

VOLUME III

CHAPTER 12

“A rock-surrounded bay,
whence fronting headlands at the mouth outrun,
Leaving a little narrow entrance way,
Wherethrough they drive the vessels one by one.”

—*The Odyssey.*

IT WAS a hot Sunday afternoon in August. Every particle of mica in the granite boulders and granite dust of Kingstown Pier glowed like molten silver. The harbour was like a mirror: not a ripple disturbed its surface; and every yacht seemed double, so clear was the reflection, in the water, of the brightly-painted hull and rigging. The tide was out, and the seaweed on the pier wall scorched and blackened in the heat. A tiny breeze that breathed but fitfully had enticed some few pleasure-boats out in the bay, and there held them captive, their white sails drooping, waiting its good will. Seagulls crouched languidly on the shady side of far-out rocks, left bare by the tide; and children in their Sunday clothes cast longing eyes at the pools where the little crabs were running about; and the sea anemones, hid under the tangle, were shrunk to the merest points of red jelly. Howth shimmered in a hot, blue haze; and the white villas that dot its sides shone in brilliant relief against the tawny fields of corn. The eye turned with a grateful sense of relief from the painful glare of the water to the masses of dark green foliage that lined the coast towards Dublin. The hottest and most exposed portion of the pier was that selected by the promenaders. Up and down, to and fro, moved the crowds, as if in search of something. All the motley population of a watering-place joined to the contingent of Sunday people from the city. Country girls, high-coloured of complexion and apparel; strangers, tourists,

English and American, from the hotels; priests, up from the country for their summer vacation, came down in scores from their boarding-houses and lodgings. Father Jim Corkran, from Peatstown, with a gorgeous black velvet waistcoat, swaggered about, casting as he did so sharp glances in the direction of the Misses Shea, of Mulla Castle; one of whom was reported to be engaged to be married to a prosperous wholesale dealer of the Metropolis. Father Jim, strange as it may sound, after his "denunciation," had been reconciled with the Sheas for some time. Ned Shea was amiable and careless, and his wife had little difficulty in bringing about a reconciliation. Father Jim's "bark," as the saying goes, "was worse than his bite." He prided himself on his peaceful, forgiving disposition; moreover, he was one of that class who never have any difficulty in forgiving themselves. The fact that there were three daughters in the house, with fortunes of fifteen hundred each, had no doubt something to do with it. Father Jim was bynomeans too well off, and could not afford to have the percentage on so considerable a sum of money "go past" him. His parish, though wide in extent, was neither populous nor rich. Emigration and eviction had woefully thinned out the class of small farmers, who form the main support of the prosperity of the priests, as they do that of the country at large; and he was obliged, like his *confrères*, to supply the deficit in his income by taxing the wealthy few. Five per cent. is not an uncommon fee. It is almost the rule when the woman's fortune is under five hundred pounds; when it exceeds that sum, a special arrangement is made between the priest and the bride's family. This custom, unknown in any other Catholic country, is of comparatively recent origin. Formerly, it was usual to send round a plate piled with cake after the wedding feast; and the guests each took a piece, and laid down his subscription,—which formed the marriage fee. Forty years ago, when there was a wedding every week where there is not one now in the year, this mode was found to snit very well; but with altered circumstances the priests have found it necessary to discontinue it.

Father Jim presently fell in with Ned Shea, who had come up with his family from the country, and whose sunburnt countenance was turned first on one side, then on another, staring in bewilderment at the crowds.

"How are ye, Father Corkran? I heard you were at the sea. Did ever ye see such a power of people get together? I did not think Dublin held half that number. Where do they all get the dress? Bedad! the missis has

run a bill with what's-his-name, that has me nearly foundered. Faix, only the hay was so good, I'd rebel."

"Ha, she has, eh? Who do you think passed me there above, but that precious member of yours, Hogan! Be jabbers, yes! and here he's coming down. Look at him, Ned Shea; fat and well the rogue is looking. Look at him now and the day he came to Peatstown, with not as much flesh on him as would bait a mousetrap. I was talking to his uncle, Bishop O'Rooney; and begged, I don't think he's content with the lad at all."

"No, now! why's that?" asked Shea; like all country people, greedy for news.

"Augh! musha," replied his reverence, shaking his ponderous shoulders, "he thinks he's giving up his practice entirely, and has taken to newspaper writing. Rale low, that is; but, as I say, take care the practice hasn't given him up, *ma bouchal*. Here, he's coming over to talk to you. I'm gone."

Suiting the action to the word, Father Corkran hastily mounted a flight of stone steps leading to the upper walk of the pier; where he joined a party of bucolic Churchmen, who, leaning against the wall, were sunning their fine red faces, and enjoying the view.

Hogan, on seeing Ned Shea, dropped Saltasche's arm, and advanced to meet him, with the greatest urbanity.

"My dear Shea, how are you? and why the deuce didn't you let me know you were coming to town? Where are you staying, and how are the family?—Mrs. Shea blooming as ever, I hope?"

Shea wrung his hand with a will, and pointed out the whereabouts of his flock,—conspicuous enough, thanks to their gaudy attire.

"Barney's all right," said he; "and has a couple of splendid young horses coming on for Ballinasloe. Maybe you'd be wanting a pair by that time, Counsellor?"

"Not I! Where are you, though? I want you to give me the pleasure of your company at dinner on Tuesday. Is Killeen in town, or Daly?"

"No: but Father Desmond is; he's here above, stopping beside me."

Hogan wrote down both addresses in his pocket-book; and promising to call to see the young ladies in a day or two, followed his friend Saltasche, and they strolled on together watching the passers-by.

“I ought to have remained another week in Scotland,” said Hogan discontentedly. “What a day this would be by Dee side!”

“Ah!” said the other abstractedly, “or at Baia.” Then recollecting himself, he started violently, and bit his lip.

“Baia! where’s that?” said Hogan.

“Oh! name of a friend’s place where I stay a good deal. By-the-bye, I met Braddell, the member for Blankstown, you know: his wife was asking me could it be true Miss Bursford and you were engaged,—in fact, it seems to be the generally received opinion hereabouts.”

Hogan looked at him with an angry frown, but did not reply. Just then they fell in with a large group standing all together by the water-side. The Raffertys now engaged Mr. Hogan’s attention. Mrs. Rafferty almost immediately started the company into a walk, in the hope that the Member would distinguish one of her daughters by escorting her down the Pier as her cavalier. She was doomed to disappointment, however; Mr. Hogan singled out Miss Davoren, who had stopped as she passed to speak to them, for that honour. Her brother Dicky advanced beside Saltasche; and they speedily left the rest behind them, and started towards the end of the Pier.

Nellie was looking lovely: the sun lighted up her hair, filling it with little golden shades, and the radiance and depth of the waters lying bathed in its warm embrace, seemed mirrored in her blue eyes. Hogan, who had not seen her for some time, thought her more beautiful than ever.

“I have not seen you now since April,—since I was last here,” he said. “What an age it has seemed to me!”

“Has it?” she replied. “And how have you amused yourself ever since in London?” A mocking glance accompanied the words.

“Amused myself? That is kind of you, Miss Nellie: and I am worked nearly to death. Ask Mr. Saltasche here, behind us. Let us climb up here: the bay must be looking pretty. Come.” He led the way to the flight of steps at the end of the Pier; and they climbed up to the top and looked out to sea.

“Those boats look like seagulls, do they not? They must be becalmed,” said Nellie.

“Come down here, to the water’s edge; I have something to say to you,” said Hogan in a low voice. Then he held out his hand. She took it; and they descended together the shelving rampart wall down quite to the edge, where the sea grass, left bare by the tide, was shrivelling on the stones. The strong salt smell of the water and the seaweed came up; and the tiny murmur of the little pebbles as they swayed to the motion of the now turning tide.

“Nellie,” said he, stooping down to her,—she was standing farther down than he,—“it is likely you will hear some rumours of me from London, ere long; don’t believe them, dear; promise you’ll not heed them: won’t you promise me?”

She turned round astonished, and looked up straight into his face. His eyes met hers for a second, then shifted uneasily; and his brows had an anxious, drawn expression.

“Rumours,” she repeated vaguely. “What rumours? I sha’n’t mind.”

“As I told you before, Nellie, I’m not my own master. I hope to be soon; but things have gone very hard with me of late, dear,—they have indeed. You will pay no attention to anything? it’s untrue.”

“Nellie, I say, Nellie!” called Dicky, just as she was framing a question. “Quick; till I show you Dermot Blake. Come up! he’s down there with Dorothy: we’d better go to them.”

“Allow me,” said Hogan gravely, offering his hand and stepping to one side to assist her. She took his hand to step across to a rock. He pressed it, looking eagerly at her; but her face showed nothing further than a sort of anxious surprise.

“We have to dine with our cousin this afternoon, to meet a Mr. Blake, her nephew, just home this morning from India,” Dicky explained. “See, Nell—that tall, sunburnt fellow down there.”

Nellie and Dick left now, and followed Miss O’Hegarty; who, leaning on the arm of the long-expected Dermot, was parading the Pier. He was a very tall, broad-shouldered, and athletic-looking man of thirty-four; greatly sunburnt, as far as could be seen of his face, which was almost covered by a huge tawny beard. He had bushy eyebrows, like his aunt, but not her round, hard grey eyes. Dermot’s were dark grey-blue, with a merry quizzical expression in them. Dorothy felt quite proud of him. One of the Bragintons was on the Pier (from which it may be inferred that the godly Lord Brayhead was not in the neighbourhood),

and Dorothy brought Dermot up to her with quite an air, just as of the owner of an excellent *parti*, and who is waiting for bidders. Miss O'Hegarty was to be a personage of no small importance until her nephew was disposed of.

"I really feel ashamed," she said, "to be seen with him; he has such a colonial air, —just like a bushranger or gold miner, you know. That complexion is really — You must do something for it, dear."

"There's the thanks she gives me! Why, aunt, I stopped ten days in London on purpose to get myself fined down before coming over —dressed myself at Poole's, too."

"Oh, pray *don't* take off the sunburn; I do admire it so. You have no idea how becoming sunburn is," protested Miss Braginton.

Dermot grinned good-humouredly, twisting an end of his long moustache between his teeth.

"I'd have to get myself flayed to take it off. Here's a fellow coming up here just as brown as I am."

Dorothy bestowed a passing glance on Ned Shea as he passed by.

"My dear, that's some farmer—a hay-maker, or some working man. You don't see many gentlemen like that."

"I've been so long out of Ireland, I hardly recognize position by appearances that way, now. I declare in California there was an English earl twice as rough-looking as that man."

"The Pier is really crowded with very common people this summer. Every year it gets worse," said Miss Braginton. "Now, just look at these costumes—R. C.s, my dear, of course."

"These costumes" were the Rafferty's and Malowney's, who looked like a walking flower-garden as they passed.

"R. C.s! what's that for, eh?" asked Mr. Blake.

"Roman Catholic," explained Dorothy; "common people,—trade, you know."

"Haw! Why, you know, ma'am, in Kerry the best families round are that persuasion. What dooced difference does it make?"

But Miss O'Hegarty never answered the question; for at that moment she spied the young Davorens approaching.

“Oh, here are Nellie and Dicky. Dermot, darling, these are Everilda’s children. Don’t you remember?—Everilda Davoren.”

Dermot did not answer; he was too busy staring at the pretty slim girl in a pale blue bonnet, with the lovely complexion and eyes, who was coming up, and blushing so prettily and naturally too. Miss Braginton, who did not care to risk a possible comparison of her elderly charms with those of the new comer, dived back to her post of observation by the wall.

“We’re cousins, you know—ain’t we?” said Dermot, when the ceremony of introduction had been gone through. “Certainly we’re cousins: I ought in simple duty to kiss you—yes, both of you; and faith, I’d do it too, only, you see, the very simplest acts are liable to misconstruction in this wicked world. Look here, ma’am; here’s a seat for you till I take a stroll with my relations. I’ll come back to you.”

So talking Mr. Blake planted Dorothy beside Miss Braginton, and marched off between Nellie and Dick.

“Bless us! what heaps of women. They ought to be packed off west, ’pon my word,” continued the traveller. “Out in the west women are that scarce that if a man only sees a petticoat hanging on a bush he takes off his hat to it.”

“Here comes my dear Miss Brangan,” said Dick.

“Why does she bow so stiffly to you, pray?” asked Nellie.

“Well, a little lapse on my part. I was talking to the young woman the other day, and I unluckily mentioned a character famous in song,—‘Charming Judy Branigan,’ says I. My dear, she got in a fury all in one minute; and, said she, ‘I’d have you know, Mr. Davoren, that my name’s not Branigan, but Brangan.’ I know why she was so huffy: her name *was* Branigan, but when the family got rich they changed it.”

“Changed it? Why, pray?” asked Dermot, laughing.

“For gentility—to take the Irish out of it, of course. Here’s a man coming up here his name is Burke, and he has changed it back, as he says, to De Burgh; and there go the Byrnes, who spell themselves Burnes; and the Reillys, who call themselves Reallys. They’re past counting. Dugan, whose father was Duggan; Roneys, who were Rooneys. Oh! look! look! here come ‘The World, the Flesh, and the Devil.’”

“What!” cried Dermot, staring at three over-dressed, elderly young women who were coming up.

“That’s what they’re called,” explained Dicky; “and that swell yonder, he is a rich tallow-chandler, and he’s called Count Chandelier.”

“Why,” said Dermot Blake, “you have as many nicknames here as we had at Yosemite or the North Fork. Come up on the top of the wall, and you will show me everybody; and perhaps, my dear cousin, you will allow me to smoke a cigar. You’re coming up to dine with us in Royal Terrace, are you not?”

“Yes,” replied Nellie abstractedly.

She was looking down at Hogan and his friend Saltasche, who were standing amid a crowd of gentlemen talking and laughing together. What could be the rumour? What had he done? She thought he looked the handsomest and best dressed man amongst them all. He had such a tone and bearing. Certainly London does improve people. The Raffertys were sitting on a bench near; and she could see that Mrs. Rafferty pointed out her friend, the Member for Peatstown, to every one who came up. They quite plumed themselves on his acquaintance. What in the world could the rumour be? Business? Maybe that Mr. Saltasche: but stay—was not Cousin Dorothy speaking of Diana Bursford? She was in London; could—no——”

Then a deep-chested laugh from Dermot Blake startled her. Dicky was pointing out some one below.

“So, eh, that’s O’Rooney Hogan, M.P. Now, is it the man with the light zephyr coat? Hey, now! and that’s the fellow they say my old flame, Di. Bursford, is to marry. How funny!” and Dermot stared at Hogan with his great eyes wide open. “Why, he’s rather a good-looking fellow. See, Cousin Nellie,—what’s your opinion? Oh! you know him, hey, do you?”

“Nellie, what’s the matter with you? you’re as white as a sheet,” Dicky asked abruptly.

“Ah, nothing!” she replied, a little peevishly; for she felt confused by the sudden and inquisitive gaze Dermot Blake had turned upon her. The sun is making me quite giddy. I have a bad headache.”

“Have you, now?” asked Dermot, quite interested and anxious. “Come along down, and take my arm; we’ll go up to where Dorothy is.”

They redescended the steps, and crossing to the outside edge of the Pier, where there was the least dust, and where the *patchouli* and *frangipani* of the fine lathes did not offend them, they walked slowly on.

Nellie passed the group where Hogan stood without raising her eyes. She could not, for Dermot Blake's were so closely bent on her. She was sick of the noise and glare and bustle, and longed to be away in some retired, shady nook, to think quietly over everything. She was trying to remember what Hogan had said at the head of the Pier—the exact words, his look and manner. It was no use. Dicky was chattering and laughing; and Dermot, who seemed capable of attending to both of them at the same time, appeared never to relax his watch. She was ready to cry with vexation; and when they at last reached Miss Dorothy, she insisted on sitting down beside her and Miss Braginton, and refused to walk again to the end to let Dicky show Dermot the beautiful yacht which had arrived last week from Cowes, and on board which the owner, a rich Manchester man, and all his family were living. They went off, Dermot rather unwillingly, it seemed to her; and she, not being called on to take her part in Miss Braginton's discourse, sat and fretted and troubled to her heart's content. Dermot Blake—great, big, disagreeable, teasing creature—must have taken something into his head; and how in the world was she ever to sit opposite to him at dinner?