

Beauchamp's Double

THE PRIMA DONNA.

A Story of Mystery, Love and Devotion.

BY DAVID LOWRY.

CHAPTER I.

THE SINGER.

The theater was crowded from the parquette to the gallery with a critical audience.

The opera was now, the prima donna was unknown to the audience, and it was the opening night of the new theater, all of which was commented on frequently afterward by those who witnessed the performance and the press.

The manager was apprehensive, as he had good reason to be, when he realized the full significance of a remark one critic made concerning the chances involved in a new theater, a new opera, and a new singer. The critic had witnessed many debuts, assisted at many openings, and damned many new operas. The audience manifested little interest, and maintained a haughty composure.

The people looked about them, at each other, and at the appointments and ornaments of the theater. Friends recognized each other and nodded, while fans fluttered and beauties primed.

In the second scene, a singer not wholly unknown to the greater portion of the audience came on; a pretty, graceful girl, with eyes like a gazelle, and a sweet voice, but the audience contemplated her calmly. The women especially wondered what the men saw in her that entitled her to the distinction of rare beauty; nobody referred to her musical talent, discussion was devoted to the singer's personal charms.

Her first note was greeted by the women in a better mood, having disposed of one victim submitted to public caprice.

Two young men occupying seats together were talking to each other in undertones. Fifty more were doing the same thing.

"I never bother with the libretto unless I am interested. Besides, we know the story."

"The orchestration is execrable."

"You are forever finding fault, Livingston."

"The house is not properly ventilated."

"Anything else?"

"I don't see much color; distracts one's attention."

"Is that all?"

"Then these seats are absolutely stuffy. It makes me warm to look at the boxes."

"Hush! There she is! Ah!"

The prima donna was bowing in answer to the ripple of applause that rose until it swelled into a hearty greeting in the gallery.

The singer swept the house with a glance, and in the same instant Livingston discovered she was a great beauty. She was altogether unlike the singer who had preceded her.

This woman with the flashing dark eyes and sylvan-like grace was conscious of her power, self-contained.

She looked over the audience a second time, bowed slightly in response to the warm greeting, and began to sing. The first note she uttered startled Livingston. He glanced quickly at his companion. Beauchamp's eyes were fixed upon the singer, whose voice searched the innermost recesses of the heart, and moved it in spite of one's self.

As the singer became absorbed in her part, the sea of faces were forgotten. She sang like a bird in a cage, and the wonderful voice ceased, and then there was a whirlwind of applause.

Whatever was in store for the opera, Vittoria, the prima donna, had scored an instantaneous success.

"What do you think of her, Beauchamp?"

Beauchamp's gaze was so intent, his being so absorbed in the action and the singer, that he had eyes or ears for anything else. His eyes drank in the elegance of her attitude, "the exquisite contour of her head, the beauty of the crown of brown hair that adorned her as few women are crowned. Then he settled himself in his seat with an involuntary sigh.

"Positively you are hit, Beauchamp," Beauchamp put out a hand.

"She is going to sing again."

The prima donna moved slowly across the stage; the strings trembled in at the open windows; the checkered rays fell upon the sprays of silver that caught up her robe; she slanted on her brown hair, giving it a tinge of gold, and at that moment she looked divine.

Her voice rose, fell, stole aloft, lingered in the air, and then, as if by magic, the hearts of the listeners throbbled as she poured out her soul in song. And still her voice soared aloft, hung pulsing in the air in throbs, while men and women held their breath in suspense.

The words and the air transported the audience to the heights of the mountains; the pulsing notes were like the lingering softness of the mountain breeze sighing on the heather.

The singer swayed the vast audience as one person; her empire was undisputed.

When she ceased, the audience, relieved from a trance of feverish intoxication, burst forth into such a fury of applause that the singer was compelled to repeat her song again, and again.

The opera was no longer a trial. It was a success.

"It is no longer a trial, it is a dream, and tosses them high in the air, so the whirlwind of popular approval carried the audience away until men and women waved handkerchiefs, fans and flowers aloft. The thunders that voiced the applause filled the theater; they rang through the lobby, the main entrance, out upon the street. They penetrated the green-room, echoed in the drawing-room.

Beauchamp was aroused by his friend; he was sitting like one in a dream.

"I spoke twice. What possesses you?"

Then, as Beauchamp turned to him slowly, Livingston added:

"You are very positive."

"I have good reason. I have studied the face."

"For fully fifteen minutes."

"Say rather fifteen days."

Livingston turned quickly. The act was over, and people were going out. The hum of conversation filled the theater.

"Yes; I retouched her portrait. I was so struck with it that I made a copy of it—that is, I rubbed it in, and worked up the details later, but I now see my error. I don't mind telling you—I met her abroad. I have not done the original justice. However, I can remedy the defects in twenty minutes now—less time."

He was speaking to himself rather than to Livingston, who caught him by the shoulder, laughingly saying:

"What nonsense is this? Wake up, old fellow! There is a very tiresome way, I'm told. Let's go out; this air is stifling."

The friends went out arm in arm. When they reached the street, a cry was raised by a victim of a pickpocket. When the rush was over Livingston looked for Beauchamp in vain.

He walked rapidly in one direction, then in another, and then into the street. He was looking for Beauchamp, who was likely to enter a saloon and a restaurant, but Beauchamp was not in either.

Livingston was annoyed, but not seriously alarmed. Beauchamp was abundantly able to take care of himself. A city-bred man, as many in Rome; a man used to meeting all kinds of people, could surely hold his own in any community chance might throw him into—and yet it was strange, deuced strange, that he should disappear so suddenly.

The street was well lit, and when Livingston re-entered the theater slowly. Half a dozen people scowled as he resumed his seat; they were deep y interested in the opera, enthused over the new singer.

Suddenly Livingston experienced relief. He smiled now at his dullness. Nothing could be a career. Beauchamp's words were sufficient. He was smitten with the singer's charms, and since he had retouched her portrait within a fortnight, what could be more natural. Doubtless he had availed himself of an unexpected opportunity to pay his respects to the prima donna in the green-room. He was smiling, and he was smiling. A man had over heels in love with a woman, as it was plain Beauchamp was—however, Livingston resolved to rally him the moment they met again. And yet—why should Beauchamp remain in the green-room? The prima donna was not so good, was she? The artist was smiling, and he was smiling. He was so overjoyed that night that he talked to everybody.

A commotion near one of the doors caused half the audience to look around angrily. There was a scuffle, cries and oaths blended. Blows sounded simultaneously with the oaths. There were cries of:

"Kick him out!"

"The ruffian!"

Many rows in their places and looked on the scene that interrupted the performance on the stage.

Livingston beheld a young man with disheveled hair, and one of the ushers a violent blow in the face.

The young man's face was inflamed and red with passion.

If Livingston had not stood up quickly and noted all that passed, he would have thought it was a disagreeable dream, but there was no doubt of its reality.

The young man who had cursed the ushers and knocked one down, and who stood in full view of the people in the parquette striking right and left at the ushers and police officer and Leslie Beauchamp.

Livingston experienced a sickening sensation, but controlled himself instantly and made his way to the entrance as fast as he could.

That Beauchamp would drink to excess, Livingston until that moment deemed incredible; that drink would transform a man with all the instincts, and the power of a god, into a brute, was a violent blow in the face.

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Was he insane—crazed with some vile delusion, or was he only drunk, and like some men when drunk devilish?

Whatever it was Livingston resolved to "get at the bottom of the business."

That was the duty he charged himself with now, and for several reasons deemed sufficient taken separately.

In the first place he would not be guilty of deserting a friend in a pinch.

In the second place his curiosity was piqued, and in the third place the affair was now, and for several reasons deemed sufficient taken separately.

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Interest in him than in the tobacco-stained floor they spat on. Simmons rejoined him at the end of five minutes, and they left the dive without speaking.

When they stood on the pavement again Simmons said:

"Our man was there."

"In that place?" Livingston looks as well as his tones discredited the statement. "If you are quite sure, Simmons, that settles it; at the same time, the proof must be powerful to convince me."

Well, that crowd gave me a cold chill. I'd soon make my bed in a cave with rattlesnakes as to trust my life to that gang."

"And you would be right there. Nearly every man there has killed his man, and some have helped to kill more than one, and two or three I noticed have served full time for murder, or been pardoned—nice, choice lot. Yes, Steve knows our man. He made no bones about telling me. Why he was so outspoken I can't say. I was with a crowd of 'em—I went say without good cause. Steve would give all he has in the world to read my gravestone. Our man is—"

Simmons halted, looked at Livingston with friendly interest, then walked on again.

"You may as well prepare yourself for disagreeable news, Mr. Livingston."

"Out with it; but cut it short, Simmons."

"Well, you are all wrong—dead wrong. Your man is a full-blown double, as near as you can get. He won't often make mistakes. I don't care in this case—I'd rather be mistaken on your account, after what you've told me."

"What do you mean by a full-blown double?"

"Your friend has two sides, one for decent people and one for the crowd back there."

Simmons lifted his left thumb to his shoulder. "Pest not worry over it, Mr. Livingston, but he is bound to come to grief sooner or later. It's only a question of time with the smartest of 'em."

"There is some mistake. You are talking of another man altogether. It is impossible."

"We are all liable to mistakes," said Simmons slowly. "It is coming pretty close this time. He told Steve he had got into a scrape, and changed his hat and coat in there. He went out the back way, crossed a fence, and walked out on the next street. The simplest thing in the world. He walked through a saloon after he jumped the fence."

"I don't believe Beauchamp could be paid to do it," said Livingston. "Nor would you, Simmons, if you could see him and talk with him five minutes."

Livingston spoke with considerable feeling, at first with spirit, then a shade of disappointment was manifested.

"Your business make you suspicious; you can't help it, but the thing is impossible."

"There's a good deal in what you say, but Steve says he said the fuss was in the theater. He knocked two or three men down, beside clipping the policeman they brought in. There is no mistake about that. Then he is the only man Steve knows that can do that trick with his hands. He would see that he has seen him do it more than once, but never knew just how he managed. I think I know it. D'd you ever notice anything peculiar about your friend's hands?"

"No," said Livingston, absent-mindedly.

"Everything all right? Thumbs usual size? No marks on hands, no—"

"Simmons, once for all," said Livingston, in positive tones, "you are all wrong. As for Beauchamp's hands, I never noticed particularly, more than that they are finely formed, but they are well, and that is the only particular about them. That is what I am convinced there is an absurd mistake. Beauchamp is the soul of refinement—utterly incapable of such deception. He could no more associate with that villainous crowd—"

"He got drunk. You saw him punch the ushers."

"I did—but that is what I want cleared up, Simmons."

"Very well. Stick to your friend, Mr. Livingston. That's all right. I admire you all the more for it. But now you've got my curiosity aroused. I'll see it through, it takes months. There's my hand on it."

Simmons extended a hand, which Livingston grasped cordially.

"There's just one more place I want to look in now. Steve thinks he might be there—he was leading that way. We can walk—no need to get in a car. I am going to convince you that Beauchamp is another sort of man, and satisfy myself, then we'll arrange to set him out of the road for awhile. That is your idea?"

"Precisely," Livingston replied. "I am putting the matter entirely in your hands now, Simmons."

"You have anything of value, just put it in a safe place. I could get it back, but there is no use inviting trouble. You'll only meet crooks—there isn't a man there that could be hired to murder you. Altogether different from that crowd, and Steve says your friend isn't a time favorite on the account. He goes there often that he is wanted."

"Among pickpockets?"

"Steve says he has seen him there often."

"Beauchamp is a rendezvous with pickpockets—a common associate?"

"We are going right to the bottom of this business now," said Simmons, resolutely. "There's no stopping place."

His professional pride was piqued now.

"Why isn't he a favorite? Has Beauchamp killed his man, too? I'll believe it when he tells me."

"There's something back of their dislike. Steve thinks it the most natural thing in the world. Here we are. This way."

Simmons led the way through an entry. Livingston had remarked a hundred times.

The passageway had always been associated in his mind with a dinky little store. He had assumed the passage had fallen into disuse because the occupants of the store found it more convenient to pass in and out the store-room.

When Simmons stepped clear of the passage, and opened a door on the left in the rear building, Livingston looked into a pool-room in full blast.

NO BE CONTINUED.

ABOUT 125,000 copies of General Booth's book, "On Darkest England, and the Way Out," have been sold, and the demand is still as great as ever. The work is being translated into Japanese, French, Dutch, Swedish and German.

EDNA noticed that papa did not kiss the new baby, so she put her arm around his neck and said, coaxingly, "Kiss it, papa; it won't bite."

It is a peculiar faculty of human memory says the Philadelphia Times, to misquote proverbs and poetry and almost invariably to place the credit where it does not belong.

Nine men out of ten think that the Lord tempts the wind to the shorn lamb's ears from the Bible, whereas Lawrence Stern is the author. He sends a reply to the editor of the Times, and says: "Pouring oil upon the troubled waters" is also ascribed to the sacred volume, whereas it is not there; in fact, no one knows its origin.

Again, we hear people say: "The proof of the pudding is in chewing the string."

This is arrant nonsense, and the proverb says:

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating thereof and not in chewing the string."

Nothing is more common than to hear:

"A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."

This is an impossible condition of mind, for no one can be convinced of an opinion and at the same time hold to an opposite one. What Butler wrote was eminently sensible:

"He that compiles against his will is of the same opinion still."

A famous passage of scripture is often misquoted thus: "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone." It should read: "Let him cast a stone."

Sometimes we are told: "Behold how great a little matter kindleth," whereas St. James said: "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth," which is quite a different thing.

We also hear that "A miss is as good as a mile," which is not as sensible or forcible as the true proverb: "A miss of an inch is as good as a mile."

"Look before you leap" should be: "And look you ere you leap."

Pope is generally credited with having written:

"In modest words admit of no defense, For want of decency is want of sense, though it would puzzle any one to find the verses in his writing. They are written by the Earl of Roscommon, who died before Pope was born.

Franklin said "Honesty is the best policy," but the maxim is of Spanish origin, and may be found in "Do's Quixote."

One of Barnum's Jokes.

Barnum was an inveterate joker, and a joke did not lose its flavor to him if it was turned against himself. He loved to relate the practical jokes in which he had participated. One of his last jokes was played on a party of good deacons of the church, pillars of the church of which he was a member. They were aboard his private yacht, and early one Sunday morning were steaming toward New York, intending to do so church there. Two of them needed shaving. Barnum also wanted a shave. Barnum had the only razor on board. They drew lots to see who should shave first. Barnum was the lucky man.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Barnum with a chuckle. "I'll shave one side of my face and pass the razor along to you. You both shave one side of your face then. While I am shaving the other side of my face you can be having the other side of yours and we'll get through quick."

The good deacons fell into Mr. Barnum's trap without a struggle. Each shaved one side of his face. Barnum started in and finished his shave. As he did so he turned and threw the razor out of the stateroom window. His merriment and that of the rest of the party at the plight of the two half-shaven men restored their good nature. Making the best of the situation, they washed the lather off their faces and finished the trip with one-half of their faces beardless and the other half covered with heavy scrub.

"Barnum's last joke was perpetrated on his legal adviser two days before his death. He turned to the gentleman and very seriously said: 'My neighbor here has a lot of peacocks. Suppose they come over in my garden and lay eggs. Are the eggs mine or his?'

"Well," the lawyer innocently responded, "that is an intricate point. The next time his peacocks come over here and lay eggs we'll make him sue to recover them."

Barnum checked and asked: "But suppose his peacocks come?" The accent he put on the "hens" showed the lawyer how he had been caught, and he turned from his client with: "Confound it, my neighbor's peacocks and peahens!"

How to Advertise.

"I've learned that the force and effect of an advertisement depend largely upon the way it is worded," said a West Sider.

"Last week," continued he, "I had an umbrella stolen from the vestibule of the church I attend. I went down to a newspaper office and had the following advertisement inserted:

LOST FROM THE VESTIBULE OF THE CHURCH last Sunday evening a gold-headed black silk umbrella. The gentleman who took it will be handsomely rewarded by leaving it at No. — street.

"I waited several days and got no response, and I told the newspaper advertiser that advertisements were no good, that they were never read, etc. Said he: