

## VOLUME III

### CHAPTER 6

“Apemantus.—Heyday! what a sweep of vanity comes this way?

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Var. Servant.—How dost? Fool!

Apem.—Dost dialogue with thy shadow?

Var. Serv.—I speak not to thee.

Apem.—No! ‘tis to thyself—come away.”

—*Timon of Athens.*

THE AFTERNOON of a fine day, early in June. The various approaches to the “Palace Gardens” were unusually thronged with people, on foot or in carriages. The Rose Show of the year was being held, and everybody was in haste to get in. Their Excellencies were to be present, and as the weather was perfectly fine and warm, hardly a ticket had been left unsold. At one of the entrance-gates—not the principal one—stood Mr. Saltasche, evidently on the look-out for some one. He never quitted his post of observation, though innumerable people of his acquaintance passed in, and many gorgeously-dressed ladies smiled gracious encouragement to him to escort them. Dicky Davoren passed, with his sister—taking off his hat gravely as they went by, in return for Saltasche’s careless nod. The Brangans and Raffertys, looking like full-blown peonies of various startling colours, were attended by Bishop O’Rooney and a couple of young lads: gentlemen of their persuasion are not generally burdened with much spare time, and their young ladies are left pretty much to themselves until after business hours. There were abundance of military men—recognizable, as a rule, by their well-cut clothes and “set-up” air; a sprinkling of professional men; and a large number of

country gentlemen up for the Cattle Show, slouching of gait, freckled of countenance, and deliberate of movement. All these passed Mr. Saltasche in crowds. At last a cab drove up, and Mrs. Poignarde, dressed in light mourning and looking paler and thinner than before, accompanied by her husband and a lady whom Saltasche did not know, got out. He advanced to meet them, his eyes sparkling with exultation.

“I am so pleased you have come. My sister and Mrs. Grey are in the tents: we shall follow them. How do you do, Captain?”

“My cousin, Miss Stroude, from London: Mr. Saltasche.”

Saltasche bowed to a middle-aged, pleasant-looking lady. After a moment or two, they joined the stream that was flowing towards the tents. Poignarde was dumb, as usual, and Saltasche speedily found his sister and introduced the stranger to her. Miss Saltasche was busy with a note-book and pencil, taking down the names of the finest plants. Mrs. Grey was talking to people near her.

“Have their Excellencies come yet?” asked Mrs. Poignarde.

“I do not know,” replied Saltasche. “As yet I have seen no one. We must have your opinion,” he added, turning to Miss Stroude with bland bow and smile, “on our horticultural efforts. After Kew and the Crystal Palace this must seem very poor to you.”

“Are you exhibiting anything?” asked Poignarde, who for some reason or another seemed trying to be agreeable and talkative.

“No, not this time. I had some things at the last show, and got a prize—I believe for a tree-fern; but the plants were so injured that McKie would not allow me to send anything to this.”

“Your ferns are very valuable, I believe?” continued the Captain.

“I was offered a hundred pounds for a tree-fern, McKie tells me. I know it cost me more than that,” said Mr. Saltasche, laughing.

“You have a Scotch gardener, then?” said Miss Stroude.

“Yes; I dare not gather one of my own flowers, he is such a tyrant. The dream of his life is to compass a blue rose.”

“A blue rose!” she repeated. “What an absurdity!”

“Everybody has his hobby; and that is McKie’s. I believe my sister encourages him in it—just out of policy, you know.”

Then Miss Saltasche fell into rank beside Miss Stroude. Poignarde seeing a brother-officer outside, slipped away to join him; his wife and Saltasche made the tour of the tent side by side.

“Come and see the geraniums,” said he. “I want to show you Lord Brayhead’s collection of plants.”

They made their way across the grounds to another large tent, not yet thronged with people. They stopped for a moment before a beautiful pyramid of scarlet blossoms, which seemed to send out a glow of warmth all round it. The reflection shone in her long brown eyes, opened wide in admiration. Her exquisite oval face, framed in soft wreaths of hair and the black tulle of her mourning bonnet, looked like marble in its paleness. He was watching her.

“Tell me,” he said in a low voice, “how has it been with you since? How have you decided now?”

“He is arranging an exchange. His cousin, Miss Stroude, is staying with us. She has come over here on some business, and has been very good, after her fashion. She says she will procure me teaching in London.”

“Teaching? You! Surely not!”

“Yes; she wonders I have not tried long ago. It would be so easy, she says, with my talent and proficiency. She did not know the plan that I have been building on for years. And now that has all vanished, it seems to me I am indifferent to everything. What does it matter?”

“It does matter,” said he brusquely. “You are talking nonsense. When does Miss Stroude leave you?”

“She is going down to Westmeath to-morrow. She will be back in a short time; and she spoke of my going over to London with her, if he can manage to settle his exchange in so short a time.”

“Settle nothing,” breathed Saltasche, in a low fierce whisper; “leave things as they are. I’ll find you something pleasanter than teaching. You, indeed! Mind—promise nothing.”

She looked up at the strange tone, and a faint shell-pink tinged her cheeks when she met the greedy eyes bent upon her.

“Let us find our people now,” said he. And they retraced their steps towards the first tent. It was not an easy matter to get on now. The vice-regal party had arrived, and the usual mobbing was going on. It was

easy to discern their whereabouts. One had only to follow the pushing, struggling *queue* that extended behind them. Every one who had ever been presented bowed as they passed; and his Excellency's unfortunate hat seemed to be only put on his head to be taken off again immediately. They got back to the rose-tent with difficulty, and found their party collected at the entrance.

"Oh, here you are," said Miss Saltasche. "We want to see the fruit. Which tent is it in? Come with us, Mrs. Grey. Lord Tenbrock is exhibiting some. You will like to see that, of course." Lord Tenbrock was one of the patrons of the Greys' parish.

They all filed off in the direction of a small tent, towards which the crowd seemed also to be rushing. The viceregal party having completed their scamper through the floral section, were now inspecting the strawberries, giant cabbages and onions, of the fruit and vegetable department. On the way they encountered Mrs. Hepenstall, Mrs. de Lancier, and some attendant military men. They greeted the Saltasches and Greys very cordially. Mrs. Poignarde, who was walking beside Saltasche, raised her eyelashes, and timidly looked for a recognition. Mrs. Hepenstall, a very frisky matron, and her friend of the auricomous hair, looked blankest forgetfulness. Their military attendants cast admiring glances at the slender, white-faced little woman in black. One of them knew Saltasche, and commenced a lively conversation with him, in the hope, evidently, of drawing her into it.

Saltasche, generally complaisant enough in this *genre*, listened and answered stiffly; and the two groups swept asunder presently. He looked at her archly.

"You are complimented highly to-day, you see. I had a great mind to introduce Captain du Maurel to you. I wonder would those ladies ever have forgiven me. See: here come their husbands!" A couple of well-dressed, fast-looking men passed. ("Good-day, Lancier! Day, Hep!") "The near man belongs to the little fair woman. He won a bet of fifty pounds yesterday: rather a droll one, too. Backed himself for two ponies to drink a pint of stout out of a soup-plate with an egg-spoon, while Mr. Duffer of the —th walked round Stephen's Green. Did it, too."

"Oh! was it he? I heard Eric talking of that last night. It seems to have caused great excitement."

“Immense. I believe it is a cousin of Du Maurel’s or Lancier’s (I forget which)—Mr. Sharpsye—that owns the Derby favourite this year.”

“Bah! Talk to Captain Poignarde of those matters; he is sure to know. I hate the very name of horse.”

“What’m I sure to know? eh?” growled a well-known voice behind them. The Captain’s voice was thick and his eyes watery. He had evidently been paying a visit to the refreshment stall.

“I was saying to Mrs. Poignarde that Sharpsye, who bought Sky-scraper from Lord Bentinck, was a cousin of one of those men who have just passed us.”

“He is a cousin of Du Maurel. Made all his money by knife-handles. Fact: Sheffield man. I say, that reminds me, I want to say a word to you. What are we stayin’ here for? Just look at these cabbages?—indeed I won’t, ma’am. These old women are fit for anythin’. Come on outside and leave them. Selina Grey will pocket some of those onions yet. Came from Tenbrock’s? Oh! that’s what’s the matter, is it?”

So speaking, the Captain elbowed his way out. Saltasche, after a look at her, followed him. When they got outside, Poignarde shook himself as if relieved.

“I say,” he began, “it looks nice and quiet over there: what do you say to cross over and have a weed?”

They left the crowd, and passed over the grass sward to a comparatively deserted alley bordered with lilacs and laburnums all in full blossom. Entering this, Poignarde lighted a cigar and seated himself on a bench.

“I have been told,” he began, “of a real sure thing.” He stopped to give a long puff at his cigar. Saltasche’s eyes kindled with impatience.

“Derby, eh?” said he quickly. He knew perfectly well what the fellow wanted; and he was in a hurry to get back to his friends. He looked at him with a sort of impatient disgust. The sodden countenance and pimpled nose, and the insolent, patronizing air, never appeared to him more sickening. A wretch not worth a penny if his creditors were paid,—on the verge of ruin, and yet swaggering and boasting to the last.

“Derby! Yaas, that’s the ticket.” And he nodded his head sapiently. “Stand to win three thousand this minute.” Saltasche blandly smiled, as if quite pleased and not at all astonished at this news. “I say,” went on the

Captain, "I'll put you up to a good thing. Battler is to be 'pulled.'" And he looked all round cautiously among the stems of the lilacs, as if some listener might be crouching to gather the words of wisdom that fell from his lips. "Don't let that out. I have it from the stable direct. I've laid heavily against him. Skyscraper's the horse. Yes, sir. Du Maurel even doesn't know: he'll come a cropper—ho! ho! Will you put anything on it? eh?"

"Er—no; much obliged to you, Captain. My business is enough for me. I never cared for 'horse politics,' either; never had time, you see: all that requires time and attention."

"Tention! By Jove, I should say so. The sums I have had to pay for tips, now!" he added, reflectively.

"More than that, it really takes such foresight, calculation, and arrangement to win—er—you know. It would be quite beyond me—quite;" and Mr. Saltasche smiled agreeably at this avowal of his own incapacity.

"I dare say," assented the other, patronizingly. "I think I'll have to ask you to let me have that hundred."

"Impossible!" answered the broker, sharply and decisively. "I could not realize it for a week to come. I can give you fifty, or eighty, to-morrow or the day after, if you like. I am told," said he, "you intend to exchange to India."

"Yes. The ——th sails July 2nd; and in case—ah——I'm only thinking about it," and he looked at Saltasche with a half-grin. "I don't want that generally known, you see; it ain't settled."

"Thursday next, the day after the Derby," said the broker sententiously, "you'll know for certain."

Poignarde nodded, and throwing away his cigar they strolled back to the crowd. Lady Brayhead and her nieces the Bragintons had appeared on the scene. They walked about patronizing everything and everybody. The flowers were compared disadvantageously with those of the London fetes: nothing to Kensington, not to speak of the private collections of their titled friends.

"Begonia? Yes; nothing to Lord Fraisefeuilles, is it, Blanche? Do you remember the table vines at dear Lady St. Elmo's? How do you do, Mr. Saltasche? Lord Brayhead? No, he is not here. Oh! you saw him in

London the day before yesterday? Did you meet Diana and Aunt Bursford?"

"Oh yes, several times. I called in Clarges Street. They are looking uncommonly well, and go out immensely. The day I saw them, they were going to afternoon tea at the Under Secretary's, and to Mrs. Ware Hawk's concert in the evening."

Miss Braginton's complexion took a green shade, and her black eyes glittered viciously. Just then she caught sight of her friend Mrs. Braddell, escorted by a great fat country gentleman with a band of crape round his hat. She dived into the crowd to secure her prize; but when she came up with them she found Miss O'Hegarty had caught Mrs. Braddell in conversation, so she was obliged to wait an instant. She stared blankly at Nellie Davoren, who was leaning on her brother's arm, and on whom the stare was lost—for Nellie did not recognize the little lady in the pink silk bonnet, whose eyes seemed glancing in every direction. At last Miss O'Hegarty noticed her; and she was obliged to come forward—against her will, for she would much have preferred waiting until the coast was clear.

"Miss Braginton, how are you? and where's your sister? When did you hear from Diana? She is enjoying herself in London, I'm told. Any amount of gaieties and beaux."

At the last word a smile curled Miss Braginton's lips that was edifying to see.

"I am glad to hear it," she snapped out.

"Oh, indeed, then; but I have heard of her at the National Gallery, and somewhere else—Kensington Gardens—with a very devoted squire indeed. Fact, I assure you." And Miss O'Hegarty nodded her head significantly.

"Pray, who is it? Come now, Miss O'Hegarty,—pray now; you *are* too bad,"—and Miss Braginton put on all her force of smiles and affected implorings, for the benefit of the widower, who was standing close by.

Nellie recognized her now: she watched the little lady's contortions with a sort of curiosity. She, too, had heard Miss O'Hegarty's insinuations; but she never dreamed that she could mean Mr. Hogan—Hogan, from whom that very morning she had received a letter, which was in her pocket now, and would be carried about with her until by dint of constant reading she would know its contents off by heart. She turned and said

something to Dicky; and they both left Miss Dorothy to her friends, and went outside to speak to the Raffertys, who were now accompanied by Mr. Mulcahy. The Bishop was walking with Mrs. Rafferty. He gave a long look at Miss Nellie, remembering her perfectly well; and she, too, looked at him well and long—not for any interest she took in himself, but just because he was Mr. Hogan’s uncle.

The day was beautiful, and it was pleasanter outside than in the tents, where the crowds of people and the heavy odours of the flowers made it very oppressive. Nellie felt in high spirits, and laughed and talked with Mr. Mulcahy until that youth felt utterly bewildered, and Miss Brangan, who looked upon him as her property because he had come with her party, bent her black brows in displeasure.

“Look out there; there’s Mr. Saltasche: do you see him, Nellie?” said Dicky. “He’s speaking to his Ex’cy, I declare.” The whole group turned their heads in the direction indicated.

“I didn’t see the Lord Lieutenant yet,” said Miss Brangan, in a discontented tone; “let us go over, and try to get near that tent where they are now.”

“Oh no, don’t! They’ll be going now directly, and we can watch them pass out of the gate,” cried Dicky.

But Miss Brangan would not be satisfied with this. She was determined to inspect their Excellencies just as she had inspected the other attractions of the *fête*; and she dragged the party over to that part of the grounds where the vice-regal party now were. Dicky gave Nellie a pull and a meaning glance.

“Let them go—and deuce go with them. Pack! Here come Orpen and Griffiths; I’m delighted they’re gone.”

Mr. Orpen engaged Nellie in conversation, while Mr. Tad Griffiths whispered hurriedly to Dicky,

“Are you coming to-night? Orpen said you were afraid to.”

“Afraid, eh? We’ll see. I’m short of cash, though. Has he settled who is to be in the collection for the Derby?”

“Yes, ten of us; it’s twenty-five shillings each. Listen: they say Mahoney’s married to the housemaid. Lord!—fact! Did you ever hear of such a fool? Big idiot! Mulcahy said he’d join too. Is all your money gone?”

Dicky nodded. “I’ll manage it, though. Who else is in?”

“Wylding, he is going it: he told me this morning he had his mother’s Indian shawl, his own and his brother’s dress suit, and a whole heap of books, in pawn. And the fun of it is, they’re invited to a dance next week, and the dress suits will be wanting, ho! ho! Isn’t that a joke? Moreover, there’s a nice row already: you see his father locks the hall door every night, and the keys are carried upstairs. Well, my brave Wylding hops in and out by the dining-room window; there’s no area round the corner. And if the cook didn’t see him and tell on him! Such a scrum-mage! And now, if this other little game is found out it will be a nice job altogether.”

Just then Miss O’Hegarty appeared, having followed Nellie and Dicky.

“How do you do, Mr. Orpen? I hope your mother is better. Nellie and Dick, their Ex’cises are gone; I think we ought to be going. Nearly six o’clock! dinner will be ready before we are home. Come along, dears. Nice gentlemanly lads, those are, Dicky,” she went on as they walked towards the gates. “I am glad to see you choose such nice improving companions: that young Orpen is so quiet and refined.”

A grim smile passed over Dicky’s rather haggard face; but he did not endeavour to disillusion her.

“Who were those people you were with, Nellie?”

“The Miss Raffertys, and some of their friends,” answered Nellie a little absently.

“Ah yes: R. C.’s; I guessed as much. Their toilettes decidedly bore the ‘mark of the Beast,’ as Mr. Wyldoates calls it. Wonderful,—it’s wonderful; but one recognizes them always. Do walk faster, children. Peter will be so furious.”