

# Daniel O'Rourke

By Thomas Crofton Croker

People may have heard of the renowned adventures of Daniel O'Rourke, but how few are there who know that the cause of all his perils, above and below, was neither more nor less than his having slept under the walls of the Pooka's tower. I knew the man well. He lived at the bottom of Hungry Hill, just at the right-hand side of the road as you go toward Bantry. An old man was he, at the time he told me the story, with gray hair and red nose; and it was on the 25th of June, 1813, that I heard it from his own lips, as he sat smoking his pipe under the old poplar tree, on as fine an evening as ever shone from the sky. I was going to visit the caves in Dursey Island, having spent the morning at Glengariff.

"I am often *axed* to tell it, sir," said he, "so that this is not the first time. The master's son, you see, had come from beyond foreign parts in France and Spain, as young gentlemen used to go before Buonaparte or any such was heard of; and sure enough there was a dinner given to all the people on the ground, gentle and simple, high and low, rich and poor. The *ould* gentlemen were the gentlemen after all, saving your honor's presence. They'd swear at a body a little, to be sure, and, maybe, give one a cut of a whip now and then, but we were no losers by it in the end; and they were so easy and civil, and kept such rattling houses, and thousands of welcomes; and there was no grinding for rent, and there was hardly a tenant on the estate that did not taste of his landlord's bounty often and often in a year; but now it's another thing. No matter for that, sir, for I'd better be telling you my story.

"Well, we had everything of the best, and plenty of it; and we ate, and we drank and we danced, and the young master by the same token danced with Peggy Barry, from the *Bohereen*—a lovely young couple they were, though they are both low enough now. To make a long story short, I got, as a body may say, the same thing as tipsy almost, for I can't remember ever at all, no ways, how it was I left the place; only I did leave it, that's certain. Well, I thought for all that, in myself, I'd just step to Molly Cronohan's, the fairy woman, to speak a word about the bracket heifer that was bewitched; and so as I was crossing the stepping-stones of the ford of Ballyashenogh, and as looking up at the stars and blessing myself—for why? it was Lady-day—I missed my foot, and souse I fell into the water. 'Death alive!' thought I, 'I'll be drowned now!' However, I began swimming, swimming, swimming away for the dear life, till at last I got ashore, somehow or other, but never the one of me can tell how, upon a *dissolute* island.

"I wandered and wandered about there, without knowing where I wandered, until at last I got into a big bog. The moon was shining as bright as day, or your fair lady's eyes, sir (with the pardon for mentioning her), and I looked east and west, and north and south, and every way, and nothing did I see but bog, bog, bog—I could never find out how I got into it; and my heart grew cold with fear, for sure and certain I was that it would be my *berrin* place. So I sat down upon a stone which, as good luck would have it, was close by me, and I began to scratch my head, and sing the *Ullagone*—when all of a sudden the moon grew black, and I looked up, and saw something for all the world as if it was moving down between me and it, and I could not tell what it was. Down it came with a pounce, and looked at me full in the face; and what was it but an eagle? as fine a one as ever flew from the kingdom of Kerry. So he looked at me in the face, and says he to me, 'Daniel O'Rourke,' says he, 'how do you do?' 'Very well, I thank you, sir,' says I; 'I hope you're well'; wondering out of my senses all the time how an eagle came to speak

like a Christian. ‘What brings you here, Dan?’ says he. ‘Nothing at all, sir,’ says I; ‘only I wish I was safe home again.’ ‘Is it out of the island you want to go, Dan?’ says he. ‘‘Tis, sir,’ says I: so I up and told him how I had taken a drop too much, and fell into the water; how I swam to the island; and how I got into the bog and did not know my way out of it. ‘Dan,’ says he, after a minute’s thought, ‘though it is very improper for you to get drunk on Lady-day, yet as you are a decent, sober man, who ‘tends mass well and never flings stones at me or mine, nor cries out after us in the fields—my life for yours,’ says he; ‘so get up on my back, and grip me well for fear you’d fall off, and I’ll fly you out of the bog.’ ‘I am afraid,’ says I, ‘your honor’s making game of me; for who ever heard of riding horseback on an eagle before?’ ‘Pon the honor of a gentleman,’ says he, putting his right foot on his breast, ‘I am quite in earnest: and so now either take my offer or starve in the bog—besides, I see that your weight is sinking the stone.’

“It was true enough as he said, for I found the stone every minute going from under me. I had no choice; so thinks I to myself, faint heart never won fair lady, and this is fair persuadance. ‘I thank your honor,’ says I, ‘for the loan of your civility; and I’ll take your kind offer.’

“I therefore mounted upon the back of the eagle, and held him tight enough by the throat, and up he flew in the air like a lark. Little I knew the trick he was going to serve me. Up—up—up, God knows how far up he flew. ‘Why then,’ said I to him— thinking he did not know the right road home—very civilly, because why? I was in his power entirely; ‘sir,’ says I, ‘please your honor’s glory, and with humble submission to your better judgment, if you’d fly down a bit, you’re now just over my cabin, and I could be put down there, and many thanks to your worship.’

“‘*Arrah*, Dan,’ said he, ‘do you think me a fool? Look down the next field, and don’t you see two men and a gun? By my word it would be no joke to be shot this way, to oblige a drunken blackguard that I picked up off of a *could* stone in a bog.’ ‘Bother you,’ said I to myself, but I did not speak out, for where was the use? Well, sir, up he kept flying, flying, and I asking him every minute to fly down, and all to no use. ‘Where in the world are you going, sir?’ says I to him. ‘Hold your tongue, Dan,’ says he: ‘mind your own business, and don’t be interfering with the business of other people.’ ‘Faith, this is my business, I think,’ says I. ‘Be quiet, Dan,’ says he: so I said no more.

“At last where should we come to, but to the moon itself. Now you can’t see it from this, but there is, or there was in my time, a reaping-hook sticking out of the side of the moon, this way (drawing the figure thus,  $\Omega$ , on the ground with the end of his stick).

“ ‘Dan,’ said the eagle, ‘I’m tired with this long fly; I had no notion ’twas so far.’ ‘And my lord, sir,’ said I, ‘who in the world *axed* you to fly so far—was it I? Did not I beg and pray and beseech you to stop half an hour ago?’ ‘There’s no use talking, Dan,’ said he; ‘I’m tired bad enough, so you must get off, and sit down on the moon until I rest myself.’ ‘Is it sit down on the moon?’ said I, ‘is it upon that little round thing, then? why, then, sure I’d fall off in a minute, and be *kilt* and spilt and smashed all to bits; you are a vile deceiver—so you are.’ ‘Not at all, Dan,’ said he; ‘you can catch fast hold of the reaping-hook that’s sticking out of the side of the moon, and ‘twill keep you up.’ ‘I won’t then,’ said I. ‘Maybe not,’ said he, quite quiet. ‘If you don’t, my man, I shall just give you a shake, and one slap of my wing, and send you down to the ground, where every bone in your body will be smashed as small as a drop of dew on a cabbage-leaf in the morning.’ ‘Why, then, I’m in a fine way,’ said I to myself, ‘ever to have come along with the likes of you;’ and so giving him a hearty curse in Irish, for fear he’d know what I said, I got off his back with a heavy heart, took hold of the reaping hook, and sat down upon the moon, and a mighty cold seat it was, I can tell you that.

“When he had me there fairly landed, he turned about on me, and said: ‘Good morning to you, Daniel O’Rourke,’ said he; ‘I think I’ve nicked you fairly now. You robbed my nest last year (’twas true enough for him, but how he found it out is hard to say), ‘and in return you are freely welcome to cool your heels dangling upon the moon like a cockthrow.’

“ ‘Is that all, and is this the way you leave me, you brute, you,’ says I. ‘You ugly, unnatural *baste*, and is this the way you serve me at last? Bad luck to yourself, with your hook’d nose, and to all your breed, you blackguard.’ ’Twas all to no manner of use; he spread out his great big wings, burst out a-laughing, and flew away like lightning. I bawled after him to stop; but I might have called and bawled for ever, without his minding me. Away he went, and I never saw him from that day to this sorrow fly away with him! You may be sure I was in a disconsolate condition, and kept roaring out for the bare grief, when all at once a door opened right in the middle of the moon, creaking on its hinges as if it had not been opened for a month before, I suppose they never thought of greasing ’em, and out there walks—who do you think, but the man in the moon himself? I knew him by his bush.

“ ‘Good-morrow to you, Daniel O’Rourke,’ said he; ‘how do you do?’ ‘Very well, thank your honor,’ said I. ‘I hope your honor’s well.’ ‘What brought you here, Dan?’ said he. So I told him how I was a little overtaken in liquor at the master’s, and how I was cast on a dissolute island, and how I lost my way in the bog, and how the thief of an eagle promised to fly me out of it and how, instead of that, he had fled me up to the moon.

“ ‘Dan,’ said the man in the moon, taking a pinch of snuff when I was done, ‘you must not stay here.’ ‘Indeed, sir,’ says I, ‘’tis much against my will I’m here at all; but how am I to go back?’ ‘That’s your business,’ said he; ‘Dan, mine is to tell you that here you must not stay; so be off in less than no time.’ ‘I’m doing no harm,’ says I, ‘only holding on hard by the reaping-hook, lest I fall off.’ ‘That’s what you must not do, Dan,’ says he. ‘Pray, sir,’ say I, ‘may I ask how many you are in family, that you would not give a poor traveler lodging: I’m sure ’tis not so often you’re troubled with strangers coming to see you, for ’tis a long way.’ ‘I’m by myself, Dan,’ says he; ‘but you’d better let go the reaping-hook.’ ‘Faith, and with your leave,’ says I, ‘I’ll not let go the grip, and the more you bid me, the more I won’t let go;—so I will.’ ‘You had better, Dan,’ says he again. ‘why, then, my little fellow,’ says I, taking the whole weight of him with my eye from head to foot, ‘there are two words to that bargain; and I’ll not budge, but you may if you like.’ ‘We’ll see how that is to be,’ says he; and back he went, giving the door such a great bang after him (for it was plain he was huffed) that I thought the moon and all would fall down with it.

“Well, I was preparing myself to try strength with him, when back again he comes, with the kitchen cleaver in his hand, and, without saying a word, he gives two bangs to the handle of the reaping-hook that was keeping me up, and *whap!* it came in two. ‘Good-morning to you, Dan,’ says the spiteful little old blackguard, when he saw me cleanly falling down with a bit of the handle in my hand; I thank you for your visit and fair weather after you, Daniel.’ I had not time to make answer to him, for I was tumbling over and over and rolling and rolling, at the rate of a fox-hunt. ‘God help me!’ says I, ‘but this is a pretty pickle for a decent man to be seen in at this time of night: I am now sold fairly.’ The word was not out of my mouth when, *whiz!* what should fly by close to my ear but a flock of wild geese, all the way from my own bog of Ballyasheenogh, else how should they know *me*? The *ould* gander, who was their general, turning about his head, cried out to me, ‘Is that you, Dan?’ ‘The same,’ said I, not a bit daunted now at what he said, for I was by this time used to all kinds of *bedevilment*, and, besides, I knew him of *ould*. ‘Good-morrow to you,’ says he, ‘Daniel O’Rourke; how are you in health this morning?’ ‘Very well, sir,’ says I, ‘I thank you kindly,’ drawing my breath, for I was mightily in

want of some. 'I hope your honor's the same.' 'I think 'tis falling you are, Daniel,' says he. 'You may say that, sir,' says I. 'And where are you going all the way so fast?' said the gander. So I told him how I had taken the drop, and how I came on the island, and how I lost my way in the bog, and how the thief of an eagle flew me up to the moon, and how the man in the moon turned me out. 'Dan,' said he, 'I'll save you: put out your hand and catch me by the leg, and I'll fly you home.' 'Sweet is your hand in a pitcher of honey, my jewel,' says I, though all the time I thought within myself that I don't much trust you; but there was no help, so I caught the gander by the leg, and away I and the other geese flew after him fast as hops.

"We flew, and we flew, and we flew, until we came right over the wide ocean. I knew it well, for I saw Cape Clear to my right hand, sticking up out of the water. 'Ah, my lord,' said I to the goose, for I thought it best to keep a civil tongue in my head anyway, 'fly to land if you please.' 'It is impossible, you see, Dan'; said he, 'for a while, because you see we are going to Arabia.' 'To Arabia!' said I; 'that's surely some place in foreign parts, far away. Oh! Mr. Goose: why then, to be sure, I'm a man to be pitied among you.' 'Whist, whist, you fool,' said he, 'hold your tongue; I tell you Arabia is a very decent sort of place, as like West Carbery as one egg is like another, only there is a little more sand there.'

"Just as we were talking, a ship hove in sight, scudding so beautiful before the wind. 'Ah! then, sir,' said I, 'will you drop me on the ship, if you please?' 'We are not fair over it,' said he; 'if I dropped you now you would go splash into the sea.' 'I would not,' says I; 'I know better than that, for it is just clean under us, so let me drop now at once.'

" 'If you must, you must,' said he; 'there, take your way'; and he opened his claw, and faith he was right—sure enough I came down plump into the very bottom of the salt sea! Down to the very bottom I went, and I gave myself up then forever, when a whale walked up to me, scratching himself after his night's sleep, and looked me full in the face, and never the word did he say, but lifting up his tail, he splashed me all over again with the cold salt water till there wasn't a dry stitch upon my whole carcass! and I heard somebody saying—'twas a voice I knew, too—'Get up, you drunken brute, off o' that,' and with that I woke up and there was Judy with a tub full of water, which she was splashing all over me for, rest her soul! though she was a good wife, she never could bear to see me in drink, and had a bitter hand of her own.

" 'Get up,' said she again: 'and of all places in the parish would no place *sarve* your turn to lie down upon but under the *ould* walls of Carrigapooka? an *uneasy* resting I am sure you had of it.' And sure enough I had: for I was fairly bothered out of my senses with eagles, and men of the moons, and flying ganders, and whales, driving me through bogs, and up to the moon, and down to the bottom of the green ocean. If I was in drink ten times over, long would it be before I'd lie down in the same spot again, I know that."