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FALKLAND

By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

BOOK IV.

FROM MRS. ST. JOHN TO ERASMUS FALKLAND, ESQ.

At last I can give a more favourable answer to your letters. Emily is now quite out of danger. Since the day you forced yourself, with such a disinterested regard for her health and reputation, into her room, she grew (no thanks to your forbearance) gradually better. I trust that she will be able to see you in a few days. I hope this the more, because she now feels and decides that it will be for the last time. You have, it is true, injured her happiness for life her virtue, thank Heaven, is yet spared; and though you have made her wretched, you will never, I trust, succeed in making her despised.

You ask me, with some menacing and more complaint, why I am so bitter against you. I will tell you. I not only know Emily, and feel confident, from that knowledge, that nothing can recompense her for the reproaches of conscience, but I know you, and am convinced that you are the last man to render her happy. I set aside, for the moment, all rules of religion and morality in general, and speak to you (to use the cant and abused phrase) "without prejudice" as to the particular instance. Emily's nature is soft and susceptible, yours fickle and wayward in the extreme. The smallest change or caprice in you, which would not be noticed by a mind less delicate, would wound her to the heart. You know that the very softness of her character arises from its want of strength. Consider, for a moment, if she could bear the humiliation and disgrace which visit so heavily the offences of an English wife? She has been brought up in the strictest notions of morality; and, in a mind, not naturally strong, nothing can efface the first impressions of education. She is not—indeed she is not—fit for a life of sorrow or degradation. In another character, another line of conduct might be desirable; but with regard to her, pause, Falkland,

I beseech you, before you attempt again to destroy her for ever. I have said all. Farewell.

Your, and above all, Emily's friend.

FROM ERASMUS FALKLAND, ESQ., TO LADY EMILY MANDEVILLE.

You will see me, Emily, now that you are recovered sufficiently to do so without danger. I do not ask this as a favour. If my love has deserved, anything from yours, if past recollections give me any claim over you, if my nature has not forfeited the spell which it formerly possessed upon your own, I demand it as a right.

The bearer waits for your answer.

FROM LADY EMILY MANDEVILLE TO ERASMUS FALKLAND, ESQ.

See you, Falkland! Can you doubt it? Can you think for a moment that your commands can ever cease to become a law to me? Come here whenever you please. If, during my illness, they have prevented it, it was without my knowledge. I await you; but I own that this interview will be the last, if I can claim anything from your mercy.

FROM ERASMUS FALKLAND, ESQ., TO LADY EMILY MANDEVILLE.

I have seen you, Emily, and for the last time! My eyes are dry—my hand does not tremble. I live, move, breathe, as before—and yet I have seen you for the last time! You told me—even while you leaned on my bosom, even while your lip pressed mine—you told me (and I saw your sincerity) to spare you, and to see you no more. You told me you had no longer any will, any fate of your own; that you would, if I still continued to desire it, leave friends, home, honour, for me; but you did not disguise from me that you would, in so doing, leave happiness also. You did not conceal from me that I was not sufficient to constitute all your world: you threw yourself, as you had done once before, upon what you called my generosity: you did not deceive yourself then; you have not deceived yourself now. In two weeks I shall leave England, probably for ever. I have another country still more dear to me, from its afflictions and humiliation. Public ties differ but little in their nature from private; and this confession of preference of what is debased to what is exalted, will be an answer to Mrs. St. John's assertion, that we cannot love in disgrace as we can in honour. Enough of this. In the choice, my poor Emily, that you have made, I cannot reproach you. You have done wisely, rightly, virtuously. You said that this separation must rest rather with me than with yourself; that you would be mine the moment I demanded it. I will not now or ever accept this promise. No one, much less one whom I love so intensely, so truly as I do you, shall ever receive disgrace at my hands, unless she can feel that that disgrace would be dearer to her than glory elsewhere; that the simple fate of being mine was not so much a recompense as a reward; and that, in spite of worldly depreciation and shame, it would constitute and concentrate all her visions of happiness and pride. I am now going to bid you farewell. May you—I say this disinterestedly, and from my very heart—may you soon forget how much you have loved and yet love me! For this purpose, you cannot have a better companion than Mrs. St. John. Her opinion of me is loudly expressed, and probably true; at all events, you will do wisely to believe it. You will hear me attacked and reproached by many. I do not deny the charges; you know best what I have deserved from you. God bless you, Emily. Wherever I go, I shall never cease to love you as I do now. May you be happy in your child and in your conscience! Once more, God bless you, and farewell!

FROM LADY EMILY MANDEVILLE TO ERASMUS FALKLAND, ESQ.

O Falkland! You have conquered! I am yours—yours only—Wholly and forever. When your letter came, my hand trembled so, that I could not open it for several minutes; and when I did, I felt as if the very earth had passed from my feet. You were going from your country; you were about to be lost to me for ever. I could restrain myself no longer; all my virtue, my pride, forsook me at once. Yes, yes, you are indeed my world. I will fly with you anywhere—everywhere. Nothing can be dreadful, but not seeing you; I would be a servant—a slave—a dog, as long as I could be with you; hear one tone of your voice, catch one glance of your eye. I scarcely see the paper before me, my thoughts are so straggling and confused. Write to me one word, Falkland; one word, and I will lay it to my heart, and be happy.

——— Hotel, London.

I hasten to you, Emily—my own and only love. Your letter has restored me to life. To-morrow we shall meet.

It was with mingled feelings, alloyed and embittered, in spite of the burning hope which predominated over all, that Falkland returned to E——. He knew that he was near the completion of his most ardent wishes; that he was within the grasp of a prize which included all the thousand objects of ambition, into which, among other men, the desires are divided; the only dreams he had ventured to form for years were about to kindle into life. He had every reason to be happy;—such is the inconsistency of human nature, that he was almost wretched. The morbid melancholy, habitual to him, threw its colourings over every emotion and idea. He knew the character of the woman whose affections he had seduced; and he trembled to think of the doom to which he was about to condemn her. With this, there came over his mind a long train of dark and remorseful recollections. Emily was not the only one whose destruction he had prepared. All who had loved him, he had repaid with ruin; and one—the first—the fairest—and the most loved, with death.

That last remembrance, more bitterly than all, possessed him. It will be recollected that Falkland, in the letters which begin this work, speaking of the ties he had formed after the loss of his first love, says, that it was the senses, not the affections, that were engaged. Never, indeed, since her death, till he met Emily, had his heart been unfaithful to her memory. Alas! none but those who have cherished in their souls an image of the death; who have watched over it for long and bitter years in secrecy and gloom; who have felt that it was to them as a holy and fairy spot which no eye but theirs could profane; who have filled all things with recollections as with a spell, and made the universe one wide mausoleum of the lost;—none but those can understand the mysteries of that regret which is shed over every after passion, though it be more burning and intense; that sense of sacrilege with which we fill up the haunted recesses of the spirit with a new and a living idol and perpetrate the last act of infidelity to that buried love, which the heavens that now receive her, the earth where we beheld her, tell us, with the unnumbered voices of Nature, to worship with the incense of our faith.

His carriage stopped at the lodge. The woman who opened the gates gave him the following note

"Mr. Mandeville is returned; I almost fear that he suspects our attachment. Julia says, that if you come again to E——, she will inform him. I dare not, dearest Falkland, see you here. What is to be done? I am very ill and feverish: my brain burns so, that I can think, feel, remember nothing, but the one thought, feeling, and remembrance— that through shame, and despite of guilt, in life, and till death, I am yours. E. M."

As Falkland read this note, his extreme and engrossing love for Emily doubled with each word: an instant before, and the certainty of seeing her had suffered his mind to be divided into a thousand objects; now, doubt united them once more into one.

He altered his route to L——, and despatched from thence a short note to Emily, imploring her to meet him that evening by the lake, in order to arrange their ultimate flight. Her answer was brief, and blotted with her tears; but it was assent.

During the whole of that day, at least from the moment she received Falkland's letter, Emily was scarcely sensible of a single idea: she sat still and motionless, gazing on vacancy, and seeing nothing within her mind, or in the objects which surrounded her, but one dreary blank. Sense, thought, feeling, even remorse, were congealed and frozen; and the tides of emotion were still, bid they were ice!

As Falkland's servant had waited without to deliver the note to Emily, Mrs. St. John had observed him: her alarm and surprise only served to quicken her presence of mind. She intercepted Emily's answer under pretence of giving it herself to Falkland's servant. She read it, and her resolution was formed. After carefully resealing and delivering it to the servant, she went at once to Mr. Mandeville, and revealed Lady Emily's attachment to Falkland. In this act of treachery, she was solely instigated by her passions; and when Mandeville, roused from his wonted apathy to a paroxysm of indignation, thanked her again and again for the generosity of friendship which he imagined was all that actuated her communication, he dreamed not of the fierce and ungovernable jealousy which envied the very disgrace which her confession was intended to award. Well said the French enthusiast, "that the heart, the most serene to appearance, resembles that calm and glassy fountain which cherishes the monster of the Nile in the bosom of its waters." Whatever reward Mrs. St. John proposed to herself in this action, verily she has had the recompense that was her due. Those consequences of her treachery, which I hasten to relate, have ceased to others—to her they remain. Amidst the pleasures of

dissipation, one reflection has rankled at her mind; one dark cloud has rested between the sunshine and her soul; like the murderer in Shakespeare, the revel where she fled for forgetfulness has teemed to her with the spectres of remembrance. O thou untameable conscience! thou that never flatterest—thou that watchest over the human heart never to slumber or to sleep—it is thou that takest from us the present, barrest to us the future, and knittest the eternal chain that binds us to the rock and the vulture of the past!

The evening came on still and dark; a breathless and heavy apprehension seemed gathered over the air: the full large clouds lay without motion in the dull sky, from between which, at long and scattered intervals, the wan stars looked out; a double shadow seemed to invest the grouped and gloomy trees that stood unwavering in the melancholy horizon. The waters of the lake lay heavy and unagitated as the sleep of death; and the broken reflections of the abrupt and winding banks rested upon their bosoms, like the dreamlike remembrance of a former existence.

The hour of the appointment was arrived: Falkland stood by the spot, gazing upon the lake before him; his cheek was flushed, his hand was parched and dry with the consuming fire within him. His pulse beat thick and rapidly; the demon of evil passions was upon his soul. He stood so lost in his own reflections, that he did not for some moments perceive the fond and tearful eye which was fixed upon him on that brow and lip, thought seemed always so beautiful, so divine, that to disturb its repose was like a profanation of something holy; and though Emily came towards him with a light and hurried step, she paused involuntarily to gaze upon that noble countenance which realised her earliest visions of the beauty and majesty of love. He turned slowly, and perceived her; he came to her with his own peculiar smile; he drew her to his bosom in silence; he pressed his lips to her forehead: she leaned upon his bosom, and forgot all but him. Oh! if there be one feeling which makes Love, even guilty Love, a god, it is the knowledge that in the midst of this breathing world he reigns aloof and alone; and that those who are occupied with his worship know nothing of the pettiness, the strife, the bustle which, pollute and agitate the ordinary inhabitants of earth! What was now to them, as they stood alone in the deep stillness of Nature, everything that had engrossed them before they had met and loved? Even in her, the recollections of guilt and grief subsided: she was only sensible of one thought—the presence of the being who stood beside her,

That ocean to the rivers of her soul.

They sat down beneath an oak: Falkland stooped to kiss the cold and pale cheek that still rested upon his breast. His kisses were like lava: the turbulent and stormy elements of sin and desire were aroused even to madness within him. He clasped her still nearer to his bosom: her lips answered to his own: they caught perhaps something of the spirit which they received: her eyes were half-closed; the bosom heaved wildly that was pressed to his beating and burning heart. The skies grew darker and darker as the night stole over them: one low roll of thunder broke upon the curtained and heavy air—they did not hear it; and yet it was the knell of peace—virtue—hope—lost, lost for ever to their souls!

They separated as they had never done before. In Emily's bosom there was a dreary void—a vast blank-over which there went a low deep voice like a Spirit's—a sound indistinct and strange, that spoke a language she knew not; but felt that it told of woe-guilt-doom. Her senses were stunned: the vitality of her feelings was numbed and torpid: the first herald of despair is insensibility. "Tomorrow then," said Falkland—and his voice for the first time seemed strange and harsh to her—"we will fly hence for ever: meet me at daybreak—the carriage shall be in attendance—we cannot now unite too soon—would that at this very moment we were prepared!"—"To-morrow!" repeated Emily, "at daybreak!" and as she clung to him, he felt her shudder: "to-morrow-ay-to-morrow!"—one kiss—one embrace—one word—farewell—and they parted.

Falkland returned to L——, a gloomy foreboding rested upon his mind: that dim and indescribable fear, which no earthly or human cause can explain—that shrinking within self—that vague terror of the future—that grappling, as it were, with some unknown shade—that wandering of the spirit—whither?—that cold, cold creeping dread—of what? As he entered the house, he met his confidential servant. He gave him orders respecting the flight of the morrow, and then retired into the chamber where he slept. It was an antique and large room: the wainscot was of oak; and one broad and high window looked over the expanse of country which stretched beneath. He sat himself by the casement in silence—he opened it: the dull air came over his forehead, not with a sense of freshness, but, like the parching atmosphere of the east, charged with a weight and fever that sank heavy into his soul. He turned:—he threw himself upon the bed, and placed his hands over his face. His thoughts were scattered into a thousand indistinct forms, but over all, there was one rapturous remembrance; and that was, that the morrow was to unite him for ever to her whose possession had only rendered her more dear. Meanwhile, the hours rolled on; and as he lay thus silent and still, the clock of the distant church struck with a distinct and solemn sound upon his ear. It was the half-hour after midnight. At that moment an icy thrill ran, slow and curdling, through his veins. His heart, as if with a presentiment of what was to follow, beat

violently, and then stopped; life itself seemed ebbing away; cold drops stood upon his forehead; his eyelids trembled, and the balls reeled and glazed, like those of a dying man; a deadly fear gathered over him, so that his flesh quivered, and every hair in his head seemed instinct with a separate life, the very marrow of his bones crept, and his blood waxed thick and thick, as if stagnating into an ebbless and frozen substance. He started in a wild and unutterable terror. There stood, at the far end of the room, a dim and thin shape like moonlight, without outline or form; still, and indistinct, and shadowy. He gazed on, speechless and motionless; his faculties and senses seemed locked in an unnatural trance. By degrees the shape became clearer and clearer to his fixed and dilating eye. He saw, as through a floating and mist-like veil, the features of Emily; but how changed!—sunken and hueless, and set in death. The dropping lip, from which there seemed to trickle a deep red stain like blood; the lead-like and lifeless eye; the calm, awful, mysterious repose which broods over the aspect of the dead;—all grew, as it were, from the hazy cloud that encircled them for one, one brief, agonising moment, and then as suddenly faded away. The spell passed from his senses. He sprang from the bed with a loud cry. All was quiet. There was not a trace of what he had witnessed. The feeble light of the skies rested upon the spot where the apparition had stood; upon that spot he stood also. He stamped upon the floor—it was firm beneath his footing. He passed his hands over his body—he was awake—he was unchanged: earth, air, heaven, were around him as before. What had thus gone over his soul to awe and overcome it to such weakness? To these questions his reason could return no answer. Bold by nature, and sceptical by philosophy, his mind gradually recovered its original tone: he did not give way to conjecture; he endeavoured to discard it; he sought by natural causes to account for the apparition he had seen or imagined; and, as he felt the blood again circulating in its accustomed courses, and the night air coming chill over his feverish frame, he smiled with a stern and scornful bitterness at the terror which had so shaken, and the fancy which had so deluded, his mind.

Are there not "more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy"? A Spirit may hover in the air that we breathe: the depth of our most secret solitudes may be peopled by the invisible; our uprisings and our downittings may be marked by a witness from the grave. In our walks the dead may be behind us; in our banquets they may sit at the board; and the chill breath of the night wind that stirs the curtains of our bed may bear a message our senses receive not, from lips that once have pressed kisses on our own! Why is it that at moments there creeps over us an awe, a terror, overpowering, but undefined? Why is it that we shudder without a cause, and feel the warm life-blood stand still in its courses? Are the dead too near? Do unearthly wings touch us as they flit around? Has our soul any intercourse which the body shares not, though it feels, with the supernatural world—mysterious revealings—unimaginable communion—a language of dread and power, shaking to its centre the fleshly barrier that divides the spirit from its race?

How fearful is the very life which we hold! We have our being beneath a cloud, and are a marvel even to ourselves. There is not a single thought which has its affixed limits. Like circles in the water, our researches weaken as they extend, and vanish at last into the immeasurable and unfathomable space of the vast unknown. We are like children in the dark; we tremble in a shadowy and terrible void, peopled with our fancies! Life is our real night, and the first gleam of the morning, which brings us certainty, is death.

Falkland sat the remainder of that night by the window watching the clouds become gray as the dawn rose, and its earliest breeze awoke. He heard the trampling of the horses beneath: he drew his cloak round him, and descended. It was on a turning of the road beyond the lodge that he directed the carriage to wait, and he then proceeded to the place appointed. Emily was not yet there. He walked to and fro with an agitated and hurried step. The impression of the night had in a great measure been effaced from his mind, and he gave himself up without reserve to the warm and sanguine hopes which he had so much reason to conceive. He thought too, at moments, of those bright climates beneath which he designed their asylum, where the very air is music, and the light is like the colourings of love; and he associated the sighs of a mutual rapture with the fragrance of myrtles, and the breath of a Tuscan heaven. Time glided on. The hour was long past, yet Emily came not! The sun rose, and Falkland turned in dark and angry discontent from its beams. With every moment his impatience increased, and at last he could restrain himself no longer. He proceeded towards the house. He stood for some time at a distance; but as all seemed still hushed in repose, he drew nearer and nearer till he reached the door: to his astonishment it was open. He saw forms passing rapidly through the hall. He heard a confused and indistinct murmur. At length he caught a glimpse of Mrs. St. John. He could command himself no more. He sprang forwards—entered the door—the hall—and caught her by a part of her dress. He could not speak, but his countenance said all which his lips refused. Mrs. St. John burst into tears when she saw him. "Good God!" she said, "why are you here? Is it possible you have yet learned—" Her voice failed her. Falkland had by this time recovered himself. He turned to the servants who gathered around him. "Speak," he said calmly. "What has occurred?" "My lady—my lady!" burst at once from several tongues. "What of her:" said Falkland, with a blanched cheek, but unchanging voice. There was a pause. At that instant a man, whom Falkland recognised as the physician of the

neighbourhood, passed at the opposite end of the hall. A light, a scorching and intolerable light, broke upon him. "She is dying—she is dead, perhaps," he said, in a low sepulchral tone, turning his eye around till it had rested upon every one present. Not one answered. He paused a moment, as if stunned by a sudden shock, and then sprang up the stairs. He passed the boudoir, and entered the room where Emily slept. The shutters were only partially closed a faint light broke through, and rested on the bed: beside it bent two women. Them he neither heeded nor saw. He drew aside the curtains. He beheld — the same as he had seen it in his vision of the night before—the changed and lifeless countenance of Emily Mandeville! That face, still so tenderly beautiful, was partially turned towards him. Some dark stains upon the lip and neck told how she had died—the blood-vessel she had broken before had burst again. The bland and soft eyes, which for him never had but one expression, were closed; and the long and disheveled tresses half hid, while they contrasted, that bosom, which had but the night before first learned to thrill beneath his own. Happier in her fate than she deserved, she passed from this bitter life ere the punishment of her guilt had begun. She was not doomed to wither beneath the blight of shame, nor the coldness of estranged affection. From him whom she had so worshipped, she was not condemned to bear wrong nor change. She died while his passion was yet in its spring—before a blossom, a leaf, had faded; and she sank to repose while his kiss was yet warm upon her lip, and her last breath almost mingled with his sigh. For the woman who has erred, life has no exchange for such a death. Falkland stood mute and motionless: not one word of grief or horror escaped his lips. At length he bent down. He took the hand which lay outside the bed; he pressed it; it replied not to the pressure, but fell cold and heavy from his own. He put his cheek to her lips; not the faintest breath came from them; and then for the first time a change passed over his countenance: he pressed upon those lips one long and last kiss, and, without word, or sign, or tear, he turned from the chamber. Two hours afterwards he was found senseless upon the ground; it was upon the spot where he had met Emily the night before.

For weeks he knew nothing of this earth—he was encompassed with the spectres of a terrible dream. All was confusion, darkness, horror—a series and a change of torture! At one time he was hurried through the heavens in the womb of a fiery star, girt above and below and around with unextinguishable but unconsuming flames. Wherever he trod, as he wandered through his vast and blazing prison, the molten fire was his footing, and the breath of fire was his air. Flowers, and trees, and hills were in that world as in ours, but wrought from one lurid and intolerable light; and, scattered around, rose gigantic palaces and domes of the living flame, like the mansions of the city of Hell. With every moment there passed to and fro shadowy forms, on whose countenances was engraven unutterable anguish; but not a shriek, not a groan, rung through the red air; for the doomed, who fed and inhabited the flames, were forbidden the consolation of voice. Above there sat, fixed and black, a solid and impenetrable cloud-Night frozen into substance; and from the midst there hung a banner of a pale and sickly flame, on which was written "For Ever." A river rushed rapidly beside him. He stooped to slake the agony of his thirst—the waves were waves of fire; and, as he started from the burning draught, he longed to shriek aloud, and could not. Then he cast his despairing eyes above for mercy; and saw on the livid and motionless banner "For Ever."

A change came o'er the spirit of his dream

He was suddenly borne up on the winds and storms to the oceans of an eternal winter. He fell stunned and unstruggling upon the ebbless and sluggish waves. Slowly and heavily they rose over him as he sank: then came the lengthened and suffocating torture of that drowning death—the impotent and convulsive contest with the closing waters—the gurgle, the choking, the bursting of the pent breath, the flutter of the heart, its agony, and its stillness. He recovered. He was a thousand fathoms beneath the sea, chained to a rock round which the heavy waters rose as a wall. He felt his own flesh rot and decay, perishing from his limbs piece by piece; and he saw the coral banks, which it requires a thousand ages to form, rise slowly from their slimy bed; and spread atom by atom, till they became a shelter for the leviathan: their growth, was his only record of eternity; and ever and ever, around and above him, came vast and misshapen things—the wonders of the secret deeps; and the sea-serpent, the huge chimera of the north, made its resting-place by his side, glaring upon him with a livid and death-like eye, wan, yet burning as an expiring seta. But over all, in every change, in every moment of that immortality, there was present one pale and motionless countenance, never turning from his own. The fiends of hell, the monsters of the hidden ocean, had no horror so awful as *the human face of the dead whom he had loved*.

The word of his sentence was gone forth. Alike through that delirium and its more fearful awakening, through the past, through the future, through the vigils of the joyless day, and the broken dreams of the night, there was a charm upon his soul—a hell within himself; and the curse of his sentence was—never to forget!

When, Lady Emily returned home on that guilty and eventful night, she stole at once to her room: she dismissed her servant, and threw herself upon the ground in that deep despair which on this earth can

never again know hope. She lay there without the power to weep, or the courage to pray—how long, she knew not. Like the period before creation, her mind was a chaos of jarring elements, and knew neither the method of reflection nor the division of time.

As she rose, she heard a slight knock at the door, and her husband entered. Her heart misgave her; and when she saw him close the door carefully before he approached her, she felt as if she could have sunk into the earth, alike from her internal shame, and her fear of its detection.

Mr. Mandeville was a weak, commonplace character; indifferent in ordinary matters, but, like most imbecile minds, violent and furious when aroused. "Is this, Madam, addressed to you?" he cried, in a voice of thunder, as he placed a letter before her (it was one of Falkland's); "and this, and this, Madam?" said he, in a still louder tone, as he flung them out one after another from her own escritoire, which he had broken open.

Emily sank back, and gasped for breath. Mandeville rose, and, laughing fiercely, seized her by the arm. He grasped it with all his force. She uttered a faint scream of terror: he did not heed it; he flung her from him, and as she fell upon the ground, the blood gushed in torrents from her lips. In the sudden change of feeling which alarm created, he raised her in his arms. She was a corpse! At that instant the clock struck upon his ear with a startling and solemn sound: it was the half-hour after midnight.

The grave is now closed upon that soft and erring heart, with its guiltiest secret unrevealed. She went to that last home with a blest and unblighted name; for her guilt was unknown, and her virtues are yet recorded in the memories of the Poor.

They laid her in the stately vaults of her ancient line, and her bier was honoured with tears from hearts not less stricken, because their sorrow, if violent, was brief. For the dead there are many mourners, but only one monument—the bosom which loved them best. The spot where the hearse rested, the green turf beneath, the surrounding trees, the gray tower of the village church, and the proud halls rising beyond,—all had witnessed the childhood, the youth, the bridal-day of the being whose last rites and solemnities they were to witness now. The very bell which rang for her birth had rung also for the marriage peal; it now tolled for her death. But a little while, and she had gone forth from that home of her young and unclouded years, amidst the acclamations and blessings of all, a bride, with the insignia of bridal pomp—in the first bloom of her girlish beauty—in the first innocence of her unawakened heart, weeping, not for the future she was entering, but for the past she was about to leave, and smiling through her tears, as if innocence had no business with grief. On the same spot, where he had then waved his farewell, stood the father now. On the grass which they had then covered, flocked the peasants whose wants her childhood had relieved; by the same priest who had blessed her bridals, bent the bridegroom who had plighted its vow. There was not a tree, not a blade of grass withered. The day itself was bright and glorious; such was it when it smiled upon her nuptials. And size—she—but four little years, and all youth's innocence darkened, and earth's beauty come to dust! Alas! not for her, but the mourner whom she left! In death even love is forgotten; but in life there is no bitterness so utter as to feel everything is unchanged, except the One Being who was the soul of all—to know the world is the same, but that its sunshine is departed.

The noon was still and sultry. Along the narrow street of the small village of Lodar poured the wearied but yet unconquered band, which embodied in that district of Spain the last hope and energy of freedom. The countenances of the soldiers were haggard and dejected; they displayed even less of the vanity than their accoutrements exhibited of the pomp and circumstances of war. Yet their garments were such as even the peasants had disdained: covered with blood and dust, and tattered into a thousand rags, they betokened nothing of chivalry but its endurance of hardship; even the rent and sullied banners drooped sullenly along their staves, as if the winds themselves had become the minions of fortune, and disdained to swell the insignia of those whom she had deserted. The glorious music of battle was still. An air of dispirited and defeated enterprise hung over the whole army. "Thank Heaven," said the chief, who closed the last file as it marched—on to its scanty refreshment and brief repose; "thank Heaven, we are at least out of the reach of pursuit; and the mountains, those last retreats of liberty, are before us!" "True, Don Rafael," replied the youngest of two officers who rode by the side of the commander; "and if we can cut our passage to Mina, we may yet plant the standard of the Constitution in Madrid." "Ay," added the elder officer, "and I sing Riego's hymn in the place of the Escorial!" "Our sons may!" said the chief, who was indeed Riego himself, "but for us—all hope is over! Were we united, we could scarcely make head against the armies of France; and divided as we are, the wonder is that we have escaped so long. Hemmed in by invasion, our great enemy has been ourselves. Such has been the hostility faction has created between Spaniard and Spaniard, that we seem to have none left to waste upon Frenchmen. We cannot establish freedom if men are willing to be slaves. We have no hope, Don Alphonso—no hope—but that of death!" As Riego concluded this desponding answer, so contrary to his general enthusiasm, the younger officer rode on among the soldiers, cheering them

with words of congratulation and comfort; ordering their several divisions; cautioning them to be prepared at a moment's notice; and impressing on their remembrance those small but essential points of discipline, which a Spanish troop might well be supposed to disregard. When Riego and his companion entered the small and miserable hovel which constituted the headquarters of the place, this man still remained without; and it was not till he had slackened the girths of his Andalusian horse, and placed before it the undainty provender which the *ecurie* afforded that he thought of rebinding more firmly the bandages wound around a deep and painful sabre cut in the left arm, which for several hours had been wholly neglected. The officer, whom Riego had addressed by the name of Alphonso, came out of the hut just as his comrade was vainly endeavouring, with his teeth and one hand, to replace the ligature. As he assisted him, he said, "You know not, my dear Falkland, how bitterly I reproach myself for having ever persuaded you to a cause where contest seems to have no hope, and danger no glory." Falkland smiled bitterly. "Do not deceive yourself, my dear uncle," said he; "your persuasions would have been unavailing but for the suggestions of my own wishes. I am not one of those enthusiasts who entered on your cause with high hopes and chivalrous designs: I asked but forgetfulness and excitement—I have found them! I would not exchange a single pain I have endured for what would have constituted the pleasures of other men:—but enough of this. What time, think you, have we for repose?" "Till the evening," answered Alphonso; "our route will then most probably be directed to the Sierra Morena. The General is extremely weak and exhausted, and needs a longer rest than we shall gain. It is singular that with such weak health he should endure so great an excess of hardship and fatigue." During this conversation they entered the hut. Riego was already asleep. As they seated themselves to the wretched provision of the place, a distant and indistinct noise was heard. It came first on their ears like the birth of the mountain wind—low, and hoarse, and deep: gradually it grew loud and louder, and mingled with other sounds which they defined too well—the hum, the murmur, the trampling of steeds, the ringing echoes of the rapid march of armed men! They heard and knew the foe was upon them!—a moment more, and the drum beat to arms. "By St. Pelagio," cried Riego, who had sprung from his light sleep at the first sound of the approaching danger, unwilling to believe his fears, "it cannot be: the French are far behind:" and then, as the drum beat, his voice suddenly changed, "the enemy? the enemy! D'Aguilar, to horse!" and with those words he rushed out of the hut. The soldiers, who had scarcely begun to disperse, were soon re-collected. In the mean while the French commander, D'Argout, taking advantage of the surprise he had occasioned, poured on his troops, which consisted solely of cavalry, undaunted and undelayed by the fire of the posts. On, on they drove like a swift cloud charged with thunder, and gathering wrath as it hurried by, before it burst in tempest on the beholders. They did not pause till they reached the farther extremity of the village: there the Spanish infantry were already formed into two squares. "Halt!" cried the French commander: the troop suddenly stopped confronting the nearer square. There was one brief pause—the moment before the storm. "Charge!" said D'Argout, and the word rang throughout the line up to the clear and placid sky. Up flashed the steel like lightning; on went the troop like the clash of a thousand waves when the sun is upon them; and before the breath of the riders was thrice drawn, came the crash—the shock—the slaughter of battle. The Spaniards made but a faint resistance to the impetuosity of the onset: they broke on every side beneath the force of the charge, like the weak barriers of a rapid and swollen stream; and the French troops, after a brief but bloody victory (joined by a second squadron from the rear), advanced immediately upon the Spanish cavalry. Falkland was by the side of Riego. As the troop advanced, it would have been curious to notice the contrast of expression in the face of each; the Spaniard's features lighted up with the daring enthusiasm of his nature; every trace of their usual languor and exhaustion vanished beneath the unconquerable soul that blazed out the brighter for the debility of the frame; the brow knit; the eye flashing; the lip quivering:—and close beside, the calm, stern; passionless repose that brooded over the severe yet noble beauty of Falkland's countenance. To him danger brought scorn, not enthusiasm: he rather despised than defied it. "The dastards! they waver," said Riego, in an accent of despair, as his troop faltered beneath the charge of the French: and so saying, he spurred his steed on to the foremost line. The contest was longer, but not less decisive, than the one just concluded. The Spaniards, thrown into confusion by the first shock, never recovered themselves. Falkland, who, in his anxiety to rally and inspire the soldiers, had advanced with two other officers beyond the ranks, was soon surrounded by a detachment of dragoons: the wound in his left arm scarcely suffered him to guide his horse: he was in the most imminent danger. At that moment D'Aguilar, at the head of his own immediate followers, cut his way into the circle, and covered Falkland's retreat; another detachment of the enemy came up, and they were a second time surrounded. In the mean while, the main body of the Spanish cavalry were flying in all directions, and Riego's deep voice was heard at intervals, through the columns of smoke and dust, calling and exhorting them in vain. D'Aguilar and his scanty troop, after a desperate skirmish, broke again through the enemy's line drawn up against their retreat. The rank closed after them like waters when the object that pierced them has sunk: Falkland and his two companions were again environed: he saw his comrades cut to the earth before him. He pulled up his horse for one moment, clove down with one desperate blow the dragoon with whom he was engaged, and then setting his spurs to the very rowels into his horse, dashed at once through the circle of his foes. His remarkable presence of mind, and the

strength and sagacity of his horse, befriended him. Three sabres flashed before him, and glanced harmless from his raised sword, like lightning on the water. The circle was passed! As he galloped towards Riego, his horse started from a dead body that lay across his path. He reined up for one instant, for the countenance, which looked upwards, struck him as familiar. What was his horror, when in that livid and distorted face he recognised his uncle! The thin grizzled hairs were besprent with gore and brains, and the blood yet oozed from the spot where the ball had passed through his temple. Falkland had but a brief interval for grief; the pursuers were close behind: he heard the snort of the foremost horse before he again put spurs into his own. Riego was holding a hasty consultation with his principal officers. As Falkland rode breathless up to them, they had decided on the conduct expedient to adopt. They led the remaining square of infantry towards the chain of mountains against which the village, as it were, leaned; and there the men dispersed in all directions. "For us," said Riego to the followers on horseback who gathered around him, "for us the mountains still promise a shelter. We must ride, gentlemen, for our lives—Spain will want them yet."

Wearied and exhausted as they were, that small and devoted troop fled on into the recesses of the mountains for the remainder of that day—twenty men out of the two thousand who had halted at Lodar. As the evening stole over them, they entered into a narrow defile: the tall hills rose on every side, covered with the glory of the setting sun, as if Nature rejoiced to grant her bulwarks as a protection to liberty. A small clear stream ran through the valley, sparkling with the last smile of the departing day; and ever and anon, from the scattered shrubs and the fragrant herbage, came the vesper music of the birds, and the hum of the wild bee.

Parched with thirst, and drooping with fatigue, the wanderers sprung forward with one simultaneous cry of joy to the glassy and refreshing wave which burst so unexpectedly upon them: and it was resolved that they should remain for some hours in a spot where all things invited them to the repose they so imperiously required. They flung themselves at once upon the grass; and such was their exhaustion, that rest was almost synonymous with sleep. Falkland alone could not immediately forget himself in repose: the face of his uncle, ghastly and disfigured, glared upon his eyes whenever he closed them. Just, however, as he was sinking into an unquiet and fitful doze, he heard steps approaching: he started up, and perceived two men, one a peasant, the other in the dress of a hermit. They were the first human beings the wanderers had met; and when Falkland gave the alarm to Riego, who slept beside him, it was immediately proposed to detain them as guides to the town of Carolina, where Riego had hopes of finding effectual assistance, or the means of ultimate escape. The hermit and his companion refused, with much vehemence, the office imposed upon them; but Riego ordered them to be forcibly detained. He had afterwards reason bitterly to regret this compulsion.

Midnight came on in all the gorgeous beauty of a southern heaven, and beneath its stars they renewed their march. As Falkland rode by the side of Riego, the latter said to him in a low voice, "There is yet escape for you and my followers: none for me: they have set a price on my head, and the moment I leave these mountains, I enter upon my own destruction." "No, Rafael!" replied Falkland; "you can yet fly to England, that asylum of the free, though ally of the despotic; the abettor of tyranny, but the shelter of its victims!" Riego answered, with the same faint and dejected tone, "I care not now what becomes of me! I have lived solely for Freedom; I have made her my mistress, my hope, my dream: I have no existence but in her. With the last effort of my country let me perish also! I have lived to view liberty not only defeated, but derided: I have seen its efforts not aided, but mocked. In my own country, those only, who wore it, have been respected who used it as a covering to ambition. In other nations, the free stood aloof when the charter of their own rights was violated in the invasion of ours. I cannot forget that the senate of that England, where you promise me a home, rang with insulting plaudits when her statesman breathed his ridicule on our weakness, not his sympathy for our cause; and I—fanatic—dreamer—enthusiast, as I may be called, whose whole life has been one unremitting struggle for the opinion I have adopted, am at least not so blinded by my infatuation, but I can see the mockery it incurs. If I die on the scaffold to-morrow, I shall have nothing of martyrdom but its doom; not the triumph—the incense—the immortality of popular applause: I should have no hope to support me at such a moment, gleaned from the glories of the future—nothing but one stern and prophetic conviction of the vanity of that tyranny by which my sentence will be pronounced." Riego paused for a moment before he resumed, and his pale and death-like countenance received an awful and unnatural light from the intensity of the feeling that swelled and burned within him. His figure was drawn up to its full height, and his voice rang through the lonely hills with a deep and hollow sound, that had in it a tone of prophecy, as he resumed "It is in vain that they oppose OPINION; anything else they may subdue. They may conquer wind, water, nature itself; but to the progress of that secret, subtle, pervading spirit, their imagination can devise, their strength can accomplish, no bar: its votaries they may seize, they may destroy; itself they cannot touch. If they check it in one place, it invades them in another. They cannot build a wall across the whole earth; and, even if they could, it would pass over its summit! Chains cannot bind it, for it is immaterial—dungeons enclose it, for it is universal. Over the faggot and the scaffold—over the bleeding bodies of its defenders which they pile against its path, it sweeps on with a

noiseless but unceasing march. Do they levy armies against it, it presents to them no palpable object to oppose. Its camp is the universe; its asylum is the bosoms of their own soldiers. Let them depopulate, destroy as they please, to each extremity of the earth; but as long as they have a single supporter themselves—as long as they leave a single individual into whom that spirit can enter—so long they will have the same labours to encounter, and the same enemy to subdue."

As Riego's voice ceased, Falkland gazed upon him with a mingled pity and admiration. Sour and ascetic as was the mind of that hopeless and disappointed man, he felt somewhat of a kindred glow at the pervading and holy enthusiasm of the patriot to whom he had listened; and though it was the character of his own philosophy to question the purity of human motives, and to smile at the more vivid emotions he had ceased to feel, he bowed his soul in homage to those principles whose sanctity he acknowledged, and to that devotion of zeal and fervour with which their defender cherished and enforced them. Falkland had joined the constitutionalists with respect, but not ardour, for their cause. He demanded excitation; he cared little where he found it. He stood in this world a being who mixed in all its changes, performed all its offices, took, as if by the force of superior mechanical power, a leading share in its events; but whose thoughts and soul were as offsprings of another planet, imprisoned in a human form, and *longing for their home!*

As they rode on, Riego continued to converse with that imprudent unreserve which the openness and warmth of his nature made natural to him: not one word escaped the hermit and the peasant (whose name was Lopez Lara) as they rode on two mules behind Falkland and Riego. "Remember," whispered the hermit to his comrade, "the reward!" "I do," muttered the peasant.

Throughout the whole of that long and dreary night, the—wanderers rode on incessantly, and found themselves at daybreak near a farm-house: this was Lara's own home. They made the peasant Lara knock; his own brother opened the door. Fearful as they were of the detection to which so numerous a party might conduce, only Riego, another officer (Don Luis de Sylva), and Falkland entered the house. The latter, whom nothing ever seemed to render weary or forgetful, fixed his cold stern eye upon the two brothers, and, seeing some signs pass between them, locked the door, and so prevented their escape. For a few hours they reposed in the stables with their horses, their drawn swords by their sides. On waking, Riego found it absolutely necessary that his horse should be shod. Lopez started up, and offered to lead it to Arguillas for that purpose. "No," said Riego, who, though naturally imprudent, partook in this instance of Falkland's habitual caution: "your brother shall go and bring hither the farrier." Accordingly the brother went: he soon returned. "The farrier," he said, "was already on the road." Riego and his companions, who were absolutely fainting with hunger, sat down to breakfast; but Falkland, who had finished first, and who had eyed the man since his return with the most scrutinising attention, withdrew towards the window, looking out from time to time with a telescope which they had carried about them, and urging them impatiently to finish. "Why?" said Riego, "famished men are good for nothing, either to fight or fly—and we must wait for the farrier." "True," said Falkland, "but—" he stopped abruptly. Sylva had his eyes on his face at that moment. Falkland's colour suddenly changed: he turned round with a loud cry. "Up! up! Riego! Sylva! We are undone—the soldiers are upon us!" "Arm!" cried Riego, starting up. At that moment Lopez and his brother seized their own carbines, and levelled them at the betrayed constitutionalists. "The first who moves," cried the former, "is a dead man!" "Fools!" said Falkland, with a calm bitterness, advancing deliberately towards them. He moved only three steps—Lopez fired. Falkland staggered a few paces, recovered himself, sprang towards Lara, clove him at one blow from the skull to the jaw, and fell with his victim, lifeless upon the floor. "Enough!" said Riego to the remaining peasant; "we are your prisoners; bind us!" In two minutes more the soldiers entered, and they were conducted to Carolina. Fortunately Falkland was known, when at Paris, to a French officer of high rank then at Carolina. He was removed to the Frenchman's quarters. Medical aid was instantly procured. The first examination of his wound was decisive; recovery was hopeless!

Night came on again, with her pomp of light and shade—the night that for Falkland had no morrow. One solitary lamp burned in the chamber where he lay alone with God and his own heart. He had desired his couch to be placed by the window and requested his attendants to withdraw. The gentle and balmy air stole over him, as free and bland as if it were to breathe for him for ever; and the silver moonlight came gleaming through the lattice and played upon his wan brow, like the tenderness of a bride that sought to kiss him to repose. "In a few hours," thought he, as he lay gazing on the high stars which seemed such silent witnesses of an eternal and unfathomed mystery, "in a few hours either this feverish and wayward spirit will be at rest for ever, or it will have commenced a new career in an untried and unimaginable existence! In a very few hours I may be amongst the very heavens that I survey—a part of their own glory—a new link in a new order of beings—breathing amidst the elements of a more gorgeous world—arrayed myself in the attributes of a purer and diviner nature—a wanderer among the planets—an associate of angels—the beholder of the arcana of the great God—redeemed, regenerate, immortal, or—dust!

"There is no OEdipus to solve the enigma of life. We are—whence came we? We are not—whither do we go? All things in our existence have their object: existence has none. We live, move, beget our species, perish—and for what? We ask the past its moral; we question the gone years of the reason of our being, and from the clouds of a thousand ages there goes forth no answer. Is it merely to pant beneath this weary load; to sicken of the sun; to grow old; to drop like leaves into the grave; and to bequeath to our heirs the worn garments of toil and labour that we leave behind? Is it to sail for ever on the same sea, ploughing the ocean of time with new furrows, and feeding its billows with new wrecks, or—" and his thoughts paused blinded and bewildered.

No man, in whom the mind has not been broken by the decay of the body, has approached death in full consciousness as Falkland did that moment, and not thought intensely on the change he was about to undergo; and yet what new discoveries upon that subject has any one bequeathed us? There the wildest imaginations are driven from originality into triteness: there all minds, the frivolous and the strong, the busy and the idle, are compelled into the same path and limit of reflection. Upon that unknown and voiceless gulf of inquiry broods an eternal and impenetrable gloom; no wind breathes over it—no wave agitates its stillness: over the dead and solemn calm there is no change propitious to adventure—there goes forth no vessel of research, which is not driven, baffled and broken, again upon the shore.

The moon waxed high in her career. Midnight was gathering slowly over the earth; the beautiful, the mystic hour, blent with a thousand memories, hallowed by a thousand dreams, made tender to remembrance by the vows our youth breathed beneath its star, and solemn by the olden legends which are linked to its majesty and peace—the hour in which, men should die; the isthmus between two worlds; the climax of the past day; the verge of that which is to come; wrapping us in sleep after a weary travail, and promising us a morrow which, since the first birth of Creation has never failed. As the minutes glided on, Falkland felt himself grow gradually weaker and weaker. The pain of his wound had ceased, but a deadly sickness gathered over his heart: the room reeled before his eyes, and the damp chill mounted from his feet up—up to the breast in which the life-blood waxed dull and thick.

As the hand of the clock pointed to the half-hour after midnight the attendants who waited in the adjoining room heard a faint cry. They rushed hastily into Falkland's chamber; they found him stretched half out of the bed. His hand was raised towards the opposite wall; it dropped gradually as they approached him; and his brow, which was at first stern and bent, softened, shade by shade, into his usual serenity. But the dim film gathered fast over his eye, and the last coldness upon his limbs. He strove to raise himself as if to speak; the effort failed, and he fell motionless on his face. They stood by the bed for some moments in silence: at length they raised him. Placed against his heart was an open locket of dark hair, which one hand still pressed convulsively. They looked upon his countenance—(a single glance was sufficient)—it was hushed—proud—passionless—the seal of Death was upon it.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FALKLAND, BOOK 4 ***

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