

**THE KING'S OWN
BORDERERS.**

A Military Romance.

VOL. III.

BY
JAMES GRANT

"Memories fast are thronging o'er me,
Of the grand old fields of Spain;
How he faced the charge of Junot,
And the fight where Moore was slain.
Oh the years of weary waiting
For the glorious chance he sought,
For the slowly ripened harvest
That life's latest autumn brought."

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THE KING'S OWN BORDERERS.

CHAPTER I. PLAYING WITH FIRE.

"Fraught with this fine intention, and well fenced
In mail of proof—her purity of soul,
She, for the future of her strength convinced,
And that her honour was a rock or mole,
Exceeding sagely from that hour dispensed
With any kind of troublesome control;
But whether Julia to the task was equal,
Is that which must be gathered in the sequel."
BYRON.

For two other entire days the rain continued to pour as it only pours in the Peninsula during the wet season, and our travellers were compelled to keep close within the doors of the Villa de Maciera. Could Quentin have lifted the veil that hides the future, and foreseen the turmoil and danger in which this unexpected delay would eventually involve him, he would certainly have made some vigorous efforts to procure horses or mules at Salorino, to push on for Portalegre, in spite of wind or rain; but what, then, was he to do with Donna Isidora? In such a November deluge she could neither travel on horse or foot, and "leathern conveyances" were not to be had in Spanish Estremadura in those days, nor in the present either, probably. To leave her alone in that deserted house was not to be thought of.

So Quentin stayed.

Time did not pass slowly, however. They did not read, you may be assured, though books were plentifully strewed about, as the French had been lighting their pipes with them; but Isidora

took to teaching Quentin the language of the fan, as spoken or used at the bull-fight, the theatre, on the Prado, or elsewhere, and with such a pair of eyes beaming on him, over, under, or through the sticks of the aforesaid fan, he proved an apt scholar. Who would have been otherwise?

He taught her his name, at which she laughed very much, and thought it an odd one.

Ere the noon of the second day, they had made great progress in their friendship, and, circumstanced as they were, could they have failed to do so? Isolated and without resource, save in each other's dangerous society, they could scarcely be ever separate in that huge deserted house, in which they were besieged by the weather.

That the impulsive Spanish girl had conceived a strong affection for Quentin was evident from her occasional silence, her palpitation, her changing look, and the half-suppressed fire of her dark eyes, when he approached or spoke to her; then it would seem, that as he grew bewildered and timid, she became bold and unconstrained.

It would be difficult to trace the workings and describe the struggles of Donna Isidora's heart in the growing passion she felt for Quentin—the mere result of accidents which she could not control, and a propinquity which she could not avoid; or how rapidly the brief self-delusion of sisterhood and platonic affection melted away before the warm and impulsive nature of her character; how reason weakened as passion grew strong, and how she resolved to bend him to her will, for in mind and race, rather more than years, she was much his senior.

She knew that Spain was almost lawless now; that ties were broken, the bonds of society loosed, and that civil order, such as it was, had disappeared amid the anarchy consequent to the French invasion: hence a hundred wild schemes coursed through her busy brain. She even hoped to lure him into the guerilla ranks, or to fly with her to some remote part of the provinces, where they could never more be traced; to the mountains of Estrella, the Sierra de Oca, or the dark and wooded ranges of the Sierra Morena, where, forgotten alike by friend and foe, they could live on unknown. Such were her vague ideas for the future. For the present, it sufficed her that she loved Quentin, and that he must be taught to love her in return.

On the other hand, it is difficult to define exactly the feeling which Quentin entertained for his young Spanish friend. Of her wonderful beauty he was by no means insensible. Was it platonic regard that *he* felt? We should not think so at his years, and more especially as we are disinclined to believe in such love at all. Then what the deuce was it? the reader may ask.

Flirtation, perhaps—"playing with fire," certainly.

Young though he was, Quentin could not forget Flora Warrender, and that sweet evening by the Kelpie's Pool, and the first thrill of boyish love, with all the anxious moments, the feverish hopes that stirred his heart—the tender memories of his grande passion, for such it was; and thus something of chivalry in his breast made him struggle against the present tempter and her piquante charms, for Flora's gentle image always seemed to rise up between him and her; and yet—and yet—there was something very bewildering in the hourly companionship, the complete isolation and reliance of this lovely young girl with whom he was now

wandering in solitude—a companionship known to themselves alone. It was delightful but perilous work, and Quentin could not analyse, even if he cared to do so, the emotions she was exciting in his breast.

Where, when, and how was it all to end? He feared that he felt too little anxiety for reaching Portalegre and delivering the reply to Sir John Hope's despatch; and yet, if the storm abated, why tarry?

Quentin was soon assured that Isidora loved him; and as he was not without that most useful bump on his occiput denominated self-esteem, he felt flattered accordingly; yet, withal, he struggled manfully against the passion, with which this dangerous knowledge and Isidora's attractions, were both calculated to inspire him.

He was anxious to appear to advantage in her eyes. Why? She was nothing to him, yet, for some time, she had been the object of all his solicitude. In the course of conversation, she admitted that she had many admirers, which, for a girl so attractive, was likely enough. But why permit the development of a passion in her that could lead to nothing good? Why respond to her growing tenderness? Why—ay, there was the rub, the lure, and the peril.

His affections, such as a lad not yet twenty may possess, were promised elsewhere. Was Flora true, and remembering him still? This was rub number two.

Quentin Kennedy, I tremble for thee; and, if the truth must be told, much more for the future peace and reputation of Donna Isidora de Saldos, for neither a wholesome terror of Baltasar's wrath or the Padre Trevino's knife may avail her much.

"What if she loves me—loves me as dear Flora did?" thought Quentin; and when this pleasing but alarming idea occurred to him, he really dreaded that her heart might be too far involved in those tender passages, coquetries, and other little matters incident to their hourly intercourse: white hands taken almost inadvertently or as a matter of course; a soft cheek, at times so near his own; and darkly-lashed eyes that looked softly into his, were rather alluring, certainly.

In Spain, women do not shake hands with men; their dainty fingers (dingy frequently) are kissed, or not touched at all; hence we may suppose that Quentin and Isidora, when they began to sit hand-in-hand looking out on the pouring rain as twilight deepened, had got a long way on in lovemaking—in engineering parlance, that he had pushed the trenches to the base of the glacis.

Some one remarks somewhere, that the fogs and sleet of England mar many a ripening love; but that under the clear skies, in the balmy air, in the long sultry days, the voluptuous evenings, and still more in the gorgeous moonlights of Spain, the gentle passion is of more rapid growth, and becomes more impulsive, heartfelt, and keen.

In the present instance, however, chance and a storm—such as that which waylaid Dido and the Trojan hero—had been the inspirers of Donna Isidora, who, sooth to say, found Quentin somewhat slow to follow her example.

"Mi hermano—my brother—you will be and must be," she would whisper at times, in a manner that, to say the least of it, was very bewitching.

"I shall try, Donna Isidora."

"Try, say you? Wherefore only *try*?" she asked, with her eyes full of fire and inquiry. "Is it a task so difficult to feel esteem or love for me? Go! I shall hate you!" Then she would thrust aside his hand, and pouting, half turn away her flushing face, only that the little hand might be taken again, an explanation made, and reconciliation effected.

On the evening of the second day, after one of those little poutings, and after Isidora, in anger, had been absent from him nearly two hours, she rejoined Quentin in the boudoir, which was their usual apartment, and where he welcomed her reappearance so warmly, that her face was overspread by happy and beautiful smiles.

Poor Quentin, who was at that age when a young man is apt to slide rather than fall into a regular love fit, was gradually being ensnared.

"The companionship of these few days I shall remember for ever," said he. "You shall indeed be sorrowed for, *hermana mia*."

"Think only of the present, and not of parting," said she, letting her cheek sink upon his shoulder, as they sat, hand in hand, in the window of the little boudoir, the objects of which were half hidden in the twilight.

Quentin felt his heart beat quickly, and his respiration become thick, but he said with a tender smile—

"Isidora, I am almost afraid of you."

"Afraid—and of *me*?"

"Yes."

"But why, mi querido?"

"You carry a stiletto," said he, laughing, "and I don't like it."

"There—behold!" she exclaimed in a breathless voice, as she drew the long steel bodkin from her hair, which fell in a dark and ripply volume over her shoulders and bosom; "I am defenceless now," she added, throwing it on the sofa; but Quentin was slow to accept the challenge.

"Oh, Isidora, to what end is all this?" he asked, struggling with himself, and almost remonstrating with her. "Why allure me to love you, as love you I shall?"

As he said this, the dark and lustrous eyes of the Castilian girl filled with half-subdued fire; her lashes drooped, and she heaved a long sigh.

"You speak of love," she said, in a low voice, while her bosom swelled beneath its scarlet corset and the thin muslin habit-shirt that was gathered round her slender throat; "all men are alike to a woman who is not in love; but in my heart I feel an emotion which tells me that if I loved there would be to me but one only in the world—he, my lover!"

Her calm energy, and the deep sudden glance she shot at Quentin, quite bewildered the poor fellow.

"Tell me," she resumed, while his left hand was caressed in both of hers, and her right cheek yet rested on his shoulder, while the massive curls of her hair fell over him, "is there not something delicious in the mystery and tremulousness of love; to feel that we are no longer two, but one—ONE in heart and soul, in thought and sympathy? Speak—you do not answer me—estrella mia—mi

vida—mi alma!" (my star—my life—my soul) she added, in a low but piercing accent.

Trembling with deep emotion, Quentin pressed his lips to her burning brow, and there ensued a long pause, during which she lay with her forehead against his cheek.

"Listen to me, Quentin," said she, looking upward with swimming eyes; "I would speak with you seriously, earnestly, from my heart."

"Niña de mi alma—about what?"

"Religion, love."

"You choose an odd time for it—but wherefore?"

"I would teach you mine," she whispered.

"Yours—and for what purpose?"

"That—that——"

"Nay, I have courage enough to hear anything, dearest; for what purpose, mi querida?"

"That endearing term decides me—that we may be married, Quentin."

"I—senora!"

"You and I—what is there wonderful in that?"

Had a shell exploded between them, poor Quentin could not have been more nonplussed than by this proposition.

"Flirtation is a very fine thing," says his Peninsular comrade, Charles O'Malley, "but it's only a state of transition, after all; the tadpole existence of the lover would be very great fun, if one was never to become a frog under the hands of the parson."

Some such reflection occurred to Quentin, who stammered—

"But, Isidora, people require money to marry."

"Of course—sometimes."

"Well, I am not the heir of a shilling in the world."

"Nor am I the heiress of a pistole."

"Well, dearest Isidora——"

"Who should marry if we don't, whose circumstances are equal, and whose position in the world is so exactly similar? Ah, that we had the Padre Florez here!"

Though this was said with the sweetest of smiles, Quentin failed to see the force of her reasoning; but it was impossible to refrain from kissing the rounded cheek that lay so near his own.

Then an emotion of compunction stole into his heart, and rousing her from the delicious trance into which she seemed sinking, he withdrew a little (for he had never been made love to before, so surprise gave him courage), and then said—

"Isidora, this must not be—be calm and listen to me: I promised your brother—what was it that he said to me?—oh, Isidora, I must not love you; moreover, I am pledged to love a girl who is far, far away, and—but be calm, I beseech you, and think of the future!"

She now sprung from his side to snatch her stiletto from the sofa where it lay. Whether she meant to use it against herself, or him, or both, for a moment he could scarcely tell; her dark eyes were filled with a lurid gleam, and her cheek was now deadly pale; one little hand, white and tremulous, tore back her streaming and dishevelled hair; the other clutched the hilt of the weapon. She gave a keen glance at the blade, and then, as if to place the temptation to destroy beyond her reach, she snapped it to pieces and cast them from her.

Then snatching up a lamp which Quentin had lighted but a short time before, she rushed from the room, leaving him alone, bewildered and in darkness.

Quentin hurried after, and called to her repeatedly; but there was no response. He heard a door closed with violence at a distance, and then all became still—terribly still, save the now familiar sound of the rain lashing the walls and windows of the villa in the darkness without, and the howling of the wind, as it tore through the bleak October woods.

Nearly an hour elapsed after this, and knowing her wild and impulsive nature, his excitement and alarm for her safety became all but insupportable.

"Oh heavens, if she should have destroyed herself! Her death will be laid to my charge."

There seemed to be no length her fiery rashness was not capable of leading her, and not unnaturally Congreve's well-known couplet occurred to his memory:—

"Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turn'd,
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorn'd!"

CHAPTER II. THE POISONED WINE.

"Whatever can untune th' harmonious soul,
And its mild reasoning faculties control;
Give false ideas, raise desires profane,
And whirl in eddies the tumultuous brain;
Mixed with curs'd art, she direfully around,
Through all his nerves diffused the sad compound."
OVID.

When Donna Isidora rushed from Quentin, she took her way unerringly (as she knew the villa well) up several flights of stairs, through passages and suites of apartments, where he could not have followed her without a guide, until she reached a little room, which had been the library and confessional of the family chaplain.

Remote from the rest of the house, its shelves full of books, its table and desk littered with letters and papers, with little religious pictures on the walls, a Madonna crowned by a white chaplet on a bracket, a vase of withered lilies, and other little matters indicative of taste, were all untouched as when the poor Padre Florez had last been there. In rambling over the villa, if Ribeaupierre's dragoons had been in the chamber, they found nothing in it which they deemed valuable enough to destroy or carry off.

Here it was that Donna Isidora had been, when, in a fit of petulance, she had before absented herself from Quentin. She set down the lamp, and taking up a book which she had been previously perusing, and which she had found lying upon the desk where the padre had left it open, for its pages were covered with dust, she muttered—

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