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THE RIVALS.

By Gerald Griffin.

CHAPTER III.

(Continued.)

The old house-keeper had been heard slowly ascending the stairs, step by step, like Dante on the mountain, — the hinder foot still firmer; and made her appearance almost before the last sentence had been concluded. She had that well conditioned rotundity of figure, and respectable neatness of attire, which are usual in her situation. Her face, though the foot-print of the raven was about her eyes, had that character of "youth in the heart" which some happy beings can preserve unaltered amid the decay of youthful passions and the loss of early friends; and yet this was blended with an expression of affectionate sadness in the old woman's eyes. — The length of her countenance, the blackness of her hair and eyes, and shade of deep olive in her complexion, showed her to be a native of the south-western coasts, where the external peculiarities of the Spanish colonists are still preserved in a remarkable degree. A large rosary of horn beads, with an old shilling instead of a cross, hung conspicuously on the same string as her multitude of keys, serving at the same time as a symbol of her religious independence toward her patrons, and a testimony in the eyes of her country friends, of her honest adherence to the faith of her ancient village. "Mrs. Keleher," said her master, "I sent for you to know whether you remember Mr. Riordan; of Roundwood?" "Mr. Francis Riordan, that went out with the paythriots?" "The same."

"God, bless it!" an' 'm sure, when I come out again to call after her, there was no account to be had o' the lady, high or low." "And so the child was overlooked?" said Mr. Leonard. "The child was overlooked," returned the housekeeper; "an' I don't know what it fancy o' me, but from that hour I thought I saw the same mournful look in his eyes that he had till the day he parted me. I never seen two (an' sure I ought to know 'em, afther nursin' the both o' 'em) I never seen two that were so unlike in themselves, an' loved so dearly as himself an' the young darlin' above stairs, Miss Esther." "Come, come," said Mr. Damer, with a warning voice. "Oh, 'tis no thraison what I say, sure, when 'tis among ourselves," continued the old woman. "I said, before, they loved as I never seen man and woman love, an' still they were as contrary in their ways as two could be. Miss Esther, though bein' of a methodish family, (forgive us all our sins!) was the merriest child I think I ever laid my two eyes on, just as she was always, an' as she is this day, heart-broken as she is." "What!" "With the sickness, I mean; with the dint o' the delicacy, inwardly, sure, I said already it is the course o' nature for the living to forget the dead, an' I wish no man happier than Richard Lacy, now that the turf is green above my own poor lad. She was ever an' always laughin' an' jokin' poor Masther Frank about his sorrowful ways. An' still she had great feelin's, the craither! She cried a power when she heard of his death." "How did she spend this evening?" asked Mrs. Damer. "The same as the day, then, ma'am, between laughin' (though there was only a little o' that indeed) an' shiverin', an' faintin', as it were, but sure you were with her yourself, ma'am. She had no fit since you saw her. Ah, Masther, take it from me, she never had the same heart from the day that Masther Francis fitted."

ance, while he took his seat near Mrs. Damer, was not free from agitation. Leonard gazed at him with an unliking eye. He whispered something, in a low and broken voice, about the troubled look of the sky, and then, fixing his eyes upon the doorway, seemed to watch for the entrance of the fair ward with the eye of a real lover. CHAPTER IV. This night had been appointed for the formal signing of the marriage articles. The witnesses, as we have said, were ready, the desk was thrown open, the candles were moved to a suitable distance, and every eye was bent upon the parlor door. It opened at length, and a figure entered very unlike that of the lovely sectarian for whose approach the eyes of Lacy longed as for the light. It was that of a tall, muscular, middle aged man, dressed in a brown suit, with grizzled hair brushed sleekly upon his brow, a face, of a deep yellow tinge, sown thick with freckles, and eyes which had a curious mixture of active thought and of solemnity in their expression. "Well, Aaron," said Mr. Damer, "what of your mistress?" "She is not coming," said the servant. "She wishes to speak with you in the drawing room." "With me?" asked Lacy, starting from his chair. Aaron replied to this question by a stare of calm surprise, and then stalked after Mr. Damer out of the parlour. That gentleman found his niece standing in a niche formed by one of the lower windows, with a white veil drawn round her person, her arms folded, with one hand laid upon her throat, and her person as motionless as a statue. The window curtains were drawn back, and the thin moonlight, falling upon her pale face and light drapery, gave something of a spiritual expression to the whole figure. "Well, Esther, pet, why do you keep us waiting?" said Damer, patting his niece affectionately on the shoulder, "Richard is below this hour." "Uncle," replied Esther, making an effort at her usual liveliness of manner, "you must read the Bible, and learn to bear with me. My valor is oozing out at my finger ends, as the time approaches, and I fear you will find me out to be an arrant coward before long." "Fie, fie! you are trembling."

my Esther will be generous enough to remember that there are others whose feelings are not less intimately affected by this negotiation than her own. You would not put poor Lacy to the agony of such a disappointment, after so many years of steady faith and constancy?" Esther remained for a few moments silent, with her face buried between her hands, and then raising her person and making an effort to appear determined, she placed her arm within that of Mr. Damer. It is well, thought that gentleman within his own mind; the usual maidenly prologue is concluded, and we may shortly hope to have the play begin. He led her, still trembling, from the room. — They reached the hall, upon which the door of the dining room opened. Here the courage of Esther once more failed her. Her uncle felt her hang more heavily upon his arm, and her breath came thick and short, as if she were threatened with some hysterical affection. At that instant, the door opened, and Mrs. Damer made her appearance. The rigid character of this lady had always impressed her niece with a certain degree of awe, and that sentiment came now most opportunely to check the deep emotion which already began to agitate her limbs, and features. Supported, at either side, by her relatives, she once more summoned resolution enough to approach the dreaded poor, when some sudden and new occasion made her start and turn her head in the attitude of one who listens intently. "Who said that?" she asked, in a hurried whisper. "That? — what Esther?" enquired her uncle. "Somebody spoke behind me, somebody said 'Be true! Did you not hear? I did, as plainly as I hear my own voice now.'" "It could not be, my love," said Mrs. Damer, "the doors are all closed, and the hall is empty." "I heard the words," repeated Esther, panting heavily, "as plainly as I heard you now. — Oh, heaven, support me!" "Fie, Esther, fie!" "I have no choice!" continued she, looking upward fixedly, and seeming to address her speech to heaven. "If you hear and see and blame me, Francis, remember what I suffered for your sake. I do it for the best. O, my good guardian, look on me to-night! If, in this step I am about to take, I act at all from selfish or unworthy motives; if my heart be false; if I seek my own good in anything I do to-night, I do no ask thee to hold up thine arm! I do not shun the anger that is gathering on my destiny! But my heart is silent. My heart accuses me of nothing evil in my intention, and I fear not your displeasure since you know it is my duty and not my will that draws me to this sacrifice."

addressing a handsome countryman who just then made his appearance in the passage leading to the servants' hall. "Where are you goin' now?" "To Glendalough, Misther Aarun," returned the stranger, gathering around him the folds of his large frieze coat. "How's the missiz?" "Thank you, finely. You mustn't stir yet." "O, that I mightn't if I can stop a minute, 'tis a most one, an' I have a long road before me." "You must come back, and take a little nourishment again' the way. Take off your coat and come." With some decent persuasions, Davy Lenigan, ("for that was his name," as the old story books have it) was prevailed upon to return and take his seat by the blazing fire in the servants' hall. It was a comfortable apartment, floored with brick, with a deal table extending nearly the whole length, and flanked by two forms of the same material. A pair of arm-chairs, intended as seats of honor for the coachman and the cook, were placed on each side the fire, and, those respected functionaries being now absent, Davy Lenigan was invited to take possession of that position which was usually occupied by the Phaeton of Glendearg. Here he sat for some moments, while old Aaron hurried out of the room, to procure materials for whiskey punch, which was what he meant to intimate by the word "nourishment." "Ah, Mrs. Keleher," said Davy, observing the nurse making some arrangements at the end of the room, "so this is the way old times are forgotten above stairs!" "Ah, how your tongue now, Davy," said the old woman, "there's reason in all things." "Ah," continued Davy, with a sad countenance, "it's little Misther Riordan, my poor young masther, ever thought she'd turn on him that way in his grave." "E'howl your tongue, now, Davy." "Oh, Masther Francis, they hadn't my heart in their buzzom when they forgot you that way, and the color you wore the day you died. Only four years gone, what four? 'tisn't, nor passin' three an' a half, an' there she is goin' to put the very deceiver in your place that was the cause o' your destruction an' your banishment! The very deceiver! 'm sure I hard him myself, the day he parted her, talkin' an' he havin' her hand betune the two of his, an' he sayin' his last word, 'Be true! Look, Mrs. Keleher, there's no use in talkin', but it would kill the Danes to hear him sayin' that word, that day! An' now to think of her marryin' another man, an' takin' to Lacy of all the world! Dear knows, my heart is broke from the thoughts of it. An' sure what hurt it was for one of his own profession (religion) he suffered, but for a methodish? Ah, dear, dear, dear!" "Howl, again, Davy; Aaron will hear you." "Aye, let me alone. Let 'em all rise out of it for love, afther that. An' 'tisn't that, but the talk she used to have herself, about the country, an' the boys, Ah, Masther Frank! Masther Frank! Dear knows I wouldn't wonder if he showed himself to her of a night on the 'count of it." "Eyeh!" Mrs. Keleher exclaimed with a faint shriek. "Dear knows, I wouldn't. Three year an' a half! Sure it takes seven years to make a man dead in law, an' it seems there's only half the time wantin' to make him dead in love." "Well, well, acree, the dead is dead, an' the livin' is livin', let us take care of ourselves and not to be jedgin' any one. Howl your tongue, now, here's Aaron comin'."