

## VOLUME I

### CHAPTER 3

“The head of a petty corporation, who opposes the designs of a prince who would tyrannically force his subjects to save their best clothes for Sundays; the young pedant who finds one undiscovered property in the polype, or describes an unheeded process in the skeleton of a mole, and whose mind, like his microscope, perceives nature only in detail; the rhymers, who makes smooth verses and paints to our imagination, when he should only speak to our hearts; all equally fancy themselves walking forward to immortality, and desire the crowd behind them to look on.”

—*Goldsmith*

MISS DAVOREN'S COUSIN, Dorothy O'Hegarty, sat in a sunny bay-windowed parlour of Fitzgerald Place, waiting breakfast for her young relative. The wintry November sun shone in, lighting up the silver on the breakfast table, and brightening the grim visage of Desmond O'Hegarty, staring with hard grey eyes from his gilt frame over the sideboard. Everything in the room was bright and burnished; the carpet, an old well-worn Brussels, was brushed to perfection; the breakfast-cloth was spotless; you might see yourself mirrored in the heavy old plate that decked the table and sideboard, and the fireplace was nothing short of a picture. Seated with her slippers on the edge of the fender, reading with gold spectacles on nose the fashionable intelligence in her favourite Tory paper, Miss Dorothy herself deserves a passing word of description. Tall and thin, not to say angular, with round, hard, grey eyes and bushy eyebrows, she had a good nose, in profile,—it was rather sharp at the point,—strong white teeth, and a weak chin. Like most of her country-people, the upper portion of her face was the best: from the upper lip down, few Irish faces are well moulded. There is a peculiar look, as if of a

squeeze, about the chin that is easily distinguished. She had a broad forehead and thick grey hair,—on the whole a rather handsome and uncommon physiognomy, but stamped with hardness, and unmistakably cynical.

Miss O’Hegarty had quite finished the list of names at Lord Brayhead’s dinner, when the door opened and Nellie entered, fresh as a rose, and without a trace of headache or lassitude—blessed privilege of *débutantes*—after her night’s dancing. Her hair was not dressed,—that is, it was not plaited up in the hideous unnatural-sized braids of the day; merely rolled up in a coil at the back, and drawn tightly off her brows, it showed the beautiful Greek outline of the head; and a hundred tiny transparent ringlets clustered at the nape of her neck, and swayed with every breath upon her temples. A clear fair forehead, and eyes as limpid and soft as a May morning,—truly, as yet, Nellie was a day beauty. The bright shell-pink that the gaslights of the night before had not been able to set forth now glowed upon her cheeks, which then had seemed too pale.

As the door opened Miss O’Hegarty dropped the paper and spectacles into her lap.

“Now, child, good morning. Are you rested? No one would imagine you had been dancing all night. Perhaps you were not;—you were a wall-flower, hey?” and she laughed ironically.

“Not altogether, Cousin Dorothy,” said Nellie, laughing as she rubbed her hands at the fire.

“Well, well,” said Dorothy, pouring out tea, “come and take your breakfast, and tell us all about it. Whom had you there?”

“We had a delightful ball; really, cousin, I enjoyed it so much. And there was the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress, and Alderman Brangan, and—”

“Why, you had everybody of note,” interrupted Miss O’Hegarty sarcastically; “come now, tell your conquests: one of the Malowneys, I hope? They’re rich, you know.”

Nellie permitted herself a little curl of her upper lip. “Really, I only danced a few times with the Malowneys.”

“A few times!—that wasn’t bad, altogether,” commented the old lady.

“There was also Mr. Mulcahy, one of Dicky’s friends, and a Mr. O’Rooney Hogan.”

“O’Rooney Hogan!—who’s that?”

“I don’t know, Cousin; he’s a barrister, and very gentlemanlike indeed. Somebody said he was a nephew of Bishop O’Rooney.”

“Oh! one of your own people, then: I think I’ve seen his name in the papers.”

“He’s quite a rising young man, and I heard somebody say won’t be long until he gets into Parliament.”

“Ha, indeed: To be sure, that’s what all those creatures go for nowadays.” Miss Dorothy was looking over the column of births and deaths for any familiar names. Not finding any, she resumed.

“Who was the belle? or how many of them were there?”

“There was a great tall black-haired girl,—a Miss Dorney, from Galway; but I did not like her dress.”

“Galway! Dorney? Tush! that’s not a Galway name,” said Miss O’Hegarty scornfully. If there was one thing more than another that she prided herself on, it was her knowledge of the generic names and habitats of the Irish country gentry. Given a name, she could place and classify it with as unerring sagacity as an Owen or a Lyell would an antediluvian claw or tooth.

“You have no beauties among your set, Nellie,” continued the old lady, just in the tone she might use in discussing the habits and peculiarities of a Central African tribe. “Anyhow, not among the Dublin lot. They’re all overfed and underbred;” and she chuckled at the neat antithesis. “All as like as bullets cast in the same mould. I don’t know what does it. Letitia O’Rourke now, poor thing, she was ladylike and refined—had a real air of civilization about her; but her daughters, how or why I never could make out, were coarse-looking, clumsy, unfinished, and all of them with such accents! It’s those convent schools.”

“It must be the mixture, for they’re really all mixed,” said Nellie; “and then you know there are far more Catholics of the common class than the other.”

“I know it. That’s just it. They’re all new tradespeople, and of course they swamp the upper element altogether. It must be so in their schools, even more so than in society—their own society, I mean; and that ac-

counts for the commonness of all the young R.C.s now. I declare I've often been puzzled to know how it is the rising generation are so inferior to their parents. It's all this frightful irruption of trade. Shoddy, my dear; it's shoddy."

"Well, but I am sure the nuns are all nice and ladylike; they do their best, and really you can't—"

"You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.' No, I suppose not, poor things; but after all, Nellie, the nuns are the very same themselves. Don't tell me. Dooly, my butcher, had his daughter enter a convent the other day, and his sister is in one. Ah! to be sure."

"Very well, Cousin Dolly,—if they're able to pay for it, why not?—their money is as good as anybody else's; and no matter who they were, I never met a nun that was not nice."

"No, it isn't, it's made by cheating; and as for Dooly, he is charging me a shilling a pound this minute, while he's paying the farmers not the one-third of that price for their beasts; he's in a ring to make a hundred per cent., like those vile coal people; and traders who go on like that, of course may make their children into nuns and priests, and all that's grand, and give balls to three hundred if they like. All I say is, don't ask me to have anything to do with them, for I abhor them. Pah!"

"Ah! now, Cousin Dorothy, what can you mean? And there were no butchers nor coal people there last night. They were nice enough, and very good-natured."

"No, you hadn't butchers; but you had salesmasters, and that's not much better; and if you hadn't coal people, you had whiskey people—wholesale or retail, or both."

"Come now, Cousin Dorothy, will you tell me if you object to meeting Lady Plutus Grains and Mrs. Trebblex,—and pray what are they?"

"They are ladies of family and fortune,—aristocrats who have married men of fortune: that's all, Miss."

"Well, Mrs. Malowney's only fault is, then, that she is—"

"Mrs. Malowney,—you don't know what you are talking about, child." Miss Dorothy cut Nellie short with an air of superiority. "How was she dressed, by-the-bye?"

Miss Davoren proceeded to describe the dress at length; and her relative laughed heartily.

“The daughters, of course, were to match,” chuckled she, “were they not?”

“No; they were dressed in rather good taste, but very richly.”

“Well, you know, Tims does that for them. They may buy Paris dresses; but figure and style, thank goodness, that is not in the market yet.”

“I must go home now, Cousin. Do you want anything? Mamma has been by herself since early yesterday.”

“Well, you had better take care not to excite her by telling her too much of all your fine doings. I met Surgeon Graham last week, and you know he is particular about her being kept quiet.”

“I’ll take care, Cousin Dorothy.”

“And see here, Nellie,”—here Miss Dorothy hesitated an instant,—“Nellie! I have an afternoon tea on Monday, and if you like to come over for it, do; but mind, there will be nobody but a pack of old women and some few young ones, or rather would-be young ones—no men, Nellie; and if there were, none for you—remember that, child. I set my face altogether against mixed marriages; no good can come of them. Marry in your own set, or don’t marry at all, *I* say; but, if you *will* marry, gild your pill,—some rich wholesale dealer, or great stack of a tea-man that can keep you a carriage and pair. I always think of the maxim, ‘Repentance is easiest in a coach and four.’ Heigh-ho!”

And Miss O’Hegarty, who was perfectly serious, sighed a little absently, and leaving the breakfast table, mounted her feet again on the fender preparatory to finishing her paper.

Nellie assented gladly, for she never before had been invited by her cousin to any of these festivities, and she was curious to meet the guests, some of whom had been friends of her mother’s before she had married and given up society. Nellie’s mother had been ward and niece of Desmond O’Hegarty, Miss Dorothy’s father; and she had lived with him until she fell in love with, and married, Mr. Davoren. A long estrangement ensued on this step; but gradually the old friendship had been renewed, and had lasted since the birth of her first child, Nellie.