

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**LEILA OR, THE SIEGE
OF GRANADA, BOOK
IV**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

**Leila or, the Siege of
Granada, Book IV**

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Edward Bulwer Lytton

Leila or, the Siege of Granada, Book IV

Book IV

CHAPTER. I

LEILA IN THE CASTLE—THE SIEGE

The calmer contemplations and more holy anxieties of Leila were, at length, broken in upon by intelligence, the fearful interest of which absorbed the whole mind and care of every inhabitant of the castle. Boabdil el Chico had taken the field, at the head of a numerous army. Rapidly scouring the country, he had descended, one after one, upon the principal fortresses, which Ferdinand had left, strongly garrisoned, in the immediate neighbourhood. His success was as immediate as it was signal; the terror of his arms began, once more to spread far and wide; every day swelled his ranks with new recruits; and from the snow-clad summits of the Sierra Nevada poured down, in wild hordes, the fierce mountain race, who, accustomed to eternal winter, made a strange contrast, in their rugged appearance and shaggy clothing, to the glittering and civilised soldiery of Granada.

Moorish towns, which had submitted to Ferdinand, broke from their allegiance, and sent their ardent youth and experienced veterans to the standard of the Keys and Crescent. To add to the sudden panic of the Spaniards, it went forth that a formidable magician, who seemed inspired rather with the fury of a demon than the valour of a man, had made an abrupt appearance in the ranks of the Moslems. Wherever the Moors shrank back from wall or tower, down which poured the boiling pitch, or rolled the deadly artillery of the besieged, this sorcerer—rushing into the midst of the flagging force, and waving, with wild gestures, a white banner, supposed by both Moor and Christian to be the work of magic and preternatural spells—dared every danger, and escaped every weapon: with voice, with prayer, with example, he fired the Moors to an enthusiasm that revived the first days of Mohammedan conquest; and tower after tower, along the mighty range of the mountain chain of fortresses, was polluted by the wave and glitter of the ever-victorious banner. The veteran, Mendo de Quexada, who, with a garrison of two hundred and fifty men, held the castle of Almamen, was, however, undaunted by the unprecedented successes of Boabdil. Aware of the approaching storm, he spent the days of peace yet accorded to him in making every preparation for the siege that he foresaw; messengers were despatched to Ferdinand; new out-works were added to the castle; ample store of provisions laid in; and no precaution omitted that could still preserve to the Spaniards a fortress that, from its vicinity to Granada, its command of the Vega and the valleys of the Alpuxarras, was the bitterest thorn in the side of the Moorish power.

It was early, one morning, that Leila stood by the lattice of her lofty chamber gazing, with many and mingled emotions, on the distant domes of Granada, as they slept in the silent sunshine. Her heart, for the moment, was busy with the thoughts of home, and the chances and peril of the time were forgotten.

The sound of martial music, afar off, broke upon her reveries; she started, and listened breathlessly; it became more distinct and clear. The clash of the zell, the boom of the African drum, and the wild and barbarous blast of the Moorish clarion, were now each distinguishable from the other; and, at length, as she gazed and listened, winding along the steps of the mountain were seen

the gleaming spears and pennants of the Moslem vanguard. Another moment and the whole castle was astir.

Mendo de Quexada, hastily arming, repaired, himself, to the battlements; and, from her lattice, Leila beheld him, from time to time, stationing to the best advantage his scanty troops. In a few minutes she was joined by Donna Inez and the women of the castle, who fearfully clustered round their mistress,—not the less disposed, however, to gratify the passion of the sex, by a glimpse through the lattice at the gorgeous array of the Moorish army.

The casements of Leila's chamber were peculiarly adapted to command a safe nor insufficient view of the progress of the enemy; and, with a beating heart and flushing cheek, the Jewish maiden, deaf to the voices around her, imagined she could already descry amidst the horsemen the lion port and snowy garments of Muza Ben Abil Gazan.

What a situation was hers! Already a Christian, could she hope for the success of the infidel? ever a woman, could she hope for the defeat of her lover? But the time for meditation on her destiny was but brief; the detachment of the Moorish cavalry was now just without the walls of the little town that girded the castle, and the loud clarion of the heralds summoned the garrison to surrender.

"Not while one stone stands upon another!" was the short answer of Quexada; and, in ten minutes afterwards, the sullen roar of the artillery broke from wall and tower over the vales below.

It was then that the women, from Leila's lattice, beheld, slowly marshalling themselves in order, the whole power and pageantry of the besieging army. Thick-serried—line after line, column upon column—they spread below the frowning steep. The sunbeams lighted up that goodly array, as it swayed, and murmured, and advanced, like the billows of a glittering sea. The royal standard was soon descried waving above the pavilion of Boabdil; and the king himself, mounted on his cream-coloured charger, which was covered with trappings of cloth-of-gold, was recognised amongst the infantry, whose task it was to lead the assault.

"Pray with us, my daughter!" cried Inez, falling on her knees.—Alas! what could Leila pray for?

Four days and four nights passed away in that memorable siege; for the moon, then at her full, allowed no respite, even in night itself. Their numbers, and their vicinity to Granada, gave the besiegers the advantage of constant relays, and troop succeeded to troop; so that the weary had ever successors in the vigour of new assailants.

On the fifth day, all of the fortress, save the keep (an immense tower), was in the hands of the Moslems; and in this last hold, the worn-out and scanty remnant of the garrison mustered, in the last hope of a brave, despair.

Quexada appeared, covered with gore and dust—his eyes bloodshot, his cheek haggard and hollow, his locks blanched with sudden age—in the hall of the tower, where the women, half dead with terror, were assembled.

"Food!" cried he,—"food and wine!—it may be our last banquet."

His wife threw her arms round him. "Not yet," he cried, "not yet; we will have one embrace before we part."

"Is there, then, no hope?" said Inez, with a pale cheek, yet steady eye.

"None; unless to-morrow's dawn gild the spears of Ferdinand's army upon yonder hills. Till morn we may hold out." As he spoke, he hastily devoured some morsels of food, drained a huge goblet of wine, and abruptly quitted the chamber.

At that moment, the women distinctly heard the loud shouts of the Moors; and Leila, approaching the grated casement, could perceive the approach of what seemed to her like moving wails.

Covered by ingenious constructions of wood and thick hides, the besiegers advanced to the foot of the tower in comparative shelter from the burning streams which still poured, fast and seething, from the battlements; while, in the rear came showers of darts and cross-bolts from the more distant

Moors, protecting the work of the engineer, and piercing through almost every loophole and crevice in the fortress.

Meanwhile the stalwart governor beheld, with dismay and despair, the preparations of the engineers, whom the wooden screen-works protected from every weapon.

"By the Holy Sepulchre!" cried he, gnashing his teeth, "they are mining the tower, and we shall be buried in its ruins! Look out, Gonsalvo! see you not a gleam of spears yonder over the mountain? Mine eyes are dim with watching."

"Alas! brave Mendo, it is only the sloping sun upon the snows—but there is hope yet."

The soldier's words terminated in a shrill and sudden cry of agony; and he fell dead by the side of Quexada, the brain crushed by a bolt from a Moorish arquebus.

"My best warrior!" said Quexada; "peace be with him! Ho, there! see you yon desperate infidel urging on the miners? By the heavens above, it is he of the white banner!—it is the sorcerer! Fire on him! he is without the shelter of the woodworks."

Twenty shafts, from wearied and nerveless arms, fell innocuous round the form of Almamen: and as, waving aloft his ominous banner, he disappeared again behind the screen-works, the Spaniards almost fancied they could hear his exulting and demon laugh.

The sixth day came, and the work of the enemy was completed. The tower was entirely undermined—the foundations rested only upon wooden props, which, with a humanity that was characteristic of Boabdil, had been placed there in order that the besieged might escape ere the final crash of their last hold.

It was now noon: the whole Moorish force, quitting the plain, occupied the steep that spread below the tower, in multitudinous array and breathless expectation. The miners stood aloof—the Spaniards lay prostrate and exhausted upon the battlements, like mariners who, after every effort against the storm, await, resigned, and almost indifferent, the sweep of the fatal surge.

Suddenly the lines of the Moors gave way, and Boabdil himself, with Muza at his right hand, and Almamen on his left, advanced towards the foot of the tower. At the same time, the Ethiopian guards, each bearing a torch, marched slowly in the rear; and from the midst of them paced the royal herald and sounded the last warning. The hush of the immense armament—the glare of the torches, lighting the ebon faces and giant forms of their bearers—the majestic appearance of the king himself—the heroic aspect of Muza—the bare head and glittering banner of Almamen—all combined with the circumstances of the time to invest the spectacle with something singularly awful, and, perhaps, sublime.

Quexada turned his eyes, mutely, round the ghastly faces of his warriors, and still made not the signal. His lips muttered—his eyes glared: when, suddenly, he heard below the wail of women; and the thought of Inez, the bride of his youth, the partner of his age, came upon him; and, with a trembling hand, he lowered the yet unquailing standard of Spain. Then, the silence below broke into a mighty shout, which shook the grim tower to its unsteady and temporary base.

"Arise, my friends," he said, with a bitter sigh; "we have fought like men—and our country will not blush for us." He descended the winding stairs—his soldiers followed him with faltering steps: the gates of the keep unfolded, and these gallant Christians surrendered themselves to the Moor.

"Do with it as you will," said Quexada, as he laid the keys at the hoofs of Boabdil's barb; "but there are women in the garrison, who—"

"Are sacred," interrupted the king. "At once we accord their liberty, and free transport whithersoever ye would desire. Speak, then! To what place of safety shall they be conducted?"

"Generous king!" replied the veteran Quexada, brushing away his tears with the back of his hand; "you take the sting from our shame. We accept your offer in the same spirit in which it is made. Across the mountains, on the verge of the plain of Olfadez, I possess a small castle, ungarrisoned and unfortified. Thence, should the war take that direction, the women can readily obtain safe conduct to the queen at Cordova."

"Be it so," returned Boabdil. Then, with Oriental delicacy, selecting the eldest of the officers round him, he gave him instructions to enter the castle, and, with a strong guard, provide for the safety of the women, according to the directions of Quexada. To another of his officers he confided the Spanish prisoners, and gave the signal to his army to withdraw from the spot, leaving only a small body to complete the ruin of the fortress.

Accompanied by Almamen and his principal officers, Boabdil now hastened towards Granada; and while, with slower progress, Quexada and his companions, under a strong escort, took their way across the Vega, a sudden turn in their course brought abruptly before them the tower they had so valiantly defended. There it still stood, proud and stern, amidst the blackened and broken wrecks around it, shooting aloft, dark and grim, against the sky. Another moment, and a mighty crash sounded on their ears, while the tower fell to the earth, amidst volumes of wreathing smoke and showers of dust, which were borne, by the concussion to the spot on which they took their last gaze of the proudest fortress on which the Moors of Granada had beheld, from their own walls, the standard of Arragon and Castile.

At the same time, Leila—thus brought so strangely within the very reach of her father and her lover, and yet, by a mysterious fate, still divided from both,—with Donna Inez, and the rest of the females of the garrison, pursued her melancholy path along the ridges of the mountains.

CHAPTER II

ALMAMEN'S PROPOSED ENTERPRISE.—THE THREE ISRAELITES— CIRCUMSTANCE IMPRESSES EACH CHARACTER WITH A VARYING DIE

Boabdil followed up his late success with a series of brilliant assaults on the neighbouring fortresses. Granada, like a strong man bowed to the ground, wrenched one after one the bands that had crippled her liberty and strength; and, at length, after regaining a considerable portion of the surrounding territory, the king resolved to lay siege to the seaport of Salobrena. Could he obtain this town, Boabdil, by establishing communication between the sea and Granada, would both be enabled to avail himself of the assistance of his African allies, and also prevent the Spaniards from cutting off supplies to the city, should they again besiege it. Thither, then, accompanied by Muza, the Moorish king bore his victorious standard.

On the eve of his departure, Almamen sought the king's presence. A great change had come over the canton since the departure of Ferdinand; his wonted stateliness of mien was gone; his eyes were sunk and hollow; his manner disturbed and absent. In fact, his love for his daughter made the sole softness of his character; and that daughter was in the hands of the king who had sentenced the father to the tortures of the Inquisition! To what dangers might she not be subjected, by the intolerant zeal of conversion! and could that frame, and gentle heart, brave the terrific engines that might be brought against her fears? "Better," thought he, "that she should perish, even by the torture, than adopt that hated faith." He gnashed his teeth in agony at either alternative. His dreams, his objects, his revenge, his ambition—all forsook him: one single hope, one thought, completely mastered his stormy passions and fitful intellect.

In this mood the pretended santon met Boabdil. He represented to the king, over whom his influence had prodigiously increased since the late victories of the Moors, the necessity of employing the armies of Ferdinand at a distance. He proposed, in furtherance of this policy, to venture himself in Cordova; to endeavour secretly to stir up those Moors, in that, their ancient kingdom, who had succumbed to the Spanish yoke, and whose hopes might naturally be inflamed by the recent successes of Boabdil; and, at least, to foment such disturbances as might afford the king sufficient time to complete his designs, and recruit his force by aid of the powers with which he was in league.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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