward and forward. His whole mind was fixed on the face and form of the girl sitting in the stern. "And so, you really must go back to Dublin?" he said ruefully. "Yes," she answered with a smile. "I must really go back to Dublin within a fortnight." "And leave all here behind," he said tenderly. "All!" she exclaimed, looking around sadly. "There is not much to leave besides the sea, which I always loved, and my mother, whom I always loved also." "There is nothing else in the place, I suppose, Miss Creagh, you love, but the sea and your mother?" "No," she answered, "nothing. I have no relative living but my mother, and she and the sea are my oldest friends." "But have you no new friend or friends?" She shook her head, and leaning over the side of the boat, drew her fingers slowly through the water. "The Vernons," she said, "are good to me, and I like the girls very much. But I am only their servant—a mere governess." "A mere queen!" he said. "I have known you but a short time. That has been the happiest time of my life. I at least can never forget it. May you?" Suddenly a slight change came over her. She lost a little of her gaiety, and gathered herself together with a shadow of reserve. "I do not think, Mr. Lavirotte, I shall soon forget the many pleasant hours we have spent together and the great kindness you have shown to me." "And you do not think you will forget *me*?" "How can I remember your kindness and forget you?" she asked gravely. "Yes, yes," he said eagerly, "but you know what I mean, and are avoiding my meaning. Perhaps I have been too hasty. Shall I sing you a song?" "Yes, please, if you will row towards home."

Then he sang:

"The bright stars fade, the morn is breaking,
The dew-drops pearl each flower and leaf,
When I of thee my leave am taking,
With bliss too brief.
How sinks my heart with fond alarms,
The tear is hiding in mine eye,
For time doth chase me from thine arms:
Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye."

The boat was now well inshore. "Lavirotte! Lavirotte's voice, by all the gods!" cried Eugene O'Donnell, raising himself into a sitting posture. "Doing the polite—doing the lover, for all I know. Why has he stopped there? He will begin again in a moment." "When you go, Ellen, will you give me leave to bid you adieu in these words?" "Mr. Lavirotte," she said, in doubt and pain, "I am exceedingly sorry that—" "It is enough," he said. "Say no more. I am a ruined man." "He will not finish it," said O'Donnell. "He is ungallant. I will finish it for him."

"The sun is up, the lark is soaring,
Loud swells the song of chanticleer;
The leveret bounds o'er earth's soft flooring:
Yet I am here.
For since night's gems from heaven did fade,
And morn to floral lips must hie,
I could not leave thee though I said,
Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye."

The girl raised her head and listened for a moment, and then bent her head in some confusion. There was to her a sense of surprise in feeling that this song had, bearing its present associations, been completed by an unknown voice. Lavirotte noticed the look of disquietude on the girl's face, and said lightly and bitterly: "You need not be uneasy, Miss Creagh. I know the man who finished my song for me, when there was no use in my going on with it. He and I are rival tenors. I will introduce you to him when we get ashore. We are the closest friends. He is the best of good fellows, and reputed-ah, I envy him-to be a woman-hater." At length the boat glided slowly through the green channel that led from the plain of the violet bay to the ridge of blue shingle. Lavirotte handed the girl out as soon as they reached the beach, and, as he did so, said: "You have no objection to know my friend?" She was anxious to conciliate him in any way she might. "No," she whispered. "What a lovely voice he has." "Better than mine?" he asked abruptly and harshly. "I-I," she hesitated, "am but a poor judge." "Which means," he said bitterly, "that you are a good judge, and decide against me." By this time they were close to where O'Donnell was. He was standing, and looking out to sea. "Comrade," said Lavirotte, touching him on the shoulder, "I am delighted to see you. I am in sore need of a *friend*. Miss Creagh has admired your singing very much. Mr. O'Donnell-Miss Creagh." "Am I dreaming," thought O'Donnell, "or is this beauty real?"

CHAPTER II

There was around Dominique Lavirotte an air of mystery which kept the good simple folk of Glengowra at bay. Although, theoretically, Frenchmen have always been popular in Ireland, this applies rather to the mass than to the individual. There was nothing repulsive about Dominique Lavirotte. On the contrary, he had attractive manners, and although he spoke English with a broken accent, he spoke it fluently and faultlessly. He was agreeable in company, well-read, and possessed a shallow encyclop[ae]dic knowledge, by means of which he was enabled to give great brilliancy and point to his conversation. Yet at certain moments he was taciturn, and if one attempted to break in upon his reserve he turned swiftly and snarled even at his best friend. According to his own account, he was descended from Louis Anne Lavirotte, medical doctor, born at Nolay, in the diocese of Autun, somewhere about a hundred years ago, who was a most skilful physician, and one well versed in the English language. This dead doctor of a hundred years ago had devoted much of his attention while on earth to more or less obscure forms of mental disease, and had written a treatise on hydrophobia. Dominique was very proud of this learned ancestor, and paid his relative of the last century the compliment of devoting some of his own time to the consideration of abnormal mental developments. Indeed, some of those who knew him best said that there was a twist in his own mind, and that under extreme provocation, mental or physical, the brain would give way. Lavirotte and O'Donnell were as close friends as it is possible for men to be; and, notwithstanding the ten miles which separated their homes, they saw much of one another. Each was young and enthusiastic, each sang tenor, and sang uncommonly well. In the town of Rathclare, no young man was more popular than Eugene O'Donnell, and the people there thought it a thousand pities that he should select as his favourite friend a man who was not only not a resident of Rathclare, but a foreigner, with mysterious ways and an uncertain temper. O'Donnell laughed off all their expostulations and warnings, and said that in so far as his friend was a stranger and afflicted with a bad temper, there was all the more reason why someone should do him any little kindness he could. But the people of Rathclare shook their heads gravely at the young man's temerity, and prophesied that no good would come to O'Donnell of this connection. They did not like this foreigner, with his strange ways and mysterious retirements into himself. They were free and open-hearted themselves, and they liked free and open-hearted souls like O'Donnell. They did not like swarthy skins; and now and then in the newspapers they read that men with swarthy skins drew knives and struck their dearest friends; that foreigners were treacherous, and not to be trusted with the lives, into the homes, or with the honour of law-abiding folk. They knew, it being a seaport, that foreigners spoke a gibberish which they affected to understand, and which was in reality no better than the language of Satan. Once a Greek, an infamous Greek, had been hanged in their town for an intolerable crime of cruelty committed on board ship; and somehow, ever since then, all foreigners, particularly swarthy foreigners, seemed in their eyes peculiarly prone to atrocious cruelties. What a luxury it must have been for this swarthy man of uncertain temper to meet and speak with Ellen Creagh, who was the very embodiment of all that is fair in the rich, warm sense of fairness in the North; and free in the sense of all that is open and joyous, and full of abounding confidence, in the North! During the fortnight in which he had been admitted to what he considered the infinite privilege of her society, he had fallen helplessly, hopelessly, madly in love. He had drunk in the subtle poison of her beauty with an avidity almost intolerable to himself. All the poetry and passion of his nature had gone forth ceaselessly towards that girl, as only the poetry and passion of southern blood can go forth. The violence of his feelings had astonished even himself. These feelings had grown all the more intense by the fierce repression in which he had kept them. For until that day in the boat he had never seemed to take more than a passing, polite interest in Ellen. Even then, in his dark and self-restrained nature, he had given no indication of the struggle within. The frenzy of his worship found

no expression, and he took his dismissal with as much apparent indifference as though he had put the question to her merely out of regard to the wishes of others. Yet when he said the words, "I am a ruined man," he meant the words, or rather he meant that he was determined to take an active part in his own destruction. "If I die," he thought, "what is death to me? The sun is dead, the moon is dead, the stars are dead, earth is dead, and perdition will be a release from this valley of phantoms. When life is not worth living, why should one live? I will not live. I have no cause against her, but I have cause against myself, for I am a failure." He had determined to make away with himself; he had made up his mind that he would not survive this terrible disappointment; he would go home that night and take some painless and swift poison, and so pass out of this vain world to the unknown beyond; he would not declare his intention to anyone, least of all to O'Donnell, whose voice he recognised in the second stanza of the song; he knew where he could get the poison—from a friendly apothecary. They would hold an inquest on him, no doubt, and discover that he had done himself to death. Her name might even get mixed up in the affair, but he could not help that. He meant to do her no harm; he simply could not and would not endure. When that meeting took place on the beach, whereat he introduced Ellen to O'Donnell, he had noticed the latter's start of amazed admiration. "What," thought Lavirotte, "is he hit too; he, the invincible! he, the adamant man, who has hitherto withstood all the charms of her lovely sex? It would be curious to watch this. Will he too make love, and fail-succeed? Ah." When this thought first occurred to Lavirotte he paused in a dim, dazed way. Of all men living he wished best to O'Donnell, now that he might regard himself as dead. "If I am to die and she is to love, would it not be best that she should love him?" And while he was thinking thus, and as he was mentioning his friend's name to her, he saw her, too, start and seem for a moment confused. He could easily understand why it was O'Donnell had started. Such beauty as hers appeared potent enough to infuse the Belvidere Apollo with action. But why should she start? Woman is not overwhelmed by the beauty of man, as man is by the beauty of woman. Here it was that the demon of jealousy first entered the soul of Dominique Lavirotte; here it was he first inhaled the mephitic breath of jealousy, destined to poison all his life and to embitter the last moment of his existence. As the three turned away and left the blue shingle for the yellow road, the sun fell behind them, and almost imperceptibly the gray dusk of twilight gathered in the east. Overhead the blue of day was becoming fainter and fainter, making way for the intenser blue of night. Neither of the men seemed disposed to speak. The heart of each was full of new emotion—one of love, the other of jealousy; one of the first rapturous buoyancy of dearest hope, the other of degrading cark. Nothing but the most ordinary commonplaces were uttered that night; and after the leave-taking each went a different way—she to the modest lodging where she spent her brief holiday with her mother; Lavirotte to his quiet room, and O'Donnell back to Rathclare by the latest train leaving the village that night. When the last-mentioned got home, he astonished his father and mother by walking into the room where they were sitting, and saying abruptly: "Sir, you have often advised me to marry, and I have put the matter off. Are you still of your former mind?" "God bless my soul!" cried the father in astonishment. "God bless my soul, Eugene, what's the matter?" He could get no further than this with surprise, and the question he asked was put merely as a matter of form, and not from any desire to ascertain the condition of his son's mind. But the mother was quicker—took in the whole situation at once, plunged at the heart of things, and asked breathlessly: "Eugene, who is she?" He coloured slightly and drew back. His father was too slow, and his mother too quick for him. He preferred his mother's mode of treating the matter. The word "she" brought back to his enchanted eyes the vision he had seen on the beach. He said to himself: "My mother has no right to be so quick. For all I know to the contrary, she may be engaged to Lavirotte." Then aloud he said: "Mother, I assure you, there is no 'she.' I never said two civil words to any girl in all my life." "Eugene," she said, dropping into her lap the woollen stocking she was knitting for him, "no young man ever yet thought of marriage until thinking of some girl had put the thought into his head." He felt in a way flattered and fluttered. It was pleasant even for a moment to fancy that

his mother, although she knew nothing of Miss Creagh, had suggested the notion he might marry her. He laughed and shook his head, and laughing and shaking his head became him. His mother looked at him half sadly, and thought: "No girl in all the world could refuse my boy-my handsome boy, my noble boy. And now one of them is going to take him away from me, who reared him, and have known him every hour since he was born." "Eugene," said the father deliberately, "do I understand that you wish me to give you my opinions on marriage?" The young man burst into a loud laugh. He had got far beyond the theoretic aspect of the affair now, and his father's opinion would have made very little impression indeed when compared with the impression Ellen Creagh had left upon his heart. After this the three talked upon the subject of Eugene's possible marriage, he telling them no more about the adventure on the beach than that the notion of marriage had been put into his mind by the sight of a most estimable young lady, in every way suited to him, but of whom he had only the slightest knowledge up to this. That night, when Ellen Creagh found herself in her own room, no thoughts of love were in her head. A feeling of pity for the fair young man she had met was uppermost in her head. It was not sentimental pity, but pity of a much more substantial and worldly kind. She had a letter to write, and sat down to write it. It began, "My dear Ruth," and continued to narrate certain trivial matters connected with seaweed and shells. Then it went on to say: "I have seen young Mr. O'Donnell, son of your father's great friend, here. I was quite startled when I heard the name. I was introduced to him by a friend who had told me of him before." When she had finished her letter, she addressed it to Miss Vernon, Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin. She added a postscript, saying: "I hope you will soon get out of Dublin. You must be weary of it this lovely weather. I shall write again in a few days." Then she stood awhile at the table, musing over the events in the boat. "He could not have been serious," she thought. "I daresay if I had looked at his face I should have seen him smiling. Anyway, he took it very quietly." That night Dominique Lavirotte slept little. "Though he were my friend over and over again," he cried passionately, "he shall not. No! Not if I were to-" Here he covered his face with his hands. "What a horrible thought! I can see his white face now in the moonlight. Why is it white? Why is it moonlight? Oh, God! was beauty ever such as hers?"

CHAPTER III

It was in the full height of summer, and by the bland sea, and while gathering a bouquet of wild flowers for a girl clad in white, and sitting on a mound hard by, that Eugene O'Donnell had for the first time the courage to tell himself he was in love. A minute before and he had stood in great fear of this said love-it had seemed silly, childish, unworthy of a full-grown man in the perfect possession of all his faculties. And now, all at once, even while his back was towards her, and he was not under the glamour of her eye, the magic of her touch, the mysterious fascinations of her motions, when, apparently, nothing was going on in the bare daylight but the tranquil ripple of the waves on the shore below, this fear left him, and all at once he confessed to himself his love, and began to glory in it. Once the flood-gate was broken down his nature knew no pause, saw no obstacle, appreciated no difficulty. Turning round hastily, with the flowers in his hand and a laugh upon his lips, such a laugh as he had never laughed before, for now the whole nature of the man was stirred, he cried: "What a fool I have been, Ellen." It was the first time he had called her by her name, and yet it seemed old and familiar to him. "What a fool I have been," he said, "to bother about these flowers." She blushed, and looked up timidly, and looked down bashfully, and smiled, and moved as though to rise, and then sat still. She was not familiar with her name upon his lips. "Eugene," to her mind, seemed familiar, for from one reason or another, perhaps the love of brevity, she so called him when she thought of him. But to hear him call her Ellen was as though her secret had been penetrated, and the fact that she called him Eugene laid bare. "What a fool I have been to gather these idle flowers," he repeated. "They are but the symbols of what I could say so much better in words. May I speak?" She grew red, and then deadly pale, and seemed about to faint. Her lips opened, but no sound came. "Whether you give me leave or not," he said, "I must. Ellen," he went on, "I think there is at this moment but one thing I believe impossible, and it is that I could ever go away from you. I never was in love before, and I don't exactly know the regular thing to say, but I'll tell you how I feel. If you were to get up off that mound now and walk away, supposing back to Glengowra or to the world's end, I'd follow you. And I'd never cease to follow you, even beyond the world's end, until you turned back and put your hand in mine. That's better than these flowers," he said, tossing the bouquet from him. "It's straighter, anyway, Ellen. Will you give me your hand, dear?" He called her "dear," and after a little while her hand was raised slightly from where it lay, and he took it, and she let it bide with him. So the stupid flowers lay-nowhere; and two pure hearts, sweet with God's goodliest graces, were opened to the understanding of one another. Then came moonlight nights to make the rich completion of the full day. He sang to her among the rocks, with the cool fresh sea washing beneath their unwearied feet. She sat clasped to him, and glad to be so clasped; and he sat strong beside her, and conscious of his strength. There was no worshipping on his part, no bowing down before a golden image. He took her to his heart in the beauty of her wholesome girlhood, as one takes a melody or a flower, without question and without any exaggeration of dearness beyond the exaggeration compelled by all beautiful things. These moonlit nights amid the rocks were the dearest things which had been, up to that, with him. There was no impediment in the course of his true love; his father was affluent; he had explained the whole matter at home; he had brought his sweetheart home, and there had she been approved of. Her mother saw no reason why the handsome, good-natured, good-humoured, well-off young man should not marry her beautiful daughter; and the daughter, on her part, saw all the reasons between heaven and earth, and several others which had no existence in heaven or earth or the region between, why she should marry him. It was their custom in these moonlight nights to stroll down to that cove where their first meeting had taken place, and where the glamour of her beauty had first fallen upon him. Here, of nights, were privacy, the moon and the sea, and the perfections lent to the moon and the sea by the cliffs and the rocks and the sounds of the sea (that are subtler

than any voice); and now and then the sounds of the land, which take away the aerial perspective of the sea and bring to the soothed eye visions of homesteads and fallows, of sleeping woods and gentle useful beasts, of pious folk at rest by night and pious folk at rest for ever; and, over all, the limitless quiet of night. Here on several occasions they sat for hours, from the late sunset, through the late dusk, into the dark. And once or twice, when he bade her good-bye at her mother's gate, he stole back again to the cove which had been the theatre of the magic drama in which he was acting. He now lived in the village, and often sat at the cove until the blue dawn blotted out the bluer night, and the seagulls awoke, and the sails of the fishing-boats out in the bay were trimmed for home. All this time, though he knew it not, a shadow dogged him, an evil shadow, a morally misshapen shadow, a pitiless dark shadow, that hid here and there where it could, behind wall, or tree, or rock, and ever glared unwholesomely. The shadow of a swarthy man, of a man that showed his teeth in the moonlight and fumbled something in his pocket; a sinister stealthy shadow, that boded good to no one, lurked, and dodged, and followed in the footsteps of the lovers like the evil genius of their career. When all had been settled between the lovers, Ellen had written to Mrs. Vernon and obtained release from her duties in that household. A month had now gone by since that meeting on the shingle, and it was arranged that in another month the wedding was to take place. The course of true love was running as smooth as the planets in their orbits. The happiest man and woman in Ireland were Eugene O'Donnell and Ellen Creagh. As the days went by that cove grew dearer to his heart; and even now, when the moon was making moonlight for lovers somewhere else, he, Eugene O'Donnell, could not keep away from it, nor could he sleep. One night he left her at her mother's gate and walked slowly down the road to the cove. It was dark for a summer night. Yet still there was light enough to see a large object, say the figure of a man, fifty yards off. He knew the ground as a farmer knows his farm. Following the declivity of the road he soon arrived at the broken ground. Here was a high rock on the right, high enough to conceal a man; and here, behind this rock, was hidden a man with gleaming teeth, and in his right hand a gleaming blade. As O'Donnell drew near the rock the man sprang forth, seized the other by the throat with the left hand, and, whirling up his right, whispered: "You shall never marry her." "Lavirotte! Lavirotte! My God, Lavirotte, are you mad?" "Yes, and you are dead." The hand holding the knife descended swiftly.

CHAPTER IV

Instinctively O'Donnell shot his left hand upward and seized the descending wrist. But the force in Lavirotte's arm was too great to be overcome. The blow was diverted; but the long, keen blade tipped the shoulder, tore through the cloth of the coat, and buried itself in the flesh, just above the shoulder-blade. "Heavens and earth, man! What's the matter?" cried O'Donnell, rendered almost powerless, more by astonishment than pain. "Death!" cried the infuriated man—"your death! – that's what's the matter." And, withdrawing the knife, he raised his arm once more aloft. O'Donnell now plainly saw that he was indeed dealing with a madman, or, at least, with a man who seriously intended taking his life. Still retaining his hold on the right wrist, he seized Lavirotte by the throat and shook him violently. The pain in his shoulder was nothing. It was no more than if he had been touched by a piece of iron just uncomfortably hot. Yet he felt confused and queer in his head, as though he had received the blow on his head, rather than on his shoulder. Lavirotte now seized O'Donnell by the throat, and for a while, with the two hands raised in the air—the one holding the knife, the other the wrist of the hand that held it—the two men struggled fiercely. It was a matter of life and death. O'Donnell had now lost all care for the cause of the attack, and was simply engaged in a brute attempt to defend his life against a brute attack. Both men were mad. Both men had now lost everything but the instinct of victory. All the faculties of each were concentrated upon the muscles each used—upon the advantages each gained—upon the chances each afforded. Each now meant to kill, and to kill speedily—to kill with all the force, all the power, all the devices of his body. One was armed and whole; the other was unarmed and hurt. Both were sensible that this conflict could not last many minutes. The two twisted and writhed and struggled abroad on the open way. Now they swayed this way, now that. Now, as though one were about to fall; now, as though the other. Now one strove to throw the other by the aid of mere weight and muscle; now the other sought to win by the force of strangulation. Meanwhile, above the heads of both rose the two upstretched arms—one hand clasped around a wrist, one hand holding a bloody knife. The two men's faces were livid. They breathed only now and then, and with terrible difficulty. Their eyes were dilated and protruding, the nostrils wide set and quivering. For some time, he knew not how long—he never knew how long the fight lasted—O'Donnell had felt something warm trickling down his back. He was bleeding freely. He was half suffocated. He felt he must succumb. For an instant everything was dark. Suddenly he saw once more; his vision, his senses were restored, but only to reveal to him the fact that his powers were failing swiftly. The two men rocked and swayed in the broad roadway leading towards the cove. Neither knew nor cared which way he went, so long as he might cling to the other. At the moment when O'Donnell's faculties returned, after that instant's unconsciousness, the two men were struggling a few feet from the rock behind which Lavirotte had hidden. "Now," thought O'Donnell swiftly, "for one last effort; if I fail he will kill me." Suddenly relaxing his knees, he stooped so as to bring his head on a level with the shoulder of his antagonist; then, loosing his hold of Lavirotte's throat, he seized him by the ankle, and, putting all his strength into his right arm and back, he sought to lift and throw the other. But his strength was gone; his head was dizzy; his eyes grew dim. Finally, all was dark once more. He lurched heavily forward, striking his antagonist in the chest with his head. Lavirotte stumbled and fell backwards. O'Donnell struggled for a moment to regain his upright position, but his strength was spent; he was unconscious, and subsided in the middle of the road. Now was Lavirotte's opportunity. O'Donnell could not have resisted a child. The most cowardly cut-throat that ever lifted steel need have no fear of him. The darkness increased as the night went on. By this time it had grown so great that it was impossible to see an arm's length. The sky, for all the light it gave, might as well have been the solid earth. No sound stirred the profound silence save the mellow washing of the waves upon the shore. It was sultry and suffocating. Now and then the air panted, beating this way and that in

little hot gusts that brought no freshness and left no coolness behind. Although the murmuring of the sea filled the night with a low plaintive music, the silence seemed to deepen as the minutes went by. At length a form began to stir. For a while the man did not seem to know where he was, or the circumstances which had led to his condition. It was only by feeling around him he was able to know he was in the open air. He felt the road, the stones, the sunbaked clay of the road. Then he listened intently awhile, and by his hearing confirmed the notion that he was in the open air. That was the murmur of the sea. These little puffs of wind that beat against his face showed he was not between walls. Ah! Now something of it came back. There had been a struggle of some kind, a fight with someone. What was it exactly? This was the road to the cove. Of course it was. The sea lay beyond there somewhere. To the right, to the left, no matter where, the sea was somewhere near. It would be good to get down to the sea and lie down in its cool waters, for he was aching and burning. What a fearful thirst! His tongue was parched, baked dry as the baked clay on which he sat. He had been hurt, how or why he could not recollect. There had been a fight. That was all right. But why he had fought or with whom, these were the mysteries. Oh! why did they not bring him some water? He was dying of thirst, and no one would come. He didn't remember going to bed. He never felt so sleepy in all his life before. It was a kind of deathly sleep, a sleep with no mercy in it, a sleep that promised no ease, no repose, no alleviation of the torturing uncertainties. Such a bed, too; it was as hard as iron. What did they mean by giving so sleepy a man such a bed? What nonsense it was for his mother to sing a lullaby. He was a grown man, and needed no such inducement to sleep. Oh, this terrible, tyrannical sleep that brought no ease, no repose. How strange that the cathedral organ should be booming away in the dark! If service was going on, why not have lights? Lights! Was it magic? No sooner did he think of them than the whole cathedral blazed out for one brief moment, and then fell back into darkness again. It was marvellous, incredible; and the cathedral seemed so vast, vaster than the reason could believe, although the eye had seen it. And, then, there was the music once again. Why did the organist play only when the lights were out? That was the swell organ. It was the loudest organ he had ever heard. What seemed most incredible of all was the organ was big enough to fill the church, and did fill it, until it made the windows, the pillars, ay, the very ground itself tremble. Ground! Ay, surely it was the ground. How extraordinary that he should be lying on the ground! What was this so delicious and cool? Cool and refreshing after that horrible dream of fighting with someone, and then waking on a road. And yet there was something in that dream, for this was a road. He sat up. It was very extraordinary. It was the most extraordinary thing that had ever happened to him in his life. Was he alive, in the old familiar sense of that word? Of course he was, for this was a road, and he knew it was a road, and- Lightning-thunder-rain. What was that he had seen beside him? The rain was refreshing. It was cooling his head, collecting his thoughts. What was that he had seen beside him? More lightning-thunder-rain. What was that beside him? Lavirotte-dead.

CHAPTER V

Lavirotte dead! Absurd. Now he remembered how it had been. Lavirotte had sprung upon him out of the shadow of that rock, and seized him and sought to kill him, because Lavirotte was mad with jealousy, or with southern blood, or with something else or other, no matter what-mad anyway. And there was that burning sensation in his shoulder, and the fever in his blood, and that-ugh! – clammy feeling down his back, But Lavirotte dead? No; the very notion was preposterous. Now he remembered the struggle. Another flash. Another roar of thunder. Another deluge of rain. He looked wonderfully like death in that blue light. And yet in that struggle he (O'Donnell) did not remember having struck the other. It was a common tussle, an irregular wrestle, with the supreme interest of a knife added by Lavirotte. That was all. Yet he lay there motionless, and it must have been a considerable time since he fell. With great difficulty and a sense of oppression, O'Donnell rose partly, and crawled towards the prostrate man. "Dominique," he whispered, "Dominique, what is the matter? Rouse up." There was no response. The form of the Frenchman lay there motionless, inert, nerveless. O'Donnell raised an arm; it fell back again into the mud of the road, unsustained by any trace of vitality. "What can it be?" thought O'Donnell, straightening himself, as another flash of lightning revealed the pallid face of Lavirotte. He waited for the thunder to pass, and then, putting his hands around his mouth, shouted with all the strength that was left in him: "Help! Help! Help!" The storm had not been unnoticed in the village, and many were awake. James Crotty, boatman, had been roused by the first peal of thunder, had filled a pipe, undone the door of his cottage, and come out to see how the night went. His boat was moored in the cove, but as there was no wind his mind was easy about her. His wife and little ones were safe asleep in the cottage, and his mind was easy about them. At the best of times he was a light sleeper and a great smoker, and took a boatman's interest in the weather, fair or foul, but had a particular interest in the great conflicts of nature. While he was standing in the doorway he was within a few hundred yards of the two men below near the cove. His cottage was about half-way down the road, and it was quite possible to hear an ordinary speaking voice from where the men now were. When O'Donnell's loud cry for help rang out in the stillness, Crotty started, and then listened intently. No other sound followed. There was no mistaking the nature of that cry. He had heard the word as distinctly as though it were spoken in the dark room behind him. "It can't be any of the men," he said, meaning the fishermen of the place. "It is too early for any of the boats to be back, and too late for them to be going out. What can have brought anyone down there at this hour? I'd better go and see, anyway." He went down the little garden in front of his cottage, and gained the road. He turned to the left. Then he went on slowly, cautiously, keeping to the middle of the road. "Who's there?" he called out. "What's the matter?" "Here," cried O'Donnell faintly, "This way. Help." The rain had now ceased, and the silence was intense. Far out there in the darkness was the soft washing of the wavelets on the shore. No other sound burdened the night. Guided by O'Donnell's voice, Crotty now walked on with decision. "What's the matter?" he called out again. "Who is it?" O'Donnell's voice answered from the darkness. "It is I, O'Donnell." "Oh, Mr. O'Donnell, is it you? What's the matter?" "I'm hurt, badly I think, and here is Mr. Lavirotte insensible. I know how I got my hurt." Crotty was now close to the speaker. "That makes no difference; but I don't know how Mr. Lavirotte was hurt." "Maybe 'twas a fight," said Crotty, in a tone of interest. A fight is always an interesting thing, but a fight here and on such a night as this was something which Crotty did not feel himself justified in treating with anything but the greatest respect. "Never mind what has been," said O'Donnell feebly. "The thing is to get him to the village and call a doctor. I can't be of much help. I am quite weak. Come now, Crotty, look sharp. Knock them up at Maher's, tell them to put a horse in, and be back here in no time, and let there be a doctor at hand by the time we get back. Run now. Don't lose a minute." "And leave you here by yourself, hurt? Aren't you strong enough to walk as far

as Maher's, or my place even?" "No. Be off. Every second you wait is killing us." Crotty started at the top of his speed, and in less than half-an-hour returned with a car from Maher's hotel. He had brought a lantern, and he and the driver carried Lavirotte to the car, and sat him up on it. Then Crotty got up and held the insensible man. O'Donnell got up on the other side, and thus they drove to the hotel. Here the doctor was awaiting them. "What's this, O'Donnell?" he said. He knew the two men thoroughly. "You two have been quarrelling. What is the meaning of this? Blood on both! Nasty scalp wound. Don't think the bone is broken. Clear case of concussion. What did you hit him with?" "Nothing," said O'Donnell. "Is it dangerous?" "Dangerous! I should think it is dangerous. Dangerous enough to mean manslaughter, it may be." "Good heavens!" cried O'Donnell, faintly. "I assure you I never struck him." "All right. Stick to that. It never does to make admissions. What's the matter with you? Blood and mud all over. Cut off his coat. Here, give me the scissors. No bleeding except here. Ugly cut." "Is it much?" said O'Donnell, very weak now. "Yes, it's a good hit." "Will it do for me?" "I don't think so, if you have luck. He has a much better chance of going than you. What *did* you hit him with, O'Donnell? It was a terrible blow. Something blunt—a stone, or something of that kind. It's a downright shame that two young fellows like you, of good education, and so on, should fall to hacking and battering one another in this brutal way, and at midnight, too. It's more like assassination than fighting. A woman in the matter, eh?" "For heaven's sake, hush, O'Malley." "All right. I'm not a magistrate. My business is with the bruises, not with the row, or the cause of the row; but I'm sure it's a woman. Men don't go ripping one another open for anything else nowadays." "I swear to you, O'Malley, as far as I am concerned, there was no row, and that I did not strike him." "Who else was with you? — although I'm not in the least curious. That was a tremendous blow. I can't make it out. If he had stabbed you first, I don't think you could have struck that blow. I can't make it out. I can't do any more for you now. You mustn't lie on it, you know." "O'Malley," said O'Donnell, "I want you to do me a great favour." "Oh, my dear fellow, you needn't be afraid that I'm going to swear an information. It's nothing to me if two fellows go hacking and slashing at one another. I shouldn't like to see either of you killed outright for the finest woman in creation." "Do stop, O'Malley, like a good fellow. I'll tell you what you must do for me. I want you to break the matter to her to-morrow morning the first thing." Suddenly the manner of the glib doctor changed. "My dear fellow, I have been very impertinent, very thoughtless, very rude, and as soon as you are quite well you shall punch my head, and welcome. I had clean forgotten that you are going to be married. When you do punch my head, I hope it won't be quite so terribly as poor Lavirotte's. I'll do anything in the world I can for you. What am I to say? She's at her mother's, I suppose." "Yes; she's at her mother's. The fact is, I don't exactly know what to say. I can't tell her the truth." "And you want me to tell her a lie, eh?" "No, no; I would not be so rude as to ask you to do anything of the kind. The fact of the matter is, I can tell and trust you—" "Stop, O'Donnell, don't. Don't tell me anything you want to keep quiet. If you told me now 'twould be known in China at breakfast-time. I'm dying to know all about it, but, as your friend, I recommend you not to tell me a word of it. What shall I tell her?" "That I have been a little hurt." "Lie No. 1. You are a good deal hurt." "That I shall soon be all right." "Lie No. 2. For a man who wouldn't be so rude as to ask me to tell a lie, you are getting on marvellously." "And that you do not know how I got the hurt." "Truth this time, by Jove, for a change. And most unpleasant truth, too, for I really am most curious to know." "Then you shall know." "No; as your friend I decline to listen. There, I promised to do the best for you. I'll lie as much as ever I choose, and confound your politeness for not asking me. There, now, you mustn't speak any more. You must keep as quiet as possible." And after a few words more of instruction the busy, talkative little doctor left O'Donnell. Lavirotte had been put in another room. O'Malley went to him, and again examined his condition, and then left the hotel. When O'Donnell was alone, he thought to himself: "I suppose if Lavirotte recovers, we may be able to hush the matter up. But if he dies—great heavens, what a thought! — there will be a trial, and how will it go with me? I can prove nothing. I know nothing of how he came by this hurt. It will

seem to anyone that we fought. It may seem that I was the aggressor. That I attacked him foully, and killed him ruthlessly while he was trying to defend his life. This is a terrible thought. It will drive me mad. Why, they may bring in a verdict of Murder! They may hang me. Innocent men have been hanged before. Hang me on the very day that I was to have been married. What can I do for you, Nellie? What better can I do for you, Nellie, than die here?"

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