VOLUME III

CHAPTER 15

"Everyone that flatters thee
Is no friend in misery.
Words are easy like the wind;
Faithful friends are hard to find.
Every man will be thy friend
Whilst thou hast wherewith to spend;
But if store of crusts be scant
No man will supply thy want."

THE VACATION was over, and the College boys were nearly all back at work. One day, shortly after the commencement of term, our old acquaintance Mr. Orpen, and his friend Gagan, were walking in the front gateway.

"Young Davoren's in a nice fix, is he not?" observed Mr. Orpen.

"This bill affair, do you mean? Yes, the little ass is in a fix. Mel. will kick up a shine, won't he? What's this the amount is now? Renewed twice,—and how much per cent?"

"Don't know nor care," answered Orpen airily; "I fancy our brave Dicky will have to hook it. He's been going ahead nicely of late—got money to pay his tailor and bookseller, and then the fees. Moreover, Tad and he have been patronizing their outfitters lately."

"And pawning the clothes—eh? Ha! ha! ha!" And Mr. Gagan laughed so violently that he found himself obliged to support his frame against a pillar. Orpen also indulged in a burst of hilarity, but in a quieter way.

"I shouldn't wonder," said he, scratching his chin thoughtfully, "if they'd both be off immediately—perhaps to-night."

"Laws, now!" said Gagan, "let's look for them after lecture, and find out what the beggars are up to."

"I sha'n't," said Orpen, flicking a crumb off his coat lapel with his handkerchief. "Young Davoren was with me this morning, trying to borrow a pound. What a notion I had of lending it to him!"

"Not by any manner of means," sneered Gagan, who had a fine opinion of his friend's prudence. "A precious flat Davoren must be, indeed."

"As for Tad," pursued Orpen unheedingly, "he'll turn up all right; he's done it before, and his father bought him out."

"What, enlisted? are they going to enlist? Poor Dav.! what a greenie he always was!"

"Tad will enlist; the other fellar wants to go to sea,—thinks he'd like a voyage."

"I always knew what was before that fellow," continued Orpen; "all he wanted was rope, just rope enough—to hang himself. I've seen lots of fellars here, now, in my time, and I pretty well know their sort; but for a regular fool, I give it up to young Davoren—and Mahoney Quain, perhaps, too. Wanting to be equal with fellars that are twice as long on town, and know enough to buy and sell them. Pah! Why, the marker in Kelly's rooms here, in —— Street, used to get a half sov. at a time out of Davoren, just for telling him he made good strokes, fact, I assure you: he thought he could play billiards."

Mr. Gagan expressed a fitting sense of contempt and disgust, and the gentlemen then went to lecture.

Meantime Dicky, unconscious of the elegy which his friends were composing over him, was sitting on a bench in a low public-house off Grafton Street, waiting for his friend Tad Griffiths. The bar of a dingy tavern, unillumined by gas, and looking out into a filthy, muddy lane, is not a cheerful place to be obliged to spend a couple of hours in. The heavy smell of stale tobacco and beer and damp sawdust was sickening; and Dicky felt his head almost reel between terror and anxiety and the effects of the vile atmosphere. He would have liked to have stood at the door, but feared, lest he should be seen; and it was necessary now that he should shun observation. So he squeezed himself up into a corner where the projecting side of a great cask almost hid him, and having borrowed a newspaper, held it, under pretence of reading it, so as to cover his face. Not a word could he see to read, although he tried to. The lines all danced

before his eyes, burning like those of a person in fever. Every time the door opened he shook and started, dreading to meet the eye of some one in search of him: the tailor's clerk, to demand payment for the goods he had ordered and pawned; the bootmaker's son, who had threatened him already several times; or, worst of all, a messenger to fetch him to explain to his father the terrible affair of Melchisedech's bill,—anything on earth would be better than that. Why had he not asked Dermot Blake to help him out of his scrape, when he was in Dublin six weeks ago? and why had he misappropriated the other money? He might, had he not listened to Orpen and Tad and Gagan, have saved his money and paid off his share of the bill. Gagan had got out of it long ago; so had Wylding. He and Tad were the only two now. Then he thought of his mother,—the poor bedridden woman, whose only joy it was to see him and to hear him talk to her; for now she could scarcely speak at all, having had a second stroke during the last few months; and how he had neglected and forgotten her of late; and what might not happen before he could return? Dicky dropped the newspaper, and covered his face with his hands.

"Are you sick?" said the frowzy barmaid, who was knitting behind her counter; "have something?"

Seeing that he did not move, and noticing his paleness, she filled out a glass of cherry-brandy and put it into his hand. Scarcely had he touched it, when the door opened, and in walked Tad Griffiths. He shook his head when he saw the glass.

"Hollo, Dick! I told you not to do that," said he reprovingly. "Did Orpen lend you the sovereign?" whispered he, sitting down beside him on the bench.

Dicky finished the cherry-brandy before he replied, with a shake of the head.

Tad looked grave. "Just like him," said he. "In that case we must take a deck passage to Holyhead; all I have is a pound, and you have nothing at all. The boat starts at seven to-night, from the North Wall. Have you a great-coat?"

"No, I haven't. I've nothing but what I've got on. Oh, Tad!" cried Dicky, with a sudden burst of terror, "I'd like to go home first." And he looked eagerly into his companion's eyes for help or counsel.

"If you do, you'll need to start at once; it's after four. What do you want to go home for, you ass? You'll be home soon enough. Don't I tell you

the governor bought me out of the Fusileers? He left me in a month—to cool me, as he said. If you go home now, your governor will kill you over those bills and all the rest of it. Just let him find it out for himself; and then he'll be delighted to see you home by the time you get back from China or India, and all will be right as a trivet. Just give him time to forget everything, and then you'll come out all right and tight."

Dicky brightened on hearing this sanguine forecast, and consented to remain where they were until it was time to go to the boat. Tad sent out for sandwiches, and they had some more cherry-brandy. The barmaid entered into the conversation, which now assumed a cheerful, jocular cast; and at half-past six, flushed and excited, Dicky and his friend took their way on foot to the quay, to where the steamer was in readiness for the night trip to Holyhead. They took a deck passage over; which left them just money enough to get by rail to Chester, where the —th Foot was stationed,—in which regiment Tad intended to enlist. Fortune seemed to favour their schemes. They reached Holyhead next morning—cold, and miserably tired; and after a meagre breakfast, started for Chester, whither Dicky accompanied his friend, and where they parted. Dicky went on to Liverpool, and had the good luck to find a ship just sailing for Gibraltar; on board which he engaged as cabin boy, having first sold his clothes to a Jew huckster. Twenty-four hours after leaving Dublin he was far out to sea.

At the same time, perhaps, that the two boys were making their entry into the historic city of Chester, Mr. Davoren was engaged in examining the contents of some blue envelopes which reached him by the midday post. Having perused them, he looked at his watch. Finding it to be just the time he might expect to meet his son coming out of college, he took an hour's leave, and mounting a car, was soon at the college gate. He watched the crowd of lads coming out; and not seeing Dicky among them, asked the porter if he had seen him that day. The man replied that he had not; but catching sight of Orpen passing, he pointed him out, saying that gentleman might be able to inform him, as he was constantly in his company. Mr. Davoren accordingly accosted Orpen.

"Would you be good enough, sir, to tell me if you know where I can find Richard Davoren, my son?"

Mr. Orpen raised his hat politely. "I have not seen him since yesterday morning when he called at my rooms—about a book of his, I think. About ten; yes, ten o'clock."

"You have not seen him since? or could you tell me if you know of anyone who has?"

"I have not, and I do not know any one who could tell you anything about him. I am very sorry indeed. Good day!"

Mr. Davoren then went to Dicky's tutor; and from him he came away with a very angry face. He jumped on his car again, and returned to his office. There he found fresh trouble. A disreputable-looking man presented him with Mr. Melchisedech's document, and a request for thirty pounds to enable him, the drawer of the bill, to meet it. After a moment's thought Mr. Davoren wrote the name and address of his solicitor on an envelope, and desired the man to meet him there the following morning. Then, feeling unfit for any more work, he left his office and went home.

Nellie was sitting in her accustomed place in her mother's room; and seeing from her window her father coming in at such an unusual hour, hastened down to know if anything was wrong.

"Wrong!" he shouted angrily. "I should think there was, indeed! That young ruffian, your brother, has gone to the devil;" and he dashed down his stick and hat with violence on the floor:

"Oh! oh!" she cried, startled and alarmed, and perhaps almost more concerned for the paralytic patient above, whom a shock might kill, than for the cause of her father's violence and anger.

Mr. Davoren flung into the parlour, pushing the door after him with a crash that resounded through the house, and began to walk up and down, trampling the floor with his heavy boots in a perfect ecstasy of fury. Dicky had caused him a terrible annoyance and expense, and he was determined in no way to suppress his sensations. The disgrace, the vexation, were overwhelming. He had no room for other considerations; and it was with a sort of anger that he encountered Nellie's hastily uttered reminder of the patient upstairs.

He ceased his march, and dropped into a chair.

"Every one but me, of course. God help me! What have I done that I should have such a curse in my children? How shall I bear it, after all I have done for him? No one did anything for me; and yet I gave *him* every advantage. I was willing to give him a profession. He got everything he wanted. Thousands and thousands would never have done what I did for him. And look at the way he treats me. I shall never forgive him—never!"

"Where is he? What has he done?" She gasped rather than spoke the words.

"Run in debt; borrowed right and left; made away with everything. Of course, he has run off now. No one knows where he is."

"Run off! Oh, my God! Run off!—it will kill mamma."

"Aye, indeed. God help me!—nothing but disappointment and trouble everywhere before me. Last week I lost ten pounds, and now—look at this little monster. I had better go back to town, and inquire if he has let me in with any other shopkeepers. Heavens and earth! How shall I look any one in the face? Was there ever a being persecuted like me?"

So this distracted parent set off back to town; and Nellie, frightened to death and pale as a ghost, stole back upstairs to her post. She found her mother awake, her face turned towards the door, watching for her.

"Dicky, tell him to come to me," said she indistinctly, opening her eyes wide—blue, soft eyes, like her boy's. "Do you hear me?" she added sharply; "send him."

Nellie breathed a prayer for aid, and put forth all her strength; then slowly, and trying hard to master her voice—breaking and trembling in spite of her—replied,—

"Mamma, he is not in. I'll send him directly he comes."

"What? Where is he? I insist. He has not been here for days. This moment, Nellie: tell me where is Dicky?"

Her cheeks were flushed now, and her eyes seemed unnaturally large and bright. She tried to move, to raise herself. The thick tone had disappeared from her voice, and she spoke fast and nervously. Nellie's heart sank within her at this ominous sign.

"I assure you, mamma, you are doing yourself harm; indeed, I will bring him directly. I expect him now at once. Do lie down—let me settle the pillow. He will be in now directly."

"You are not speaking the truth. He must be ill. Nellie," said she after a pause, looking with terrified eyes at Nellie's pale face, "is Dicky dead, that he has not come to me?"

"Oh, mamma; no, no. Why do you speak so? Why do you distress yourself? Believe me, he will be here directly—by dinner-time; he will indeed."

Her mother spoke no more: she seemed worn out, and laid down her head, moaning faintly. The moment Nellie thought she could quit her safely, she slipped downstairs, and sent a servant for the doctor. How she wished Dorothy were near, or some one, to help her! She feared that another stroke might supervene after the excitement her mother had gone through, and of which she feared a recurrence; for she must know the truth some time, and if Dicky had really run away, it would certainly be the death of her mother. She sat down on a low stool before the fire, and in the darkness and solitude abandoned herself to bitter tears, and to thoughts that were angry as well as bitter. The heedless selfishness of Dicky, the callous indifference with which he had pursued his own ends, and the terrible result that might be entailed now; the disgrace, the wretched fate in prospect for him, poor misguided child;—all were passed in review. She had had her own troubles and heartaches, as we know, of late; and this seemed to be the drop wanting to fill the cup to the brim. Until late in the evening she remained crouched before the fire. Her father did not return to dinner; and it was the entry of the doctor that roused her at last.

He pronounced her mother to be in a highly dangerous state, and advised that some one be got to watch all night by her.