

Lushington obeyed, and if he wondered a little at first why his mother should want a big cloak on a suffocating evening in July, he soon forgot all about it in listening to Margaret's duet with Rigoletto. His mother sat perfectly motionless in her seat, her eyes closed, following every note.

At the end of the short act, the applause became almost riotous, and if Margaret had appeared before the curtain she would have had an ovation. But in the first place, it was only a rehearsal, after all, and secondly there was no one to call her back after she had gone to her dressing-room to dress for the last act. She heard the distant roar, however, and felt the tide of triumph rising still higher round her heart. If she had been used to her cadaverous maid, too, she would have seen that the woman's manner was growing more deferential each time she saw her. Success was certain, now, a great and memorable success, which would be proclaimed throughout the world in a very few days. The new star was rising fast, and it was the sallow-faced maid's business to serve stars and no others.

For the first scene of the last act Gilda puts on a gown over her man's riding-dress; and when Rigoletto sends her off, she has only to drop the skirt, draw on the long boots and throw her riding-cloak round her to come on for the last scene. Of course the prima donna is obliged to come back to her dressing-room to make even this slight change.

Madame Bonanni was speaking earnestly to Lushington in an undertone during the interval before the