

He had watched over Constance as she had once tended him; and he had mourned over her declining strength, and sought, by every means within his power, to win back health to her pale cheek; and when he found this attempt was vain, he had soothed, by his tenderness and love, the path to her early grave.

With a deep groan, Charles sank by the side of Constance, who knelt by the couch upon which her father had expired, while her lips moved, as if in prayer.

At length Constance arose, and taking the hand of O'Donnel, conducted him to a seat.

"Charles," she began—and her voice sounded solemn in that melancholy chamber—"you remember that night when last we met together in this apartment, where my father expired, and where I became your wife. Charles, I am dying: in a few days, at most, I will be no more; and here, in this chamber, I would say a few words to you before I depart. With you, dear Charles, I have been happy; you have ever been to me all that I could have desired—always kind and affectionate; and when sickness and sorrow have depressed this weary frame, you have ever been untiring in your devotion to me. Let this affection console you when I am gone. One doubt alone has ever risen to disturb my happiness—to cloud the serenity of my wedded life. Our hurried marriage, in which my dying father, perhaps, did not consult your feelings, has often raised a doubt in my mind as to whether you loved me, or whether another had already possessed your heart, and that I was but a creature who stood between you and happiness. Even your unwearied kindness—your watchful tenderness towards me—have served to confirm this doubt. You were too anxious to please me in all things—too fearful of neglecting me, I thought; for there is a carelessness in secure love which makes us at times apparently cold and neglectful. Charles, if I have stood in your path—a dark shadow between you and happiness—I trust you will forgive me; for, if such be the case, I have been more sinned against than sinning. My father's intention in marrying us was unknown to me till he was about to carry it into execution. Even then, I would have remonstrated; but I felt it would be cruel to tear from him the thought which appeared to lend him such consolation upon his death-bed. Charles, in this chamber, in which two solemn scenes took place, when last we were here together, I ask you whether you have ever loved me, or whether your wedded life has been but a term of bondage, from which you will soon be set free?"

"Constance," replied O'Donnel, "ask me not

whether I *have* loved thee. From my earliest years I have found happiness in thy presence; and when absent from thee, thine image ever has had power to chase sadness from my heart. To win thee for mine own—to become more worthy of thy love—was the motive which made me leave my home, to seek fame and fortune, which were to be shared by thee. Ask me not, dearest Constance, whether I *have* loved thee. I love thee now as fondly—aye, more fondly—than in happier days, when grief had not quenched the light of thine eyes, or taught me to appear gloomy and estranged. But, no! I cannot longer conceal within my breast that withering secret! Constance! my injured wife! hear me. Here let me kneel before thee, wretch that I am!—unworthy of such love as thine!—I, who have blighted thy happiness! Constance, pardon me the guilt!"

But Constance heard him not. Suddenly she raised her hand and pressed it upon her heart, as if some inward spasm convulsed her, and when O'Donnel raised his eyes to her face it was rigid, while the large dark eyes still looked upon him with their melancholy, motionless gaze, and her gentle smile beamed upon him. He took her hand in his, but the pulse had ceased to beat—the fingers lay cold and motionless within his own. And this was death!

O'Donnel rose and seized a bell which lay upon the table, and rang it violently for assistance. The bewildered servants, ignorant that he and Constance were in this apartment, terror-stricken at a sound they had not heard since the room had been occupied by Fitzgerald, hesitated to enter. At length, one more courageous than the rest opened the door, and revealed the melancholy sight within. O'Donnel supported the form of his wife in his arms, and her cheek, cold and lifeless, was pressed to his. Every eye was moved to tears at the sight of their young mistress, so beloved, so gentle. They advanced to carry her to her own chamber, but O'Donnel, with a commanding gesture, waved them back, and lifting her in his arms, laid her lifeless form upon the couch which had last sustained that of her father. Then desiring them all to withdraw, he was left alone.

Hours passed away before O'Donnel left that chamber, and though none knew what had passed through his mind during that space, none knew the remorse, the anguish which he endured as he kept his lonely vigil beside the lifeless form of his gentle wife, when he left it, he looked as if years had passed over his head, and stolen from him every trace of youth.

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