

THE MAYOR OF WIND-GAP.

(By the O'HARA FAMILY.)

CHAPTER XIX.—(Continued).

"The last time you and I laid our heads together, I told you, that when I had left Connor Kennedy trampled down on my own hearth-stone, I thought my full revenge was wreaked upon him, but that he, even in this, deceived me. More, that instead of ensuring my own triumphant vengeance that night, the villain was still able to breathe his coils closer and closer around me;—was still able to crush and sting, till he made the remainder of my life but one long writhing fit of shame and degradation. Well, you, good youth, had previously been placed by me, as an infant, where I could find you when I had leisure. Find you, to bring you up for any purpose, which on reflection should appear best to me. Well, I say, after the sentence which sent me, branded like Cain, into a strange country, I felt, whenever the recollection of your existence occurred to me, that revenge by my own hand, upon the author of all my ruin, would not be half enough. That your hand, aye, yours only, must, from that moment, be appointed and directed to right me. And such, at last, turns out to be the case. At last, I am righted."

"It was a fell and baleful plan," said Gerald. "Why should I—your son, have been selected for effecting it? And how can my hand have avenged you better than your own could have done?"

"My son!—but I will answer you in my own way, and yet quite to your satisfaction, I have no doubt. Harken to me. I have been, and I am, a bold and courageous man. With my single arm often I have overpowered heavy odds; but that was in fair fighting. Always excepting my wish to trample, to buffet, aye, to kick to death, the dastard Connor Kennedy, never have I taken a life in cold blood;—never have I thought of so taking one. My enemies were met front to front, and battle roared around us; I pushed my full breast against them; we encountered on the compact of the valiant; 'Search for my heart with your sword, if your arm be stronger, or your blow surer, than mine!' Not the poor dog that crouched and crawled for mercy never could I smite. When his death was needful, have I left him, left him, mark you to be dealt upon by meaner hands than mine own! And in proportion to my manly disgust of a mean assassination, are my dislike and contempt of the mean assassin. Aye, the skulking, cowardly, midnight murderer I do detest;—with him I can hold no intercourse; and him I do repudiate. In his base veins there never could have run a drop of the lion's blood that courses through mine!"

"Father, what mean you?"

"Father! Reptile, spawn, paltrion, man-killer! you are, in truth, no son of mine. I lied to the teeth when I said you were. But I lied boldly, and for my purpose, as I also did on sundry other points, with you. For instance, I told you that Kennedy had plotted against you, and then I lied. I told you that he had suborned Donnelly against you, and then I lied, too. Listen to me with your soul! I told you that he had seduced your Annie from you—that he had injured her, and that, at last, he had married her. Again, and again, and again, and on, on to the end of the chapter, I lied, and lied, and lied. Why? ha, ha! why? to madden you into the mood for doing what you have so nobly done! To make sure of your killing Connor Kennedy! To make sure, quite sure, of his death by your hand! By his own son's hand! Aye, at that you will gape at me. But, just as true as that you are no son of mine, it is true that you *are* the son of the man whose blood is upon you! whose grovelling, traitor-blood gave life to your heart, fitly timing its pulses for such an action! For, as I told you before, blood of mine could never have warned you, or, rather, cooled you down to the perpetration of such a mean atrocity."

"Now, I do not believe you," said Gerald.

"Sirrah! not believe me!"

"No, I do not believe you! I am not Connor Kennedy's son: 'tis a fiendish fiction. 'Tis an impossibility, an utter impossibility."

"And what, particularly, makes you so very incredulous?" sneered Stokesbury.

"Because I feel convinced that you, even you devil as you are, never could conceive the thought of setting on the son to kill the father. You dare not! Heaven would not suffer you to do so. I say again, I do not believe you. I say again, I am not Connor Kennedy's son."

"You have spoken well, boy, passing well. There is pith in your words; and your view of right and wrong is very correct. Yes, I do myself declare it is a black and ugly deed to murder a father! Yet that deed you have done."

"I have not! *You* live; and you *are* my father. You have brought me up as your offspring; you have given me the title of son, and that title I will uphold, even against yourself, before the world."

"Psha!—I can easily disprove your title."

"I dare you to that disproof!"

"Fool! do you think I cannot make my words good? Do you think me so very poor an artificer as that my patient work of nearly twenty years is likely to be blown down by a puff of your flimsy breath?—Silly cur!—I had anticipated your present attempt to palm yourself upon me, even before I entered this house to-night. And now to begin my course of proof."

He took off the handkerchief which usually half covered his face and continued,

"Joseph Fitzgerald, old and faithful servant of my father's house—do you recollect your former master?"

"Oh, sir, sir," answered the man, "great wonder comes upon me with your words.—I don't know what reply to make you!"

"Time has, doubtless, changed me; the weather has pelted on me, and the sun has scorched me. You see before you, however, the master you have long thought dead. Go for your wife and lead her thither directly."

"My wife, you said, sir!" repeated Joseph, looking more and more frightened.

"Yes, man—your wife—did I not speak distinctly?—Tell her that Harry Stokesbury summons her to speak with him. Tell her to remember the evening when young Harry Stokesbury forced Connor Kennedy's brat from her arms; tell her to remember that he then warned her she would be called upon at a future day to identify the traitor's bawling. Tell her that the time is now come. Retire, I say, and lead your wife up to this room."

He opened the door, and the servant withdrew. He went on to Gerald—

"Yes, son of Connor Kennedy, I will soon demonstrate to you who is, or rather who was your father, and how full and how true has therefore, been my revenge. On one point, alone, I have not quite satisfied myself.—Before the very last gasp left his body, he did not know who killed him. Oh!—would that he could have known it! And, trust me, often and often have I pondered to try and arrange that he should be made acquainted with the relationship between him and his executioner. But it was impossible to compass it, without putting both of you on your guard. When you lay in yonder gaol, too, by my contrivance, another mode of vengeance on him slightly occurred to me. For a moment I thought it might be practicable to change my tactics; to get you tried, convicted, and excellently well hanged for the abduction of Annie Kennedy, making him a witness against you. Then, after your popular exit from this world, I would have just whispered to him the story of your parentage.—But my chief witness, Donnelly, I could not depend upon at the push; he was what you call a person of bad character, and, besides, any man's servant, either in truth or in falsehood, for the heaviest bribe.—You have yourself heard him admit as much, a few hours ago. But no matter. Although Connor Kennedy could not, lest our plan might fail, get a hint in this world of who it was I doomed to take his life, yet, as very good people say there is another world, perhaps he knows it now. Indeed for the especial consolation of my heart, never before this hour have I felt half so inclined to be a firm believer on that knotty subject."

Joseph Fitzgerald re-entered, conducting his wife, both agitated and trembling to excess.

"I am told," began the woman, "there is one here who says he is the Master Harry Stokesbury."

"Come hither dame.—You nursed for a few days Connor Kennedy's and Mary Bryan's first and only son?" The servant assented.

"You have received the message I sent you this moment by your husband?—You have understood it?"—She again assented affirmatively.

"Well. Examine these things attentively."—He took a small box from his bosom, opened it, and placed it on the table. "Have you seen them before? Are these the clothes in which your own hands clothed Connor Kennedy's son, before you took him to nurse at your house? And do you find upon them the marks which I, Harry Stokesbury, directed you to put upon them, before I dragged your charge over your threshold?"

"Whether it comes to pass that you are Master Harry Stokesbury or not," she replied, "these are the same clothes Connor Kennedy's son had on him when Master Harry Stokesbury took away the child from me."

"So. Look at this, too; can you call this little thing to mind?"

"Oh! mercy be to me! It is the gospel I hung round the infant's neck, to save him from his evil doom," answered the woman.

"Yes," scoffed Stokesbury, close into Gerald's face. "And thus I learned the fable of your famous doom—the doom I have led you here to-night to accomplish, as I before told you—and learned it from this woman's lips, when by chance I asked the meaning of the silly amulet she had appended to your little carcass. Ha!—And you begin to admit my proofs, do you?—Yes; I see that horror is on your face;—I see that your cheek is livid; I see that a cold sweat trickles down your forehead, and that your limbs totter beneath you. But there is stronger proof of the true nature of the cowardly murder you have just committed. Attend, sirrah; attend, closely—Woman!" he went on aloud, and now imperiously and passionately, "you will recollect that I ordered you to notice a something on the arm of Connor Kennedy's whelp."

"May the heavens save us! and it is the same voice I now hear that said the same words to me more than twenty years ago!"

"Right—the same voice, the very same. But did I not order you to note that mark? And when you had done so did you not call it a cherry mark, caused, you would have me believe, from a cherry having being flung in play at his mother, before his birth? But no matter what you say—was there not a reddish spot of that kind on the young toad's arm?"

"I recollect every word you say, sir.—It is all fresh to my mind as if it happened but yesterday."

"Examine your arm, then, Gerald Kennedy—I call you at last by your true name. I have, before now, allowed you to peer at *my* arm."

The unhappy young man suddenly sat down, as if from total incapacity to stand; placed his elbows on the table, and fully covered his face with his hands. Tears stole through his fingers, as in a weak and broken voice he said—"The mark is upon my arm."

"And my proof complete," cried Stokesbury. "Connor Kennedy's murderer is Connor Kennedy's son!—And that son knows as much!—Knows, too, that I set him on to kill his scoundrel parent—and why I did so!—Cur? you have named *me*—father—and the words came like the serpent's hiss into my ear. For, when you gave me that title, I called to mind that you were the offspring of my direst enemy—that you were of the loathed blood of him who duped, abused, robbed, plundered, branded, banished me; and who had wiled Mary Bryan from my arms.—Oh! spume of the old reptile!—but that I cherished you as my avenger, I could have struck you to my foot, and spurned you, and spat upon you, when you dared so to address me—Ha, but no matter!—From Connor Kennedy's own slime