

## VOLUME III

### CHAPTER 11

“Truth may perhaps come to the price of a pearl that showeth best by day, but it will not rise to the price of a diamond or carbuncle that showeth best in varied lights. A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure. Doth any man doubt, that if there were taken out of men’s minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like; but it would leave the minds of a number of men, poor shrunken things, full of melancholy and indisposition and unpleasing to themselves.”

—*Bacon.*

“IT’S THE MOST unaccountable proceeding I ever remember to have heard of. Disappear in broad daylight, without ever giving notice to anybody, leaving one in such suspense; and then a newspaper paragraph like this informs one of his whereabouts! Do let me see that *Beacon*, Mr. Hogan. Are you sure it is he?”

The speaker, Mrs. Bursford, who was seated in her easy-chair, stretched out her hand for the newspaper which Mr. Hogan had just brought in.

“Where is it? Oh yes: ‘Mr. Saltasche has had an interview with Signor Minghetti, and has quitted Naples *en route* for Vienna.’ Well, well, it must be he: and what has he been doing in Naples?”

“Or what is he going to do in Vienna?” said Hogan, laughing. “That gives me very little concern, so that he reappears here, I can assure you. What a fright I did get, to be sure! You know our friend Mr. Bruen went over to Dublin one night to see Miss Saltasche. She laughed at his fears, but at the same time could give him no information. They knew nothing

about him at his office at all. At the same time, neither Johns, his clerk, nor Miss Saltasche seemed to care in the least, or attach any importance to his disappearance.”

“Elizabeth Saltasche knows him better,” said Mrs. Bursford drowsily. “How fearfully warm it is, to be sure!”

Miss Diana was leaning back in her chair, fanning herself with a blue and gold fan. “Fearfully warm!” she echoed.

“Just allow me,” said Hogan, taking the fan from her. How I should have enjoyed this last night in the House! Is it not awful to keep us in town this way? It will soon be over now, thank goodness!”

Diana smiled faintly, half closing her eyes under the vigorous breeze of the fan. She was not by any means in a hurry to leave London. She had now been there nearly four months, engaged in the struggle, and success had not as yet crowned her efforts. All her forces had been drawn up, and she had been sitting round the fortress, which had as yet given no tangible sign of surrender. Saltasche had deserted for the nonce; but he was to return, and she hoped to press him into the service for the final attack, ere the rising of Parliament should necessitate a retreat.

“How long have you to suffer now?” she asked, in the faintest die-away tone.

“Hum—another fortnight, I daresay, will see me nearly out of it. I’ll go to Scotland, I think, for a few weeks. When do you mean to go? or do you remain till the end of the session?”

“We’re going to Devonshire, to some friends near Exeter. After that, we thought of Blankenberg or Trouville for a while.”

“Ah! Lady Brayhead is at some of those places now. By-the-bye, I met your cousin Miss Braginton in Regent Street yesterday. I was speaking to her. She said she would be here shortly to see you. She is staying with Mr. John Braddell, the member for Blankstown.”

“I knew she was in London,” said Diana coldly. “Indeed, mamma, did I not say at the Academy the other day that I was sure I had a glimpse of her in the crowd? I wonder when she will be here.”

“You were at the Academy, then? Did you look at the picture I recommended you to? Whom did it remind you of?”

Mrs. Bursford was gone out of the room: The door and windows stood wide open, and a pleasant current of air came from the balconies, which linen awnings kept fresh and cool for the flowers. Hogan felt more disposed than usual to-day for an aesthetic flirtation. The weight of anxiety had been removed by Saltasche's telegram to the *Beacon*; and although some things had gone seriously wrong in the City, he trusted that the return of their leader would set matters right again. So he disposed himself comfortably in the cool chaise-longue—thinking that an hour's pleasant, if idle conversation, would do no harm.

"I could not fancy. The portrait of Miss Babillon, the actress, do you mean?" said Miss Bursford, in reply to his question.

"No: Enid. Don't you remember Enid—that scene we were reading? Where is the Tennyson?"

He rose and fetched a large illustrated Tennyson from a side-table. Of course, from the special passage it was easy to digress to various others. Diana opportunely recollected several bits she "did not understand." Now, for two people to read out of a book it is absolutely necessary that they should sit not merely on a straight line with each other, but close together. Diana was really looking very well and even pretty that day. Warm weather suited her; and under its influence the wintry tints of her complexion had disappeared. A charming dress of silver-grey and blue silk set off her golden hair to perfection; and of course it was merely to hold the great awkward Tennyson that Mr. Hogan turned round that unfortunate chair of his in such a way that both their backs were turned to the drawing-room door. So it was, anyhow. And the explanations had barely lasted a short twenty-five minutes,—only one piece had been dissected, and its abstruse and hidden signification brought to light; the second was in process of treatment, at a very much slower rate, and in a very much lower tone of voice than we would imagine necessary,—when a brace of exclamations simultaneously struck on the students' ears, and caused the valuable drawing-room-table, Doré-illustrated, Tennyson to slip from their fingers and crash down upon the ground.

"We have not disturbed you, I hope, Cousin Di.?" said Miss Braginton, with beaming looks advancing to embrace her relative.

"God bless me, Mr. Saltasche! You back? Why?" And Hogan's astonishment fairly swallowed up and overcame his embarrassment. He was not deficient in *aplomb*, and managed to brave the quizzical, half-contemptuous eyes of Saltasche, and the triumphant, condescending signif-

icance of Miss Braginton's with fair success. Diana, whose very lips had turned white with mortification, speedily chose her *rôle*. She cast a meaning glance at her mother, who had entered, utterly bewildered, to find who the visitors were; and assumed that air and tone *de circonstance* supposed to be peculiarly becoming to and indicative of the state of betrothal. So she kissed the extreme corner of her cousin's cheek, shook hands with Mr. Saltasche without raising her drooped eyelids, and sank back in her chair with a lassitude plainly referable to and caused by the same interesting and critical conjuncture. The amiable Miss Braginton hastily ran her eye over Diana's dress and general equipment,—both of them fortunately calculated to bear out the impression which was desired to be conveyed by her manner. "Engaged" was her mental comment. "Engaged, no doubt. At last!"

"Yes, Aunt Bursford; I am in London, enjoying myself—oh yes, ever so much! They've brought the carriage over. I haven't seen either of you in the Park since I came."

Of course she had not. The Bursfords had no carriage to appear there in.

"Well, no; we have not a carriage this season of *our own*; and—ah—of course we have been asked to join the Bradwardines ever so often, but really three girls in a carriage is too much; and—ah—besides, the Bradwardines, you know, are *hardly* in our set."

Now Miss Braginton's boast was repaid with interest—the John Braddells having been in business; but indeed the lady scarcely heard the insinuation, she was so busy taking notes of Diana's intended. "Not more than four or five and twenty, quite plain-looking, and nothing of manner or style. Diana just looks like his aunt." She was already composing a letter home to Dublin.

"Are you going out at all, Blanche?" asked Diana, who had taken a good-natured, patronizing tone. "Mamma, are we not going to Lady Clanronald's at-home on Friday? We could quite easily get a card for Blanche."

"Well, if she'd care for leaving her friends. You know she is staying with the Braddells; and—ah—I *couldn't*, you know, ask dear Lady Clanronald for cards for them."

“Pray don’t speak of it, aunt. I don’t think Amelia would in the least care for the Clanronalds. You see they are in such a mixed set—*Roman Catholics*, and that sort of creatures.”

Diana gave a sort of little jump.

“Lord G——!” Mr. Saltasche had been talking rapidly to Hogan for the few moments occupied by this little interlude; and now, having occasion to use that nobleman’s name, raised his tone unconsciously, as people will do when they have to mention a name with a handle to it. Silence was imposed on the ladies—not a bit too soon, for Miss Braginton’s blackberry eyes were gleaming ominously.

“Lord G——,” continued the speaker, “was exceedingly pleased with the intelligence; and he told me just now that the Government will take up the matter immediately. The English shareholders will be especially favoured in the scheme.”

“You have been seeing Lord G——, then?” said Diana in awestruck tones, and heartily glad of the *divertissement* thus afforded. Miss Braginton almost gaped with astonishment.

“Yes; I’ve been over to Naples, to talk to Minghetti, an old friend of mine. I dined with him two days running at the Ministry: delightful man! How are Lord and Lady Brayhead, Miss Braginton?”

“Oh! very well, thank you. My aunt is at Biarritz with my sister. Lord Brayhead is at Claridge’s Hotel.”

“I must be away: I have appointed to see the Whip at the Reform Club,” said Hogan. “Miss Bursford, good-morning. Good-morning, Miss Braginton,” continued Hogan, bowing over the tips of that lady’s gloves, tendered in the stiffest manner. In spite of himself there was some significance in his glance as he took Diana’s hand, which she gave with an affectation somewhat unusual, and for which he was at a loss to account.

“*Au revoir, donc!*” She bowed and smiled as consciously as she could.

“Are you at home this evening? I’m coming up after dinner,” said Saltasche hastily to Mrs. Bursford, but looking at Diana. Of course they were at home; so Saltasche followed Hogan, leaving the ladies to their own agreeable reflections.

“How on earth”—Hogan broke out when they found themselves in the street—“did you reach London at the same time as your telegram?”

“Bah!” replied his companion, airily; “I had left Naples two days before that was sent. I was in Paris, and telegraphed to a friend in Naples to forward that. Vienna was a mistake: I never said anything about Vienna. Then you see I was operating on the Bourse; and the rise in those Transcontinentals brought me over. By Jove! that won’t do. I have to deliver on Monday, and they have gone up twenty. I have some slips here from the Paris papers yesterday; and I met a fellow who has let me into the scheme; so I think the *Beacon* financial article to-morrow will bring those shares down with a run. At all events, I stand to lose fifteen thousand by these fools Stier and Bruen.”

“How is that?”

“Bah! hogs!”—and Saltasche shook his shoulders with a grimace of disgust. “Going over to Dublin, and shaking my credit there, with his nonsensical talk of my disappearance: damned egotist! Nothing like those Germans for egotism. I’ll pay them for it. I must have a paragraph for the Dublin papers now on Sicily and its mineral resources, and the new coast railway. I shall capitalize shortly, and invest in land around Palermo.”

“It’s too hot to be walking,” said Hogan, in a peevish, impatient tone. In truth he felt his head spinning. So they stood for a moment till a hansom approached.

“Now,” continued Saltasche, “for a man to write up this Sicilian affair. Jones, I suppose, will be glad of a couple of pounds; and you must go to work now. I’ll drop you at Temple Bar. Here”—and the energetic gentleman drew out a roll of papers and handed them to Hogan—“I have marked what is necessary. Write it up concisely; in a solid style, mind; and let me see it when I call between six and seven this evening. I shall be going up town again then. By-the-bye, am I to congratulate you and Miss Diana?” And Saltasche faced round, with a movement as sudden and abrupt as his question, and peered gravely into his companion’s face.

“Dear no!” returned Hogan, with a sickly attempt at a laugh; “not at all. Oh dear no! you are quite in error.”

“H’m, h’m!” said Saltasche, with a shake of his head; “I must say I thought so. I can tell you Miss Braginton gives you credit for it too. Hum—yes, indeed—it looked very suspicious; uncommonly so. Here we

are, now," said he, stopping the cab at Temple Bar. "Good-bye: half-past six. I'm going to give these Cole Alley blockheads a rating."

Hogan turned up Chancery Lane to Holborn; and Mr. Saltasche went on his way down the Strand.

He grinned when he thought of how easily Hogan and the women they had just left had swallowed his lie about Minghetti and G——, G——, whom he had never laid eyes on in his life! Nothing like a name: nothing in life. If I'd said the secretary, now, or mentioned any understrapper, I wager one of them would have made inquiries about it," thought he. Then he nodded amiably to a Dublin broker, who was standing at the corner of Farringdon Street, talking to a couple of men. He observed the astonished look that came over the broker's face as he returned the salutation, and also the pull he gave his companions to look in his direction. He took out his watch. Twenty minutes to three: just time to go and show himself on 'Change. So he dismissed his cab at the Bank, and crossed over to the Exchange. To a great number of men he was unknown, of course; but he found numbers of curious, questioning eyes turned upon him as he entered the crowd. Mr. Stier came forward a little shamefacedly. Saltasche held out his hand with his usual *bon-homie*, and plunged straight into business talk. He transacted some business, too—making loud bids for some condemned Peruvians, which had the effect of drawing some more eyes upon him. Presently his Dublin friend, whom he had passed at the corner of Farringdon Street, entered, and made up straight to him.

"Hollo, Stonelock, how are you? I've just come back from Naples."

"Laws!" said Mr. Stonelock; "Naples, were you now?"

"Ran over to have a talk with Minghetti, my old friend, about the new Sicilian line we're starting. Lord G—— has promised me this morning that he'll have it taken up in no time."

"God bless us all, man!" was all Mr. Stonelock could say.

Then another man came up, heated and panting.

"I say, Saltasche, this is most infernal, I say,—the way the *Beacon* has attacked the Mutual Combination Assurance Bank. In three days, I declare to Heaven, the stock has gone down to five-and-twenty; and I bought at sixty. Those infernal newspapers will kill all enterprise in the country, I say."

“Why, the *Daily Rattletrap* is running Combinations down a month back.”

“No, it’s not: that’s been stopped; the manager is paying fifteen pounds a week for advertisements.” And the warm gentleman, after exchanging a knowing wink, plunged back into the din.

“Scandalous state of affairs—’pon my soul it’s scandalous!” said Mr. Saltasche: “the idea of any newspaper blackmailing that way. Stonelock, is it not audacious of the *Beacon*, now?”

“Yankee notions, my dear boy. The manager of the Diddlewhey manganese works refused to pay the *Rattletrap* ten pounds a week for advertisements; and now see where they are. That Chaffinch, the editor, blew on the whole dodge. Sharp fellow that!”

“Fifteen pounds a week; ten pounds a week. By Jove!” thought Mr. Saltasche, “I’d soon have Mr. Hogan’s salary clear at that rate;” and he began to consider to whom he could send a danger-threatening “proof.” “Must be done by Chaffinch, though. Hogan would not like that sort of thing—oh no, no!” Then Mr. Stier came out of the Bedlam again, and taking Saltasche’s arm, led him off towards Cole Alley.