

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 paralyzing grip. He could not turn his eyes away

from the lonely stretch of land and water before him. He trembled and sweated with a horror which he could not fight against.

Stephen Butler came out of the door and greeted Mr. Manders' groom who stood beside his horse's head.

"It's a fine night, Thomas, but cold. Ah! You've put the rug over the mare. That's right. Mr. Manders was afraid she might get chilly."

"It's herself would be making the ructions' if she did, sir. That's the one he bought from Lord Daintree's man as a two-year-old, and she never had a strap nor harness on her till I put her under the car six months ago. But, sure, she's a fine stepper."

"Well, you'll have to be careful tonight. You're taking a lady along with you."

"Never fear, your honour; she has as sweet a mouth and as tender as the lady herself."

"Come along, Mrs. Hegarty," said Mr. Manders. "You and I will sit on the near side of the car and put your husband and the Major on the other. That will be the best division of the party. I'm the heaviest man of the three. You and I will weigh down the other two nicely."

Mrs. Hegarty stood beside him.

"Oh," she said, "I've forgotten my music. I think I must have left it in the drawing-room."

Major Thorne, who had not yet left the house, turned and went back for the music.

"Now then, Hegarty," said Mr. Manders, "up with you on the far side and get the rug ready. The Major will be round with you in a minute. Hold the mare steady, Tom, till Mrs. Hegarty gets up."

He stepped forward, holding out his hand for Mrs. Hegarty to grasp.

"Hullo!" he said, "I forgot. There's my rifle on the seat. You wouldn't be very comfortable sitting on that, would you, Mrs. Hegarty?"

He took the rifle from the car, slipped the

waterproof cover off it, and held it out to Stephen, who was still standing on the doorstep.

"A Winchester repeater," he said. "A neat weapon. There's eight cartridges ready for use this minute. I've nothing to do but pull this handle to put a fresh one into place ready for firing."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Hegarty. "How horrid! Please be careful. I wish you wouldn't take it on the car with me when it's loaded. Suppose the horse was to shy and it went off?"

"Unless the horse shies so as to get his hind leg against the trigger it won't go off, Mrs. Hegarty, without my wanting it to."

"Promise me faithfully that it won't," she said.

Major Thorne appeared in the hall with the roll of music in his hand.

"Mr. Butler," he said, "may I have another of your cigars to see me home?"

"Yes, do. Help yourself," said Stephen. "The box is there on the table."

Mr. Manders took the rifle from Stephen and began to wrap it again in its cover.

"Major Thorne says the district's quiet," he said, "but I'd as soon have this with me as not. It inspires confidence. Come along now, Mrs. Hegarty. Up with you."

Major Thorne came out of the door and stood between Stephen and Mrs. Hegarty.

"I've got the music," he said. "It was just where you left it——"

Mrs. Hegarty turned to take it from him. Suddenly she flung up her arms and collapsed, crumpled up on the ground.

At the same moment a shot rang out clearly through the still air. Major Thorne sprang forward instantly, dropping the music and thrusting his hand into the pocket of his coat. Stephen saw Mrs. Hegarty's hands twitch once or twice in a curious, spasmodic way. Then he felt a pain, like that of a sharp blow on his right side near

his shoulder. He heard a second shot; felt his arm grow quite numb and then acutely painful; realised that he was becoming giddy and leaned back for support against the doorpost, clutching it with his left hand to save himself from falling.

Major Thorne, with his revolver in his hand, rushed into the middle of the gravel sweep.

"There they are!" he shouted. "They're running from behind the wall. There are two of them. They are making for the trees by the lake. Fire, Manders, fire!"

He blazed away with his own revolver as he spoke. The shots followed each other rapidly till he had to stop to reload. Then, when the revolver had ceased crackling for a moment; there was a louder report. Mr. Manders had fired his rifle. The two men, clearly to be seen in the moonlight, still ran steadily towards the belt of trees which stood round the lake.

"Damn it," said Mr. Manders, "I've missed! For God's sake, Thorne, don't start shooting off that pop-gun of yours again! They are far out of your range. And don't shout at me. I see the devils as well as you do, and I'm doing my best. Tom, pull the mare out of that and get clear."

"Quick!" said Major Thorne. "What the hell are you waiting for? They'll get to cover if you don't fire."

A few paces away from the door of the house, just in front of the corner of the bottom step, was a large stone block about three feet high. Long ago it had been placed there as a help to the old Stephen Butler when he grew stiff and found mounting his horse a difficulty. Mr. Manders sat down behind it with his legs curled up under him. He leaned his rifle on it. The foremost runner was within twenty yards of the trees. There was a moment of tense silence, then Mr. Manders fired, the runner stumbled, fell, struggled to rise, and

fell again. A second and a third shot followed in quick succession. The other runner reached the trees and disappeared.

"Missed him, by God!" he said. "But I winged one. That's not bad shooting considering the light. And he's not dead. I'm glad he's not dead, for I want to see him hanged. He's crawling on. Come along, Thorne, we'll go and gather him up."

He got up on his feet and looked round. Major Thorne and Eugene Hegarty were kneeling together over Mrs. Hegarty's body.

"Very well," said Mr. Manders; "you stay there. I'll bag the ruffian. Just give me your revolver, will you, Thorne? The other fellow may be waiting to take a shot at me from behind the trees. The revolver may be handy at close quarters. I'll get him too if he's there."

Major Thorne handed over his revolver without a word and bent over Mrs. Hegarty. She lay just as she had fallen first, dead. Her husband held one of her hands against his lips. He was dazed, speechless, helpless. Major Thorne gently disengaged his hold on the hand and stretched the body out reverently. On the bodice of the blue dress there was a single stain of blood. She had been shot through the heart. Eugene Hegarty, without speaking a word, began to stroke the bare arm which lay beside him on the gravel, at first with his two hands, then, bending low over it, with his lips.

The servants, a frightened crowd of men and maids, stood in the hall peering out. Major Thorne stood up and called to them.

"Carry her in," he said.

Then he turned to Stephen Butler, who was still leaning against the doorpost struggling with unconsciousness.

"My God!" said Major Thorne. "You're hit too, and badly hit."

The fact was obvious. Stephen's coat and shirt

front were soaked with blood. Major Thorne put his arm round him and led him to the door. Two of the maids and Stephen's butler passed them, carrying the dead body. Mr. Hegarty followed, still silent.

"Who is that?" asked Stephen feebly. "Is she dead?"

Major Thorne did not answer him. He turned to Mr. Manders' groom.

"Drive like hell," he said, "for the nearest doctor, and on your way stop at the police barrack and send up the sergeant and four men. Don't lose a minute. Can you walk a bit further?" he said to Stephen. "I want to get you up to bed. Steady now. Lean on me. I'll keep my arm round you. Here, you," he called to a maid, who still lingered in the hall, "where's Mr. Butler's bedroom? Light candles, lamps, anything, and show me the way."

"No," said Stephen feebly, "let me stay here in the hall for a while. I'll be all right in a few minutes, and there may be things to be done that I must see after."

Major Thorne attempted no argument. He laid Stephen down on the floor.

"Fetch me pillows and cushions to put under him," he said to the maid, "and get the whisky off the sideboard in the dining-room."

Holding Stephen's head upon his knee, he began to cut away his clothes with his pocket-knife until he had the wound exposed. The maid returned, and with her the other servants. They carried cushions, pillows, and blankets. They were white-faced, desperately frightened, but ready to do the bidding of the one man in the house capable of giving orders.

"Good," said Major Thorne. "Now fetch an old sheet, old linen of any sort, and tear it into strips. I'm afraid this is serious, and I must get the bleeding stopped at once."

He held a glass of whisky to Stephen's lips.

A faint colour returned to his cheeks as he drank the spirit.

There was a noise of heavy treading on the gravel outside. The door was pushed open and Mr. Manders entered the hall carrying a man in his arms.

"I've got him, Thorne," he said as he entered. "It's a good job he's light for I had to carry him the whole way. He couldn't walk a step. My God, Butler, are you hit? And where's Mrs. Hegarty?"

"Dead," said Major Thorne; "shot through the heart."

Mr. Manders laid the man he was carrying dowl on the floor. He spoke no single word of sorrow, amazement or horror. He stood staring at the man, his prisoner, who lay below him, with an expression of hatred in his face. His lips parted slightly and drew out into a grin behind which his teeth gleamed. The two figures were strongly contrasted. On the floor huddled up was a thin, almost emaciated boy in ragged clothes. His hands were clenched in the effort to bear pain without moaning. His face was contorted with pain, but his eyes were clear. They looked straight at Mr. Manders who stood above him. They expressed neither hatred nor fear, nothing but a kind of sorrowful amazement. Mr. Manders, strong, vigorous, and upright, was plainly well fed, was well dressed and well cared for. He stood there a type of those to whom the world gives rulership and its good things. He glared down at the wounded boy and then said slowly, speaking his words through his clenched teeth with extraordinary malevolence—

"You will be hanged by the neck until you are dead. Afterwards, you will burn in the eternal torture of hell, damned—damned—damned!"

Then he turned and passed through the door into the open air. He stood white and grim in the moonlight. The grin on his face disappeared,

and in its place came an expression of vindictive determination. It was likely that the man who had escaped would be pursued with relentless energy, would be caught, if it lay in Mr. Manders' power to catch him. It was curious that he left the care of Stephen Eutler entirely to Major Thorne. His affection for Stephen, and it was a real affection, focussed itself to a single desire for vengeance so absorbing that there was no room left in his mind for a wish to tend or help.

"Manders," said Stephen feebly, "who is he?"

He got no answer. Major Thorne, busy bandaging the wound, took no notice of the question. Mr. Manders was gone. Stephen raised himself with a struggle on the elbow of his uninjured arm and looked at the man who lay in a corner of the hall.

"Sheridan!" he cried. Then he sank back moaning and crying in a pitiful way. "Why did you do it? Oh, why did you do it?"

A voice stronger than his, though feeble too, came to him across the hall.

"Mr. Butler, your honour, Mr. Butler, listen to me. Sure you'll believe me now. It wasn't you we wanted. The God above us knows it wasn't you. The blood's running from me now, but I'd give every drop of it and every drop that's left in my heart along with that to save yourself from ache or pain or wound. There was love on my people for your people in the old days, and there's love on us for you to-day. There isn't one but loves you. I told you, the day you took me by the hand in the agent's office—I told you there'd be bad work, but God knows I never thought it would have been like this. I'll go a happy man to the gallows that's waiting for me if so be that it's the will of God for me to hear of yourself being well and strong before my time comes. And, your honour, Mr. Butler, if it's what he said that's for me after; if it's hell

itself——” He stopped for a moment, choked by a sudden sob, “I’ll be able to bear it, and worse itself, if there is worse, only I’d like to think that you won’t be cursing us. You know the way it was with us. We were driven till there was no road for us to go but a bad one. It never was you we wanted, but only the stranger that came here among us to do us harm.”

Major Thorne finished his work on Stephen’s shoulder, and crossed over to where Sheridan lay.

“Lie still, my man, lie still,” he said, “and let me see what I can do for you.”

It was a witness to the extraordinary strength of the instinct for duty which has made the best Englishmen the great men they are that Major Thorne should have knelt down beside this man, and set to work at his wound with the same cool skill and the same tenderness with which he had treated Stephen Butler. He neither remembered that the man was destined to be hanged nor that his own life had been the one desired. He recognised simply that it was his duty to stay the bleeding, and bind up the wound as best he could.

“Come here and help me,” he said to the butler who stood near.

The man hesitated. Sheridan’s thigh, ploughed by Mr. Manders’ bullet, lay bare, a ghastly sight. Then Eugene Hegarty stepped forward and knelt down beside Major Thorne.

“Let me help you,” he said.

He had come down from the room where his dead wife lay, and he offered to give his help to Major Thorne in binding up the wound of the man who had killed her.

“Very well. Put your arm under him and raise him slightly. That’s right. Now, lift. What’s that you’re saying?”

“Nothing,” said Eugene Hegarty. “I didn’t speak.”

In fact his lips, without his knowing it, had let words escape.

"Father," he muttered, as he slipped his arm under Sheridan, "forgive them, for they know not what they do."

CHAPTER XXIII

BEFORE she went into the hospital to be trained as a nurse, Miss Mary Lewis was a sentimental young woman with a taste for writing letters and reading those poems of Tennyson's which deal with domestic life. Her training developed an unexpected resourcefulness and competence in her, and endowed her with an effusively cheerful manner. She was fully convinced that an effervescence of high spirits in a nurse made for the health of a patient. When she was sent down to Galway to take charge of Stephen Butler, she brought with her to the grim Dhulough a gaiety of the most infectiously sanitary kind.

She entered the sick-room smiling.

"I've good news for you to-day," she said. "The doctor says you may sit up for a couple of hours this afternoon."

Stephen looked at her eagerly.

"May I have a visitor?"

Nurse Lewis was a young woman, younger by several years than Stephen was, but she had acquired a capacity for motherly authority. She smiled again, and shook a finger at him.

"You mustn't be wanting too much all at once. We must creep, you know, before we walk. You'll have to keep quiet for a little while yet. Is there anybody in particular that you want to see?"

"Mr. Manders, my agent."

"But you mustn't think of business. He'll see after all your business for you. He was here this morning to inquire for you, and he told me to