

## VOLUME III

### CHAPTER 2

DICKY DAVOREN, on the day after his return from Peatstown, when he left his sister and Mr. Hogan at the front gate of the college, dashed straight up to the rooms of his friend Gagan. Him he found sitting in consultation with Orpen; and both of them appeared delighted to see him,—Mr. Orpen especially was most cordial.

“Dav., old boy!” he exclaimed, “how are you? I’m glad you’ve got back all safe. How have you got along ever since?”

“Blooming! Morrow, Gagan; hollo! such an eye as you have! Who knocked up against you?”

Mr. Gagan’s eye had a suggestive green and yellow tinge all round it; he put up his fingers and stroked it tenderly.

“One of those ’bom’nable Corporation lamp-posts. Put everywhere but where they’re wantin’; so they are. And I, never expecting it, fell foul of one of them as I was coming home from a ‘small and early’ in Ramines’. It’s a shame, it is!”

“So it is,” assented Orpen; “he was promenading round one special lamp-post for two hours,—and that’s a memento of the happy meeting. Was it a policeman severed you from the object of your affections, Gagan?”

“None of your chaff! Davoren, what were you doing?”

“Didn’t I tell you! Hogan—you know him—was standing for Peatstown, and he gave me a sub-sheriffship; worth a nice pile of money, let alone the fun.”

“Fifteen guineas. I had one last winter,” observed Orpen, thoughtfully.

“Have you got the money yet, Dick?” asked Gagan.

“No; not yet. What have you been at since?”

Both gentlemen grinned, and looked at each other.

“We hav’n’t exactly been tearing our hair in sackcloth and ashes for your departure. No; ha! ha! I’m cleaned out; dead beat. So’s Tad. So’s Mahoney. So is not Orpen.”

“Why, Gagan, your Ulster is there yet. And—no, the books are gone!”

The shelves are still there; but the books, they are gone,” sang Gagan, parodying Moore. “I’m going over to bank the coat as soon as it’s dark. Dick, will you come in to-night till we have a small game? Grey is coming; and we’ll go to Wilding’s rooms. He has a piano, and we’ll have a musical tea.”

“And a highly moral and restricted rubber,” added Orpen, winking to Gagan. “Come on, now; there’s one striking, and we’ll be late for moral philosophy.”

As they went downstairs Dicky asked where was Mahoney Quain.

“He’ll be in to-night. I say,” said Orpen, confidentially, “Mahoney’s going it just now with a pretty housemaid of his mother’s. I met him walking with her the other night—in Summer Hill. By Jove, he is—h’m;” and Orpen winked and grinned suggestively.

“You don’t say so?”

“Yes, I do. That fellow is fool enough for anything—ass!” And Mr. Orpen straightened himself up with a look of superior wisdom that greatly impressed his companion.

“What style of a looking girl is she, now?” asked Dicky, with a would-be knowing air.

“Oh—um!” said Orpen, as if he found a difficulty in selecting terms which would accurately describe a fascinating house-maid,—“a lively, pretty-faced stump of a girl.”

“Not genteel, even, I suppose?” said Dicky, critically.

Orpen looked at him with an expression of mild contempt, and continued without otherwise seeming to hear.

“She writes letters to Mahoney; copies them off from a Polite Letter-writer—invitations to balls, dinners, everything, straight out,—fact,

for I've seen 'em. Sh! here we are, now. Last one he got from her was a letter of advice about a promissory note,—begad, yes."

The lecture over, Mr. Orpen linked his arm under his young friend's and carried him off to a billiard-room situated close to the college, in a by-street. Under the billiard-room there was a bar, where anything to drink could be had at public-house prices.

Dicky had not been in a billiard-room to play before. He had several times accompanied his father to a billiard-room on the other side of town; an establishment of much better standing than this, and where he had seen some fine players. He had never had a cue in his hand before, and felt quite ashamed when he saw Orpen, having taken off his coat, chalk the end of his cue in the most natural way possible. Orpen and the marker, a red-nosed, dirty man, played a game first. They offered Dicky the mace to try a stroke or two with, as a beginner; but he declined rather sulkily. It was stupid enough, sitting on a raised form by the wall looking at them; and he began to think what he should do. Presently a thought struck him.

"I'll have a drink, Orpen—hey? What will you have?"

"I'll get it, sir; in a minute, sir," said the marker, who seemed to be imbued with new life on hearing this proposal.

He left the room; and Orpen, coming over to where Dicky was lounging, said, in a half whisper,—

"When he comes up with it—ah—tell him to go and get one for himself; it's the way in this sort of place, you know."

Dicky despatched the willing Mercury this time on a still more grateful errand; and when he returned, affairs wore a very different aspect. The marker, having knocked the balls into position, called Dicky over.

"Now, sir; this is a very nice stroke, sir. What do you think you'd do in my position, sir?"

"Why, go in between, and pocket that red ball."

"Precisely, sir. Why, you couldn't have settled it more accurately if you were—'scuse me, sir—an old hand. Would you like to try the stroke, sir? Take my cue."

Dicky knocked the red ball into the pocket with ease. The marker was loud in his praises. Such steadiness of hand—fine eye! The gentle-

man only required a little practice to become a bang-up billiard player. After a while Dicky found himself obliged to stand treat again; and when the time came to go, he found he had actually won a couple of shillings from Orpen—who, most unaccountably, though he could hold his own against the marker, was obliged to confess himself unable to stand against some of the tyro's strokes. They said they would call again soon; and the marker, a most good-natured poor fellow, offered to give the strange gentleman the use of the table any time he liked to drop in, when there was nobody using it, for a little practice.

Dicky stepped out into the ill-smelling lane feeling in the highest good humour with himself. It was not every one that developed a talent for billiards; he knew that very well, without the marker telling him. Mahoney Quain could not hold a cue in his hand. Lots of fellows could never strike with the right degree of force. Mahoney was unrivalled at football and racing and wrestling, but he never did anything, except betting on the game, at billiards. Tad and Gagan were no good either,—not a bit. When they got to the corner of the lane, where it debouches into Brunswick Street, Orpen, who had no fancy for being seen, was for drawing back cautiously until a group of people just passing had gone; but Dicky, heedless of the pull at his sleeve, blundered on, and his companion had no choice but to keep up with him.

“What hurry are you in you fool you! Couldn't you have waited an instant to let those Smyths go by, eh?”

“Eh?” repeated Dicky, quite unconsciously, and turning in surprise. The expression of Orpen's face explained what was wrong. And all in one minute he became aware of the reasons why they should not be seen. For the first time he realized the exact significance of what he had been doing. Gambling and drinking! And that, too, in broad daylight, in a low publichouse, when he ought to have been reading for his grinder. A frightened look came into his eyes, and a sort of idea rose to his mind of atonement—of remaining at home that evening, instead of going to Wilding's rooms.

“I must go to the train. Orpen, good-bye,” he said.

“I'll see you to-night?”

“Well, I think not; I think I'll have to stay at home. I've lost all this afternoon, you see, and old Chute——”

“Pshaw! what a flat you are. Why, Wilding invited you specially. Every one will be there. Are you afraid, young one?”

He saw what was passing in Dicky’s mind and he determined to reassert his mastery at once.

“Afraid! no, I’m not.” Dicky resented his mentor’s tone. “By the bye, too, I cannot come to-night. I forgot entirely—I’m obliged to remain at home, positively: very sorry.”

His tone was perfectly sincere; and Orpen thought it better not to press the point. He was sure that the next evening would do quite as well. He knew with whom he had to deal, and that Dicky’s conceit and desire to be thought a man by his new friends, all of whom were older than himself (Orpen was twenty), would soon bring him back if he had any notion of breaking with them. He was a fish that required a little playing; and Mr. Orpen’s practised hand could do that patiently and well until the time came to gaff, and land, hum high and dry.