

Ellen retired to rest at a village inn, within the distance of ten miles of Ardmore.

## CHAPTER XX.

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What angel shall

Bless this unworthy husband? He cannot thrive  
Unless her prayers,—whom heaven delights to hear  
And loves to grant—reprieve him from the wrath  
Of greatest justice. SHAKESPEARE.

THE next morning, with a resolution strong as ever, Ellen Douglas departed for Ardmore, in a vehicle which she had procured from the host of the inn at which she had lodged the preceding night. In her agitated state of mind, the distance seemed interminable; and an age appeared to elapse before she entered the stately avenue, which, rendered serpentine by the inequalities of the ground, did not permit a view of the house till close upon it.

As, by a sudden turn in the road, the ancient structure of Ardmore burst full upon the sight of Ellen, her heart beat so loudly that she pressed her hand upon it, as if to still its pulsations; and, unable to proceed, she instinctively caught the arm of the boy who drove her; and, till she could arrange her scattered thoughts, she desired him to stop. Ellen felt that the crisis had arrived; and although she had thought herself fully prepared for whatever might await her, already her heart failed. A moment she sat pale and immoveable, till, summoning her fortitude, she bade the driver proceed. A few moments brought her humble vehicle before the house, and, alighting from it, she ascended the steps, and knocked at the door.

A servant appeared, and she enquired if Mr. O'Donnel were at home.

"Yes, Madam," respectfully replied the servant, and after conducting her through a spacious hall, he opened the door of an apartment and requested her to enter.

As Ellen stepped upon the threshold of this room, an object caught her eye which made her start back, and turning to the servant, she said:

"I requested to see Mr. O'Donnel."

"I beg your pardon, Miss," he replied; "but my master will not be disengaged for some time. That is my lady, Mrs. O'Donnel."

With a self-possession which astonished herself, Ellen entered the apartment, as Constance Fitzgerald, for Ellen immediately recognized the likeness which she bore to the miniature which O'Donnel had shown her, rose from the couch upon which she reclined, and saluted her with graceful courtesies.

True, it was Constance Fitzgerald whom she

beheld, more beautiful even than represented by O'Donnel. The same gentle, expressive dark eyes, shaded by the heavy fringes, the same raven tresses parted upon her brow. But nevertheless, how changed! How melancholy to look upon her youthful form, shadowy as a spirit—to gaze upon her young face, so wan and emaciated; colourless, except where upon each cheek a spot of bright hectic shone.

But the words of the servant rang in the ears of Ellen Douglas. Was it some deception which her agitated senses had practised upon her, or did she hear that gentle creature upon whom she looked with feelings of the most tender pity, called by that name which she alone was entitled to bear? For a moment she doubted her senses, and sat with eyes riveted upon the face of Constance. Far from appearing displeased or embarrassed by the steadfast look with which the stranger surveyed her, Constance in return fixed her dark, melancholy eyes, with as steadfast a gaze, upon the face of Ellen Douglas. And there they sat, those two young beings, radiant in all that loveliness which seldom belongs even to youth, with eyes bent upon each other with a look expressive of even more than mutual admiration, as if drawn together by some invisible sympathy.

Constance was the first to break the silence, and the tones of her musical voice sank deep in the heart of Ellen.

"Forgive me," she said, "but although a stranger, your face appears quite familiar to me, and linked with pleasing recollections;" and Constance musingly leant her head upon her hand, and tried to recall to memory when and where she had beheld the countenance of the stranger so rarely beautiful, as once seen, hardly to be forgotten. But, no! in vain she endeavoured to recollect, yet sure she was that she had before seen that face, although it appeared to her to have worn a different expression, another character from that which it now bore. In her memory it was connected with pleasing associations, and she thought that the pensive brow, the troubled eyes, and the melancholy mouth of the stranger, should wear a joyous expression to render her all that memory recalled.

Constance! wert thou to go to thy chamber, thou wouldst there see that winning face smiling upon thee, from where thy hands in happier days placed it. But it there wears, as thine own did, an expression of happiness which tells of a heart which as yet had known no sorrow.

But if such were the feelings with which Constance surveyed the stranger, how intense were those with which Ellen Douglas returned