

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**ERNEST  
MALTRAVERS —  
VOLUME 04**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

**Ernest Maltravers — Volume 04**

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# Edward Bulwer-Lytton

## Ernest Maltravers — Volume 04

### BOOK IV

*"Strange is the land that holds thee,—and thy couch is widow'd of the loved one."*

*EURIP. /Med./ 442*

*Translation by R. G.*

### CHAPTER I

*"I, alas!*

*Have lived but on this earth a few sad years;*

*And so my lot was ordered, that a father*

*First turned the moments of awakening life*

*To drops, each poisoning youth's sweet hope."*

*"/Cenci/."*

FROM accompanying Maltravers along the noiseless progress of mental education, we are now called awhile to cast our glances back at the ruder and harsher ordeal which Alice Darvil was ordained to pass. Along her path poetry shed no flowers, nor were her lonely steps towards the distant shrine at which her pilgrimage found its rest lighted by the mystic lamp of science, or guided by the thousand stars which are never dim in the heavens for those favoured eyes from which genius and fancy have removed many of the films of clay. Not along the aerial and exalted ways that wind far above the homes and business of common men—the solitary Alps of Spiritual Philosophy—wandered the desolate steps of the child of poverty and sorrow. On the beaten and rugged highways of common life, with a weary heart, and with bleeding feet, she went her melancholy course. But the goal which is the great secret of life, the */summum arcanum/* of all philosophy, whether the Practical or the Ideal, was, perhaps, no less attainable for that humble girl than for the elastic step and aspiring heart of him who thirsted after the Great, and almost believed in the Impossible.

We return to that dismal night in which Alice was torn from the roof of her lover. It was long before she recovered her consciousness of what had passed, and gained a full perception of the fearful revolution which had taken place in her destinies. It was then a grey and dreary morning twilight; and the rude but covered vehicle which bore her was rolling along the deep ruts of an unfrequented road, winding among the uninclosed and mountainous wastes that, in England, usually betoken the neighbourhood of the sea. With a shudder Alice looked round: Walters, her father's accomplice, lay extended at her feet, and his heavy breathing showed that he was fast asleep. Darvil himself was urging on the jaded and sorry horse, and his broad back was turned towards Alice; the rain, from which, in his position, he was but ill protected by the awning, dripped dismally from his slouched hat; and now, as he turned round, and his sinister and gloomy gaze rested upon the face of Alice, his bad countenance, rendered more haggard by the cold raw light of the cheerless dawn, completed the hideous picture of unveiled and ruffianly wretchedness.

"Ho, ho! Alley, so you are come to your senses," said he, with a kind of joyless grin. "I am glad of it, for I can have no fainting fine ladies with me. You have had a long holiday, Alley; you must

now learn once more to work for your poor father. Ah, you have been d——d sly; but never mind the past—I forgive it. You must not run away again without my leave; if you are fond of sweethearts, I won't balk you—but your old father must go shares, Alley."

Alice could hear no more: she covered her face with the cloak that had been thrown about her, and though she did not faint, her senses seemed to be locked and paralysed. By and by Walters woke, and the two men, heedless of her presence, conversed upon their plans. By degrees she recovered sufficient self-possession to listen, in the instinctive hope that some plan of escape might be suggested to her. But from what she could gather of the incoherent and various projects they discussed, one after another—disputing upon each with frightful oaths and scarce intelligible slang, she could only learn that it was resolved at all events to leave the district in which they were—but whither seemed yet all undecided. The cart halted at last at a miserable-looking hut, which the signpost announced to be an inn that afforded good accommodation to travellers; to which announcement was annexed the following epigrammatic distich:

"Old Tom, he is the best of gin;  
Drink him once, and you'll drink him /agin/!"

The hovel stood so remote from all other habitations, and the waste around was so bare of trees, and even shrubs, that Alice saw with despair that all hope of flight in such a place would be indeed a chimera. But to make assurance doubly sure, Darvil himself, lifting her from the cart, conducted her up a broken and unlighted staircase, into a sort of loft rather than a room, and, rudely pushing her in, turned the key upon her, and descended. The weather was cold, the livid damp hung upon the distained walls, and there was neither fire nor hearth; but thinly clad as she was—her cloak and shawl her principal covering—she did not feel the cold, for her heart was more chilly than the airs of heaven. At noon an old woman brought her some food, which, consisting of fish and poached game, was better than might have been expected in such a place, and what would have been deemed a feast under her father's roof. With an inviting leer, the crone pointed to a pewter measure of raw spirits that accompanied the viands, and assured her, in a cracked and maudlin voice, that "'Old Tom' was a kinder friend than any of the young fellers!" This intrusion ended, Alice was again left alone till dusk, when Darvil entered with a bundle of clothes, such as are worn by the peasants of that primitive district of England.

"There, Alley," said he, "put on this warm toggery; finery won't do now. We must leave no scent in the track; the hounds are after us, my little blowen. Here's a nice stuff gown for you, and a red cloak that would frighten a turkey-cock. As to the other cloak and shawl, don't be afraid; they sha'n't go to the pop-shop, but we'll take care of them against we get to some large town where there are young fellows with blunt in their pockets; for you seem to have already found out that your face is your fortune, Alley. Come, make haste, we must be starting. I shall come up for you in ten minutes. Pish! don't be faint hearted; here, take 'Old Tom'—take it, I say. What, you won't? Well, here's to your health, and a better taste to you!"

And now, as the door once more closed upon Darvil, tears for the first time came to the relief of Alice. It was a woman's weakness that procured for her that woman's luxury. Those garments—they were Ernest's gift—Ernest's taste; they were like the last relic of that delicious life which now seemed to have fled for ever. All traces of that life—of him, the loving, the protecting, the adored; all trace of herself, as she had been re-created by love, was to be lost to her for ever. It was (as she had read somewhere, in the little elementary volumes that bounded her historic lore) like that last fatal ceremony in which those condemned for life to the mines of Siberia are clothed with the slave's livery, their past name and record eternally blotted out, and thrust into the vast wastes, from which even the mercy of despotism, should it ever re-awaken, cannot recall them; for all evidence of them—all individuality—all mark to distinguish them from the universal herd, is expunged from the world's

calendar. She was still sobbing in vehement and unrestrained passion, when Darvil re-entered. "What, not dressed yet?" he exclaimed, in a voice of impatient rage; "hark ye, this won't do. If in two minutes you are not ready, I'll send up John Walters to help you; and he is a rough hand, I can tell you."

This threat recalled Alice, to herself. "I will do as you wish," said she meekly.

"Well, then, be quick," said Darvil; "they are now putting the horse to. And mark me, girl, your father is running away from the gallows, and that thought does not make a man stand upon scruples. If you once attempt to give me the slip, or do or say anything that can bring the bulkies upon us—by the devil in hell!—if, indeed, there be hell or devil—my knife shall become better acquainted with that throat—so look to it!"

And this was the father—this the condition—of her whose ear had for months drunk no other sound than the whispers of flattering love—the murmurs of Passion from the lips of Poetry.

They continued their journey till midnight; they then arrived at an inn, little different from the last; but here Alice was no longer consigned to solitude. In a long room, reeking with smoke, sat from twenty to thirty ruffians before a table on which mugs and vessels of strong potations were formidably interspersed with sabres and pistols. They received Walters and Darvil with a shout of welcome, and would have crowded somewhat unceremoniously round Alice, if her father, whose well-known desperate and brutal ferocity made him a man to be respected in such an assembly, had not said, sternly, "Hands off, messmates, and make way by the fire for my little girl—she is meat for your masters."

So saying, he pushed Alice down into a huge chair in the chimney-nook, and, seating himself near her, at the end of the table, hastened to turn the conversation.

"Well, Captain," said he, addressing a small thin man at the head of the table, "I and Walters have fairly cut and run—the land has a bad air for us, and we now want the sea-breeze to cure the rope fever. So, knowing this was your night, we have crowded sail, and here we are. You must give the girl there a lift, though I know you don't like such lumber, and we'll run ashore as soon as we can."

"She seems a quiet little body," replied the captain; "and we would do more than that to oblige an old friend like you. In half an hour Oliver<sup>1</sup> puts on his nightcap, and we must then be off."

"The sooner the better."

The men now appeared to forget the presence of Alice, who sat faint with fatigue and exhaustion, for she had been too sick at heart to touch the food brought to her at their previous halting-place, gazing abstractedly upon the fire. Her father, before their departure, made her swallow some morsels of sea-biscuit, though each seemed to choke her; and then, wrapped in a thick boat-cloak, she was placed in a small well-built cutter; and as the sea-winds whistled round her, the present cold and the past fatigues lulled her miserable heart into the arms of the charitable Sleep.

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<sup>1</sup> The moon.

## CHAPTER II

*"You are once more a free woman;  
Here I discharge your bonds."*

*/The Custom of the Country/.*

AND many were thy trials, poor child; many that, were this book to germinate into volumes more numerous than monk ever composed upon the lives of saint or martyr (though a hundred volumes contained the record of two years only in the life of St. Anthony), it would be impossible to describe! We may talk of the fidelity of books, but no man ever wrote even his own biography without being compelled to omit at least nine-tenths of the most important materials. What are three—what six volumes? We live six volumes in a day! Thought, emotion, joy, sorrow, hope, fear, how prolix would they be if they might each tell their hourly tale! But man's life itself is a brief epitome of that which is infinite and everlasting; and his most accurate confessions are a miserable abridgment of a hurried and confused compendium!

It was about three months, or more, from the night in which Alice wept herself to sleep amongst those wild companions, when she contrived to escape from her father's vigilant eye. They were then on the coast of Ireland. Darvil had separated himself from Walters—from his seafaring companions: he had run through the greater part of the money his crimes had got together; he began seriously to attempt putting into execution his horrible design of depending for support upon the sale of his daughter. Now Alice might have been moulded into sinful purposes before she knew Maltravers; but from that hour her very error made her virtuous—she had comprehended, the moment she loved, what was meant by female honour; and by a sudden revelation, she had purchased modesty, delicacy of thought and soul, in the sacrifice of herself. Much of our morality (prudent and right upon system) with respect to the first false step of women, leads us, as we all know, into barbarous errors as to individual exceptions. Where, from pure and confiding love, that first false step has been taken, many a woman has been saved in after life from a thousand temptations. The poor unfortunates who crowd our streets and theatres have rarely, in the first instances, been corrupted by love; but by poverty, and the contagion of circumstance and example. It is a miserable cant phrase to call them the victims of seduction; they have been the victims of hunger, of vanity, of curiosity, of evil /female/ counsels; but the seduction of love hardly ever conducts to a /life/ of vice. If a woman has once really loved, the beloved object makes an impenetrable barrier between her and other men; their advances terrify and revolt—she would rather die than be unfaithful even to a memory. Though man love the sex, woman loves only the individual; and the more she loves him, the more cold she is to the species. For the passion of woman is in the sentiment—the fancy—the heart. It rarely has much to do with the coarse images with which boys and old men—the inexperienced and the worn-out—connect it.

But Alice, though her blood ran cold at her terrible father's language, saw in his very design the prospect of escape. In an hour of drunkenness he thrust her from the house, and stationed himself to watch her—it was in the city of Cork. She formed her resolution instantly—turned up a narrow street, and fled at full speed. Darvil endeavoured in vain to keep pace with her—his eyes dizzy, his steps reeling with intoxication. She heard his last curse dying from a distance on the air, and her fear winged her steps: she paused at last, and found herself on the outskirts of the town. She paused, overcome, and deadly faint; and then, for the first time, she felt that a strange and new life was stirring within her own. She had long since known that she bore in her womb the unborn offspring of Maltravers, and that knowledge had made her struggle and live on. But now, the embryo had quickened into being—it moved—it appealed to her, a—thing unseen, unknown; but still it was a living creature

appealing to a mother! Oh, the thrill, half of ineffable tenderness, half of mysterious terror, at that moment!—What a new chapter in the life of a woman did it not announce:—Now, then, she must be watchful over herself—must guard against fatigue—must wrestle with despair. Solemn was the trust committed to her—the life of another—the child of the Adored. It was a summer night—she sat on a rude stone, the city on one side, with its lights and lamps;—the whitened fields beyond, with the moon and the stars above; and /above/ she raised her streaming eyes, and she thought that God, the Protector, smiled upon her from the face of the sweet skies. So, after a pause and a silent prayer, she rose and resumed her way. When she was wearied she crept into a shed in a farmyard, and slept, for the first time for weeks, the calm sleep of security and hope.

## CHAPTER III

*"How like a prodigal doth she return,  
With over-weathered ribs and ragged sails."*

*/Merchant of Venice/.*

*"/Mer./ What are these?  
/Uncle./ The tenants."*

*BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.—/Wit without  
Money/.*

IT was just two years from the night in which Alice had been torn from the cottage: and at that time Maltravers was wandering amongst the ruins of ancient Egypt, when, upon the very lawn where Alice and her lover had so often loitered hand in hand, a gay party of children and young people were assembled. The cottage had been purchased by an opulent and retired manufacturer. He had raised the low thatched roof another story high—and blue slate had replaced the thatch—and the pretty verandahs overgrown with creepers had been taken down because Mrs. Hobbs thought they gave the rooms a dull look; and the little rustic doorway had been replaced by four Ionic pillars in stucco; and a new dining-room, twenty-two feet by eighteen, had been built out at one wing, and a new drawing-room had been built over the new dining-room. And the poor little cottage looked quite grand and villa-like. The fountain had been taken away, because it made the house damp; and there was such a broad carriage-drive from the gate to the house! The gate was no longer the modest green wooden gate, ever ajar with its easy latch; but a tall, cast-iron, well-locked gate, between two pillars to match the porch. And on one of the gates was a brass plate, on which was graven, "Hobbs' Lodge—Ring the bell." The lesser Hobbses and the bigger Hobbses were all on the lawn—many of them fresh from school—for it was the half-holiday of a Saturday afternoon. There was mirth, and noise, and shouting and whooping, and the respectable old couple looked calmly on; Hobbs the father smoking his pipe (alas, it was not the dear meerschaum); Hobbs the mother talking to her eldest daughter (a fine young woman, three months married, for love, to a poor man), upon the proper number of days that a leg of mutton (weight ten pounds) should be made to last. "Always, my dear, have large joints, they are much the most saving. Let me see—what a noise the boys do make! No, my love, the ball's not here."

"Mamma, it is under your petticoats."

"La, child, how naughty you are!"

"Holla, you sir! it's my turn to go in now. Bidy, wait,—girls have no innings—girls only fag out."

"Bob, you cheat."

"Pa, Ned says I cheat."

"Very likely, my dear, you are to be a lawyer."

"Where was I, my dear?" resumed Mrs. Hobbs, resettling herself, and readjusting the invaded petticoats. "Oh, about the leg of mutton!—yes, large joints are the best—the second day a nice hash, with dumplings; the third, broil the bone—your husband is sure to like broiled bones!—and then keep the scraps for Saturday's pie;—you know, my dear, your father and I were worse off than you when we began. But now we have everything that is handsome about us—nothing like management. Saturday pies are very nice things, and then you start clear with your joint on Sunday. A good wife like you should never neglect the Saturday's pie!"

"Yes," said the bride, mournfully; "but Mr. Tiddy does not like pies."

"Not like pies! that very odd—Mr. Hobbs likes pies—perhaps you don't have the crust made thick eno'. How somever, you can make it up to him with a pudding. A wife should always study her husband's tastes—what is a man's home without love? Still a husband ought not to be aggravating, and dislike pie on a Saturday!"

"Holla! I say, ma, do you see that 'ere gipsy? I shall go and have my fortune told."

"And I—and I!"

"Lor, if there ben't a tramper!" cried Mr. Hobbs, rising indignantly; "what can the parish be about?"

The object of these latter remarks, filial and paternal, was a young woman in a worn, threadbare cloak, with her face pressed to the openwork of the gate, and looking wistfully—oh, how wistfully!—within. The children eagerly ran up to her, but they involuntarily slackened their steps when they drew near, for she was evidently not what they had taken her for. No gipsy hues darkened the pale, thin, delicate cheek—no gipsy leer lurked in those large blue and streaming eyes—no gipsy effrontery bronzed that candid and childish brow. As she thus pressed her countenance with convulsive eagerness against the cold bars, the young people caught the contagion of inexpressible and half-fearful sadness—they approached almost respectfully—"Do you want anything here?" said the eldest and boldest of the boys.

"I—I—surely this is Dale Cottage?"

"It was Dale Cottage, it is Hobbs' Lodge now; can't you read?" said the heir of the Hobbs's honours, losing, in contempt at the girl's ignorance, his first impression of sympathy.

"And—and—Mr. Butler, is he gone too?"

Poor child! she spoke as if the cottage was gone, not improved; the Ionic portico had no charm for her!

"Butler!—no such person lives here. Pa, do you know where Mr. Butler lives?"

Pa was now moving up to the place of conference the slow artillery of his fair round belly and portly calves. "Butler, no—I know nothing of such a name—no Mr. Butler lives here. Go along with you—ain't you ashamed to beg?"

"No Mr. Butler!" said the girl, gasping for breath, and clinging to the gate for support. "Are you sure, sir?"

"Sure, yes!—what do you want with him?"

"Oh, papa, she looks faint!" said one of the /girls/ deprecatingly—"do let her have something to eat; I'm sure she's hungry."

Mr. Hobbs looked angry; he had often been taken in, and no rich man likes beggars. Generally speaking, the rich man is in the right. But then Mr. Hobbs turned to the suspected tramper's sorrowful face and then to his fair pretty child—and his good angel whispered something to Mr. Hobbs's heart—and he said, after a pause, "Heaven forbid that we should not feel for a poor fellow-creature not so well to do as ourselves. Come in, my lass, and have a morsel to eat."

The girl did not seem to hear him, and he repeated the invitation, approaching to unlock the gate.

"No, sir," said she, then; "no, I thank you. I could not come in now. I could not eat here. But tell me, sir, I implore you, can you not even guess where I may find Mr. Butler?"

"Butler!" said Mrs. Hobbs, whom curiosity had now drawn to the spot. "I remember that was the name of the gentleman who hired the place, and was robbed."

"Robbed!" said Mr. Hobbs, falling back and relocking the gate—"and the new tea-pot just come home," he muttered inly. "Come, be off, child—be off; we know nothing of your Mr. Butlers."

The young woman looked wildly in his face, cast a hurried glance over the altered spot, and then, with a kind of shiver, as if the wind had smitten her delicate form too rudely, she drew her cloak more closely round her shoulders, and without saying another word, moved away. The party looked

after her as, with trembling steps, she passed down the road, and all felt that pang of shame which is common to the human heart at the sight of a distress it has not sought to soothe. But this feeling vanished at once from the breast of Mrs. and Mr. Hobbs, when they saw the girl stop where a turn of the road brought the gate before her eyes; and for the first time, they perceived, what the worn cloak had hitherto concealed, that the poor young thing bore an infant in her arms. She halted, she gazed fondly back. Even at that instant the despair of her eyes was visible; and then, as she pressed her lips to the infant's brow, they heard a convulsive sob—they saw her turn away, and she was gone!

"Well, I declare!" said Mrs. Hobbs.

"News for the parish," said Mr. Hobbs; "and she so young too!—what a shame!"

"The girls about here are very bad nowadays, Jenny," said the mother to the bride.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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