

"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

say, if you asked any questions, that everything was going on all right, and that you weren't to bother yourself."

Stephen sighed. He had little strength and little courage for a pitched battle with this vigorous young woman, who ministered to him. And a struggle, if he ventured on one, would be most undignified. He had a suspicion that Nurse Lewis was quite capable of treating him as a naughty child.

"I should like," he said, later in the day when she had him swathed and helpless in a large chair before the fire, "to look out at the sea."

The sun was shining brilliantly through the west windows of the house. It did not seem to Nurse Lewis that any harm could come of indulging Stephen's fancy. She wheeled his chair over to the window, and wrapped an extra shawl round his shoulders.

"Now," she said, "you're nice and comfortable. Would you like me to read to you? No, you mustn't have the newspapers. You know what the doctor said about them."

Doctors, who are benevolent and wise, generally refuse a sick man anything that he really wants. Stephen wanted newspapers. He desired very much to know what was going on in Ireland. Even a leading article in an English paper on the condition of Connacht would have been to him as cold water to a thirsty soul. Therefore his doctor forbade him to hear or read newspapers, and he was helpless. Mankind, having more or less got rid of the tyranny of the priest, who was supposed to know what was good for the soul, has submitted to the yoke of the medical man, who, with credentials no more reliable in reality than those of the Church, poses as an infallible authority on what is good for the body. No doubt when we have successfully rebelled against the doctors, inaugurated a kind of scientific Protestantism, we shall invite somebody else

to enslave us. Very likely our new owner will be the schoolmaster, and we shall spend our whole lives in passing examinations, believing that schoolmasters know what is good for our minds.

Stephen looked pathetically at Nurse Lewis. She smiled down at him with the greatest cheerfulness.

"Not the newspapers," she said. "Oh, certainly not. But a book? Shall I read out to you?"

While very weak Stephen had submitted to *The May Queen* and some heartrending verses about a child who was operated on in a hospital by a heartless doctor. He was not yet strong enough to insist on getting a newspaper or a visitor, but he felt equal to resisting another poem.

"No thank you," he said firmly; "I would rather be alone."

Nurse Lewis was not the least vexed by this curt dismissal. She set a small table beside his chair and placed a bell on it.

"Please ring," she said, "if you want me."

Then she left him.

Stephen could not yet realise or understand what happened on the night of his dinner-party. Certain facts were clear to him. He knew that Mrs. Hegarty was dead; that Sheridan was awaiting his trial for murder, and that he himself had been wounded; but these facts had come to him afterwards, as it were from outside. They were pieces of information which had somehow been conveyed to him. The scene itself and the parts which the different people had played in it were a confused memory, and no more; like the impression left in the morning by a very evil dream. It was all unreal, fantastic in its horror. Sitting before the window he tried, as he had tried more than once already, to recall the sequence of events, to arrange some ordered memory of what had happened. He failed as he had failed before, and after a little while gave up trying. He sat

quiet in his chair, not feeling much or thinking much, content to gaze out at the sea.

The sunlight sparkled brightly from the tops of the waves and shone, dazzling white, from the surf round Ilaun an Anama. It pleased him to picture the waves curling over towards the shore below the house, and to think how the light was shining green through their crests for the instant that they hung poised before breaking into bubbles and foam. He fancied that he could hear their crashing and the hollow roar of the stones rolled up and down against each other on the beach. He knew just how, further on at Thrawawn, where there was sand instead of stones, the waves, fringed with foam, rushed smoothly up and drew back in swirls, leaving long curved lines of quivering froth to mark the utmost of their achievement.

His eyes travelled back from Thrawawn, past the stony beach to the place where low rocks reached out, a long point, into the sea. The tide was at ebb, and the brown seaweed on the rocks lay uncovered to the sunlight and the breeze. There was a boy moving slowly about among the pools and the seaweed. He had a basket slung across his shoulder. Every now and then he lay flat, sometimes hanging over the edge of the sea, sometimes, above one of the deep pools which the receding tide had left. Afterwards, standing up, he would open his basket and drop something into it. Stephen knew well what he was doing. In the clefts of the rocks, under ledges and in the corners of the pools, large red crabs harboured at low tide. The fisherman used these for bait, putting the red pulp out of their backs on hooks and fastening it with threads of raw sheep's wool. The claws they smashed with stones, and threw them into the water as ground-bait before they fished. The boy was dragging the crabs from their holes. An hour or two later, at half-tide or thereabouts, he would go out with

his father, anchor the curragh with a large stoue and catch fish, bright-scaled gunners with bulging bellies, greeny black coal-fish, brown rock codlings, and plaice with white, gleaming undersides. Above the rocks hovered three gulls with outstretched wings. Sometimes they slid down the wind till they almost touched the sea. Then with slow, strong beatings of their wings they rose high again, slanted seaward against the breeze, swept in wide circles, lazily indifferent as it seemed to destination, but bent on satisfying themselves with exquisite, smooth motion.

Round the end of the point a boat came into sight. Two men were rowing her, and four others sat in the stern. She was heading out to sea, and made slow progress against the wind, the flowing tide and the waves. Stephen watched her plunging forward, saw the waves strike her and check her in her course, saw the occasional larger waves break into clouds of spray against her bow and drench the rowers' backs. He contrasted the slow progress of the boat, the continuous battling which was required to drive her on, the toil of her rowers, with the swift, easy gliding of the gulls through the air. The boat went as man goes towards his goal, with immense labour, much buffeting, and very slowly. The birds flew as man's thoughts fly, as his hopes fly. The comparison pleased Stephen for a while. Then he began to wonder what the boat was and where she was going. It struck him as strange that in this large boat, with room enough in her for the pulling of four oars, only two men out of six should row. Why did she carry four passengers? They could not be fishermen who sat idle in the stern. And where was she going? Her head pointed seawards, and there was nothing beyond her except Ilaun an Anama. Was she going to the island? What business could four men seated in the stern have with old Rafferty? Stephen became extremely curious

about this boat and the men in her. He turned to the table beside him, took the bell in his hand and rang it. Nurse Lewis came into the room.

"I am very sorry to trouble you," said Stephen, "but——"

"It's no trouble at all," said the nurse. "I should be very angry if you didn't ring for me directly you wanted anything."

"Thank you. Will you please get me my field glasses? They are in a brown leather case, and I think they are hanging upon a peg in the hall. If not, you will find them in the library at the back of my writing-table."

Nurse Lewis glanced out of the window. She had strict orders that Stephen was not to be allowed to excite himself in any way, but there seemed nothing in sight from the window which could excite even a child. There was a boat on the sea rowing slowly, and a boy prowling among the rocks. There were a few gulls hovering about. There was nothing else. She reflected that it might amuse her patient to watch the boy or the boat through his glasses. She fetched them, took them from their case, placed them on the table beside the bell and left the room again.

Stephen took the glasses in his left hand and adjusted the focus. They were large and heavy. It was difficult to manage them with one hand. It took him some time to screw them out to the point which suited his eyes, and then some time more, for his hand trembled a good deal, before he got the boat into his field of vision. He saw that the four men in the stern were policemen. They wore their helmets and their full uniform. They had their carbines propped, muzzles upward, between their knees. They had not gone out boating for pleasure or to fish. They were on duty of some kind. One of the rowers he did not know or could not recognise even with the glasses. The other was Johnny Darcy; half-

destitute, habitually drunken fisherman when Stephen knew him well, the prosperous-looking toady of Heverin afterwards, the hanger-on of the League, whom Mr. Manders had named along with Sheridan as one of the "boys" whom Major Thorne would have done well to arrest. The sight of this man rowing a body of police out to Ilaun an Anama filled Stephen with a vague uneasiness. It was a mere accident no doubt that Darcy had been hired for the work, but Stephen disliked and distrusted the man. He found it difficult to believe that an expedition guided by Darcy could be anything but evil. And why were the police going to the island? What business could they have with Rafferty? Stephen's vague uneasiness turned to fear. His hand trembled so much that it was impossible for him any longer to see through the glasses. He laid them down and sat still, trying to steady himself, resting his hand. He kept his eyes fixed on the boat. He saw her reach the familiar cove on the lee side of the island. The police left her. He could distinguish the four figures walking up the beach. They then disappeared from view. He saw Darcy and his companion standing in the boat. He guessed from their attitude that they were leaning on their oars and keeping the boat's head steady while they waited. Then after an interval there were figures on the beach again, a knot of men walking together, four of them or five. He took the glasses again, and with a great effort held them steady to his eyes.

There were five men on the beach. Four of them were the policemen he had seen leave the boat. The fifth was Rafferty. There was no mistaking the long white beard, the figure bent a little with age, the gait which seemed feeble in contrast with the striding of the strong young men around him. They reached the boat. Darcy and the other man pushed her close up against the shore. Two of the police climbed over the

bow, holding their carbines in their hands. It came to Rafferty's turn. He moved awkwardly and seemed to find a difficulty in boarding the boat. He did not use his hands. Stephen, now that the old man stood by himself, could see by the position of his arms that he was handcuffed. That was the reason of his awkwardness. The stern of the boat lifted slightly and fell on the waves. Rafferty, stepping cautiously aft, stumbled, and was almost pitched headlong. The two policemen who had entered the boat before him took him by the arm and pulled him to his seat. Then the other two policemen embarked. The boat was pushed out. Darcy stood up, stepped a mast and spread a brown lug sail, booming out the foot of it with an oar so that the boat ran fast before the wind.

Old Rafferty was a prisoner. He was in the hands of the police on his way to gaol. Stephen sat numb with amazement, watching the boat as she fled from the island. Then suddenly a thought struck him like a sharp pain. Rafferty was suspected of murdering Mrs. Hegarty and wounding him. There had been some monstrous blunder. There was not, there could not be, any evidence to connect Rafferty with the crime, but the fact was plain before his eyes. He saw the old man taken by the police.

Stephen dropped the glasses and rang his bell furiously. Nurse Lewis was at his side in a moment.

"Send at once for Mr. Manders," he said, "send a groom on horseback. Send to his house. If he isn't there let the groom find out where he is and follow him. I want to see him as soon as possible. There must be no delay. Do you understand? There must be no delay whatever."

Nurse Lewis looked at him anxiously. His eyes were very bright. His face was flushed. It was obvious to her that he was in a condition

of high excitement. She could not even guess what had happened to disturb him. But she wasted no time in speculating.

"You are getting feverish," she said. "You had better go back to bed at once."

Stephen stamped his foot impatiently. It was, under the circumstances, a curiously ineffective way of expressing strong feeling, for his legs and feet were swathed in blankets. He produced no more sound than a cat which jumps off a table, and the action, clothed and seated as he was, seemed ridiculous. He supplemented it with a command very angrily uttered—

"Do what I bid you and don't talk."

Nurse Lewis by way of reply laid her fingers on his pulse for a moment. Then she said—

"You ought not to see any one."

Stephen snatched his hand from her and rose unsteadily from his chair. He flung the shawl back from his shoulders and shook the encompassing blankets off his legs.

"If you won't send," he said, "I shall go for him myself. I tell you I must see him."

He couldn't possibly have gone. He couldn't, as Nurse Lewis knew very well, have got as far as the head of the stairs by himself. But she was a wise woman, and, for one of her years, had a good deal of experience. She decided that bad as it might be for Stephen to talk to Mr. Manders it would certainly be worse for him to engage in a physical conflict with her. She proposed a compromise.

"Very well; I'll send for him if you will go back to bed. Unless you keep quiet you won't be able to speak to him when he comes."

For an hour Stephen tossed and turned in his bed. Nurse Lewis, even without the aid of her clinical thermometer, could tell that he was becoming more and more feverish. She knew that a long illness, perhaps death, would be the penalty of this excitement. She was perfectly

helpless, unable to guess what had caused the sudden change in her patient's condition; she could do nothing to calm him. She had bidden the groom who rode for Mr. Manders, fetch the doctor too. She heartily wished that one or other of them would arrive.

There was a noise of wheels on the gravel outside the house. For all Nurse Lewis's anxiety and expectation it was Stephen who heard it first. He suddenly lay quite still.

"Is that Manders?" he asked.

"I will go and see."

She met Mr. Manders in the hall.

"I don't like the way he is," she said.

Something has excited him. He seemed to be getting on very well this morning, and I left him sitting up in a chair. He rang for me, and when I went to him I found him feverish. Something must have happened while I was out of the room. I don't know what it was. He insisted on my sending for you at once. I had to give in to him. But please be very careful. In his condition a feverish attack may be most dangerous."

She led the way upstairs while she talked, and opened the door of the bedroom for Mr. Manders.

"Shall I stay?" she asked.

"It seems rude to say no, and of course, Nurse, I should be delighted to have you with us; a couple of bachelors are always the better for a lady's company, but——"

Nurse Lewis frowned and left the room. On other occasions she was not averse to listening to Mr. Manders' compliments. She liked the appreciation of her pretty face which she saw in his eyes. Now she was frightened and anxious. She had little inclination to flirt. Mr. Manders looked at her in mild astonishment as she flounced away. Then he advanced into the room.

"Well, Butler, old man, how are you? You look rather a wreck, I must say. When a man

hasn't had a shave for a week or ten days his appearance is apt to be highly disreputable."

Stephen lay on the bed, staring with wide, unblinking eyes. Either he did not at once recognise his visitor, or he found some difficulty in speaking. He muttered some words rapidly. Mr. Manders did not hear them. He went on speaking cheerfully.

"I declare to goodness I think you have the best of it up here. I shouldn't mind lying up for a week myself, if I could make sure of a good-looking young woman like that nurse of yours to look after me. Quite worth while getting a bullet through your lung, eh, Butler?"

"Rafferty," said Stephen, "old Rafferty."

Mr. Manders grew suddenly serious. He guessed what was troubling Stephen, though how the news of the arrest had reached him he could not tell. He recollected the nurse's warning. He felt that he was on dangerous ground. How he could speak about Rafferty without exciting Stephen he did not know.

"Rafferty's all right," he said weakly.

Stephen broke out furiously—

"Rafferty's not all right. How dare you stand there and tell me that he is? I won't be treated like a baby and put off with lies. Tell me the truth. Do you hear? Tell me the truth, or I'll go myself and find it out from some one who will tell me. Damn you, Manders, damn you! How can you stand there with a smile on your face and say Rafferty's all right, when you know that the police have him arrested?"

Then suddenly his tone changed. His anger seemed to die away. He spoke pleadingly—

"Manders, I've always trusted you. I've liked you. You'll not go back on me now? Tell me the truth. I'm weak, Manders, desperately weak, and I can't stand much suspense. Believe me, I'll be worse and not better if you keep the truth from me."

Mr. Manders saw that it would be better to tell the truth, and he did not hesitate to tell it frankly and completely.

"Rafferty has been arrested," he said, "on the charge of being concerned in the murder of Mrs. Hegarty and the attempt on your life. Wait," he said, for Stephen had started up in his bed, "Early in the evening on which the murder was committed Rafferty rowed ashore. I saw him on his way up here at half-past seven, and he made a lame excuse about going to see you when I spoke to him. No one knows where he spent the rest of the evening. The police saw his boat on the beach at eleven o'clock. He didn't go back to his island till after that. An old rifle was picked up in the sunk fence behind the wall where the shots were fired. It was Rafferty's rifle. We've got proof of that. And it wasn't the rifle Sheridan used. That was found on the spot where he fell. This one was dropped by the other fellow, the one I didn't hit. Both rifles had been fired. Listen to me now, Butler, like a good man. Rafferty has a bad record. He was in gaol in the Fenian times, and everybody knows that the Fenians are at the bottom of all this shooting that's going on now. I put it to you as a sensible man, what could we do but arrest him?"

"He didn't do it," said Stephen. "He'd neither hand, act, nor part in it. I swear to you Manders, he couldn't do it. He'd no more do it than you would. You must get him off, Manders. You must let him go again. I tell you you must."

Mr. Manders' face became hard. His lips tightened.

"He'll have to stand his trial," he said, "along with Sheridan. He'll get a fair trial."

"Get him off," said Stephen. "He's an innocent man. If it was with my last breath I'd swear he was innocent. You must get him off. Do you hear me?"

Mr. Manders crossed the room and rang the bell. It was evident that Stephen was working himself up to a dangerous pitch of excitement. The nurse entered.

"Go away," said Stephen. "I have something more to say to Mr. Manders. You must let me finish speaking."

The nurse came over to the bed and stood beside him.

"You must lie down," she said, "and keep quiet. You are making yourself very ill."

Stephen with a great effort mastered himself. He spoke calmly and collectedly.

"Manders."

"Yes; I'm listening."

"Get the best man in Ireland, the best man there is, for the defence. If I'm not dead I'll be at the trial and give evidence. Get Hegarty to give evidence. He knew old Rafferty. He'll know he's innocent. Get Staunton. He'll be well by that time, and he knew Rafferty. Get Sheridan. Sheridan will be hanged, I suppose. When the rope is round Sheridan's neck let him swear that Rafferty's innocent. They'll believe a man's oath when the rope is round his neck. Oh, save him somehow, Manders! Spend money, my money. I don't care how much you spend. They say money can do anything. The man's innocent, I tell you. As sure as there's a God in heaven, he's innocent."

The nurse slipped her arm round Stephen and gently forced him down to the bed. He went on speaking, but his words lost coherence. At last he burst into a flood of tears. The nurse nodded to Mr. Manders.

"Do what he tells you," she said; "it'll be a help to him when he's getting better to be told that everything he wished has been done."

Mr. Manders left the room. He had been sure when he entered it that old Rafferty was Sheridan's

companion on the night of the murder. He was less sure about it when he went away.

"I'll get the best man I can to defend him," he said "But I doubt if it will be a bit of use."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE doctor took the place of Mr. Manders at Stephen's bedside. He, like Nurse Lewis, was worried and irritated by the change in his patient. Next morning he came again and looked grave. He was anxious. He spoke of things which might happen or were happening, things with long names derived, as the names which doctors give to diseases often are, from Greek words. Later in the day he telegraphed to Galway for another doctor—a man with something more than a local reputation for skill and knowledge. He, in turn, said obscure words and, since Stephen Butler was a man of some importance, passed on the responsibility of giving the final decision. A very famous surgeon was sent for and came all the way from Dublin. He was a baronet, and Mr. Manders paid him a fee suited to his eminence in his profession and his station in life. In return he greatly gratified the first and second doctors by repeating their Greek words, and gave it as his opinion that Stephen Butler would not live. He turned out to be perfectly right. Stephen died.

They buried him in the vault where the dust of his father, his grandfather, and other remoter Butlers lay. Dean Ponsonby, for the second time in the course of three weeks, read the funeral service in the little churchyard of Dhulough. Mr. Manders, a smitten man, from whose eyes the laughter had departed, stood by and sprinkled the clay upon the coffin. The people of the two villages crowded to the funeral. With them came