

**SUSAN  
COOLIDGE**

LAST VERSES

Susan Coolidge

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**Coolidge S.**

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# Last Verses

## SUSAN COOLIDGE

SARAH CHAUNCEY WOOLSEY (Susan Coolidge) was born in Cleveland, Ohio, January 29, 1835. Her father, John M. Woolsey, a New Yorker, had come to Cleveland to attend to property owned by his father, and had there met Jane Andrews, a charming and graceful girl from Connecticut, whom he made his wife.

Their home was on Euclid Avenue, and comprised about five acres in house-lot, garden, orchard, pasture, and woodland. Here came into the world a family of four girls and a boy, – all vigorous and active and full of life. Sarah was the eldest and the predestined leader of the little tribe. They grew up as children of that day did under similar conditions. There was the regular old-fashioned schooling, not too exacting or strenuous, and much wholesome out-of-door life. There were horses and dogs and cattle and birds for the children to care for and play with, and much climbing and romping were permitted in a place where no near neighbors could be disturbed. To the other children life was a joyous holiday, diversified with small disappointments and dismays; but to Sarah the sky and the earth held boundless anticipations and intentions, and the world was a place of enchantment.

She was always individual from the moment she first opened her big brown eyes – passionately loving and passionately wilful, with heroic intentions and desires, and with remorse and disappointments in proportion. Part of the woodland where the axe had not yet done its work of cutting and clipping was given to the children for a playground. They called it “Paradise,” and for all of them it was a place of rapture and mystery. To the others it was full of hiding places, – to little Sarah the hiding places were bowers. They looked for eggs and birds’ nests, and had thrilling encounters with furry wild creatures, which fled at their approach; but her intercourse was all with the fairies and elves and gnomes which peopled the place. After a time they felt the presence of the fairies too; but it was under the influence of her enthusiastic imagination, which controlled their own more mundane perceptions. With her for a leader they often passed into a new world of romance and adventure and high undertakings. They lived in battlemented castles, attended by knights and squires, with danger on all sides met by lofty courage; or they rode on elephants in India, always on dignified missions, attended by great pomp and ceremony; or they lived with fairies, whose gifts might crop up under every toadstool. To be sure, the elephant on which they made their proud progress might at other times, stripped of his trappings, be serviceable as a nursery table, and the fairy gifts were apt to bear a prosaic resemblance to certain well-known and well-worn nursery properties; but invested with the mystery and romance cast upon them by Sarah’s vivid imagination, the little band went, as she led them, into the land of dreams, and felt no incongruity.

Her education went on much as she chose. The best teachers available were employed, and to each in turn she became a favorite and interesting pupil; but though her quick intelligence enabled her to pass excellent examinations and gave her a foremost place in her classes, she really assimilated and retained only what she enjoyed. Mathematics she ignored entirely. All scientific problems fascinated her by their results; but she would not open her mind to the processes by which the results were reached. For languages she had no predilections, though she used her own with singular grace and precision, drawing her words from an apparently limitless vocabulary. Through life this charming use of language, combined with her keen humor and sympathetic appreciation of all that makes life stirring and vital, made her a most fascinating companion. Her delight in literature was her real education. From her early youth she revelled in books, reading so rapidly that it seemed impossible that she could remember what she read; but, in fact, remembering it all! To have looked over a poem

two or three times was enough to make it a permanent possession. She devoured history, biography, romances, and poetry, and with intuitive judgment and taste revelled in what was really beautiful and interesting, and discarded the second-rate and commonplace. She began writing at a very early age, – fairy stories, verses, and romances, – but she never published anything until she had reached full maturity. Meantime she grew to vigorous, active womanhood, full of interests and friendships and delightful experiences of one sort and another. She was much loved, and gave such a wealth of self-forgetting, idolizing, ardent affection in return that her friends were all lovers. She drew a circle of loving admirers about her wherever she went, and was always totally unconscious of the charm she worked by her very sweet voice and manner, brilliant fun, and warm sympathy.

The Civil War broke out just as she passed from girlhood to young womanhood. It aroused in her a passion of enthusiasm and devotion, and she threw herself with all her heart and soul into work for the soldiers at home and afield. In the Soldiers' Hospital at New Haven she was an enthusiastic helper, in the wards, or storeroom, or linen closet, wherever her energy was most needed. And her leisure was filled with knitting or sewing or preparing special diet for the sick and wounded. She was a tireless worker then and ever, and nature had endowed her with great practical gifts. She was an excellent cook and an expert needlewoman, both in plain sewing and the most dainty embroidery, and all work was done with such rapidity and perfection that it was a despair for the race of plodders even to watch her swift achievements.

From New Haven she went to the Convalescent Hospital established at Portsmouth Grove, and was one of a band of excellent workers there during the second year of the war. It was a very developing and vivid experience, and one which she counted among the greatest points of interest in her life.

When the war was over, her old career of busy, never-slackening industry and purpose began again. It was full, as ever, of friendships which could not possibly claim more than she was willing to give. She naturally drew around her the cleverest men and women of her acquaintance, and her society was sought far and near.

But she did not really begin her life as an author until a few years later, when in a grove at Bethlehem, N. H., sitting on a fallen tree, she sketched the outline of "The New Year's Bargain." She had sent a few fugitive articles to certain magazines before this, but only now did she take up writing as a real work. That dainty little book, with its fantastic and graceful imaginings, was so well received by the public that she went on in a different vein, through the series of the "Katy Did" books, where fact and fiction, experience and fancy, were so blended that it was hardly possible to say in answer to the eager questionings of some of her little readers where the one ended and the other began. Katy found a large audience, and her biographer went on from children's books to verses or historical studies, such as "Old Convent Days," or mere editor's work, like the condensations of those famous old diaries of Mrs. Delany and Miss Burney. She was consulting reader for Roberts Company in the days when the hall-mark of that firm was a proof of excellence. She was very industrious, but her literary work never seemed the most absorbing part of her life. This was partly because of her intense and vivid interest in the rest of life, – the journeys, the visits, and above all the friends, – and largely because she was absolutely devoid of literary vanity or self-consciousness. She seldom talked of her work or referred in any way to her success. Her verses found a warm welcome in many hearts whose owners were all unknown to her, and sometimes she acknowledged, with a sort of tender surprise, that it was a great reward to have been able to help and encourage others. But anything like flattery or mere compliment was very distasteful to her, and she sometimes owned impatiently that "Susan Coolidge" bored her to death, and she wished she had never heard of her!

While literature became the chief occupation of her life, her artistic temperament and love of the beautiful found expression in many other ways. She instinctively surrounded herself with beautiful objects and colors. Her taste was almost unerring, and harmony of design and softly shaded tints seemed to be her natural setting. She transformed every room she lived in, were it for a week only.

She thought little of her drawings in water color. They were all flower pieces studied from life, and she was conscious of the little instruction she had received and her ignorance of technique. But all the same these lovely panels were a joy to those who were fortunate enough to possess them. As was once said by one who was no mean artist himself, “She can do what many artists – adepts in technique – fail in. She gives us the flower in all its life and spirit.” Her china painting – necessarily more conventional – was still charming, holding something of her individuality.

This vivid life of purpose and energy and never-failing zest appeared to bubble up from such an inexhaustible fountain of vitality that it seemed as if it might go on for ever. But gradually a shadow stole over it – not a very dark one at first, but inexorable. She fought with it, played with it, defied it, but it was always there! She could not acknowledge defeat and was always planning for the future with gay self-confidence; but the shadow grew! By and by the narrowing limits shut her in her chamber, but even then she looked out upon the days to come with undaunted courage. The chamber was not like a sick room. It was bright with sunshine and the sparkle of fire, and scented and gay with the flowers she so dearly loved. Here she read and wrote and saw her many friends. From hence came words of rejoicing for all her dear ones who were happy, and words of truest sympathy for those who were sad. She was one of the few people to whom the joys and sorrows of others are of equal importance to their own. She pondered over the lives of her friends with never-ending interest, and gave at every turn and crisis the truest and most comprehending sympathy. No wonder that so many warmed hands and hearts by that generous flame!

Slowly the shadow deepened. She was disturbed by it, but still wrote happily of the future and filled it with plans and purposes. But one day, April 9, 1905, very gently, Death’s finger touched her. She was not conscious of pain or trouble, “only a new sensation,” but she closed her eyes, and without a word of farewell, was gone away from us.

It is hard to sum up such a life. It was a very full and happy one. She gave much, but received much. She loved beauty, and she was always surrounded by it. She loved friendship, and nobody had more or better friends. She gave them of her best, but she drew their best from them. Hers was an ideal companionship, so full of appreciative interest and sympathy, so illuminated by wit and humor. She was ardent and eager in her plans of life. Nothing could exceed the absorption and energy with which she carried them out. But she accepted disappointment, after a little struggle, with a gay *insouciance*. So when the final defeat came she seemed to resign herself without struggle to the inevitable, and to those of us who loved her best it seemed as if that sweet and brilliant and unwearied spirit had only folded its wings for a moment before taking a longer and surer flight.

*E. D. W. G.*

April, 1906.

## HELEN KELLER

BEHIND her triple prison-bars shut in  
She sits, the whitest soul on earth to-day.  
No shadowing stain, no whispered hint of sin,  
Into that sanctuary finds the way.  
There enters only clear and proven truth  
Apportioned for her use by loving hands  
And winnowed from all knowledge of all lands  
To satisfy her ardent thirst of youth.

Like a strange alabaster mask her face,  
Rayless and sightless, set in patience dumb,  
Until like quick electric currents come  
The signals of life into her lonely place;  
Then, like a lamp just lit, an inward gleam  
Flashes within the mask's opacity,  
The features glow and dimple suddenly,  
And fun and tenderness and sparkle seem  
To irradiate the lines once dull and blind,  
While the white slender fingers reach and cling  
With quick imploring gestures, questioning  
The mysteries and the meanings: – to her mind

The world is not the sordid world we know;  
It is a happy and benignant spot  
Where kindness reigns, and jealousy is not,  
And men move softly, dropping as they go  
The golden fruit of knowledge for all to share.  
And Love is King, and Heaven is very near,  
And God to whom each separate soul is dear  
Makes fatherly answer to each whispered prayer.  
Ah, little stainless soul, shut in so close,  
May never hint of doubt creep in to be  
A shadow on the calm security  
Which wraps thee, as its fragrance wraps a rose.

## “A CLOUD OF WITNESSES”

ON Calais sands the breakers roar  
In fierce and foaming track;  
The screaming sea-gulls dip and soar,  
White seen against the black;  
And shuddering wind and furling sail  
Are making ready for the gale.

Ho, keeper of the Calais Light!  
See that your lamps burn free;  
For, if they should go out to-night,  
There will be wrecks at sea.  
Fill them and trim them with due care,  
For there is tempest in the air.

“Go out? My lamps go out, you say?  
What words are on your lips?  
There, in the offing far away,  
Are sailing countless ships,  
Beyond my ken, beyond my sight,  
But all are watching Calais Light.

“If but a single lamp should fail,  
A single flame burn dim,  
How could they ride the gathering gale,  
Or justly steer and trim?  
To right, to left, would equal be,  
There are no road-marks in the sea.

“I should not hear their drowning cry,  
Or see the ship go down,  
And weeks and months might pass us by,  
Ere came to Calais town  
The word – ‘A ship was lost one night,  
And all for want of Calais Light.’

“Here in my tower, my lamps in row,  
I sit the long hours through;  
There is no soul to mark or know  
If I my duty do;  
Yet oftentimes I seem to see  
A world of eyes all bent on me!

“Go out! My lamps go out! alas!  
It were a woeful day  
If ever it should come to pass

That I must live to say,  
A ship went down in storm and night,  
Because there failed it Calais Light.”

Ah, Christian, in your watch-tower set,  
Fill all your lamps and trim;  
For though there seem no watchers, yet  
Far in the darkness dim,  
Where souls are tossing out of view,  
A hundred eyes are fixed on you!

## COR CORDIUM

ALL diamonded with glittering stars  
The vast blue arch of air;  
Pent in behind these mortal bars  
We strain our eyes to where,  
Oh noblest heart, thou walkest apart  
Amid thy heavenly kin.  
Though blinded with the veils of sense,  
We may not look within.

Oh eyes so tender with command!  
Oh eloquent lips and true,  
Whose speech fell like a quickening fire,  
Fell like a healing dew!  
Oh zeal so strong to right the wrong,  
Oh rich, abounding heart!  
Oh stintless, tireless, kindest hand, —  
God bless thee where thou art!

Not thine the common fate to live  
Through life's long weary days,  
And give all that thou had'st to give  
Uncheered by love and praise.  
Men did not wait to call thee great  
Till death had sealed thy brow.  
They crowned thy living head with bays;  
What does it matter now?

Thy grave mound is a shrined place,  
Where pilgrim hearts may go,  
With loving thoughts and thankful prayers,  
Soft passing to and fro.  
Seldom with word the air is stirred,  
Seldom with sob or sigh;  
All silently and ceaselessly  
The march of hearts goes by.

Now half our lives seems lived on earth,  
And half in heaven with thee.  
Our heart-beats measure out the road  
To where we fain would be, —  
Beyond this strife of mortal life,  
This lonely ache and pain,  
Where we who miss and mourn thee so  
May find thee once again.

## MARTHA

HOT on the pavement burns the summer sun,  
In the deep shadow of the ilex tree  
The Master rests, while gathering one by one  
The neighbors enter, crowding silently  
To hear His words, which drop like honey-dew;  
I may not hear, there is too much to do.

How can I pause? I seem the only one  
To take a thought about this multitude  
Who, the day past and all the preaching done,  
Will need to be refreshed with wine and food;  
We cannot send the people home unfed —  
What words were those? “I am the living bread.”

There is my sister sitting the day long  
Close to His side, serene and free from care,  
Helping me not; and surely it is wrong  
To leave to me the task that she should share.  
Master, rebuke her, just and true Thou art —  
What do I hear? “She hath the better part.”

If all chose thus then all would go unfed —  
Souls hunger, yes! but bodies have their need.  
Some one must grind and mix the daily bread,  
Some one wake early that the rest may feed,  
Some one bear burdens, face the summer sun —  
But must I always, always be the one?

“Cumbered with serving,” thus the Master spake;  
But ’twas to serve Him that I worked so hard  
(And I would serve the year long for His sake).  
I dare not take the rest which is reward  
Lest He should suffer while I stay my hand.  
How hard it is, how hard to understand!

What does a voice say? “He whose power divine  
Could feed the thousands on the mountain side  
Needeth no fretting, puny aid like thine.  
One thing is needful, trust him to provide;  
The Heavenly Chance comes once nor tarries long” —  
Master, forgive me, teach me, I was wrong!

## CAEN

1894

IN the quaint Norman city, far apart,  
A width of humming distance set between,  
They rest who once lived closely heart to heart,  
William the conquering Duke and his fair Queen.

Too near of kin to wed, the Church averred,  
And barred the way which joy was fain to tread;  
But hearts spoke louder than the priestly word,  
And youth and love o'erleaped the barrier dread.

No will of wax had England's future King;  
With iron hand he brushed the curse aside,  
As 'twere a slight and disregarded thing,  
And asking leave of no man, claimed his bride.

And they were happy, spite of ban and blame,  
Rich in renown, estate, in valiant deed;  
And the sweet Duchess at her broidery frame  
Wrought her lord's victories for all men to read.

But as the years of wedlock ebb'd and flow'd,  
And still the Church averted her stern face,  
The royal pair grew weary of the load  
Of unrepented sin and long disgrace,

And bought a peace from late relenting Rome.  
Two stately abbeys built they, and endowed,  
With carven pinnacle and tower and dome,  
And soaring spire and bell-chimes pealing loud.

Within the crypt of one they buried her,  
True wife and queen, when her time came to die;  
And when strong death conquered the Conqueror,  
He slept beneath the other's altar high.

Was it of love's devising that to-day,  
With all the wide-grown city space to bar,  
Across the roofs and towers from far away  
St. Etienne looks upon La Trinita?

Was it some subtle prescience of the heart,

Which laid on time and change resistless spell,  
Forbidding both to hide or hold apart  
The resting-place of those who loved so well?

For still defying distance, day and night  
The spires like beckoning fingers seem to rise,  
The bells to call, as perished voices might,  
“Love is not dead, Beloved; love never dies!”

## TEMPERAMENTS

JACOB BOEHME, Sage and Mystic, wert thou right or wert thou wrong,

In believing and upholding that all human souls belong  
To some elemental structure, be they weak or be they strong?

That each separate spirit made is of one element, and shows,  
By its power or by its weakness, its unrest or its repose,  
Whether earth, air, fire, or water is the Source from which it flows?

'Tis a difficult conclusion; but, as in the jewel's blue,  
Red and rose and green and amber flash and leap and sparkle through,  
Through your speculative fancy seems to scintillate the true.

For the variance of the creature whom we call our fellow-man,  
Framed alike in needs and passions, on the self-same human plan,  
Grows more wide, more past believing, as we study it and scan.

Ah, the temperaments, the fateful, how they front us and surprise,  
Looking with bewildering distance out of wistful, alien eyes,  
Never drawing any nearer, or to hate or sympathize.

Eager, dominant, all unresting are the spirits born of Fire,  
Burning with a fitful fever, ever reaching high and higher,  
Shrivelling weaker wills before them in the heat of their desire.

Cool, elusive, fluctuating, hard to fix and strangely fair  
Are the difficult, grievous, grieving souls which born of Water are —  
Ours to-day, not ours to-morrow; never ours to hold and wear.

Vainly love and passion battle 'gainst their unresisting chill,  
Like the oar-stroke in the water which the drops make haste to fill,  
The impression melts and wavers, the cool surface fronts us still.

But the souls of Air! ah, sweetest, rarest of the human kind,  
They the poets are, the singers, making music for the mind,  
Lifting up the weight of living like a fresh and rushing wind.

And the souls of Earth, dear, steadfast, firm of root and sure of stay,  
Not disdainng commonplaces, not afraid of every day,  
Taking from the air and water and the sunshine what they may.

Theirs the dower of happy giving, theirs the heritage of Fate  
Which, when faith has grown to fulness, and the little is made great,  
Brings to love its true rewarding, harvested or soon or late.

Jacob Boehme, by-gone mystic, gifted with a strange insight,  
As I read your yellowed pages, which in former times were white,  
And review my men and women, half I deem that you were right.

## THE HOLY NAME

'TIS said when pious Moslem walk abroad,  
If on the path they spy a floating bit  
Of paper, reverently they turn aside  
And shun the scrap, nor set a foot on it,  
Lest haply thereupon the awful name  
Of mighty Allah should by chance be writ.

We smile at the vain dread; but blind and dull  
The soul that only smiles, and cannot see  
A thought of perfect beauty folded in  
The zealot's reverent fear, as in some free  
And flaunting flower-cup may be hived and held  
One drop of precious honey for the bee.

Small wind-blown things there are, which any day  
Float by in air or on our pathway lie,  
Swift-winged moments speeding on their way,  
Brief opportunities, which we pass by  
Heedless and smiling, little subtle threads  
Of influence – intimations soft and sly.

Careless we tread them down, as, pressing on,  
Our eager inconsiderate feet we set  
On the unvalued treasures where they lie.  
We are too blind to prize or to regret,  
Too dull to recognize the mystic Name  
Graven upon them as on amulet.

Ah! dears, let us no longer do this thing,  
And thus the sweeter life lose and let fall;  
But with anointed eyes and reverent feet  
Pass on our way, noting and prizing all,  
Knowing that God's great token-sign is set,  
Not on the large things only, but the small.

## “I AM THE WAY”

ART Thou the way, Lord? Yet the way is steep!  
And hedged with cruel thorns and set with briars;  
We stumble onward, or we pause to weep,  
And still the hard road baffles our desires,  
And still the hot noon beats, the hours delay,  
The end is out of sight, – Art Thou the way?

Art Thou the way, Lord? Yet the way is blind!  
We grope and guess, perplexed with mists and suns;  
We only see the guide-posts left behind,  
Invisible to us the forward ones;  
The chart is hard to read, we wind and stray,  
Beset with hovering doubts, – Art Thou the way?

Art Thou the way, Lord? Yet the way is long!  
Year follows year while we are journeying still,  
The limbs are feeble grown which once were strong,  
Dimmed are the eyes and quenched the ardent will,  
The world is veiled with shadows sad and gray;  
Yet we must travel on, – Art Thou the way?

Art Thou the way, Lord? Then the way is sweet,  
No matter if it puzzle or distress,  
Though winds may scourge, or blinding suns may beat,  
The perfect rest shall round our weariness,  
Cool dews shall heal the fevered pulse of day;  
We shall find home at last through thee, the way.

## **HER HEART WAS LIKE A GENEROUS FIRE**

(S. P. C.)

**H**ER heart was like a generous fire,  
Round which a hundred souls could sit  
And warm them in the unstinted blaze.  
Those who held nearest place to it  
Had cheer and comfort all their days;  
Those who, perforce, were further still  
Yet felt her radiance melt their chill,  
Their darkness lightened by her rays.

Her heart was like a generous fire!  
The trivial dross of thought and mind  
Shrivelled when brought too near its heat,  
The hidden gold was caught, refined;  
A subtle effluence keen and sweet  
From every creature drew its best;  
Gave inspiration, strength, and rest,  
Quickened the moral pulse's beat.

Her heart was like a generous fire!  
Circled by smaller fires in ring,  
Each lit by her infectious spark  
To send forth warmth and comforting  
Into hard paths and by-ways dark.  
The little fires, they still burn on;  
But the great kindling flame is gone,  
Caught up past our imagining.

Her heart was like a generous fire!  
How changed the summer scenes, how chill,  
How coldly do the mornings break,  
Since that great heart is quenched and still,  
Which kept so many hearts awake!  
O Lord the Light! shine Thou instead,  
Quicken and trim the fires she fed,  
And make them burn for her dear sake.

## THE LEGEND OF THE ALMOST SAVED

### FROM THE RUSSIAN

ONCE a poor soul, reft from a dull, hard lot  
(Which yet was dear, as even dull life may be),  
Found herself bodiless in that dread spot  
Which mortals know as “Hell” and fearfully  
Name in a whisper, while the Saints name not.

“I was not wicked; they have told God lies  
To make him send me here,” she moaned in pain,  
Then suddenly her wan, reproachful eyes,  
Raised to the Pity never sought in vain,  
Beheld a hovering shape in aureoled guise.

It was Saint Peter, guardian of the gate,  
The shining gate where blessed ones go in.  
“Why thus,” demanded he, “bewail your fate?  
What good deed did you in your life to win  
The right to Heaven? Speak ere it be too late!”

Then the poor soul, – all downcast and dismayed,  
Scanning the saint’s face and his austere air,  
In vain reviewed her life, in vain essayed  
To think of aught accomplished which might bear  
Heaven’s scrutiny. At length she answer made.

“Poor was I,” faltered she, “so very poor!  
Little I had to spare, yet once I gave  
A carrot from my scanty garden store  
To one more poor than I was.” Sad and grave  
Saint Peter questioned, “Didst thou do no more?”

“No,” said the trembling soul. He bent his head.  
“Wait thou until I bear thy plea on high;  
The angel there who judges quick and dead  
Shall weigh thee in his scales, and rightfully  
Decide thy final place and doom,” he said.

So the soul waited till Hell’s doors should ope.  
It opened never, but adown the sky  
There swung a carrot from a slender rope,  
And a voice reached her, sounding from on high,  
Saying, “If the carrot bear thee, there is hope.”

She clutched the rescue by the Heavens sent.  
The carrot held – small good has mighty strength;  
But one, and then another, as she went  
Caught at her flying garments, till at length  
Four of the lost rose with her, well content.

The smoke of Hell curled darkly far beneath,  
The blue of Heaven gleamed fair and bright in view,  
Life quivered in the balance over Death.  
Almost had life prevailed when, “Who are you,”  
The soul cried out with startled, jealous breath,

“Who hang so heavily, going where I go?  
God never meant to save *you!* It is I,  
I whom he sent for from the Place of Wo.  
Loosen your hold at once!” Then suddenly  
The carrot yielded, and all fell below.

The pitiful, grieved angels overhead  
Watched the poor souls shoot wailing through the air  
Toward the lurid shadows darkly red,  
And sadly sighed. “Heaven was so near, so fair,  
Almost we had them safely here,” they said.

## TWO ANGELS

BESIDE a grave two Angels sit,  
Set there to guard and hallow it;  
With grave sweet eyes and folded wings  
They watch it all the day and night,  
And dress the place and keep it bright,  
And drive away all hurtful things.

And one is called in heavenly speech,  
Used by the Blessed each to each,  
“The Angel of the Steadfast Heart”:

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