

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**ALICE, OR THE
MYSTERIES — BOOK
06**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

Alice, or the Mysteries — Book 06

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Edward Bulwer Lytton

Alice, or the Mysteries — Book 06

BOOK VI

"I will bring fire to thee—I reek not of the place."

—EURIPIDES: *Andromache*, 214.

CHAPTER I

*. . . THIS ancient city,
How wanton sits she amidst Nature's smiles!
. . . Various nations meet,
As in the sea, yet not confined in space,
But streaming freely through the spacious streets.*

—YOUNG.

*. . . His teeth he still did grind,
And grimly gnash, threatening revenge in vain.*

—SPENSER.

"PARIS is a delightful place,—that is allowed by all. It is delightful to the young, to the gay, to the idle; to the literary lion, who likes to be petted; to the wiser epicure, who indulges a more justifiable appetite. It is delightful to ladies, who wish to live at their ease, and buy beautiful caps; delightful to philanthropists, who wish for listeners to schemes of colonizing the moon; delightful to the haunters of balls and ballets, and little theatres and superb *cafes*, where men with beards of all sizes and shapes scowl at the English, and involve their intellects in the fascinating game of dominos. For these, and for many others, Paris is delightful. I say nothing against it. But, for my own part, I would rather live in a garret in London than in a palace in the Chaussee d'Antin.—'Chacun a son mauvais gout.'

"I don't like the streets, in which I cannot walk but in the kennel; I don't like the shops, that contain nothing except what's at the window; I don't like the houses, like prisons which look upon a courtyard; I don't like the *beaux jardins*, which grow no plants save a Cupid in plaster; I don't like the wood fires, which demand as many *petits soins* as the women, and which warm no part of one but one's eyelids, I don't like the language, with its strong phrases about nothing, and vibrating like a pendulum between 'rapture' and 'desolation;' I don't like the accent, which one cannot get, without speaking through one's nose; I don't like the eternal fuss and jabber about books without nature, and revolutions without fruit; I have no sympathy with tales that turn on a dead jackass, nor with constitutions that give the ballot to the representatives, and withhold the suffrage from the people; neither have I much faith in that enthusiasm for the *beaux arts*, which shows its produce in execrable music, detestable pictures, abominable sculpture, and a droll something that I believe the *French* call

POETRY. Dancing and cookery,—these are the arts the French excel in, I grant it; and excellent things they are; but oh, England! oh, Germany! you need not be jealous of your rival!"

These are not the author's remarks,—he disowns them; they were Mr. Cleveland's. He was a prejudiced man; Maltravers was more liberal, but then Maltravers did not pretend to be a wit.

Maltravers had been several weeks in the city of cities, and now he had his apartments in the gloomy but interesting Faubourg St. Germain, all to himself. For Cleveland, having attended eight days at a sale, and having moreover ransacked all the curiosity shops, and shipped off bronzes and cabinets, and Genoese silks and *objets de vertu*, enough to have half furnished Fonthill, had fulfilled his mission, and returned to his villa. Before the old gentleman went, he flattered himself that change of air and scene had already been serviceable to his friend; and that time would work a complete cure upon that commonest of all maladies,—an unrequited passion, or an ill-placed caprice.

Maltravers, indeed, in the habit of conquering, as well as of concealing emotion, vigorously and earnestly strove to dethrone the image that had usurped his heart. Still vain of his self-command, and still worshipping his favourite virtue of Fortitude and his delusive philosophy of the calm Golden Mean, he would not weakly indulge the passion, while he so sternly fled from its object.

But yet the image of Evelyn pursued,—it haunted him; it came on him unawares, in solitude, in crowds. That smile so cheering, yet so soft, that ever had power to chase away the shadow from his soul; that youthful and luxurious bloom of pure and eloquent thoughts, which was as the blossom of genius before its fruit, bitter as well as sweet, is born; that rare union of quick feeling and serene temper, which forms the very ideal of what we dream of in the mistress, and exact from the wife,—all, even more, far more, than the exquisite form and the delicate graces of the less durable beauty, returned to him, after every struggle with himself; and time only seemed to grave, in deeper if more latent folds of his heart, the ineradicable impression.

Maltravers renewed his acquaintance with some persons not unfamiliar to the reader.

Valerie de Ventadour—how many recollections of the fairer days of life were connected with that name! Precisely as she had never reached to his love, but only excited his fancy (the fancy of twenty-two), had her image always retained a pleasant and grateful hue; it was blended with no deep sorrow, no stern regret, no dark remorse, no haunting shame.

They met again. Madame de Ventadour was still beautiful, and still admired,—perhaps more admired than ever; for to the great, fashion and celebrity bring a second and yet more popular youth. But Maltravers, if rejoiced to see how gently Time had dealt with the fair Frenchwoman, was yet more pleased to read in her fine features a more serene and contented expression than they had formerly worn. Valerie de Ventadour had preceded her younger admirer through the "MYSTERIES of LIFE;" she had learned the real objects of being; she distinguished between the Actual and the Visionary, the Shadow and the Substance; she had acquired content for the present, and looked with quiet hope towards the future. Her character was still spotless; or rather, every year of temptation and trial had given it a fairer lustre. Love, that might have ruined, being once subdued, preserved her from all after danger. The first meeting between Maltravers and Valerie was, it is true, one of some embarrassment and reserve: not so the second. They did but once, and that slightly, recur to the past, and from that moment, as by a tacit understanding, true friendship between them dated. Neither felt mortified to see that an illusion had passed away,—they were no longer the same in each other's eyes. Both might be improved, and were so; but the Valerie and the Ernest of Naples were as things dead and gone! Perhaps Valerie's heart was even more reconciled to the cure of its soft and luxurious malady by the renewal of their acquaintance. The mature and experienced reasoner, in whom enthusiasm had undergone its usual change, with the calm brow and commanding aspect of sober manhood, was a being so different from the romantic boy, new to the actual world of civilized toils and pleasures, fresh from the adventures of Eastern wanderings, and full of golden dreams of poetry before it settles into authorship or action! She missed the brilliant errors, the daring aspirations,—even the animated gestures and eager eloquence,—that had interested and enamoured her in the loiterer by the shores

of Baiae, or amidst the tomb-like chambers of Pompeii. For the Maltravers now before her—wiser, better, nobler, even handsomer than of yore (for he was one whom manhood became better than youth)—the Frenchwoman could at any period have felt friendship without danger. It seemed to her, not as it really was, the natural *development*, but the very *contrast*, of the ardent, variable, imaginative boy, by whose side she had gazed at night on the moonlit waters and rosy skies of the soft Parthenope! How does time, after long absence, bring to us such contrasts between the one we remember and the one we see! And what a melancholy mockery does it seem of our own vain hearts, dreaming of impressions never to be changed, and affections that never can grow cool!

And now, as they conversed with all the ease of cordial and guileless friendship, how did Valerie rejoice in secret that upon that friendship there rested no blot of shame! and that she had not forfeited those consolations for a home without love, which had at last settled into cheerful nor unhallowed resignation,—consolations only to be found in the conscience and the pride!

M. de Ventadour had not altered, except that his nose was longer, and that he now wore a peruque in full curl instead of his own straight hair. But somehow or other—perhaps by the mere charm of custom—he had grown more pleasing in Valerie's eyes; habit had reconciled her to his foibles, deficiencies, and faults; and, by comparison with others, she could better appreciate his good qualities, such as they were,—generosity, good-temper, good-nature, and unbounded indulgence to herself. Husband and wife have so many interests in common, that when they have jogged on through the ups and downs of life a sufficient time, the leash which at first galled often grows easy and familiar; and unless the *temper*, or rather the disposition and the heart, of either be insufferable, what was once a grievous yoke becomes but a companionable tie. And for the rest, Valerie, now that sentiment and fancy were sobered down, could take pleasure in a thousand things which her pining affections once, as it were, overlooked and overshot. She could feel grateful for all the advantages her station and wealth procured her; she could cull the roses in her reach, without sighing for the amaranths of Elysium.

If the great have more temptations than those of middle life, and if their senses of enjoyment become more easily pampered into a sickly apathy, so at least (if they can once outlive satiety) they have many more resources at their command. There is a great deal of justice in the old line, displeasing though it be to those who think of love in a cottage, "'Tis best repenting in a coach and six!" If among the Eupatrids, the Well Born, there is less love in wedlock, less quiet happiness at home, still they are less chained each to each,—they have more independence, both the woman and the man, and occupations and the solace without can be so easily obtained! Madame de Ventadour, in retiring from the mere frivolities of society—from crowded rooms, and the inane talk and hollow smiles of mere acquaintanceship—became more sensible of the pleasures that her refined and elegant intellect could derive from art and talent, and the communion of friendship. She drew around her the most cultivated minds of her time and country. Her abilities, her wit, and her conversational graces enabled her not only to mix on equal terms with the most eminent, but to amalgamate and blend the varieties of talent into harmony. The same persons, when met elsewhere, seemed to have lost their charm; under Valerie's roof every one breathed a congenial atmosphere. And music and letters, and all that can refine and embellish civilized life, contributed their resources to this gifted and beautiful woman. And thus she found that the *mind* has excitement and occupation, as well as the heart; and, unlike the latter, the culture we bestow upon the first ever yields us its return. We talk of education for the poor, but we forget how much it is needed by the rich. Valerie was a living instance of the advantages to women of knowledge and intellectual resources. By them she had purified her fancy, by them she had conquered discontent, by them she had grown reconciled to life and to her lot! When the heavy heart weighed down the one scale, it was the mind that restored the balance.

The spells of Madame de Ventadour drew Maltravers into this charmed circle of all that was highest, purest, and most gifted in the society of Paris. There he did not meet, as were met in the times of the old *regime*, sparkling abbes intent upon intrigues; or amorous old dowagers, eloquent on

Rousseau; or powdered courtiers, uttering epigrams against kings and religions,—straws that foretold the whirlwind. Paul Courier was right! Frenchmen are Frenchmen still; they are full of fine phrases, and their thoughts smell of the theatre; they mistake foil for diamonds, the Grotesque for the Natural, the Exaggerated for the Sublime: but still I say, Paul Courier was right,—there is more honesty now in a single *salon* in Paris than there was in all France in the days of Voltaire. Vast interests and solemn causes are no longer tossed about like shuttlecocks on the battledores of empty tongues. In the *bouleversement* of Revolutions the French have fallen on their feet!

Meeting men of all parties and all classes, Maltravers was struck with the heightened tone of public morals, the earnest sincerity of feeling which generally pervaded all, as compared with his first recollections of the Parisians. He saw that true elements for national wisdom were at work, though he saw also that there was no country in which their operations would be more liable to disorder, more slow and irregular in their results. The French are like the Israelites in the Wilderness, when, according to a Hebrew tradition, every morning they seemed on the verge of Pisgah, and every evening they were as far from it as ever. But still time rolls on, the pilgrimage draws to its close, and the Canaan must come at last!

At Valerie's house, Maltravers once more met the De Montaignes. It was a painful meeting, for they thought of Cesarini when they met.

It is now time to return to that unhappy man. Cesarini had been removed from England when Maltravers quitted it after Lady Florence's death; and Maltravers had thought it best to acquaint De Montaigne with all the circumstances that had led to his affliction. The pride and the honour of the high-spirited Frenchman were deeply shocked by the tale of fraud and guilt, softened as it was; but the sight of the criminal, his awful punishment, merged every other feeling in compassion. Placed under the care of the most skilful practitioners in Paris, great hopes of Cesarini's recovery had been at first entertained. Nor was it long, indeed, before he appeared entirely restored, so far as the external and superficial tokens of sanity could indicate a cure. He testified complete consciousness of the kindness of his relations, and clear remembrance of the past: but to the incoherent ravings of delirium, an intense melancholy, still more deplorable, succeeded. In this state, however, he became once more the inmate of his brother-in-law's house; and though avoiding all society, except that of Teresa, whose affectionate nature never wearied of its cares, he resumed many of his old occupations. Again he appeared to take delight in desultory and unprofitable studies, and in the cultivation of that luxury of solitary men, "the thankless muse." By shunning all topics connected with the gloomy cause of his affliction, and talking rather of the sweet recollections of Italy and childhood than of more recent events, his sister was enabled to soothe the dark hour, and preserve some kind of influence over the ill-fated man. One day, however, there fell into his hands an English newspaper, which was full of the praises of Lord Vargrave; and the article in lauding the peer referred to his services as the commoner Lumley Ferrers.

This incident, slight as it appeared, and perfectly untraceable by his relations, produced a visible effect on Cesarini; and three days afterwards he attempted his own life. The failure of the attempt was followed by the fiercest paroxysms. His disease returned in all its dread force: and it became necessary to place him under yet stricter confinement than he had endured before. Again, about a year from the date now entered upon, he had appeared to recover; and again he was removed to De Montaigne's house. His relations were not aware of the influence which Lord Vargrave's name exercised over Cesarini; in the melancholy tale communicated to them by Maltravers, that name had not been mentioned. If Maltravers had at one time entertained some vague suspicions that Lumley had acted a treacherous part with regard to Florence, those suspicions had long since died away for want of confirmation; nor did he (nor did therefore the De Montaignes) connect Lord Vargrave with the affliction of Cesarini. De Montaigne himself, therefore, one day at dinner, alluding to a question of foreign politics which had been debated that morning in the Chamber, and in which he himself had taken an active part, happened to refer to a speech of Vargrave upon the subject, which had

made some sensation abroad, as well as at home. Teresa asked innocently who Lord Vargrave was; and De Montaigne, well acquainted with the biography of the principal English statesmen, replied that he had commenced his career as Mr. Ferrers, and reminded Teresa that they had once been introduced to him in Paris. Cesarini suddenly rose and left the room; his absence was not noted, for his comings and goings were ever strange and fitful. Teresa soon afterwards quitted the apartment with her children, and De Montaigne, who was rather fatigued by the exertions and excitement of the morning, stretched himself in his chair to enjoy a short *siesta*. He was suddenly awakened by a feeling of pain and suffocation,—awakened in time to struggle against a strong grip that had fastened itself at his throat. The room was darkened in the growing shades of the evening; and, but for the glittering and savage eyes that were fixed on him, he could scarcely discern his assailant. He at length succeeded, however, in freeing himself, and casting the intended assassin on the ground. He shouted for assistance; and the lights borne by the servants who rushed into the room revealed to him the face of his brother-in-law. Cesarini, though in strong convulsions, still uttered cries and imprecations of revenge; he denounced De Montaigne as a traitor and a murderer! In the dark confusion of his mind, he had mistaken the guardian for the distant foe, whose name sufficed to conjure up the phantoms of the dead, and plunge reason into fury.

It was now clear that there was danger and death in Cesarini's disease. His madness was pronounced to be capable of no certain and permanent cure; he was placed at a new asylum (the superintendents of which were celebrated for humanity as well as skill), a little distance from Versailles, and there he still remained. Recently his lucid intervals had become more frequent and prolonged; but trifles that sprang from his own mind, and which no care could prevent or detect, sufficed to renew his calamity in all its fierceness. At such times he required the most unrelaxing vigilance, for his madness ever took an alarming and ferocious character; and had he been left unshackled, the boldest and stoutest of the keepers would have dreaded to enter his cell unarmed, or alone.

What made the disease of the mind appear more melancholy and confirmed was, that all this time the frame seemed to increase in health and strength. This is not an uncommon case in instances of mania—and it is generally the worst symptom. In earlier youth, Cesarini had been delicate even to effeminacy; but now his proportions were enlarged, his form, though still lean and spare, muscular and vigorous,—as if in the torpor which usually succeeded to his bursts of frenzy, the animal portion gained by the repose or disorganization of the intellectual. When in his better and calmer mood—in which indeed none but the experienced could have detected his malady—books made his chief delight. But then he complained bitterly, if briefly, of the confinement he endured, of the injustice he suffered; and as, shunning all companions, he walked gloomily amidst the grounds that surrounded that House of Woe, his unseen guardians beheld him clenching his hands, as at some visionary enemy, or overheard him accuse some phantom of his brain of the torments he endured.

Though the reader can detect in Lumley Ferrers the cause of the frenzy, and the object of the imprecation, it was not so with the De Montaignes, nor with the patient's keepers and physicians; for in his delirium he seldom or never gave name to the shadows that he invoked,—not even to that of Florence. It is, indeed, no unusual characteristic of madness to shun, as by a kind of cunning, all mention of the names of those by whom the madness has been caused. It is as if the unfortunates imagined that the madness might be undiscovered if the images connected with it were unbetrayed.

Such, at this time, was the wretched state of the man, whose talents had promised a fair and honourable career, had it not been the wretched tendency of his mind, from boyhood upward, to pamper every unwholesome and unhallowed feeling as a token of the exuberance of genius. De Montaigne, though he touched as lightly as possible upon this dark domestic calamity in his first communications with Maltravers, whose conduct in that melancholy tale of crime and woe had, he conceived, been stamped with generosity and feeling, still betrayed emotions that told how much his peace had been embittered.

"I seek to console Teresa," said he, turning away his manly head, "and to point out all the blessings yet left to her; but that brother so beloved, from whom so much was so vainly expected,—still ever and ever, though she strives to conceal it from me, this affliction comes back to her, and poisons every thought! Oh, better a thousand times that he had died! When reason, sense, almost the soul, are dead, how dark and fiend-like is the life that remains behind! And if it should be in the blood—if Teresa's children—dreadful thought!"

De Montaigne ceased, thoroughly overcome.

"Do not, my dear friend, so fearfully exaggerate your misfortune, great as it is; Cesarini's disease evidently arose from no physical conformation,—it was but the crisis, the development, of a long-contracted malady of mind, passions morbidly indulged, the reasoning faculty obstinately neglected; and yet too he may recover. The further memory recedes from the shock he has sustained, the better the chance that his mind will regain its tone."

De Montaigne wrung his friend's hand.

"It is strange that from you should come sympathy and comfort!—you whom he so injured; you whom his folly or his crime drove from your proud career, and your native soil! But Providence will yet, I trust, redeem the evil of its erring creature, and I shall yet live to see you restored to hope and home, a happy husband, an honoured citizen. Till then, I feel as if the curse lingered upon my race."

"Speak not thus. Whatever my destiny, I have recovered from that wound; and still, De Montaigne, I find in life that suffering succeeds to suffering, and disappointment to disappointment, as wave to wave. To endure is the only philosophy; to believe that we shall live again in a brighter planet, is the only hope that our reason should accept from our desires."

CHAPTER II

*MONSTRA evenerunt mihi:
Introit in aedes ater alienus canis,
Anguis per impluvium decedit de tegulis,
Gallina cecinit!*¹

—*TERENCE.*

WITH his constitutional strength of mind, and conformably with his acquired theories, Maltravers continued to struggle against the latest and strongest passion of his life. It might be seen in the paleness of his brow, and that nameless expression of suffering which betrays itself in the lines about the mouth, that his health was affected by the conflict within him; and many a sudden fit of absence and abstraction, many an impatient sigh, followed by a forced and unnatural gayety, told the observant Valerie that he was the prey of a sorrow he was too proud to disclose. He compelled himself, however, to take, or to affect, an interest in the singular phenomena of the social state around him,—phenomena that, in a happier or serener mood, would indeed have suggested no ordinary food for conjecture and meditation.

¹ "Prodigies have occurred: a strange black dog came into the house; a snake glided from the tiles, through the court; the hen crowed."

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