

VOLUME III

CHAPTER 5

“Der Mensch erwatet oft einen Kelch mit Necktar, und er kriegt eine Prügel suppe, und ist auch Necktar süß, so sind doch Prügel um so bitterer; und es ist noch ein wahres Glück, dass der Mensch, der den andern prügelt, am Ende müde wird, sonst könnte es der andere wahrhaftig nicht aushalten.”

—Heine, “Reisebilder.”

THE BURSFORDS had taken lodgings in Clarges Street, Piccadilly. A large drawing-room, with two windows facing the street, and one bed-room, formed their whole accommodation; and for this they paid a sum so high that were it not that she had the O’Gorman Mulcahy’s rent of the house in Merrion Street to fall back on, Mrs. Bursford would have rebelled outright. At it was, Jervis’ supplies were necessarily cut off.

It was an afternoon late in the month of May. The windows were open, and the air, though close and warm as it is of a London May day, smelt pleasantly of the mignonette and musk in pots in the balcony. Mrs. Bursford was lying on a sofa by the wall. She was weary and exhausted; an extensive shopping expedition had occupied her and Diana all the forenoon, and they had not long returned. Miss Bursford was sitting in the window, busily trying to read the debate of the previous night in the *Times*. She had taken a great interest of late in Parliamentary business.

She felt too tired to wade through much of it, however; and presently, lying back in her chair drowsily, she let the paper slip out of her lap and on to the floor. The rustle seemed to startle Mrs. Bursford: she raised the cushion on which her head was resting, and said,—

“Diana! you might give me Miss Saltasche’s letter. I had not time to read more than a page of it this morning.”

Her daughter unlocked a desk and handed the letter, a voluminous epistle written in a crabbed hand. Then she returned to her seat; and Mrs. Bursford put on her spectacles and began to read it aloud, with comments interpolated.

“Her brother is coming over next week, to the Westminster Palace Hotel. He always goes there. ‘That unfortunate little Mrs. Poignarde’—do you remember, Diana? the pretty foreign-looking little woman who played so well at his concert—‘she has lost her uncle, a very wealthy merchant, whose heiress she was to have been: left all his money in charity, or something of that sort. I gather from the Greys that her marriage had displeased him. Mr. Saltasche managed some money affairs for the husband,—a sad scamp, it seems: he tells me they are almost penniless. She expects to have to teach for her living.’ Dear, dear! I suppose it was the knowledge that she would have to come to that at last that made her practise and study as she did. I always thought there was something out of the way in her playing so well.”

“Oh! quite,” assented Diana. Then Mrs. Bursford went on,—

“She says she has heard Miss O’Hegarty won’t go away anywhere this summer. Her nephew, Dermot Blake, is to be home in July or August: he means to go to Blakestown direct.”

“August, is it now?” said Diana. “I thought we heard June, or May. He’ll marry and settle, no doubt. I wonder will it be one of the Haras or Dillons? They will be on the *qui vive*.”

“Won’t they, though?” said Mrs. Bursford. “I should not be one bit surprised if they packed back to Kerry for the summer instead of going to the Rhine, just because he’ll be there.”

“The Taylors, too: they have money now.”

“They’d need it. What a chance they have of him! Dermot will marry some pretty face,—that’s what he’ll do. Let Dorothy do all she likes.”

“Lady Brayhead thinks of Biarritz, and will take one of her nieces with her. She thinks it probable Miss Braginton will accompany Mrs. John Braddell to London for a while.”

“Oh!” said Diana, turning round in her chair.

“She was furious when she heard of the letting of the Burton Street establishment. I saw she was bent on getting over, by crook or by hook,” said Mrs. Bursford, folding up the letter and putting it in her pocket. “And now she has just foisted herself on these Braddell people. I do wish——”

But the wish was never spoken; for Mrs. Bursford’s glance fell on the clock on the chimney-piece, and she started up.

“Half-past four!” she exclaimed. “Diana, forgot to tell them that we wanted afternoon tea. I’ll ring for the servant.”

“She has taken up with the Braddells because of their widowed brother-in-law—that’s just it,” continued the elder lady when the order had been given. “The O’Gorman Mulcahy has gone back to Mayo, and has made no sign. Pah! the creature! I am glad Mr. Saltasche is coming over—very glad. I feel uneasy about those Leadmines shares. From what Mr. Hogan says——”

“Pray, mamma, on no account let him imagine that Mr. Hogan is your authority: now please remember that. Mr. Saltasche may be quite unaware that Mr. Hogan knows so much of our——knows we hold those shares. And then things take such sudden changes in the City: they were thirty-eight yesterday, and to-day they are thirty-seven and one-eighth. That is nothing extraordinary.” Miss Bursford evidently had been studying something more than Parliamentary business.

At five o’clock Hogan came in, looking pale and tired, and very hot. Diana rose to welcome him, with quite a pretty fuss. A long reclining chair, with soft silken cushions, was placed in the shade by the open window, where the air could come in but not the sun. A footstool seemed to present itself of its own accord to his feet, which were weary with the hot glaring walk up Piccadilly. After the heat and dust without, the cool room was delightful. It was not like a lodging: if it was, it was a different sort from his rooms in Bloomsbury. There were quantities of pretty trifles scattered about. Diana had taken the trouble to pack all her knickknackeries and carry them across with her. The O’Gorman Mulcahys must have found a bare drawing-room when they took possession. Books, magazines, vases, and pots of flowers gave it a cheerful inhabited look; and Miss Bursford, in a charming cool dress of white and blue, all the harsh lines softened and toned down by the judicious half-light, moved gracefully, on hospitality intent, about the room.

“What may we expect in another month—in the dog-days?” said Hogan, laying back his head in the chaise-lounge, and watching Diana’s gliding movements lazily from under his half-shut eyelids.

A confused dull hum, a faint echo of the thoroughfares, came in from the street with the perfume of the flowers. The change was so complete, he felt almost as if in a dream. Then the servant came in with tea. A round table on three legs, holding a miniature tea-tray, was brought forward; a funny little round teapot, shaped like a melon, with a leaf for a lid and some twisted silver tendrils for a handle; cups of different sizes, shapes, and colours, but all of them pretty and quaint,—Miss Bursford’s thin white fingers moving amongst them gracefully, if a little fussily.

“I assure you, Mrs. Bursford, you might get a sunstroke to-day in Pall Mall quite easily.”

“I daresay, indeed. I was out this morning: it was so fatiguing. I am sure it will end with a thunderstorm. There are always thunderstorms in London at this time of year. Diana, you always put too much sugar in my tea.”

Hogan rose and fetched back the teacup, to have the fault rectified by the pouring in a little more tea. Mrs. Bursford was sitting in the far window, in her own easy-chair.

“Now,” said Diana, all smiles and graciousness, handing him a cup of tea delightful of fragrance.

He laid it on the gipsy table.

“I am too far away,” he said, looking at the cumbrous chaise lounge and the footstool. “This will be a short cut;” and he lifted the little table and its load a good foot nearer to his place. Diana placed her chair nearer, and laughed.

“You are fond of short cuts, I think,” she said, with a trace of meaning in her tone. “I like them too, but I lack the power, somehow, of foreseeing short cuts. What a world of time and trouble it saves! It is a real talent.” She said this with an affected emphasis—an italicizing of eyes and voice that implied homage and admiration.

He smiled a kind appreciation as he sipped his tea.

“What is there new to-day?” asked Mrs. Bursford, from her arm-chair.

“Really very little. Judge Conolly is dying. They speak of Mr. Guages as his successor. Conolly did not hold it long.”

“No; and Mr. Guages is old: sixty-eight, they say. He has need of a rest, indeed.”

“That, and the new theatre, and the financial scandal, are about all the news going. Lord Featherhead has advanced fifty thousand. Miss Babillon’s salary is to be, according to some people, two hundred a week. Her dressing-room is a marvel: satin and point-lace hangings in all the shades of blues. He is having her picture painted as ‘Queen Too-loo-loora,’ by Fleshynge. I’m told it’s to cost eight hundred guineas. And she is to appear on the first night in a new burlesque written for her by Lord Featherhead and Tom Titt.”

“Especially Tom Titt, I suppose?” said Miss Bursford. “What idiotic puns he makes! When is his novel expected out?”

“Quite soon; it is nearly all stolen from Ernest Feydeau, and some other French writers. By-the-bye, Mrs. Stryper is bringing out another: that woman must work night and day. She makes money by it, too: advertises so daringly. Her last dodge was to present copies gratis to all the public reading-rooms and mechanics’ institutes. Then, of course, their acknowledgments appeared in the papers, and were a first-rate advertisement. I am told she will get a thousand pounds for this. The plot is certainly daring—a mother and daughter in love with the same man. By the bye, she is in a fury just now. Some Yankee got a letter of introduction to her, and was asked to dinner. And what did the fellow do but write an account of her, and her house, and her dinner, off to a New York paper!—described everything, to the pattern of the plates. Everybody is talking of it.”

“What was the financial scandal?” interrupted Mrs. Bursford, a little impatiently.

“A merchant absconded with a large sum—a hundred and twenty thousand, they say: gone to Spain. There is no extradition treaty, you know, with Spain. Such a foolish thing of anybody that is ‘wanted’ to leave London! It is the safest place of all, if they would only think it.”

“Had he speculated?” asked Mrs. Bursford.

“Yes, and had made money; but he had been implicated in some unpleasant business likely to injure his standing, and people fought shy of him; so he thought it better to be off.”

“Dear me!” Then Mrs. Bursford picked up the stitches in her tatting, and dropped out of the conversation. Diana quitted the tea-table, and seated herself opposite Hogan in the window, well back from the light, among the shadows of the curtains.

“You did not speak last night, then?” said she, in a reproachful tone. “I was so disappointed this morning.” The blonde eyelashes drooped pensively for a moment.

“You were looking for the report, eh?” said he in a lazy tone. “Ah! I had thought of saying something on that Enlistment Bill. The subject did not interest me, though; and I had had a hard day’s work in the City, so was glad to doze in my seat. It is a good quality of mine to be able to go to sleep in all sorts of odd positions and times—that is, after midnight.”

“The Duke of Wellington and Napoleon could do that too, I have read.” Diana related this admiringly, just as if she saw in it some additional links in the chain of analogy she had wrought in her own mind between these heroes and her swain.

“Saltasche, by-the-bye, prides himself greatly on his likeness to Napoleon,” said Hogan, smiling. “Have you noticed that?”

“Dear, yes: he dresses the part, too. He has a picture of Napoleon: some people say he had it painted from himself. He can give a very good imitation—that is quite his weakness; and he is very susceptible to flattery on that head.”

“I hardly supposed he had a weakness,” laughed Hogan: “we all have. That mania for imitating great people is very common. What a number of fat men prided themselves at one time on being like O’Connell! It always dies out after a while. I think almost every short swarthy man imitated Napoleon more or less. I know another who has his photograph taken in jack-boots and a sort of hunting costume—with his arms folded, of course.”

“Mr. Saltasche has a little too much colour,” said Diana.

“Well, a little. It is very vexatious, though, when you are presented with a photograph and asked deliberately, ‘Who does that remind you of?’ Of course you don’t know. Then when you are informed sulkily that it is *considered* so like the Duke of so-and-so, or Prince such-a-one, you can’t help showing surprise. There is an old gentleman here who dresses exactly like Prince G——, and will do so to the end of time, because he

was once mistaken for him. His head has been completely turned ever since.”

“I quite believe it. People are so silly. In Dublin I know several people who persist in copying exactly his Ex’cy’s dress, whiskers, and way of brushing his hair. I know a girl who was perfectly crazed for a season or two because she had been told she was like Viscountess H—. People went so far as to say that she had been saluted in the street in mistake for her. But that I doubt: she never was so good-looking.”

“Mr. Saltasche, I mustn’t forget to tell you, will be here on Monday morning,” said Hogan, looking at his watch. “I must be in my place early to-night.” Hogan had not yet got out of the trick, common to most new-made M.P.s, of regulating their daily lives in accordance with the exigencies of the House, and of continually talking of the same. “There will be an effort made by some friends to get that wretched Railway Bill on its legs again. Ah!—” and he sighed heavily.

“Is it so hopeless, then?” asked Miss Bursford, with a charming show of interest and sympathy.

“Hopeless?—indeed it is. That’s not the worry, though.” He spoke unguardedly, and heedless of the look of sharp curiosity that suddenly shone in her eyes.

“Oh dear!” sighed the lady, clasping her hands with affected vehemence, “if I were only a man! What a glorious career one could carve out! Don’t you admire that saying of Napoleon’s, *‘La carrière ouverte aux talens’*? To think that any man with talent and—ah—energy can raise himself! There is really something most fascinating to me in the aristocracy of intellect.”

This was kindly meant; but there was something in it that jarred Hogan. Self-made men may be divided into two classes—those who have advanced themselves by intellectual achievement, and that other large class, of whom the immortal Whittington may be taken as the type, and with whom we are all familiar. The last are usually proud of their own success, and fond of reverting to their humble beginnings: an amiable weakness, which society has always condoned on the ground of its supposed stimulating effect on youth.

It is strange, but true, that the contrary should exist among the “aristocracy of intellect.” This seeming anomaly may be accounted for by the fact that Intellect is not yet recognized as the ruling element of soci-

ety. It is so in reality; but the multitude bow before money. Money excuses, gilds, ennobles everything; whereas if a clever man be poor, it is dangerous for him to advertise his cleverness,—people almost instinctively button up their pockets. A successful clever man has very often a sort of apologetic air.

Hogan was no exception to the general rule. He was a self-made man, and by no means of the best stamp. He was morbidly sensitive as to his origin—maybe from some conscientious motive, after all—and he could have well dispensed with Diana’s lavish incense of this particular attribute. It was not in the best taste. But it must be allowed for the lady that she was unversed in the peculiarities of the specimen just now in hand. She was only feeling her way. He too, seeing clearly her motive—for he was quick of perception—in his masculine vanity was inclined to overlook the offence. So he smiled a mixed approval, and rose to go.

Diana accompanied him to the door with an expectant look, which he had not the presence of mind to ignore.

“Good-bye, then; I’ll see you again shortly. Let’s see,—this is Monday: Friday, in the afternoon; yes.”

It was becoming his habit now, when leaving Clarges Street, to fix the day and hour for his next visit. He had fallen into the practice quite insensibly. Having called once and found them not at home, Diana had declared it to be perfectly insupportable that a “Dublin friend,” as she was pleased to style him, should run the risk of a tiresome long walk for nothing. Mr. Hogan really must tell them when he was coming. No! she would not hear of his confining himself to Tuesdays—their at-home day: he must come whenever it suited him. The idea of tying down a member of Parliament, a public man, to a certain day or hour! Absurd! he *must* name his own time; and so on.

Hogan smiled on seeing the pleased, triumphant expression that kindled in her face.

“Oh, by-the-bye,” said he, “I’ll bring that book of poems you were speaking to me about. ‘Love is Enough’: is that it? Yes, I have ordered it.”

“You are really too kind,” she murmured, with effusion. “You will come on Friday, and bring me news of all your achievements? Good-bye: *au revoir*.” And a languishing *œillade* accompanied the parting hand-shake. He pressed her fingers just a little. It was impossible not to

acknowledge such persistent, such flattering efforts for his good graces in some way; and, clumsy novice that he was, he could think of nothing else. It was pleasant, indeed, for Hogan to be able to drop anchor in such a quiet, refreshing haven, after the heats and burdens of the day! He felt this keenly; and he liked the flattery, the attentions, and caresses of the siren. It was soft and pleasant, and we know his tastes lay in that direction. How or when it was to end he never asked himself.

As he walked down Clarges Street to the corner of Piccadilly, where he meant to hire a hansom to drive home to his dinner, he jotted down a hasty memorandum of his engagement for Friday, and dismissed all thought on the subject from his mind. After Friday there would be another day; and there might be a second visit to the National Gallery, or a flower-show or concert, or, maybe, another book of poems. Then he thought of Nellie and her coy shyness. And in the almost midsummer heat of Regent Street, amid the noise and crowd and dust, there rose to him a vision of the garden walk in Green Lanes: the trees in blossom, and hung with little glistening raindrops after the spring shower, and the timid girl, with apple-blossom cheeks and downcast blue eyes, who had walked beside him there.