## VOLUME III

# CHAPTER 13

"Wo so ein Köpfchen keinen Ausgang sieht
Stellt er sich gleich das Endo vor.
Es lebe wer sich tapfer hält!
Du bist doch sonst so ziemlich eingeteufelt.
Nichts abgeschmackters find ich auf der Welt
Als ein Teufel, der verzweifelt."

"AH—MINE GOTT! what shall pe done? He is gone with fifty dousand—perhaps a hundert —what shall I say?—all de money, Bruen!" shouted the senior partner. "Bruen, you fool! what is to be done?" And Mr. Stier dashed a slip of paper on the ground, and wringing his fat white hands, stamped up and down the hearthrug of the office in Cole Alley. Bruen, somewhat pale about his thin lips, sat stolidly in his chair.

"Well, he's gone this time in earnest; you have yourself to thank for it. I never was for allowing him to get the investing of the Leadmines capital—never! He got all the money he could lodged or invested in his name, or jointly with ours; forged our signatures. Easy affair that for him!" and Bruen shrugged his shoulders.

"He has daken every penny of eighty dousand pounds!" wailed Mr. Stier, utterly oblivious of his fine English pronunciation. "And dere is dat *Beacon*: I wish we were rid of dat *Beacon*. Ah!"

Just then the office door was thrown open, and Hogan, breathless and with a face the colour of ashes, rushed in and threw himself exhausted on a chair.

"What of this? Is he gone?" he gasped.

"Dere! read dat!" grunted the senior partner, jerking him the telegram with scant courtesy of manner, and then resuming his walk up and down the hearthrug.

Hogan drew a deep breath as he read the pencilled lines; and before he had finished the first half of the message, he uttered an inarticulate cry and fell off his chair in a swoon.

The telegram was from Dublin, stating that Saltasche was missing—that he had overdrawn his accounts at the banks, and had taken securities, bonds, and cash, to the amount of some thirty or forty thousand pounds. Moreover, that he had been gone two days before he was missed.

"See, Stier: this won't do," said Bruen, advancing hastily from his place. "Bernhardt and McKie are to be here shortly, you know. Let's put him in the private room."

A touch from Mr. Bruen's long finger, as he moved to lift the shoulders of the unconscious Hogan, sent the bolt of the outer door home. Stier and he then carried him into an inner room, and laid him on the sofa. Then a jug of water was fetched out of a cabinet, and poured over his face.

"Pretty business for him this will be, too!" said the senior partner, throwing up the window. As he turned round he met his partner's eyes fixed on his with a peculiar expression. "Eh, vat?" cried he.

Bruen frowned threateningly, and pursed up his mouth.

"Thinkest thou it is a sham—that they are confederates?" burst out Stier, speaking very rapidly, and in German.

Mr. Bruen took the wrist of the unconscious Hogan in his fingers, and felt his pulse carefully. Apparently the result was not satisfactory; for he let it fall and shook his head.

"We must pursue him at once. Send a messenger to Scotland Yard, and—let me see: have we a photograph?"

"No. He may, though," returned Stier, nodding at the prostrate figure. "But Saltasche will never be got—never! Maybe is he in London dis minute."

Just then Hogan began to show signs of returning consciousness, and moved as if to raise himself. Bruen took a flask of brandy out of a cabinet, and filling a glass, handed it to him. He swallowed it at a

draught, and rose and stumbled to a chair before the open window. Bruen followed him over; and placing himself with his back to the light, keenly watching Hogan's bewildered face, said,—

"Are you better? It was a strong shock that—hey?"

Hogan did not seem to hear him. He was staring with lack-lustre eyes out on the yard which lay before the window. A hideous backyard, grimed with the smuts of centuries, with blades of smoke-coloured grass struggling for life among the cracked flags. A water-butt, dry months ago, and whose staves were in a state of disruption, stood in a corner beneath watershoots choked with birds' nests—sooty sparrows' nests—straggling, shapeless tufts of straw filched from the nearest mews or cabstand. A desolate, overshadowed place, lying in gloom though the harvest sun shone hot overhead. How well he remembered that outlook for years to come! It seemed to have printed itself, with every hideous detail, indelibly on his brain.

"Take some more prandy?" said Stier, who had helped himself to a dram.

Hogan pressed his hands to his forehead, and started up. "Yes yes; I'm better. There will be an inquiry. My God! I am utterly ruined. What is to be done? Let us try and capture him. It was I who, at the last meeting of the Leadmines, urged them to give him the funds for investment; and there's the *Beacon*, and writing down the Transcontinentals. Oh!" groaned he, letting himself fall back in his chair.

"Bah! what's the use of this?" broke in Bruen contemptuously, walking away from the window. "There will be an inquiry; and very likely the affair will be thrown into Chancery, and a receiver appointed. The thing is—set the detectives after him. Offer a reward to-night: five hundred pounds. Are they doing anything in Dublin? Better see if they will join us there. See here: I will go to the police myself. Let me have his description. Height, five-seven—hey?" And he began to jot down the items on a sheet of paper with a pencil. "Dark eyes and hair, aquiline nose, no whiskers or moustache. Have we no photograph?"

"I can get one," said Hogan, who remembered that the Bursfords had one in their album.

"Will you go to Dublin to-night, Mr. Hogan, and inquire into this affair?" asked Stier.

"Decidedly not!" returned Hogan quickly. "I was his personal friend. I could not do it."

Hogan, indeed, thought there were few things in the world he would not do sooner than go over to Dublin on such an errand. Dublin would not see him until the Saltasche episode had been completely forgotten. How in the world could he face the Bishop? Barely eight months had been needed to realize all his sinister forebodings.

"Well, then, you will bring us the photograph, or send it, without delay. And about the *Beacon*. Go on as usual; we shall send you the day's intelligence. By-the-bye, were your shares—the qualifying shares, you know, as Director of the Leadmines—made square?"

"Made square—fully paid up?" repeated Hogan. "Never: that is what troubles me. If I could only raise a thousand pounds, now, it would save me altogether."

"H'm!" sneered Bruen; "were I you, Mr. Hogan, I would raise it—and at once. Good-afternoon. You will find me here to-night, if you need to settle anything further."

Hogan left Cole Alley in an unenviable frame of mind. He knew no one to whom he could apply for the money. He could give no security; and it must be forthcoming at once. Lord Brayhead was in Scotland; and even were he at hand, in London, there would be no use in applying to him. He was likely to be a heavy loser himself in the crash of the Leadmines; and, moreover, his Railway Bill having been shelved for another session—owing to no fault of Hogan's, though his lordship persisted in blaming him—he would be in little humour to accommodate the luckless advocate; and the idea of going to him and asking for the loan of money seemed to Hogan unbearable. He reached his lodgings in Half-Moon Street, and flung himself in his chair utterly overcome. The heat of the room—though it was on the shady side of the street—was stifling; and it seemed to him that the open windows only let in dust and still hotter air from without; so he closed them and pulled down the blinds. Then he sat down in a cushioned chair by his writing-table, and unlocking a drawer, took out a vellum-bound book in which he kept an account of all his expenses; in this were sundry loose sheets of memorandums. With aching temples he read and wrote down calculations for nearly an hour. Nothing availed him; the blank fact remained, staring him in the face from column after column of black and red figures—bankruptcy, ruin, and disgrace.

Saltasche had carried off four thousand pounds of his. Nothing remained to him but a few weeks' pay from the *Beacon* and about two hundred pounds lying loose at his bankers'. He owed money, too; he had taken a suite of rooms in Half-Moon Street, and had furnished them pretty luxuriously. Nothing in Saltasche's queer *rococo* style,—polished bare floors and painted walls, and queer gimcrackery: Hogan had given an order to a first-class upholsterer, and had got what he liked—plenty of green velvet and gold, and looking-glass everywhere; Oxford. Street *brimborions*, and prints which he knew must be good because he saw them almost in every house; the well-known Landseers and Holman Hunts, in fine, flaring frames; photographs there were also, in the inevitable Oxford borderings; and an enormous musical album, playing six tunes, and filled with bought portraits of dramatic and other celebrities. He had prided himself not a little on his "chambers" and their fittings, and had invited the Bursfords to lunch there one day, when all the arrangements had been completed, and the upholsterer's men had given the finishing touch. Diana, to tell the truth, had grimaced a little over the green velvet and gilt,—a combination which, doubtless on political rather than aesthetic grounds, is held by Dublin people to be excessively vulgar. She admired "The Combat," and "Dignity and Impudence," and "Christ the Light of the World," as if she beheld those rarities for the first time; went into raptures over the Bishop of Secunderabad, who was depicted sitting in profile, which did not suit him at all, with a tiny black skull-cap on his head, a pectoral cross, and his episcopal ring (a garnet as big as a teacup) finely displayed. Diana had become extremely High Church of late, went to confession, and dragged her mother, sorely against her will, to St. Alban's. She had frequently hinted her desire that Hogan should accompany her thither, and expressed herself utterly unable to understand why he declined; telling him the service was much more like that of his Church than theirs, and evidently expecting him to be overwhelmed by her condescension. She stuffed her prayer-book with markers and coloured ribbon, wore crosses perpetually, and talked of abstaining on Fridays.

Hogan threw down his pen after a while, exhausted. The feverish excitement caused by the dose of brandy had worn off, and the reaction left him almost helpless. Everything swam before his eyes in a mist, and his temples seemed ready to burst. He lay back in his chair for an hour or more, in a sort of stupor. The ticking of the French clock on the mantelpiece was the only sound he heard. He seemed to see Bruen's face; and

his parting words, "I would raise it—and at once," rung through his head, and seemed as if they were set to the motion of the pendulum.

A knock at the door startled him. He opened it, and took a bundle of papers and a letter from the servant. The letter was from Diana Bursford; her large round writing, and blue and gold monogram, were well known to him. He laid it on the desk, and opening a press, drank a glass of wine before reading it. Then he returned to his desk and took up the letter. The postmark was London; they ought to be at Dieppe. And he tore it hastily open.

"MY DEAR MR. HOGAN,—We are back in Clarges Street. Pray come at once, and tell us what is this *dreadful* news about Mr. Saltasche. Mamma is almost deranged. How fortunate that we are not involved in the awful catastrophe! Pray come at once.

"Ever, dear Mr. Hogan,

"Yours most sincerely,

"DIANA BURSFORD."

Hogan read it over slowly; then laid it down and seated himself in his chair with folded arms. "Not involved," he repeated to himself: "then their money is safe. Lucky for them!" Then he smiled to himself at the motive which had plainly prompted that piece of information. Saltasche had told him Diana had four thousand pounds. He repeated it over and over to himself. And now, how could he induce her to lend the fatal thousand pounds to him—lend it? There was one way he could get it—only one. He got up and walked about the room, with his hands pressed to his temples. Propose to Diana, and that within an hour's time, or else be convicted of fraud; or, if not actually disgraced, appear as the accessory of Saltasche. He might even have to resign his seat in Parliament. Then Nellie's face rose before him: he thought of the Sunday, three weeks ago, when they stood at the Pier's edge together, looking out at the silver stretch of water and the little yachts lying becalmed—their snowy sails hanging idle from the mast. He could almost see her sun-lit hair and the wondering blue eyes that met his so shyly. And Diana? He glanced at his watch: nearly three o'clock. Then he bundled the papers and books all back into the desk, and locked it—his hand shaking nervously as he did so. He caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror as he passed, and started

at the haggard face and tossed hair it showed. He went into his bedroom, and having washed, and brushed, and changed his coat and tie, he drank another glass of sherry, and started at a quick pace for Clarges Street.

Diana and her mother were in the drawing-room together; both pale and anxious-looking.

"Well, Mr. Hogan? Can this be true? Is Mr. Saltasche really gone? and are these dreadful rumours true?"

Hogan flung himself in a chair without answering. In a moment, as if he had paused to take breath, he replied,—

"Everything is true! He's nearly three days gone, and he has robbed every one. The detectives are after him. What have you heard?"

"Oh," began Diana, "the Greys are penniless. You know Mr. Grey had commuted. He entrusted the money to Mr. Saltasche —nearly four thousand pounds: it is all gone. The Helys have lost three thousand. Oh, I never could tell you all the people in Dublin he has ruined! And the funds of the Connemara Soup Society, and the Widows and Orphans of Scripture Readers Asylum."

"Oh dear!" cried Mrs. Bursford; "don't speak of it now, Diana. I can't endure to think of it. One whom I knew so long, and who was such a good friend to me. It is terrible!" And poor Mrs. Bursford began to cry.

"They have offered five hundred reward, you know," continued Hogan to Diana, in a low tone. "There's a description of him. By-the-bye, I've been asked for a photograph: have you got one?"

"Oh yes. Mamma, could you not give Mr. Hogan that last photograph of Mr. Saltasche? The police want to have one, he says."

"I'm astonished at you, Diana—I am, indeed!" cried the old lady. "I'll do nothing of the kind. Whatever the unfortunate man has done, he has spared us; and I shall not give it to them. I wonder at you, indeed, to think of such a thing!"

Thoroughly vexed, Mrs. Bursford left the room. Hogan rose and walked to the window. He rather admired the old lady for her out-burst; and moreover, with the quick instinct peculiar to him, felt convinced by it, far more than by Diana's written assurance, that their money was intact. After a moment he came back and seated himself near Diana, in an arm-chair. He leaned one elbow on the chair, and supported his head in his hand without speaking. She was watching him anxiously.

"Is anything wrong, Mr. Hogan? Pray tell me: you look so haggard and worn!"

"I need be," he answered slowly. "I am on the brink of destruction. Nothing but a—a miracle can save me."

"Oh dear! Now do tell me—do! What is it? Has he—has Mr. Saltasche——?"

"He has carried off the funds of the Leadmines Company. He got them into his hands as treasurer, at my recommendation and a director myself. That's bad enough; but I was not—not fully qualified to be a director at the time. Nine hundred and seventy pounds were due on my shares—are due still; and Saltasche has carried off every penny I possessed. Oh, Diana! had I only one thousand, I would be saved,—saved from utter ruin!" He laid his head down on his hands, and groaned.

"Tell me clearly: is that the only thing that troubles you?" asked Diana, her keen blue eyes watching him closely. "One thousand pounds would leave you as you were before this?"

"Yes, absolutely. That is the only pressure; but I fear it is a fatal one. My God!" he wailed, "I have no one to turn to for help."

"You have!" said Diana—a flush lighting up her face, and a strange glitter in her eyes: you have! Let me,"—and she laid her hand on his sleeve—"let me help you. Take my money—all, every farthing. I devote it to you gladly."

It had come at last—the inevitable. In a moment he was on his knees before her, kissing her hands.

"Dearest, best girl!—truest, only friend! Diana, dearest, you must give me a title—an excuse: how otherwise could I? Say, dear, you will be mine—my wife."

The flush spread from Diana's cheeks over her brow; and there was an under-current of exultation in the tone with which she replied, "Yes, then, since you will;—but here comes mamma."