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CHAPTER XVI.

"But oh! what storm was in that mind!"

CRABBE: RUTH.

THE pale rays of a lamp threw their shaded light over a large and richly furnished chamber at Ardmore. A shadowy female form, whose outline was rendered yet more ærial by the uncertain light, stood silently by the side of a bed, whose rich crimson drapery swept the floor, or glided through the apartment noiselessly as a disembodied spirit. Seated at a little distance from the bed, and holding in his hand a closed book, sat a middle aged man, whose dress, as well as his serious, benignant countenance, bespoke the sacred duty which had called him to soothe the bed of death.

Stillness reigned within the sick chamber, except when a deep groan or a smothered ejaculation of pain broke from the lips of the sufferer, who lay extended upon the couch. Upon his face death had already set his mark, and only waited till the spirit had struggled yet a little longer, till it should claim him as its own.

The lips of the sufferer moved, and Constance bent forward to catch the sounds.

"He has not come yet, dear father," were the words she returned to his enquiry; and then, as she heard a slight noise in the court-yard, she hastened to the window, and drawing the curtains aside, looked forth. As she saw a horseman alight, a smile passed over her face, as a stray moonbeam throws its light over the dark waters of a troubled sea, then moving towards the bed,

upon which her father lay, she whispered in his ear the glad tidings of O'Donnell's arrival.

A moment passed, and a quick step neared the door, a tall form entered the chamber and approached the sufferer. It was well that the dim, uncertain light of the lamp, did not shed its rays upon the face of O'Donnell, or its ghastly expression would have caused even Constance to shrink from his hasty salute.

"Charles, I am dying," were the words that broke at intervals from the lips of Fitzgerald, as he pressed the hand of his adopted son. "Ere I depart, I would know whether your love still remains unchanged towards the friends of your youth. I feared that absence had already taught you forgetfulness; but I cannot believe that your heart, once so warm and true, has become cold to those who love you dearly as ever."

"Father, you are right," replied O'Donnell, in low and tremulous accents; "my affection for you can never become estranged. If of late I have appeared neglectful, pardon me, and do not attribute the cause to ingratitude or indifference."

"Charles, I am satisfied," replied Fitzgerald; "you know not how your words relieve my mind, and I understand your candid nature too well to doubt what you say." Then motioning to Constance to retire to a short distance, he continued, "Charles, I have something of deep importance to say to you before my eyes are closed forever in death. Charles, I have loved, and still love you dearly as a son, and I have looked with approbation and pleasure upon the mutual affection which you and Constance have always entertained towards each other. My days are

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