CHAPTER XXI

MR. MANDERS was a man of such superb good humour that it was almost impossible for any one to quarrel with him. A good many people, moved to irritation in one way or another, had tried. They nearly always failed. Mr. Manders treated their scowls as a new and particularly excellent kind of joke, and insisted on becoming more and more friendly with them when they snubbed him. Major Thorne felt himself aggrieved by Mr. Manders' conduct in the police barrack on the night before the arrest. He determined to stand on his dignity and put the agent in his proper place. Mr. Manders met dignified coldness with an invitation to dinner.

"I'll give you a drop of the whisky you refused the other night," he said. "It's good stuff, no better."

"I fear," said Major Thorne, "that my duties——"

"Come now," said Mr. Manders, "you've got the whole committee of the League safely in gaol. There's nobody left worth arresting, unless you take Johnny Darcy and young Sheridan and a few of those boys."

Major Thorne was gratified by this allusion to the completeness of his capture. His manner softened a little. He smiled.

"I never saw a job of the sort done better," said Mr. Manders. "You had them by the leg before they knew you were after them. By the way, how is poor old Heverin? I hear you have him under police protection."

"It's really unnecessary," said Major Thorne, "quite unnecessary. The power of the League is broken in this district. But Heverin seemed to be a little nervous."

"If I were Heverin, I should be very nervous

indeed. You haven't captured Darcy and Sheridan yet, have you?"

"No. I don't consider men of that kind dangerous. Their leaders are gone."

"Ah!" Mr. Manders drawled the word. But what about the dinner? I'll ask Butler to meet you if you like, and we'll fight our battles over again."

Major Thorne was a little uneasy about Stephen Butler. There might be a difficulty in explaining, even to a sympathetic Chief Secretary, how it came that a man who was a landlord, a magistrate, and a Member of Parliament, had been placed under a species of arrest in a police barrack.

"I suppose," he said, "that Mr. Butler is very angry with me?"

"Furious I should think; but I haven't seen him since. But never mind. He'll simmer down all right in time. He's a good sort, and can see a joke. You were only taking a rise out of him, of course."

"Oh, ah, yes. A rise. Quite so."

Mr. Manders did not press his invitation to dinner. He went instead to call on Stephen Butler.

"Look here, Butler," he said. "I'm a sort of professional peacemaker. You know that, don't you?"

Stephen had not noticed the fact, and looked dubious.

"Well, I am," said Mr. Manders. "I don't set up to have any very lofty principles, but I always think it a nuisance when two people are stand-off with each other. It can't be pleasant for the men themselves, and it makes everybody else very uncomfortable."

"What are you driving at?"

"I want you to ask Thorne to dinner. Now, wait a minute." Stephen's frown threatened an instant and flat refusal. "Hear me out. The

man's an ass, I know; but he's really a well-intentioned kind of ass. After all, it's not his fault that he's an Englishman. He was born one you know, and never had any choice of his own. He has all the ridiculous notions that military Englishmen pick up; and of course he's a round man in a square hole for the job they've put him to. But he's here, and so far as I can see, he's likely to stop here for long enough. If you and he aren't on speaking terms it will be deuced awkward for me and for everybody else."

"His conduct towards me——"

"I know. But the man was as nervous as fiddle-strings that night. He thought he was engaged in preserving the British Empire at the time. I shouldn't wonder a bit if he kept screwing his courage up all the while by saying to himself that England expected every man to do his duty; or something about the honour of the flag. You can't hold a man responsible for his actions when he's in that frame of mind."

Stephen smiled, and Mr. Manders felt that his battle was half won.

"He's a lonely poor devil too. There he is, stuck in the police barrack with nobody to talk to, and most likely never a decent bite to eat. It's no wonder he gets morose and savage. You or I would be fit to arrest anybody—to put the handcuffs on little Carrie Hegarty herself—if we lived the kind of life he does."

"I don't suppose he'd come," said Stephen, "even if I did ask him."

"Come! He'd come jumping like a two-year-old if he got the chance. I can tell you he's in a deadly funk about the way he treated you. He knows he was in the wrong."

"Well," said Stephen, "I'll ask him to oblige you. But I'm not going to sit through an evening with him by myself. You'll have to come too."

"I will, of course."

"And I'll ask the Hegartys and the Dean. I'm

afraid Father Staunton is not well enough to go out at night."

"No use asking the Dean. He has a theory that he'd be shot if he put his nose out of doors after dark."

"Well, the Hegartys, then. I must have someone to keep us from talking about the state of the country."

"Carrie Hegarty will do that all right," said Mr. 'Manders. "I defy any man to talk sense if she's there."

The next time Mr. Manders met Major Thorne he heard that the invitation had been received and accepted.

"I felt I ought to go," said Major Thorne. "I wouldn't like Mr. Butler to think there was any ill-will on my part. He's a young man, and if he's wrong-headed now, I'm sure he'll learn sense later on. No doubt he means well, and, after all, he's a gentleman."

Mr. Manders chuckled. An unsolicited testimonial to the character of Stephen Butler of Dhulough from this immensely self-important half-pay officer struck him as an amusing thing.

It was with very little inclination for festivity that Stephen Butler prepared to entertain his guests. He believed, as Major Thorne did, that the Land League had been broken in Dhulough; but he felt that a terribly severe price had been paid for the victory. Between him and the people whom he loved there was a barrier raised. Friendship had become wholly impossible. He knew that nothing he could do or say would ever win their real confidence again; he was to be for the future an alien on his own land, the enemy of those to whom he wished nothing but well. He saw, too, that the political movement in which he had taken part had entered on a new phase. For a long time—perhaps longer than he had to live—the land struggle, which was in reality a war of class against class, would take the place

of the national movement to which he had devoted himself. There would be no room for him in the new Irish Party. Its driving force would not be the ideal of national independence nor the pure love for Ireland.

He was anxious also about Father Staunton. The old man was suffering for his excursion in the raw morning air. He had a severe attack of bronchitis, and the local doctor did not seem satisfied with his condition. Stephen realised that he had become very fond of the old priest now that there seemed a possibility of his death. He recollected long evenings spent by the fire in the library at Dhulough House and Father Staunton's pleasant talk of men and books. Walks by the shore of the lake in springtime and summer expeditions by boat to Rafferty's island, chance encounters and friendly greetings in the village street crowded to his recollection. He would have been better pleased if he had not undertaken to entertain Major Thorne and the Hegartys.

He braced himself to meet them. Mr. and Mrs. Hegarty were the first to arrive. The clergyman seemed, as he entered the room, to be even more absent-minded and less interested in his surroundings than usual. After shaking hands with Stephen, he stood listless and inattentive beside the fire. He did not speak at all. His eyes had a curious, vacant stare; but now and then he glanced round him quickly. When he did this his eyes were full of fear. It was as if he expected to see some terrible thing approaching him, as if he were sure that it would come, but did not know when and from what direction to look for it. Stephen noticed these rapid turnings of Eugene Hegarty's head, and the strange, terrified look in his eyes. It was impossible to avoid noticing them, for at other times the man stood very still and his face was expressionless.

Mrs. Hegarty was aggressively cheerful and talkative. Perhaps she was aware of her husband's mood, and wished to cover his strange behaviour. Certainly she was entirely pleased with herself, that is to say, with her own appearance. She had a new dress of a bright blue colour. She had bought it a few weeks before in a Dublin shop, and was assured that it was highly fashionable in shape and trimming. Round her neck, on a thin chain, hung a large gold locket—her most cherished ornament. A Latin cross, a symbol which looked strange on Mrs. Hegarty's plump flesh, stood in high relief on one side of the locket. The other side, the side not exposed to view, had a glass panel, underneath which was a lock of grey hair, her mother's. Her arms were bare up to her shoulders. On one of them she wore a broad gold bracelet, a thing with a protruding hinge and an inefficient clasp. Round the other, for want of a second bracelet, she had bound a strip of light blue velvet, not unlike a garter in appearance, which was fastened with a buckle of shiny paste brilliants. She had a pair of white kid gloves, which she carried in her hand but did not put on, because, in spite of much rubbing with bread crumbs, they looked better folded up. With the gloves she carried a fan, made principally of pink feathers. She would have been glad if the feathers had been blue, like the dress and the velvet band, but they were pink, and she would not on that account deprive herself of the dignity of carrying a fan. Tied into the ring of the fan, so that it would have been very difficult to release it for any useful purpose, was a tiny blue pocket-handkerchief. Her yellow hair was coiled and piled upon her head, so that it added inches to her height. It was stuck through with immensely thick brass hairpins, parts of which glistened on the surface of the coils and reflected little points of light when she moved her head. Her great blue eyes

shone with anticipation of pleasure. She was all smiles and animation.

"Do you remember," she said to Stephen, "that afternoon at the rectory—oh, so long ago, wasn't it? Please don't count up how long ago —when I wanted to tell your fortune by your hand? I couldn't do it a bit, and Mr. Manders made fun of me, and I think you were a little bit cross. I didn't understand it then, but I've learned a lot since. Oh, quite a lot. I've studied, you know, really studied. When I was up in Dublin last month—I think all those things are so interesting—palmistry and clairvoyance and mesmerism and crystal-gazing and everything that isn't quite common. I hope you believe in them all, Mr. Butler. I'm sure you do, don't you?"

Stephen was watching Eugene Hegarty. He had just caught one of the curious, frightened glances which the man shot round him. He wondered what cause there was for fear.

"Of course I do," he said.

"I'm so glad. I knew you did. I could see it in your eyes. I can always tell by a man's eyes whether he has a soul, I mean that kind of soul. I was in Dublin last month, and while I was there——"

The door opened. Major Thorne and Mr. Manders came in together. There were greetings and introductions. Then Mrs. Hegarty, seating herself becomingly in a low chair, addressed Major Thorne—

"I was just telling Mr. Butler that when I was last in town"—she meant Dublin, but she half hoped that Major Thorne, an Englishman, would understand that she paid occasional visits to the larger metropolis—"I saw a wonderful thought-reading performance. A man, quite blindfold, held my hand and found a pin."

"That," said Mr. Manders, who stood near her, "is the most useful conjuring trick I ever

heard of. I can't find pins when I want them with my eyes open."

"But it's not a trick," said Mrs. Hegarty. "That's just the point. It's done by animal magnetism. I got a lesson afterwards from the man himself, and he said I was an excellent subject—medium, I mean. He did, really. But you're laughing at me, Major Thorne. It's very unkind of you."

"Nothing would induce me to laugh," said Major Thorne. "When I was in India I saw a conjurer—we were stationed in the hills at the time, I remember. It was in '76 or '77, and we had been sent up from Delhi——"

The story threatened to be a long one. Major Thorne's stories frequently were. No man was more sparing of words or prompter in coming to the point than he was when there was work on hand, the capturing of bullocks, suppression of Leagues, arresting of priests, or such things. But no man believed more thoroughly in his own power of being entertaining when there was no business to be done. Mr. Manders had some experience of the Major's stories. He turned to Stephen Butler.

"I wish you'd been with us just now," he said. "You'd have seen the gallant Major jump. He thinks he's instilled a wholesome horror of the law into the people, but he's a little uneasy when he's driving in the dusk. Just as we were passing the lake at the back of your house we came on old Rafferty toddling up to see you. 'That fellow's a Fenian,' I said. 'I know him well.' I give you my word the Major had him covered with a revolver before you could have said knife. 'Good evening to you, Rafferty,' said I. 'Where are you going to at this time of the night?' It appeared he was coming up to see you. I turned him back. I thought you wouldn't want him here. Then he said he'd like to speak to me. I dare say we'll both have a visit from him to-morrow morning."

"I wonder what he wanted," said Stephen. "He often comes up here to see me; but I never knew him come at night."

Major Thorne was still pressing on with his story of the Indian Juggler, but Mrs. Hegarty's attention seemed to be wandering. Mr. Manders seized upon a pause of the narrative and broke in.

"I'll tell you what, Mrs. Hegarty. After dinner you shall find a pin for us. We'll have a regular séance. We'll put out all the lamps and tie Major Thorne down into a chair and stick a pin into him. Then you will be brought in blindfolded to find the pin. If you can't do it at first we'll go on sticking pins into him until his shrieks attract you. Listen to this, Butler."

Stephen was again watching Eugene Hegarty, and again wondering at the recurrent spasms of fear which seized the man. He turned at the sound of Mr. Manders' address.

"Listen to this, Butler. Mrs. Hegarty has been taking lessons in mesmerism, and after dinner she's going to get you and Major Thorne into her power. She says she'll make you stand quite rigid on one leg each while I hold lighted matches to the tips of your fingers and you won't feel anything."

Mrs. Hegarty shook her fan at him while he spoke till the pink feathers quivered violently, and small fragments of them broke off and floated in the air.

"I never said anything of the sort. I can't mesmerise people. I do wish I could. I only said that after dinner I'd find a pin, if you all liked."

"Have you lost one?" asked Stephen.

A burst of laughter greeted his inquiry. Then dinner was announced. Stephen took the delighted Mrs. Hegarty into the dining-room. Major Thorne followed. Mr. Manders took Eugene Hegarty by the arm and led him after the others.

"If I didn't know you were a strict teetotaler, Hegarty, I'd say you'd been drinking pretty heavily. You're all on the jump, and you look as if you were seeing things that aren't here; you know what I mean?"

"I—I—I don't know what's the matter with me. I'm not well. For the last two days I've been frightened—frightened of nothing—and the feeling is getting worse."

"Pull yourself together, man. Take a glass of Butler's champagne; it'll do you all the good in the world. You've nothing to be afraid about. There's not a man in the country would hurt you."

After dinner, Mr. Manders suggested that they should have some music. On his way from the dining-room to the drawing-room he had seen a small roll of music laid unobtrusively on the top of Eugene Hegarty's overcoat. He realised at once that it belonged to Mrs. Hegarty, and that she had come to the party prepared to sing. He was a man of kindly heart, and he was most anxious that each of Stephen's queer collection of guests should be pleased. Mrs. Hegarty would certainly enjoy herself if she was asked to sing.

"Butler," he said, "I hope your piano is in tune. I'm sure Mrs Hegarty will sing for us if you ask her. It seems years, Mrs. Hegarty, since I've heard one of your songs."

He fetched the music-roll from the hall. Major Thorne lit the candles at the piano, and stood prepared to turn over the pages of the music. Mrs. Hegarty made much show of resistance, and extracted a promise from Mr. Manders that he would sing after she had finished. Then she spread out a song before her and sat down.

In many works of fiction there are passages of a moving kind descriptive of heroines at pianos. The rooms in which they sit are dimly lighted; and there is an audience, sometimes a solitary and

amorous hero, sometimes several other people, all appreciative of music. On such occasions the lady begins by striking a few pathetic chords, and then drifts gradually into a dreamy German waltz, perhaps one of those composed by Strauss. She holds her audience spellbound, and very often the situation develops in an interesting way when she has finished. Mrs. Hegarty, who read a good deal of fiction and found great pleasure in the piano scenes, felt that the circumstances in which she was placed required romantic action. The room was dimly lighted. A warrior—a silent, strong man of action—stood beside her In the background were Stephen Butler and Mr Manders as well as her husband. She struck a succession of chords, some in the treble part of the piano, some in the bass. Then she attacked with determination the music on the page before her. She sang words about violets and a child's grave in a forgotten corner of a churchyard to a shamelessly sentimental tune. Major Thorne applauded heartily. It is to be presumed that he really enjoyed the song. If the men of his nation do not enjoy such songs, why are so many of them written in English? Mr. Manders, having winked first at Stephen Butler and then at Eugene Hegarty, also applauded. Mrs. Hegarty rose, fluttered and delighted, from her seat. She cast a glance of gratitude at Major Thorne and then approached Mr. Manders.

"Now we must have your song," she said; "shall I play your accompaniment for you? Where is your music?"

He beckoned to her with an air of great mystery. She followed him to an ill-lit corner of the great drawing-room. His face, his manner, and his silent beckoning filled her with intense curiosity.

"Mrs. Hegarty," he whispered, "I can only sing one song. You know what it is."

"Oh," she said, "surely more than one. I've

heard you sing I'm sure a dozen different songs."

This was quite true. Mr. Manders had a pleasant voice, and possessed a large and varied stock of songs.

"But there's only one that I can sing really well," he whispered again, "only one that I should care to sing after listening to you."

Mrs. Hegarty blushed.

"Why not sing it, then? I'll play your accompaniment for you."

"I don't know that it would be safe," he whispered mysteriously. "I don't mind for myself of course. I'm thinking of you."

"Safe!" gasped Mrs. Hegarty.

"Major Thorne, you know." Mr. Manders' voice became almost inaudible. "He's a government official. He might arrest us both."

"What is the song?" asked Mrs. Hegarty.

"'The West's Awake.' You remember how it goes? 'Sing, oh, hurrah! let England quake.' Would he stand that, do you think?"

"How silly you are! Of course he wouldn't mind. Nobody minds the words of a song."

"Well, if you're prepared to risk it, come along. I know there's a copy somewhere. Mr. Butler has a collection of all the rebel songs ever written."

Mrs. Hegarty played the accompaniment. Mr. Manders sang the words with spirit and effect. Stephen Butler, awakened to attentiveness, stirred in his chair. His hands tightened on the arms of it. Major Thorne fidgeted uneasily. He was not quite sure whether Mr. Manders was poking fun at him or not. He often found it difficult to appreciate Mr. Manders' peculiar humour. He was quite sure that he preferred the violets and the forsaken grave and the emotion stirred by the thought of the dead child. He did not care for this violent appeal to militant patriotism. In all probability, he reflected, Mr. Manders was

only making some obscure kind of joke. Still, the idea of England's quaking under any conceivable circumstances was not one which could, with any propriety, be treated in jest. There are many subjects which are quite proper for humorous treatment—drunken men, for instance, and mothers-in-law, and Irishmen. There are other subjects, such as the Decalogue and the British Empire, which cannot be joked about without gross indecency. Major Thorne, in his capacity of magistrate, was more or less responsible for both the Decalogue and the Empire. But he was charitable enough to suppose that the song must be meant to be funny. No sane man would sing such words in serious earnest. Mr. Manders' voice rose to an impassioned shout on the last notes, and Major Thorne drew himself up stiffly. He was an officer in the British army, and he meant to look the part. He offered no applause. It was in his opinion damned bad form to sing the song in his presence. Mr. Manders, quite unabashed, proposed the pin-hunt should begin.

"Have you got a pin, Butler? The time has now come for pursuing it. Do you prefer a black pin or a white one, Mrs. Hegarty? Major Thorne is sure to have one in the back of his tie. We'll take that. Now we'll put out the lamps."

"You needn't do that," said Mrs. Hegarty.

"Oh, yes we will. We must do the thing properly, or not at all. We'll have the curtains pulled back and let the moonlight stream in. There's nothing like moonlight on these occasions, and there's a good moon to-night. Out you go, Mrs. Hegarty; out into the passage till I've hid the pin. Then I'll come and blindfold you."

He pushed her from the room and closed the door.

"Now, Butler, wake up man and put out the lamps. We mustn't keep the lady waiting.

Hegarty, you pull back the curtains of the near window. Don't sit there as if you were looking at your own ghost. There, that will do. The light from one window will be enough. Let's have some darkness too. It's more mysterious. You sit here in the shadow, Major Thorne. There really is a pin in the back of your collar, isn't there? All right, leave it there. Now is everybody ready?"

He opened the door and led in Mrs Hegarty, blindfolded with a large silk pocket-handkerchief. She placed the fingers of one hand on his pulse. With her other hand she pressed her own forehead. For a moment she stood quite still. Then she made a short rush, dragging Mr. Manders after her. She charged into the piano.

"Cold," said Mr. Manders, "and getting colder."

"Don't say that," she said. "This isn't a silly game. It's really serious."

Again she paused. Then, perhaps a little sore after her collision with the piano, stepped very cautiously across the room and laid her hand upon her husband's head.

"I forgot to mention," said Mr. Manders "that it wasn't a hairpin we hid."

"I don't believe," said Mrs. Hegarty, 'that you're thinking a bit about where the pin is."

"I'm not," said Mr. Manders candidly. "I didn't know I had to. I was thinking how unpleasant it would have been for Mr. Hegarty if we'd hidden the pin in his scalp."

Mrs. Hegarty stamped her foot.

"Of course you must think of where the pin is. How can I read your thoughts if you're not thinking of what I want to know?"

"You can't, of course; stupid of me not to have understood that sooner. Never mind. I'm thinking now."

"Think hard."

"My mind," said Mr. Manders, "is fixed on the pin. Earth at this moment holds nothing for me except the pin. But it's very exhausting. I wish I had let Major Thorne do this part of the business. He's used to concentrating his thoughts and I'm not."

"It's much more exhausting for me," said Mrs. Hegarty. "Please think."

Mr. Manders' face assumed a fixed and rigid expression. He began towing Mrs. Hegarty slowly across the room towards Major Thorne. He firmly checked an attempt at an independent expedition which would have led into the fireplace. He guided her successfully to within a foot of Major Thorne's chair.

"You've almost got it now," he said.

Mrs. Hegarty tore the bandage off her eyes.

"You're too bad," she said. "I won't try any more with you. You won't do anything right."

"I'm very sorry," said Mr. Manders. "I really am sorry, and I was doing my dead best all the time."

"Well, then, all I can say is that you're certainly not a medium."

"I'm not. I always feared I wasn't. But I may improve with practice. We'll try again some day, Mrs. Hegarty, when there's nobody else there. Suppose you have a turn now with Major Thorne. I shouldn't a bit wonder if he turned out to be an excellent medium."

The door opened and the servant announced that Mr. Manders' car was at the door.

"Dear me," said Stephen, roused to his duty as a host, "it can't be late yet. Stay a little longer and we'll hide something else, something bigger than a pin."

"I daren't keep the mare standing," said Mr. Manders. "She'd kick the car into smithereens if she got cold. I was just going to suggest that I should drive Mr. and Mrs Hegarty round

to the rectory. It would take me very little out of my way."

Mrs. Hegarty, reflecting on the indignity of having to put on her goloshes in the hall and pin up the blue skirt, accepted the offer.

CHAPTER XXII

MRS. HEGARTY draped a white woollen shawl over head and shoulders. Major Thorne and Mr. Manders muffled themselves with great-coats and scarfs, and helped themselves to cigars from the box which Stephen handed to them. Eugene Hegarty, who did not smoke and got into his coat quickly, opened the door and stood on the steps staring out at the sea.

To his left the avenue reached away in a wide half-circle towards the trees and the dark lake behind the house. It lay white in the moonlight. Before him and beyond the avenue was a long stretch of rough grass, white as if snow had fallen on it. One dark line only crossed its surface, the shadow of a low stone wall guarding the sunk fence which divided the lawn from the fields beyond, where cattle grazed. Below the grass of the lawn was the beach where Stephen had stumbled among the breaking waves on his first Sunday in Dhulough. Beyond that again was the sea, calm to-night and shining under the moon, but making a sullen moan. Far out, but clearly outlined by the ring of surf which never even in calm weather left its shores, lay Ilaun an Anama. The voices of the men in the hall, the scent of their tobacco, and the laughter of his wife reached Eugene Hegarty's ears as he stood gazing. But the words and laughter meant nothing to him. The fear, the vague, inexplicable terror which had haunted him before, seized him now with a paralysing grip. He could not turn his eyes away