

A GREAT SECRET,

OR,
SHALL IT BE DONE.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The journey to Paris seemed long and tedious to Gerald, who was torn by anxiety as to the treatment Peggy would receive at the hands of the cunning, untrustworthy Smith, the orthodox Miss M'Leod, and the obstinate Mr. Beresford. He wondered whether the autocrat of "Les Bouleaux" had some reason stronger than a freak for wishing his daughter to return. Gerald believed that he must have given up the project of marrying her to Victor, since the young Frenchman, as well as his parents, would certainly decline to ratify an engagement made with such an erratic young lady as this last escapade proved Peggy to be. The young husband tormented himself by imagining that it was with some thought of punishment for his daughter's disobedience that Mr. Beresford had sent for her, and he was in such a fever of fear about her by the time he reached Paris that he would have taken the next train back to Calais if he had not found, waiting for him at the telegraph office, a telegram from Peggy, the contents of which reassured him. This was the message:

"Father really ill. Shuts himself up. Won't see anybody. Delphine takes this to Calais. LOVE."

With his mind relieved of a great weight, Gerald jumped into a *fiacre* to fulfil his promise to Smith that he would go to M. de Breteuil's house first. He did not suppose that he should find this errand very difficult: from what he had heard of the arrogant millionaire, he imagined that he should have to waste a couple of hours in a big, bare, coldly handsome anteroom, with a dozen more people in the same predicament, and that he should then be snubbed by the great man for a couple of minutes, and sent about his business without having accomplished anything in particular. So he turned over his letter of introduction idly in his hand, and let his thoughts settle on the more interesting subject of his visit to Madame de Lancry and the possible discoveries to which the signet-stone he was carrying might lead, when once it was placed in her clever hands.

He had worked himself into such a state of passionate excitement over the thought that he was perhaps carrying, at that very moment, the means of bringing his father's murderer to justice at last, that when the *fiacre* stopped at the imposing *porte-cochere* of one of the handsomest mansions in the Avenue Friedland, Gerald had forgotten for the moment his immediate errand; and it was not until he had paid the driver, and walked mechanically through the massive iron gates into the courtyard, that he remembered where he was. He had just been told, in answer to his inquiry, that M. de Breteuil was out, and was repossessing the courtyard, impatient to start for the hotel where Madame de Lancry was staying, when he had to step aside quickly for a victoria, drawn by a pair of chestnut horses, which rattled in over the asphalt and was drawn up sharply at the entrance, with a skill and neatness which made Gerald certain that the coachman must be an Englishman.

"What a splendid turn-out!" he thought admiringly; and just as he got to the gates he glanced back for one more look, and saw that in noticing the setting he had overlooked the gem. Standing up in the little carriage, with her hand upon the back, was a tall lady who gave him, in the glimpse he caught of her, a vivid impression of brocade and feathers. As she was looking straight at him, he withdrew his eyes at once and walked on. He was on the pavement outside the gates when a tall servant, in a livery which to his eyes appeared rather too gorgeous to be in good taste, ran after him, and respectfully asked in French, whether monsieur would be good enough to come back, as Madame wished to have the honor of speaking to him.

"Madame!" echoed Gerald, overcome with shyness at the thought of having to confront the magnificent feminine creature, the pomp and circumstance of whose surroundings had somewhat overawed his simple mind. "Madame de Breteuil!" "Ma's oui, monsieur," answered the man in a tone of respectful insolence which Gerald interpreted to mean that the lady was not popular among her servants.

The young fellow turned back reluctantly, followed his conductor up a wide, shallow-stepped marble staircase, with a balustrade of elaborate iron-work on the one side, and a painted wall on the other, to the first floor, where he was led along a corridor, the whole length of one side of which was one long window, darkened by stained glass, by high tropical plants in a conservatory on the other side, and by tapestry draperies which hung in festoons from the ceiling. The opposite wall was of carved dark oak, picked out with gold. The carpet which was laid down in the middle of the polished floor was so thick as to deaden the heaviest tread; and Gerald thought, as he followed the servant to the door at the end, that a good comfortable workhouse would be more to his taste than this silent and gloomy magnificence.

He was ushered into a very large and very lofty room, which altered his opinion. For, little as Gerald knew of anything but the outside of great houses, he was struck at once by the fact that in this apartment exceptional judgment had been used in making the most both of height and space.

The tapestries which hung on the walls were wide, and reached from the painted ceiling to the polished floor, while the looking-glasses between which they fell were of the same height. The chairs and couches in the room were all high-backed and large, less ambitious seats being provided in cushions of pseudo-Oriental pattern, which were strewn in piles of two and three in rugs about the polished floor. The room was neither bare nor overcrowded, but everything in it was on such a scale as not to be dwarfed by the surroundings. Palms in huge porcelain bowls filled the corners, an embroidered screen nine feet high stood by the fireplace, which was of old-fashioned English pattern, lofty, oaken, heavily-carved; and the curtains which draped the entrance to another room at one end were caught up by what Gerald afterwards artlessly described as "rope of gold."

"It's too big for anything human to live in," commented he critically, as, finding that he was left to himself for a consider-

able time, he began to wander about softly, wondering from what corner the queen of this surprising place would appear to him, and what remarkable attributes she would possess to distinguish her as much from the women he had met as her home was distinguished from the abodes of meaner mortals. He had time to go from end to end of the room, and to peep through the hanging curtains into the next apartment, which was smaller and decorated and furnished like an Arabian Nights' vision seen in a Parisian's dream.

"Not the real thing at all, I should say, but much more comfortable," thought Gerald, detecting a European neatness about the fringe of the carpets, and observing that the lanterns which were suspended overhead were fitted up for the electric light.

He was advancing two steps into the second room to admire the ingenuity of this arrangement, when the sound of a turning handle made him retreat hastily into the room into which he had been ushered. As he did so, however, he was in time to see a rather large-gloved hand and wrist sparkling with bracelets thrust from behind a *portiere* that screened the door through which the lady was coming.

Gerald listened to the rustle of heavy silk, to the rattle of many beads, and to a distinctly heavy step on the floor of the intervening room, with curiosity and some surprise. A quiet life had made him observant, and, long before he caught another glimpse of the lady, he knew that her refinement was not equal to her splendor. As she drew near the curtains which divided the rooms, Gerald stepped forward with a low bow; then he raised his head, met her eyes, and fell back with an irrepressible exclamation of astonishment, of horror. For the beautiful creature before him, in low-cut, trained gown of rose and coffee-colored satin, heavy with pearl embroidery, which impeded her clumsy movements and yet showed off the animal beauty of her Amazonian figure, child-like blue eyes and silky fair hair, was the gamekeeper's daughter, Babette. Her arms were encased in long, pale gloves that reached to the shoulder; on the fair white skin of her neck hung a double string of pearls; her soft hair, piled high on her head in coques and coils, held a tuft of rose-and-coffee-colored feathers and more pearls; the sunny-brown skin of her face was artificially whitened. But it was a triumph of millinery, not of mind, and, at the first straightforward glance of sorrow and disgust from Gerald's honest eyes, the ignorant creature's peacock dignity gave way, and she stood there before him stupidly picking out the feathers of her satin fan, with her frizzed and fluffy head hung bashfully down, just as, the summer before, she had pulled out the petals of a daisy with her red-brown fingers, while he thought the soft fringe of hair that escaped from under her cap on to her sunburnt neck the prettiest thing in the world.

"O Babette!" said he, in heartfelt sorrow and reproach.

"I am pretty like that, am I not?" said she, raising her head hardly, and betraying to the young fellow's shocked eyes that the confusion she felt under his glance was the old false shame with but a faint trace of any nobler feeling. He had overrated the capacity for good in this blunt, coarse nature in the old days when bashfulness under a cotton cap looked so like sweet modesty. Perhaps it was the fact that his heart was filled by another woman that helped him to be keen-sighted now. At any rate, this speech betrayed her.

"No, Babette, I shall never think you pretty again until I see you back in your blue frock and your sabots," said he simply.

"You don't admire handsome things, then," said she scornfully, walking past him so that he might be impressed by the length of her train and the height it gave to her figure. She had already discovered that.

"Yes," he answered quietly, "I like handsome things on people who are used to them."

"Well, I shall be used to them soon," said she, turning round upon him quickly and awkwardly, but showing instantly to more advantage as anger made her natural.

"I hope not," said he as gravely as a preacher. "I hope that before the person who was wicked enough to dress you up in these things gets tired of seeing you in them, you will find out yourself how silly you have been, and go back of your own accord to the old cottage and the cows that you used to be so fond of, and your poor grandmother and er—and your—er your father."

He could not find an attractive adjective for Monnier, so the end of his speech was rather abrupt. Babette tossed back her head sharply, and a little curl fastened to a hairpin fell down to the ground.

"O yes, and feed the pigs, I suppose, and wash the floors, and get scolded."

"Why, Babette," said Gerald, who had detected nervous glances which she cast from time to time at the doors, "you get scolded now. She started and stared at him. He went on: "And now, you know, you don't dare to say a word back. You used to work hard, and when any one grumbled at you, you knew you were in the right, and you could answer saucily. But now you are nothing but a poor dressed-up doll, and you scarcely dare to walk lest you should show that you miss your sabots, or to turn round for fear of tumbling over your train, and offending—"

He stopped short, having grown in a moment quite white and cold. In the astonishment, grief, and disgust he had felt at the sight of the transfigured Babette, he had forgotten for the time his suspicion that it was the murderer of Mr. Shaw who had run away with her.

"What is it? What is the matter, Monsieur Gerald?" she asked with real solicitude.

"Babette," said he huskily, seizing one of her gloved arms and speaking with earnestness, which made him shake from head to foot, "who is this M. de Breteuil? Was it he that used to come about the place after you at 'Les Bouleaux'? Tell me, for God's sake, tell me!"

But the woman was trembling. He saw at once that he had frightened her too much for her to be frank with him. She only muttered, "Let me go, let me go," and fought herself free from him, with troubled eyes, like a teased and timid child.

"No, no," she said at last, very peevish.

"I met M. de Breteuil in Paris, and I wish he would come in now, and have you turned out for frightening me. Don't you know I am a great lady now, and you mustn't treat me as if I were just peasant girl, like I used to be."

She was the peasant-girl still, if she had only known it, as she wriggled about uncomfortably in her beautiful dress, and suddenly kicked off her tight shoes as she used to do her old sabots. As soon as she saw what she had done she threw herself down on a sofa, and burst into tears of mortification.

Gerald looked at her for a few moments, and then, seeing that in this new and exciting situation he should get no help from her, he went quickly and softly toward the door by which he had come in.

But before he had reached it she looked up, sprang to her feet with a loud cry, and rushed helter-skelter along the room to him, tumbling over her gown at every step, her arms stretched out, her hair falling down, a miserable and ridiculous object.

"Don't go away, don't go away! You are right, Monsieur Gerald, I am foolish, I am unhappy. Don't go away yet. Perhaps you can tell me something; and I want to know so much. Look, look, if you will stay, I will take off all these things, and you shall treat me just as you please."

And the excited creature pulled out the ornaments from her hair, the pearls from her neck, and tore her gloves to strips under the frantic efforts of her muscular fingers to get them off. Gerald stopped and watched her in perfect silence and stillness, exactly as he would have watched a large mastiff hurting itself with its chain in its attempts to detain its master. The tears came into his eyes.

"Of course I will stay and hear whatever you want to say," he said gently. "And if I can only help you to be happy again, I will. But you must let me go soon, as I have some very important business to attend to."

The poor fellow was indeed on fire with impatience to be by himself, and with anxiety not to risk meeting M. de Breteuil until he had seen Madame de Lancry. He led the panting creature to one of the colossal couches he had admired so much; but she pushed him down upon it and stood before him, leaning against the oaken mantelpiece in shamefaced excitement, which moved and melted him.

"I don't like this place, I am unhappy and frightened," said she, incoherently. "Already he is changed in these last two weeks. When he is cold, he is like ice, so hard, so stern; and when he is gay, he is like fire—like fire. O, he frigtenes me! I do not like him, I hate him!"

"Well, why don't you run away from him, and go back to your father's cottage, you silly girl? If he isn't very good-tempered, and if your grandmother is tiresome, why, at least, you can do as you please, and you need not be afraid of anybody," said Gerald, who saw it was a mistake to take high moral ground as a stand point in dealing with her.

"O, but it was my father who sent me away, and now that there seems to be a sort of suspicion that he was mixed up with the wolf-scare, he is afraid he is no longer in favor with Mr. Beresford, and it is the more necessary for him to keep well with—"

"Well, well, with whom?" "But she did not answer. Her large, round, blue eyes were turned in terror toward the nearest of the high windows, her mouth was open, her limbs were shaking. Before Gerald could understand what new trouble had seized her, she shrank back like an overgrown, frightened child against the corner of the carved fire-place.

"What is the matter, Babette?" "Don't you hear the carriage in the courtyard?" she asked in a hoarse whisper. "He has come back, and when he finds how I have been behaving he will scold me."

She shook out the folds of her beautiful gown, looked at herself in one of the long glasses with an exclamation of despair at the havoc which the excited movements of the last ten minutes had wrought in her appearance, and began hurriedly to try to pull on one of the torn gloves. Suddenly a red flush overspread her face, from which her hot hands had during the last few minutes removed the thick coating of rice-powder.

"He mustn't find you here!" she said in a tremulous voice. "He would kill me if he were jealous, in the humor he has been in for the last few days. Come here."

She seized his hand in a muscular grip which was physically irresistible, half led, half dragged him the whole length of the two rooms, pulled aside the *portiere*, opened the door behind it by which she had herself entered, thrust him into a little over-furnished boudoir, and, before he could protest, turned the key in the lock and left him a prisoner.

A moment later Gerald heard a man's step and a man's voice in the room he had just left.

CHAPTER XXV.

Gerald was still staggering from the last push of Babette's strong hands when the heavy man's tread in the next room stopped, and for a few seconds there was dead silence. The young fellow came back to the door, and turned the handle, madly anxious to meet this man. But it was locked. Then through the heavy curtain on the other side came the muffled sounds of Babette's voice in abject apology and entreaty for forgiveness.

"I have been to sleep," she faltered, "on the sofa there, and the cushions have tumbled my hair."

"Tumbled your hair!" echoed a man's hard, grating voice, "and torn your gloves, and disarranged your dress, and made you cry! It is a great deal for a cushion to do! Then, after a moment's pause, in a voice of tenfold greater harshness: "You have been romping with one of the servants!"

"No, I haven't, no, I haven't. O, monsieur, O, Louis, nobody has been near me, indeed. You are very unkind. For the last fortnight you have been always irritable, always hard. And I have done nothing—nothing to make you so. I've been a lady every day until just now, and not burst my dress or torn anything or knocked anything over for three days."

"You seem to have been making up for your abstinence now."

She went on mumbling excuses without getting any further answer, until by an impatient exclamation her master signified that he had had enough of them, and Gerald guessed, by the little scream she uttered as her train rustled toward the door by which he was standing, that she was being

pushed toward it. The next sound he heard was the hard voice speaking close to the other side of the door.

"Go back to your maids and let them dress you and make you fit to be seen again. I dine at the British Embassy this evening. But if you are good I will take you for a drive afterward, if the night is warm enough."

The woman mumbled an abject assent and crouched by the door, quite still, while the heavy tread of the man grew fainter in the distance as he crossed the two rooms. Gerald, in intense excitement, drew from his pocket the letter entrusted to him by Mr. Smith, and knocked softly at the door which shut him in.

"Let me out, Babette, let me out," he whispered. "I must see M. de Breteuil before he leaves the house. He need not know I have been in here. Let me out, there's a good girl; it's very important."

But all the answer he got was a frightened "Sh-sh!" and for fully ten minutes he entreated and she listened without answering, until the sound of wheels in the courtyard attracted his attention.

He looked out of the window of the *boudoir*, and saw a small, dark *coupe*, drawn by horses quite as handsome as those he had admired in the victoria, drive rapidly out at the gate. Then Babette unlocked the door and he dashed past her impatiently, with Smith's letter in his hand.

"You can't catch him now, he's gone too far," she cried nervously. "What's that in your hand? What do you want of him?"

"What time will he be back?" asked Gerald, stopping suddenly and speaking with some irritation. "I have to see him most particularly, on business. I have a letter of introduction to him, and these silly fears and fancies of yours have put me to great inconvenience."

She came slowly and ponderously toward him as he spoke, with an anxious and sly look in her eyes which he was too much preoccupied to notice. As soon as she was near enough, she snatched the letter out of his hand, drew back a couple of steps, turned sharply round, and pulled off the envelope so clumsily that she tore the letter.

"Business, business! What is it? More secrets, I suppose," she said viciously, as she turned the short note about in her hot hands without reading it. "And he thinks he'll get the better of me by forbidding me to learn to read. But I'll be even with him. I can make out a lot of words already, when they're wrote clear—not like this," with a contemptuous slap on the letter she held. "And if he tries any tricks with me I'll just make off with his precious papers! I know where they're kept, simple as I am."

Gerald watched this new change with astonishment and disgust. Then he stepped toward her and held out his hand saying, very quietly: "Now give me back that letter. You have done enough mischief for one day to satisfy even you, I should think."

She yielded to his tone of authority, and put the torn note awkwardly into his hand, putting up one shoulder into her ear with shy petulance as she did so.

"Thank you. Good evening," said Gerald shortly, and without another word he turned away from her and crossed the two handsome rooms in which the dusk of the evening was already casting grim shadows. He shuddered as he cast a last look at the forlorn half-tamed animal who stood, miserable and downcast, by one of the windows of the inner room, her coarse beauty refined and idealized by the dim half-light, longing to call back again the one honest friend who was leaving her, restrained from doing so by the respect which his simple gravity had imposed upon her.

"I can't do anything for her," thought Gerald, "perhaps Madame de Lancry can."

He passed from the drawing room to the dark corridor, where little globes of electric light suddenly flashed into brightness on the walls as he entered. At the other end a servant was standing, who opened the doors on to the staircase, and accompanied him down into the hall; and it was with a feeling of relief and exultation Gerald found himself outside the house and on his way to the Hotel du Louvre.

Madame de Lancry was at home, so Gerald went up stairs and knocked at the door of the sitting-room.

"Come in," said the General's voice. "No sooner did the young man's face appear in the doorway, than with a loud exclamation of satisfaction General de Lancry, who was alone in the room, jumped up from his chair with surprising nimbleness, and came forward to lead him into the room.

"Welcome, welcome!" said he eagerly. "Madame expects you, I know. She has been crazy for the last half hour because you are late. You telegraphed that you would be here this evening, and the Calais train has been in for some time. You waited to dine somewhere, I suppose?"

It was half-past eight. The gaslight showed the still untouched dessert on the glistening white tablecloth, bright with silver, and glass, and flowers. The sight reminded Gerald that he was ravenously hungry.

"I had a business call to make for the firm," said he.

"Ah! And," dropping his voice to a mysterious whisper, and glancing at the door of his wife's room, "did the little lady find you? Not a breath about that to Madame, you understand! I've tried to put in a word now and then for you both, but it's of no use—no use," and he shook his head gloomily. "She is very determined on some points, you know; and she went as far, one day, as to say that marriage with that little girl would be your ruin; she did indeed. So I wouldn't press it, if I were you; I'd look out for a chance of taking her unawares with the announcement of your attachment, as I mean to do with the information that I'm no longer an invalid. Do you see? Sh-sh! she's coming in."

The General slid down into his chair again hastily as his wife came into the room. She looked rather thin and worn, and would have looked pale if that had not been a calamity which she knew how to avoid. Her grey eyes seemed to burn with some fierce fire, and the strong self-control, through which her words and manner appeared cold and listless, told Gerald, who noticed her keenly, and who knew something of her state of mind, that the sport was growing exciting. The glance she cast at her husband, as she came in, showed plainly that she wished that well-meaning gentleman anywhere but in her presence. She gave Gerald a long, straight look from her shining eyes, as if to read without delay the tidings he brought her, gave a long sigh of impatience as she shook his hand, gently pushed him into a chair, and poured out a glass of wine.

"You have had no dinner, poor boy, I know," she said.

And while her husband broke out into exclamations of pity and astonishment, she rang the bell, and called for the dinner should be served again at once. Then she threw herself back in a deep chair, and effaced herself, leaving Gerald to the mercies of the General, who chattered on placidly to him, delighted to have such congenial company, until the young fellow had satisfied his hunger and was able to give him more attention. As he leaned back in his chair for the first time, Madame de Lancry sprang up from hers like a tigress on the watch.

An Omnibus Pass.

The following is a copy of the pass upon which a party of statesmen travelled to the wedding of a fellow-member of the State Legislature recently:—

CINCINNATI, Feb. 14, 1888.

Conductors of C. & C. M. Railway:—
Pass Hon. E. L. Lamson, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the great State of Ohio (the third State in the Union in the point of population, and first in all other respects), and twenty-three (23) other people from Columbus to Blanchester and return, on account of the marriage of Hon. W. C. Hudson, the honorable member from Clinton. Conductors are instructed to leave their valuables in the train box while this party is on board.—[Cleveland Leader.]

A Tremendous Sensation

would have been created one hundred years ago by the sight of one of our modern express trains whizzing along at the rate of sixty miles an hour. Just think how our grandfathers would have stared at such a spectacle! It takes a good deal to astonish peoplenow-a-days, but some of the marvelous cures of consumption, wrought by Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery, have created wide spread amazement. Consumption is at last acknowledged curable. The "Golden Medical Discovery" is the only known remedy for it. If taken at the right time—which, bear in mind, is not when the lungs are nearly gone—it will go right to the seat of the disease and accomplish its work as nothing else in the world can.

Alleged Dutch hall clocks no longer command the high prices of a few years ago.

"Give Him \$2, and Let Him Guess"

We once heard a man complain of feeling badly, and wondered what ailed him. A humorous friend said, "Give a doctor \$2, and let him guess." It was a cutting satire on some doctors, who don't always guess right. You need not guess what ails you when your food don't digest, when your bowels and stomach are inactive, and when your head aches every day, and you are languid and easily fatigued. You are bilious, and Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Purgative Pellets will bring you out all right. Small, sugar coated, easy to take. Of druggists.

"Knickerbocker buff" is given as the name of a color to be fashionable in Spring goods.

"Had Been Worried Eighteen Years."

It should have read "married," but the proof reader observed that it amounted to about the same thing, and so did not draw his blue pencil through the error. Unfortunately there was considerable truth in his observation. Thousands of husbands are worried almost to despair by the ill health that afflicts their wives, and often robs life of comfort and happiness. There is but one safe and sure way to change all this for the better! The ladies should use Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription.

Silver ornaments for the person of all kinds are more fashionable now than ever before.

A Cure for Drunkenness.

The opium habit, depression, the morphia habit, nervous prostration caused by the use of tobacco, wakefulness, mental depression, scolding of the brain, etc., premature old age, loss of vitality caused by over-exertion of the brain, and loss of natural strength, from any cause whatever. Men—young, old or middle aged—who are broken down from any of the above causes, or any cause not mentioned above, send your address and 10 cents in stamps for Lubon's Tonic, in book form, of Diseases of Men. Books sent sealed and secure from observation. Address M. V. LUBON 47 Wellington Street East, Toronto Ont.

Spring bonnets are to have wide strings if the latest fashion news from Paris is reliable.

Coff No More.

Watson's cough drops are the best in the world for the throat and chest, for the voice unequalled. See that the letters R. & T. W. are stamped on each drop.

Corduroy will hold its own through the Spring and is to come in all the newest colors.

Ocean Steamship Passengers

Via New York should take the Erie railway, as it is not only the shortest and best line, but lands people close to the piers of the leading steamship companies. In buying tickets, ask for the Erie.

Jewelers say there is an unusual demand for black pearls and that they bring fancy prices.

People who are subject to bad breath, foul coated tongue, or any disorder of the stomach, can at once be relieved by using Dr. Carson's Stomach Bitters, the old and tried remedy. Ask your Druggist.

Some of the handsomest of the India wraps are trimmed with black marabout feather trimming.

CINGALESE HAIR RESTORER restores grey and faded hair to its natural color and prevents falling out.

Braid in almost Bloomingdale profusion is to trim the tailor-made and other kinds of Spring suits.

HUB! COUGH CURE cures in one minute. Half teaspoonful of common salt dissolved in a little cold water and drunk will instantly relieve heartburn.

Whenever your Stomach or Bowels get out of order, causing Biliousness, Dyspepsia, or Indigestion, and their attendant evils, take at once a dose of Dr. Carson's Stomach Bitters. Best family medicine. All Druggists, 50 cents.

Cold snaps continue to delight the hearts of women who have sealskin sacques or a Russian wrap.

A. P. 390.

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