

O'Donnel her first lesson in horsemanship. Despite the oft-repeated admonition of Charles, to sit perfectly erect and hold the tiny whip in the proper position, whenever the pony hastened its pace all his orders were forgotten, and Constance, in childish fear, would cling around the neck of the docile animal.

On a rustic seat beside the lake sat Captain Fitzgerald and his wife, watching the children with that look of interest and fondness which parental love imparts. At length the pony was led forward, and Constance, lifted from the saddle, was caught in the arms of her mother, and Charles, vaulting lightly upon the back of the diminutive steed, rode off at full gallop to the stables.

As mother and child now sat together, how much alike they seemed! Both possessed the same lustrous dark eyes, with their long jetty fringes, and beautifully pencilled eye-brows. The rich sunny complexion and exquisitely chiselled features were alike, with only that difference which distinguishes childhood and mature years. Both were beautiful and the father thought so, as he looked upon them. But Charles came bounding over the lawn, and Constance ran off to join her young playfellow.

"See what a brotherly care Charles takes of our little Constance, my dear," said Fitzgerald, as he watched the boy carrying his companion across a small brook. "It is astonishing how that child has already endeared himself to us all."

"Yes, he is, indeed, a noble boy," replied Constance, with a deep sigh, for she felt that Fitzgerald possessed no son to inherit the family honours. "Would Heaven but grant me such a child," she mentally said, "I would be perfectly happy. But it is sinful in me to complain when I am surrounded by so many blessings," and her cheerful smile returned.

"Dear Constance!" continued Fitzgerald, "it is perhaps foolish in me to look so far into the uncertain future; but when I see those children thus early attached to each other, and reflect that their childhood, the period in which the strongest and most enduring predilections are formed, will be spent together, I cannot prevent myself from forming a hope that, if the man becomes all that the boy promises, Charles O'Donnel may yet be to me a son in reality. Their dispositions are also calculated to improve each other. Charles is too fearless and daring, while Constance is timid and thoughtful beyond her years. He is the creature of impulse—she of reflection. But they are still only children. Their characters will yet doubtlessly alter greatly. I vow it is foolish in me to anticipate an event so distant and remote—but after all, who knows!"

Here Fitzgerald paused, and an echo, whose mocking tones the children loved to awaken, caught up the words, and "who knows!"—was whispered back in tones so gentle and so hopeful, that, though but a creation of his own, Fitzgerald listened to them as to an oracle. Yes! "Who knows!"—we hopefully exclaim, after having in vain sought to dive into unrevealed futurity with our dim perceptions. "Who knows!"—we again repeat, when years have passed away, and we still look forward to the same delusive hopes. Deceitful words!

CHAPTER IV.

He hath a tear to pity, and a hand
Open as day for melting charity:
Yet notwithstanding, being incensed, he's flint;
As humorous as winter, and as sudden
As flaws congealed in the spring of day.

SHAKESPEARE.

WITH what swiftness does time pass onwards when we are happy! How tardy and lingering is its progress when sorrow depresses the heart! Ask the miserable wretch, who pines in a dungeon, what is an hour? He will reply, 'tis an age, a long dull period, whose every moment is marked by a sigh and a tear. Ask the happy lover, as he is seated by his mistress, listening to her soft musical voice, and gazing into the depths of her azure eyes, what is an hour? He will answer, 'tis but a brief moment,—would that I might recall it! But Time, regardless alike of the happy and the wretched, contracts not its hours for the one nor recalls them for the other.

Thus years upon years sped away at Ardmore, while its happy inmates hardly marked their flight. Charles and Constance during this time had been daily in the society of each other. When the low, silvery laugh of Constance was heard in the garden, or echoing through the old and intricate passages of Ardmore, the more boisterous glee of Charles quickly responded. When Constance, mounted on her little palfrey, at the height of its speed, playfully endeavoured to outstrip her companion in the chase, Charles on his mettled steed would pass her like lightning, but ere he gained the goal he would slacken his pace till his fair companion reached it first, when with a look of triumph she turned back, and laughingly called him a laggard knight. Together they had climbed the neighbouring hills, had traversed the wild romantic country around, had received the same chiding for juvenile delinquencies, and had listened together with mingled terror and delight to Nora, their aged nurse's recital of ghostly traditions and warning banshees. But these happy days