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CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

'God save us!' said Flaherty; 'I suppose yees have all heard my case. Shure the gentleman is goin' to have our fires quinned on us.—I've had the notice ever since May last; but we niver thought it would come to that: well 'tis a hard thing to bear, and the place in the family for over forty-five years. It's not his father would thraite us in that way. He was the kind good man.'

'Well,' began Jim Connor, the old man who was the first spokesman on the evening in question; 'yees all know the e's a remedy; the law of powder and ball is mist for those as won't mind the laws of humanity. Now what would you say to civilising him a bit? I'll tell yees what it is: if we are to stand by and see ourselves ill-thratt in that manner, there'll be no end of it. There's Mother Whigh, down there, is raisin' the rints; and the poor craythurs have no ways even of payin' the ould rints, let alone the new ones.'

'Well,' responded Tom Flaherty, 'I would not like exactly to see a man tuk sudden; but shure when there's no help for it—well, Coonan, what do you say to it?'

'I got my notice too,' answered the last-named individual, 'and I am as much to be pitied as any one. I niver hurted any man alive; all that Square Wilcox has to say agin me—and, indeed, that is not thure either—was that my poor ould cow broke into his plantation three months ago, and the poor animal is dead since. Wisha God help us—indeed I'd be long sorry to do the like—but there's nobody I'd like to see better in his coffin than that same man.'

Here the men's conversation sunk into a whisper. Murogue's affair then came on the tapis. He had ten children, the eldest of them just thirteen, his wife had died six months before; he had been distrained for rent, which was only just due, and had not a single animal, piece of furniture, or sack of potatoes left. Compassion had been indeed felt for him by the neighbors; and the poor children had been as well cared for as could be; or, at least, they were kept from dying of want.'

'O God!' he exclaimed, 'tis fearful to see my childer actually dividing the potato-skins among them; and poor little Katie was out in the fields the other day, while the others were making the best meal they could out of what widow Malone had to give them. I found her lying on the grass sobbing as if her heart would break. 'Well, child,' said I, 'what's the matter now?' 'Father,' she said, 'I could not bear to see the others starvin', and tryin' to go out the pains of the hunger by makin' the little bit go as far as it could,—a-d shure, daddy, it could not go far—so I thought, maybe, if they had my share they would do better; so I thought, perhaps, God would take me to my mother; and I have come here in hopes I'd die.' I tuk up the poor little craythin in my arms and kissed her, and carried her into the house; the poor chud was as light as a feather; yees could feel the bones without any flesh upon them.'

Here Tom Connor interposed. 'What would yees say if we wrote him a bit o' a note now?—Who can write her?'

Will Collins, a good-looking young man, now stepped forward; and amidst exclamations he described the following on a leaf of paper torn out a prayer-book: 'Misther Wilcox, we warns you not to be after puttin' out our ould tinants as is to be put out; or if ye dus, not all the police in the barny will preserve ye. Take notice in time: prepar' as abuv', wit' 6 feet of ground to hold it. Signed, Molly Maguire.' On top, as is usual in such cases, was a coffin, drawn in the rudest possible manner.

Now came the subject of posting the letter. How was this to be done? The writer, however, was a brave fellow, and determined to do the business thoroughly; so he set off at the same hour to have the letter in before morning. There was this danger to apprehend: the letter would be surely remarked in the morning in so small and unimportant a post-office. Mr. Wilcox would, of course, on receipt of it, set every engine to work to discover the writer of the friendly warning. Then Collins might meet police on the way to the post. He therefore took every possible precaution on arriving near the place; looked up and down the small main street of Kilmoyle before posting the letter; seeing no one, he ventured to do the deed. He had not gone far when he met a friend, who carelessly asked him what he was doing so late. 'Was at a wake,' he replied, and passed on.

We must now describe to our readers Mr. Wilcox's residence—a large comfortable country-house, well furnished. A handsome avenue leads to the hall-door; fine plantations surround the place; the stable and outhouses present a most comfortable appearance; all are neatly arranged, so as to combine neatness, cleanliness, and good taste. There are servants innumerable in the house; numbers of gardeners are em-

ployed in the hothouses. In short, there is but one word necessary to explain everything—it was perfect.

On the morning after the events we have recounted, Mr. and Mrs. Wilcox were seated at breakfast in a luxurious breakfast-room; every want of human nature was lavishly supplied.—Mrs. Wilcox was well dressed—a handsome woman, in the prime of life. She looked very delicate; and many people said she was not happy with her husband. The post came in; several letters were handed to Mrs. Wilcox, and one to her spouse, who, however, was too much engaged with some rashers and poached eggs to take much notice of the post-bag.

'An invitation to the Lawson's,' said Mrs. Wilcox; 'Lady Mary has just returned from Paris, and wants us to spend a few days with her. Another invitation from the McArtens to dine on Friday next.'

'I won't go,' replied Mr. Wilcox. 'Why not?' answered his wife. 'We have not been any where for a long time; and my sister Frances, who cannot stop with us much longer might like the variety.'

'Hang your sister Frances! I don't care whether she likes it or not. I tell you, once for all I won't go; and there's an end of it.'

Mrs. Wilcox knew further argument was useless.

'What shall I say to Lady Mary?' asked Mrs. Wilcox.

'Stay; I should rather like to go there,' responded Mr. Wilcox; 'I should be out of the way when those evictions are going on; and yet it would perhaps be better not; they would say I was afraid; besides, I have business. No, I won't go.'

'But,' pleaded his wife, 'I should like it so much; you know she and I are old friends.'

'I can't help that,' answered her husband, in his roughest tones. 'Business is business, and it must be attended to; you ladies have no idea of all men have to do. Say no; and that's all about it.'

Poor Mrs. Wilcox bit her lip, and looked annoyed. She dared not say anything more.

'Here is a letter I have never opened,' continued Mr. Wilcox; 'I suppose it's a petition from some of those rille tenants. I tell you I'll not mind a word of their petitions; no, not if they were all to go down on their bare-knees to me, or that they dropped from starvation before my face. Why don't they go to the poor-house? We are heavily taxed for their support; and they won't take what is there for them. The poor-house! a deuced dead too good for any of them! Now, Maria, note of your pity, if you please, for I won't stand that either. You should know your duty as a wife, and that is to submit. Not the least use saying anything for them.'

He now broke open the letter, and started when he saw the style of announcement it contained. He was, as the conspirators very fairly remarked, a coward; and his cheek became deadly pale as he read the warning. He had scarcely anticipated such, for he had relied too much on the terror he excited in the neighborhood. He imagined that no one would have dared to threaten him; but he was disappointed. Mrs. Wilcox soon perceived the state of discomfiture her husband was in, and asked him the cause. He threw the paper over to her.

'That is what the rascals are at,' he exclaimed; 'but I would like to see them attempt any thing of the kind.' He rang the bell, and desired the servant to send the constable to him immediately. 'The wretches!' he said, between his teeth; 'I'll make them suffer for this. They shall learn that I'm not to be provoked with impunity.' He trembled violently, though he endeavored to compose his exterior, for he would not even wish his wife to see how agitated he was. He was cowering within, but tried to make her believe that he was not afraid, only angry. 'The impudence of the wretches!' he continued; 'but they'll have the worst of it.'

The constable was not long in making his appearance, and he and Mr. Wilcox were closeted together for many hours, devising the best means for detecting the source whence the communication emanated, and also making arrangements for being better guarded for the future.—He was to have a large number of police always at command. He was of too obstinate a disposition to let his fears triumph over his determination. He had given notice to quit to these people, and not even the black gentleman himself would make him draw back; but he suffered dreadfully; perhaps really more than many of his tenants. If he walked in his garden, every bush or shadow was supposed to be a man. He started in his sleep constantly; and when awaking in the night always fancied some one was lurking in the room.

Diligent search was made for the writer of the letter; a large reward was offered; all in vain. No discovery was made. Mr. Wilcox never drove or walked without policemen; one sat on

his coach-box, another on the back seat. When on foot, one of them walked some distance in advance, so as to be on the look-out in case of any lurkers behind walls, hedges, or ditches;—another followed him; both were always well armed. Who can imagine happiness under such circumstances?

The winter wore away, however. The long dark days were passed; and Mr. Wilcox was beginning to feel peace again within his bosom, so long a stranger to any pleasurable sensation. The people were put out, as had been arranged, and such a scene of horror presented itself to the sight of the passers-by. The Sheriff and bailiffs proceeded to the domiciles of those under sentence. Every article of household furniture was ruthlessly thrown down outside the door; the fire was raked out; the poor children were sent out on the roadside almost naked; the mothers wailed piteously, and pressed their infants to their bosoms; the older ones clung to their mothers' sides, shivering with cold; the snow was fast falling around. The fathers looked defiantly on at the proceedings. The relieving-officer came up; and some—indeed most—of the people took refuge in the workhouse; some, however, who had friends in the neighborhood, sought a temporary shelter from them.

Time wore on, and Mr. Wilcox was beginning to feel more comfortable, and to triumph over some who had told him to beware, to take care of himself, and such-like friendly advice; and he began to be less anxious about the police being always with him.

CHAPTER V.

'Cal. Cæsar, I never stood on ceremonies, yet now they fright me. There is one within, besides the things that we have heard and seen, Accounts most horrid sighted seen by the watch. A lioness hath whelped in the streets; And graves have yawnd, and yielded up their dead; Fierce fiery warriors fight upon the clouds, In ranks and squadrons and right form of war, Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol; The noise of battle hurried in the air, Horse did neigh, and dying men did groan, And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets. O Cæsar, these things are beyond all use, And I do fear them.'

Julius Cæsar.

We must now revert to the shebeen house again, and see for a second time its begrimed walls, and the disagreeable company who frequented it. We must be again spectators of a scene similar to that which took place on the night we were first introduced to the party assembled in this not very delightful abode. The time Mr. Wilcox's ejections again are the subject of discussion. O'Flaherty and Coonan are among those present. This time it is not to compose a threatening letter; it is not to discuss the means of giving warning; but deadly revenge is their object—revenge in its fullest extent. They are there to discuss the best means to accomplish the murder of Mr. Wilcox. For nothing but the last drop of his heart's blood will satisfy them, now that they have worked themselves up to this horrible deed.—They are now discussing the means of escape when the deed is done; the arms to be used; who is the best person to perform the horrible act; the time, the opportunity, &c.

'Flaherty, will you do it?' said Tom Connor. 'You are not a bad shot. My son will go with you, and will take a second shot at the ruffin, if the first misses.'

'I don't mind,' answered Flaherty; 'but where's the gun to come from?'

'Oh, niver mind that, my boy; I've seen to that, and they'll be here to-morrow. The assizes come on on Tuesday. He'll be going to the grand jury. Now, I'll tell yees what. He will drive to town one way, and return the other, then's yer time. It's not in flesh and blood to go through what we do.'

Tuesday following was a drizzling foggy day, much to the satisfaction of the conspirators. It was early in February, and the trees were still bare, which was greatly to their disadvantage; for a friendly tree's shelter would have afforded more of a hiding place, than merely the few furze bushes which skirted the road from Clonfarron to Landfort—Mr. Wilcox's domain.

The two men arrived at the spot on the road which had been selected as the most appropriate spot for the murder to take place. What must have been their feelings during that wait—for it was a long one—as Mr. Wilcox was detained in the town much longer than was expected.—Hour after hour they waited, this deadly purpose in their minds. One or two other vehicles passed. They started up thinking it must be the long-expected one.

At this very time Mr. Wilcox was driving on within a short distance of them. He had been depressed and out of spirits the whole day. His wife, who had felt an unexplainable fear and dread of his leaving home that morning, had begged and implored to be allowed to accompany him on his drive; but he took some crotchets into his head, and refused. She was much attached to her husband, notwithstanding his

roughness and inattention to her wishes; and she found herself unable to take any interest in her usual avocations. Towards evening, when she found the hour approaching at which she expected Mr. Wilcox's arrival, she became so nervous, that she resolved to put on her bonnet and shawl, and walk to meet him. Just as she quitted the house she heard the sound of carriage wheels in the stable-yard; but her husband was not there. She inquired where he was.

'The master,' answered the coachman, 'was not quite well, and said he had a headache, and would like to walk. He got out of the carriage at the town forepost the furze, at the cross roads. We came back by Killbough road, and the master went to look at the works in the bog.'

At this moment a distant shot was heard. 'Who can that be?' inquired Mrs. Wilcox's starting.

'I don't know, ma'am,' answered the coachman, 'unless Misther O'Brien's keeper. He might be shooting something for the house.—Mr. O'Brien has a liking for game.'

Still Mrs. Wilcox was not satisfied. She trembled violently, and would have fallen, but for the friendly support of a gate-post. An undefined fear seemed to have taken possession of her, she could not tell why. As soon as her strength returned, she walked slowly down the avenue to the lodge, passed out on the road.—It was becoming dusk; in fact, darkness was spreading its mantle over the surrounding country; but still Mrs. Wilcox walked on. She thought two or three times she saw men lurking in corners, and shuddered. They were only shadows; and as she passed them she almost laughed at herself for feeling fear. She tried to banish the terror that had taken possession of her, and pleased herself by imagining the satisfaction her husband might perhaps feel when he would think of the walk she—a delicate woman—had taken in the night air on his account.

'He can't be cross to me to-night,' she said to herself; 'he must value my solicitude on his account.'—And Maria Wilcox's thoughts reverted to the first few happy weeks after their marriage, when the slightest little attention on her part was highly appreciated. How short-lived was all this! He had been fascinated by her youthful beauty, and his passion for her was as fleeting as it was strong for the moment. Fifteen long years had passed since then, without his ever bestowing on her one word of real affection. She began to wonder how it was she saw nothing of her husband; she thought, could it be possible he had gone home another way. However, her meditations were interrupted just as she came to the furze-bushes before indicated. Something that lay across the road caught in her feet, and she was thrown violently on the ground; for a moment she was stunned; but, on recovering herself, she perceived to her horror, that a human body was the impediment. She was frightened, and screamed violently; she thought that some one had fallen in a fit. She felt for the person's face; it was not yet cold; she felt the hands, and she started as her fingers encountered a well known rug—one she had given her husband on her wedding-day. She no longer doubted who lay there, but ran as fast as her legs could carry her to a neighboring cabin.—This cottage was close to the place where the unfortunate man had breathed his last; but when Mrs. Wilcox knocked at the door, the proprietor of the place seemed utterly astounded by the fact that any one was hurt so very near. He, however, took a candle in his hand, and proceeded, with Mrs. Wilcox, to the scene of the horrible tragedy.

'My husband has a fit?' she exclaimed; 'he has fallen. Do come quickly.'

They raised the corpse. 'Let me untie his cravat,' she said quickly; and there, kneeling on the wet road,—for, as we have already said, the day had been drizzling,—with no light save that of a rush-candle, Mrs. Wilcox untied her husband's shirt-collar, Pat Collins supporting the body. Her fingers could scarcely move so numb were they with cold and terror. She imprinted one kiss on his forehead; but something made her recoil; the touch was horrible. She undid his shirt; but oh, what a frightful sight met her eyes! The neck and shirt were covered with blood. She felt for the beating of his heart; there was none. 'He is dead!' she screamed, and fell back.

Several people now came up. Mr. Wilcox was laid on a door, and carried by two men to the house he had so lately quitted in full health and strength.

A car, in which a gentleman was passing at the time, was made use of for the purpose of conveying Mrs. Wilcox home. This gentleman was Fitz-James O'Brien: his property lay quite close to the Wilcox property. He was extremely intimate with the deceased, and had often warned him against the harsh measures he was pursuing; but uselessly; his remonstrances

were unheeded. He advised him to be lenient if not for others, at least for his own sake, and that of his wife and children; but Mr. Wilcox was, as we have remarked, a most obstinate individual.

Fitz-James O'Brien was determined to lose no time in trying to secure the assassins. He went off at once to the constabulary barracks, and there gave notice that the horrible event had taken place, and that no time must be lost in the efforts to discover the guilty. He urged upon the men the necessity of losing no time, sparing no endeavor; he implored the influential men in the district to lend their aid; he remained up the whole night, driving from one place to another, to stimulate the exertions of all. He then returned to Landfort, where the inquest was to take place. The coroner and some of the near relations and friends of the murdered man were present; none had as yet seen Mrs. Wilcox. Different witnesses were examined. Some had seen him in Clonfarron scarcely an hour before the commission of the deed; others had seen the carriage on its way home, and declared on oath that Mr. Wilcox was then reading, lying back in a corner of the carriage. Nobody, however, seemed to have seen him after he got out of the carriage. It is true the road was very short that led from the furze-bushes to the gate-lodge—scarcely more than half a mile; but still it was about the hour for workmen returning to their homes. It was very strange that not one of those employed on his own estate heard the report of firearms. At any rate no one owned to it. Suspicion fell strongly on the men who were dispossessed the previous November, and most particularly on Flaherty. The police had searched his brother's house that morning (Flaherty and his family had been living there ever since the ejection), and in it was discovered the very piece of paper which corresponded exactly to what had been found as gun-waddings close to where Mr. Wilcox was lying; besides, slugs were found in a box, just of the same make, and apparently of the identical lead, as those in Mr. Wilcox's body. Besides this, Tom Flaherty had been absent from the house since the day before, and had not since been heard of.

The inquest was proceeding, when the coroner stated that, unfortunately, he must see Mrs. Wilcox; he regretted much to disturb her so soon after the dreadful shock she had received; but he was anxious to hear from her own lips if she had cause for suspecting others to be concerned in the plot; also her reasons for leaving the house at the hour she did; and when she was alarmed by hearing the report of firearms.

Mrs. Wilcox came in, leaning on her brother's arm. Her eyes had a strange unsettled look; her whole mien was changed. She approached her husband's body, and then uttered a shriek that pierced the hearts of those present. She rushed furiously on a man who was standing near, and exclaimed, 'You have murdered my husband?' She was forced to relax her hold by Fitz-James O'Brien, who now stepped forward and caught hold of her. He was a powerful man; but what is the strength of the most powerful man in existence when wrestling with a maniac?—for such Mrs. Wilcox had now become. The shock she experienced had destroyed her intellect; she was henceforward but a miserable wretch. She was conveyed back to her room, and the madness became by degrees more and more intense. She moaned piteously; she shrieked and wailed. She appeared to regard Mr. O'Brien as her deadly enemy, no one knew why; he had always been their best friend; but oftentimes madness assumes that phase.

Fitz-James was struck with the lamentable fact that the tenants on the Landfort estate, the workmen, and even the very servants, showed no regret at the fate of the unhappy man. None sorrowed, or even demonstrated pity for the wretched widow or poor helpless young children. 'He niver showed us any,' was the common remark; 'he left our wives and children naked and starving.'

But where was the murderer all the while?—Let us take a glance into a cabin we have not yet visited. It differs little from our old acquaintance the shebeen house; and in it are some of the men we have before seen. Young Connor and Flaherty are sitting smoking in an inside room; they have now become much more fierce-looking than formerly; their shirts hang loosely on them; their corduroy trousers are filthy. They are different men from formerly; at least different in this respect,—when we saw them last they had only meditated the guilt to which we allude; now the crime has been committed. Their hands have been imbrued in the blood of their fellow-man; and the mark of Cain is upon them; they are murderers.

This hovel of which I am speaking at present was several miles from the Kilmoyle district.—They had fled there the night of the murder.—