

BOOK THE FOURTH

But when the days were numbered, then befell
The parting of our Lord—which was to be—
Whereby came wailing in the Golden Home,
Woe to the King and sorrow o'er the land,
But for all flesh deliverance, and that Law
Which whoso hears, the same shall make him free.

Softly the Indian night sinks on the plains
At full moon in the month of Chaitra Shud,
When mangoes redden and the Asoka buds
Sweeten the breeze, and Rama's birthday comes,
And all the fields are glad and all the towns.
Softly that night fell over Vishramvan,
Fragrant with blooms and jewelled thick with stars,
And cool with mountain airs sighing adown
From snow-flats on Himāla high-outspread;
For the moon swung above the eastern peaks,
Climbing the spangled vault, and lighting clear
Rohini's ripples and the hills and plains,
And all the sleeping land, and near at hand
Silvering those roof-tops of the pleasure-house,
Where nothing stirred nor sign of watching was,
Save at the outer gates, whose warders cried
Mudra, the watchword, and the countersign
Angana, and the watch-drums beat a round;
Whereat the earth lay still, except for yelp

Of prowling jackals, and the ceaseless trill
Of crickets in the garden grounds.

Within—

Where the moon glittered through the lace-worked
stone,
Lighting the walls of pearl-shell and the floors
Paved with veined marble—softly fell her beams
On such rare company of Indian girls,
It seemed some chamber sweet in Paradise
Where Devis rested. All the chosen ones
Of Prince Siddhārtha's pleasure-home were there,
The brightest and most faithful of the Court;
Each form so lovely in the peace of sleep,
That you had said, "This is the pearl of all!"
Save that beside her or beyond her lay
Fairer and fairer, till the pleased gaze
Roamed o'er that feast of beauty as it roams
From gem to gem in some great goldsmith-work,
Caught by each colour till the next is seen.
With careless grace they lay, their soft brown limbs
Part hidden, part revealed; their glossy hair
Bound back with gold or flowers, or flowing loose
In black waves down the shapely nape and neck.
Lulled into pleasant dreams by happy toils,
They slept, no wearier than jewelled birds
Which sing and love all day, them under wing
Fold head till morn bids sing and love again.
Lamps of chased silver swinging from the roof
In silver chains, and fed with perfumed oils,
Made with the moonbeams tender lights and shades,
Whereby were seen the perfect lines of grace,
The bosom's placid heave, the soft stained palms

Drooping or clasped, the faces fair and dark,
The great arched brows, the parted lips, the teeth
Like pearls a merchant picks to make a string,
The satin-lidded eyes, with lashes dropped
Sweeping the delicate cheeks, the rounded wrists,
The smooth small feet with bells and bangles decked,
Tinkling low music where some sleeper moved,
Breaking her smiling dream of some new dance
Praised by the Prince, some magic ring to find,
Some fairy love-gift. Here one lay full-length,
Her *veena* by her cheek, and in its strings
The little fingers still all interlaced
As when the last notes of her light song played
Those radiant eyes to sleep and sealed her own.
Another slumbered folding in her arms
A desert-antelope, its slender head
Buried with back-sloped horns between her breasts
Soft nestling; it was eating—when both drowsed—
Red roses, and her loosening hand still held
A roses half-mumbled, while a rose-leaf curled
Between the deer's lips. Here two friends had dozed
Together, wearing *mōgra*-buds, which bound
Their sister-sweetness in a starry chain,
Linking them limb to limb and heart to heart,
One pillowed on the blossoms, one on her.
Another, ere she slept, was stringing stones
To make a necklet—agate, onyx, sard,
Coral, and moonstone—round her wrist it gleamed
A coil of splendid colour, while she held,
Unthreaded yet, the bead to close it up,
Green turkis, carved with golden gods and scripts.

Lulled by the cadence of the garden stream.
 Thus lay they on the clustered carpets, each
 A girlish rose with shut leaves, waiting dawn
 To open and make daylight beautiful.
 This was the antechamber of the Prince;
 But at the *purdah*'s fringe the sweetest slept—
 Gunga and Gotami—chief ministers
 In that still house of love.

The *purdah* hung,
 Crimson and blue, with broided threads of gold,
 Across a portal carved in sandal-wood;
 Whence by three steps the way was to the bower
 Of inmost splendour, and the marriage-couch
 Set on a dais soft with silver cloths,
 Where the foot fell as though it trod on piles
 Of *neem*-blooms. All the walls were plates of pearl,
 Cut shapely from the shells of Lanka's wave;
 And o'er the alabaster roof there ran
 Rich inlayings of lotus and of bird,
 Wrought in skilled work of lazulite and jade,
 Jacynth and jasper; woven round the dome,
 And down the sides, and all about the frames
 Wherein were set the fretted lattices,
 Through which there breathed, with moonlight and cool
 airs,
 Scents from the shell-flowers and the jasmine sprays;
 Not bringing thither grace or tenderness
 Sweeter than shed from those fair presences
 Within the place—the beauteous Sākya Prince,
 And hers, the stately, bright Yasōdhara.

Half risen from her soft nest at his side,
 The *chuddar* to her waist, her brow
 Laid in both palms, the lovely Princess leaned
 With heaving bosom and fast-falling tears.
 Thrice with her lips she touched Siddhārtha's hand,
 And at the third kiss moaned: "Awake, my Lord!
 Give me the comfort of thy speech!" Then he—
 "What is with thee, O my life?" but still
 She moaned anew before the words would come;
 Then spake: "Alas, my Prince! I sank to sleep
 Most happy, for the babe I bear of thee
 Quickened this eve, and at my heart there beat
 That double pulse of life and joy and love
 Whose happy music lulled me, but—aho!—
 In slumber I beheld three sights of dread,
 With thought whereof my heart is throbbing yet.
 I saw a white bull with wide-branching horns,
 A lord or pastures, pacing through the streets,
 Bearing upon his front a gem which shone
 As if some star had dropped to glitter there,
 Or like the *kantha*-stone the great Snake keeps
 To make bright daylight underneath the earth.
 Slow through the streets toward the gates he paced,
 And none could stay him, though there came a voice
 From Indra's temple, 'If ye stay him not,
 The glory of the city goeth forth.'
 Yet none could stay him. Then I wept aloud,
 And locked my arms about his neck, and strove,
 And bade them bar the gates; but that ox-king
 Bellowed, and, lightly tossing free his crest,
 Broke from my clasp, and bursting through the bars,

Trampled the warders down and passed away.
 The next strange dream was this: Four Presences
 Splendid, with shining eyes, so beautiful
 They seemed the Regents of the Earth who dwell
 On Mount Sumeru, lighting from the sky
 With retinue of countless heavenly ones,
 Swift swept unto our city, where I saw
 The golden flag of Indra on the gate
 Flutter and fall; and lo! there rose instead
 A glorious banner, all the folds whereof
 Rippled with flashing fire or rubies sewn
 Thick on the silver threads, the rays wherefrom
 Set forth new words and weighty sentences
 Whose message made all living creatures glad;
 And from the east the wind of sunrise blew
 With tender wraft, opening those jewelled scrolls
 So that all flesh might read; and wondrous blooms—
 Plucked in what clime I know not—fell in showers,
 Coloured as none are coloured in our groves.”

Then spake the Prince: “All this, my Lotus-flower!
 Was good to see.”

“Ay, Lord,” the Princess said,
 “Save that it ended with a voice of fear
 Crying, ‘The time is nigh! the time is nigh!’
 Thereat the third dream came; for when I sought
 Thy side, sweet Lord! ah, on our bed there lay
 An unpressed pillow and an empty robe—
 Nothing of thee but those!—Nothing of thee,
 Who art my life and light, my king, my world!
 And, sleeping still, I rose, and sleeping saw
 Thy belt of pearls, tied here below my breasts,

Change to a stinging snake; my ankle-rings
 Fall off, my golden bangles part and fall;
 The jasmines in my hair wither to dust;
 While this our bridal-couch sank to the ground,
 And something rent the crimson *purdah* down:
 Then far away I heard the white bull low,
 And far away the embroidered banner flap,
 And once again that cry, ‘The time is come!’
 But with that cry—which shakes my spirit still—
 I woke! O Prince! what may such visions mean
 Except I die, or—worse than any death—
 Thou shouldst forsake me, or be taken?”

Sweet

As the last smile of sunset was the look
 Siddhārtha bent upon his weeping wife.
 “Comfort thee, dear!” he said, “if comfort lives
 In changeless love; for though thy dreams may be
 Shadows of things to come, and though the gods
 Are shaken in their seats, and though the world
 Stands nigh, perchance, to know some way of help,
 Yet, whatsoever fall to thee and me,
 Be sure I loved and love Yasōdhara.
 Thou knowest how I muse these many moons,
 Seeking to save the sad earth I have seen;
 And when the time comes, that which will be will.
 But if my soul yearns sore for souls unknown,
 And if I grieve for griefs which are not mine,
 Judge how my high-winged thoughts must hover here
 O’er all these lives that share and sweeten mine—
 So dear! and thine the dearest, gentlest, best,
 And nearest. Ah, thou mother of my babe!

Whose body mixed with mine for this fair hope,
 When most my spirit wanders, ranging round
 The lands and seas—as full of ruth for men
 As the far-flying dove is full of ruth
 For her twin nestlings—ever it has come
 Home with glad wing and passionate plumes to thee,
 Who art the sweetness of my kind best seen,
 The utmost of their good, the tenderest
 Of all their tenderness, mine most of all.
 Therefore, whatever after this betide,
 Bethink thee of that lordly bull which lowed,
 That jewelled banner in thy dream which waved
 Its folds departing, and of this be sure,
 Always I loved and always love thee well,
 And what I sought for all sought most for thee.
 But thou, take comfort; and, if sorrow falls,
 Take comfort still in deeming there may be
 A way of peace on earth by woes of ours;
 And have with this embrace what faithful love
 Can think of thanks or frame for benison—
 Too little, seeing love's strong self is weak—
 Yet kiss me on the mouth, and drink these words
 From heart to heart therewith, that thou mayst know—
 What others will not—that I loved thee most
 Because I loved so well all living souls.
 Now, Princess! rest, for I will rise and watch.”

Then in her tears she slept, but sleeping sighed—
 As if that vision passed again—“The time!
 The time is come!” Whereat Siddhārtha turned,
 And, lo! the moon shone by the Crab! the stars
 In that same silver order long foretold

Stood ranged to say: “This is the night!—choose thou
 The way of greatness or the way of good:
 To reign a King of kings, or wander lone,
 Crownless and homeless, that the world be helped.”
 Moreover, with the whispers of the gloom
 Came to his ears again that warning song,
 As when the Devas spoke upon the wind:
 And surely Gods were round about the place
 Watching our Lord, who watched the shining stars.

“I will depart,” he spake; “the hour is come!
 Thy tender lips, dear sleeper, summon me
 To that which save the earth but sunders us;
 And in the silence of yon sky I read
 My fated message flashing. Unto this
 Came I, and unto this all nights and days
 Have led me; for I will not have that crown
 Which may be mine: I lay aside those realms
 Which wait the gleaming of my naked sword:
 My chariot shall not roll with bloody wheels
 From victory to victory, till earth
 Wears the red record of my name. I choose
 To tread its paths with patient, stainless feet,
 Making its dust my bed, its loneliest wastes
 My dwelling, and its meanest things my mates:
 Clad in no prouder garb than outcasts wear,
 Fed with no meats save what the charitable
 Give of their will, sheltered by no more pomp
 Than the dim cave lends or the jungle-bush.
 This will I do because the woful cry
 Of life and all flesh living cometh up
 Into my ears, and all my soul is full

Of pity for the sickness of this world;
 Which I will heal, if healing may be found
 By uttermost renouncing and strong strife.
 For which of all the great and lesser gods
 Have power or pity? Who hath seen them—who?
 What have they wrought to help their worshippers?
 How hath it steadied man to pray, and pay
 Tithes of the corn and oil, to chant the charms,
 To slay the shrieking sacrifice, to rear
 The stately fane, to feed the priests, and call
 On Vishnu, Shiva, Surya, who save
 None—not the worthiest—from the griefs that teach
 Those litanies of flattery and fear
 Ascending day by day, like wasted smoke?
 Hath any of my brothers 'scaped thereby
 The aches of life, the stings of love and loss,
 The fiery fever and the ague-shake,
 The slow, dull, sinking into withered age,
 The horrible dark death—and what beyond
 Waits—till the whirling wheel comes up again,
 And new lives bring new sorrows to be borne,
 New generations for the new desires
 Which have their end in the old mockeries?
 Hath any of my tender sisters found
 Fruit of the fast or harvest of the hymn,
 Or brought one pang the less at bearing-time
 For white curds offered and trim tulsī-leaves?
 Nay; it may be some of the Gods are good
 And evil some, but all in action weak;
 Both pitiful and pitiless, and both—
 As men are—bound upon this wheel of change,

Knowing the former and the after lives.
 For so our scriptures truly seem to teach,
 That—once, and wheresoe'er, and whence begun—
 Life runs its rounds of living, climbing up
 From mote, and gnat, and worm, reptile and fish,
 Bird and shagged beast, man, demon, deva, God,
 To clod and mote again; so are we kin
 To all that is; and thus, if one might save
 Man from his curse, the whole wide world should share
 The lightened horror of this ignorance
 Whose shadow is chill fear, and cruelty
 Its bitter pastime. Yea, if one might save!
 And means must be! There must be refuge! Men
 Perished in winter-winds till one smote fire
 From flint-stones coldly hiding what they held,
 The red spark treasured from the kindling sun.
 They gorged on flesh like wolves, till one sowed corn,
 Which grew a weed, yet makes the life of man;
 They mowed and babbled till some tongue struck speech,
 And patient fingers framed the lettered sound.
 What good gift have my brothers, but it came
 From search and strife and loving sacrifice?
 If one, then, being great and fortunate,
 Rich, dowered with health and ease, from birth designed
 To rule—if he would rule—a King of kings;
 If one, not tired with life's long day, but glad
 I' the freshness of its morning, one not cloyed
 With love's delicious feasts, but hungry still;
 If one not worn and wrinkled, sadly sage,

But joyous in the glory and the grace
 That mix with evils here, and free to choose
 Earth's loveliest at his will; one even as I,
 Who ache not, lack not, grieve not, save with griefs
 Which are not mine, except as I am man;—
 If such a one, having so much to give,
 Gave all, laying it down for love of men,
 And thenceforth spent himself to search for truth,
 Wringing the secret of deliverance forth,
 Whether it lurk in hells or hide in heavens,
 Or hover, unrevealed, nigh unto all:
 Surely at last far off, sometime, somewhere,
 The veil would lift for his deep-searching eyes,
 The road would open for his painful feet,
 That should be won for which he lost the world,
 And Death might find him conqueror of death.
 This will I do, who have a realm to lose,
 Because I love my realm, because my heart
 Beats with each throb of all the hearts that ache,
 Known and unknown, these that are mine and those
 Which shall be mine, a thousand million more
 Saved by this sacrifice I offer now,
 Oh, summoning stars! I come! Oh, mournful earth,
 For thee and thine I lay aside my youth,
 My throne, my joys, my golden days, my nights,
 My happy palace—and thine arms, sweet Queen!
 Harder to put aside than all the rest!
 Yet thee, too, I shall save, saving this earth;
 And that which stirs within thy tender womb,
 My child, the hidden blossom of our loves,
 Whom if I wait to bless my mind will fail.

Wife! child! father! and people! ye must share
 A little while the anguish of this hour
 That light may break and all flesh learn the Law.
 Now am I fixed, and now I will depart,
 Never to come again till what I seek
 Be found—if fervent search and strife avail.”
 So with his brow he touched her feet, and bent
 The farewell of fond eyes, unutterable,
 Upon her sleeping face, still wet with tears;
 And thrice around the bed in reverence,
 As though it were an altar, softly stepped
 With clasped hands laid upon his beating heart,
 “For never,” spake he, “lie I there again!”
 And thrice he made to go, but thrice came back,
 So strong her beauty was, so large his love:
 Then, o'er his head drawing his cloth, he turned
 And raised the *purdah's* edge:

There drooped, close-hushed,
 In such sealed sleep as water-lilies know,
 The lovely garden of his Indian girls;
 Those twin dark-petalled lotus-buds of all—
 Gunga and Gotami—on either side,
 And those, their silk-leaved sisterhood, beyond.
 “Pleasant ye are to me, sweet friends!” he said,
 “And dear to leave; yet, if I leave ye not
 What else will come to all of us save old
 Without assuage and death without avail?
 Lo! as ye lie asleep so must ye lie
 A-dead; and when the rose dies where are gone
 Its scent and splendour? when the lamp is drained
 Whither is fled the flame? Press heavy, Night!

Upon their down-dropped lids, and seal their lips,
 That no tear stay me and no faithful voice.
 For all the brighter that these made my life,
 The bitterer it is that they and I,
 And all, should live as trees do—so much spring,
 Such and such rains and frosts, such winter-times,
 And then dead leaves, with maybe spring again,
 Or axe-stroke at the root. This will not I,
 Whose life here was a god's!—this would not I,
 Though all my days were godlike, while men moan
 Under their darkness. Therefore farewell, friends!
 While life is good to give, I give, and go
 To seek deliverance and that unknown Light!"
 Then, lightly treading where those sleepers lay,
 Into the night Siddhārtha passed: its eyes,
 The watchful stars, looked love on him: its breath,
 The wandering wind, kissed his robe's fluttered fringe;
 The garden-blossoms, folded for the dawn,
 Opened their velvet hearts to waft him scents
 From pink and purple censers: o'er the land,
 From Himalay unto the Indian Sea,
 A tremor spread, as if earth's soul beneath
 Stirred with an unknown hope; and holy books—
 Which tell the story of our Lord—say, too,
 That rich celestial musics thrilled the air
 From hosts on hosts of shining ones, who thronged
 Eastward and westward, making bright the night—
 Northward and southward, making glad the ground.
 Also those four dread Regents of the Earth,
 Descending at the doorway, two by two,—
 With their bright legions of Invisibles

In arms of sapphire, silver, gold, and pearl—
 Watched with joined hands the Indian Prince, who
 stood,
 His tearful eyes raised to the stars, and lips
 Close-set with purpose of prodigious love.
 Then strode he forth into the gloom, and cried:
 "Channa, awake! and bring out Kantaka!"
 "What would my Lord?" the charioteer replied—
 Slow-rising from his place beside the gate—
 "To ride at night when all the ways are dark?"

"Speak low," Siddhārtha said, "and bring my horse,
 For now the hour is come when I should quit
 This golden prison where my heart lives caged
 To find the truth; which henceforth I will seek,
 For all men's sake, until the truth be found."

"Alas! dear Prince," answered the charioteer,
 "Spake then for nought those wise and holy men
 Who cast the stars and bade us wait the time
 When King Suddhōdana's great son should rule
 Realms upon realms, and be a Lord of lords?
 Wilt thou ride hence and let the rich world slip
 Out of thy grasp, to hold a beggar's bowl?
 Wilt thou go forth into the friendless waste
 That hast this Paradise of pleasures here?"

The Prince made answer, "Unto this I came,
 And not for thrones: the kingdom that I crave
 Is more than many realms, and all things pass
 To change and death. Bring me forth Kantaka!"

"Most honoured," spake again the charioteer,
 "Bethink thee of my Lord thy father's grief!

Bethink thee of their woe whose bliss thou art—
 How shalt thou help them, first undoing them?"
 Siddhārtha answered, "Friend, that love is false
 Which clings to love selfish sweets of love;
 But I, who love these more than joys of mine—
 Yea, more than joys of theirs—depart to save
 Them and all flesh, if utmost love avail.
 Go, bring me Kantaka!"

Then Channa said,
 "Master, I go!" and forthwith, mournfully,
 Unto the stall he passed, and from the rack
 Took down the silver bit and bridle-chains,
 Breast-cord and curb, and knitted fast the straps,
 And linked the hooks, and led out Kantaka:
 Whom tethering to the ring, he combed and dressed,
 Stroking the snowy coat to silken gloss;
 Next on the steed he laid the *numdah* square,
 Fitted the saddle-cloth across, and set
 The saddle fair, drew tight the jewelled girths,
 Buckled the breech bands and the martingale,
 And made fall both the stirrups of worked gold.
 Then over all he cast a golden net,
 With tassels of seed-pearl and silken strings,
 And led the great horse to the palace door,
 Where stood the Price; but when he saw his Lord,
 Right glad he waxed and joyously he neighed,
 Spreading his scarlet nostrils; and the books
 Write, "Surely all had heard Kantaka's neigh,
 And that strong trampling of his iron heels,
 Save that the Devas laid soft unseen wings
 Over their ears and kept the sleepers deaf."

Fondly Siddhātha drew the proud head down,
 Patted the shining neck, and said, "Be still,
 White Kantaka! be still, and bear me now
 The farthest journey ever rider rode;
 For this night take I horse to find the truth,
 And where my quest will end yet know I not,
 Save that it shall not end until I find.
 Therefore to-night, good steed, be fierce and bold!
 Let nothing stay thee, though a thousand blades
 Deny the road! let neither wall nor moat
 Forbid our flight! Look! if I touch thy flank
 And cry, 'On, Kantaka! let whirlwinds lag
 Behind thy course! Be fire and air, my horse!
 To stead thy Lord; so shalt thou share with him
 The greatness of this deed which helps the world;
 For therefore ride I, not for men alone,
 But for all things which, speechless, share our pain
 And have no hope, nor wit to ask for hope.
 Now, therefore, bear thy master valorously!"

Then to the saddle lightly leaping, he
 Touched the arched crest, and Kantaka sprang forth
 With armed hoofs sparkling on the stones and ring
 Of champing bit; but none did hear that sound,
 For that the Suddha Devas, gathering near,
 Plucked the red mohra-flowers and strewed them thick
 Under his tread, while hands invisible
 Muffled the ringing bit and bridle-chains.
 Moreover, it is written when they came
 Upon the pavement near the inner gates,
 The Yakshas of the air laid magic cloths
 Under the stallion's feet, so that he went

Softly and still.

But when they reached the gate
Of tripled brass—which hardly fivescore men
Served to unbar and open—lo! the doors
Rolled back all silently, though one might hear
In daytime two *koss* off the thunderous roar
Of those grim hinges and unwieldy plates.

Also the middle and the outer gates
Unfolded each their monstrous portals thus
In silence as Siddhārtha and his steed
Drew near; while underneath their shadow lay,
Silent as dead men, all those chosen guards—
The lance and sword let fall, the shields unbraced,
Captains and soldiers—for there came a wind,
Drowsier than blows o'er Malwa's fields of sleep,
Before the Prince's path, which, being breathed,
Lulled every sense aswoon: and so he passed
Free from the palace.

When the morning star
Stood half a spear's length from the eastern rim,
And o'er the earth the breath of morning sighed
Rippling Anoma's wave, the border-stream,
Then drew he rein, and leaped to earth and kissed
White Kantaka betwixt the ears, and spake
Full sweet to Channa: "This which thou hast done
Shall bring thee good and bring all creatures good:
Be sure I love thee always for thy love.
Lead back my horse, and take my crest-pearl here,
My princely robes, which henceforth stead me not,
My jewelled sword-belt, and my sword, and these
The long locks by its bright edge severed thus

From off my brows. Give the King all, and say
Siddhārtha prays forget him till he come
Ten times a Prince, with royal wisdom won
From lonely searchings and the strife for light;
Where, if I conquer, lo! all earth is mine—
Mine by chief service!—tell him—mine by love!
Since there is hope for man only in man,
And none hath sought for this as I will seek,
Who cast away my world to save my world."