

**RICHARD
DODDRIDGE
BLACKMORE**

FRIDA; OR, THE LOVER'S
LEAP

Richard Doddridge Blackmore

Frida; Or, The Lover's Leap

«Public Domain»

Blackmore R.

Frida; Or, The Lover's Leap / R. Blackmore — «Public Domain»,

© Blackmore R.
© Public Domain

Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	7
CHAPTER III	9
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	10

R. D. Blackmore
Frida; Or, The Lover's Leap: A Legend
Of The West Country / From «Slain
By The Doones» By R. D. Blackmore

CHAPTER I

On the very day when Charles I. was crowned with due rejoicings—Candlemasday, in the year of our Lord 1626—a loyalty, quite as deep and perhaps even more lasting, was having its beer at Ley Manor in the north of Devon. A loyalty not to the king, for the old West-country folk knew little and cared less about the house that came over the Border; but to a lord who had won their hearts by dwelling among them, and dealing kindly, and paying his way every Saturday night. When this has been done for three generations general and genial respect may almost be relied upon.

The present Baron de Wichehalse was fourth in descent from that Hugh de Wichehalse, the head of an old and wealthy race, who had sacrificed his comfort to his resolve to have a will of his own in matters of religion. That Hugh de Wichehalse, having an eye to this, as well as the other world, contrived to sell his large estates before they were confiscated, and to escape with all the money, from very sharp measures then enforced, by order of King Philip II., in the unhappy Low Countries. Landing in England, with all his effects and a score of trusty followers, he bought a fine property, settled, and died, and left a good name behind him. And that good name had been well kept up, and the property had increased and thriven, so that the present lord was loved and admired by all the neighbourhood.

In one thing, however, he had been unlucky, at least in his own opinion. Ten years of married life had not found issue in parental life. All his beautiful rocks and hills, lovely streams and glorious woods, green meadows and golden corn lands, must pass to his nephew and not to his child, because he had not gained one. Being a good man, he did his best to see this thing in its proper light. Children, after all, are a plague, a risk, and a deep anxiety. His nephew was a very worthy boy, and his rights should be respected. Nevertheless, the baron often longed to supersede them. Of this there was every prospect now. The lady of the house had intrusted her case to a highly celebrated simple-woman, who lived among rocks and scanty vegetation at Heddon's Mouth, gathering wisdom from the earth and from the sea tranquillity. De Wichehalse was naturally vexed a little when all this accumulated wisdom culminated in nothing grander than a somewhat undersized, and unhappily female child—one, moreover, whose presence cost him that of his faithful and loving wife. So that the heiress of Ley Manor was greeted, after all, with a very brief and sorry welcome. "Jennyfried," for so they named her, soon began to grow into a fair esteem and good liking. Her father, after a year or two, plucked up his courage and played with her; and the more he played the more pleased he was, both with her and his own kind self. Unhappily, there were at that time no shops in the neighbourhood; unhappily, now there are too many. Nevertheless, upon the whole, she had all the toys that were good for her; and her teeth had a fair chance of fitting themselves for life's chief operation in the absence of sugared allurements.

A brief and meagre account is this of the birth, and growth, and condition of a maiden whose beauty and goodness still linger in the winter tales of many a simple homestead. For, sharing her father's genial nature, she went about among the people in her soft and playful way; knowing all their cares, and gifted with a kindly wonder at them, which is very soothing. All the simple folk expected condescension from her; and she would have let them have it, if she had possessed it.

At last she was come to a time of life when maidens really must begin to consider their responsibilities—a time when it does matter how the dress sits and what it is made of, and whether the hair is well arranged for dancing in the sunshine and for fluttering in the moonlight; also that the eyes convey not from that roguish nook the heart any betrayal of “hide and seek”; neither must the risk of blushing tremble on perpetual brinks; neither must—but, in a word, ‘twas the seventeenth year of a maiden’s life.

More and more such matters gained on her motherless necessity. Strictly anxious as she was to do the right thing always, she felt more and more upon every occasion (unless it was something particular) that her cousin need not so impress his cousinly salutation.

Albert de Wichehalse (who received that name before it became so inevitable) was that same worthy boy grown up as to whom the baron had felt compunctions, highly honourable to either party, touching his defeasance; or rather, perhaps, as to interception of his presumptive heirship by the said Albert, or at least by his mother contemplated. And Albert’s father had entrusted him to his uncle’s special care and love, having comfortably made up his mind, before he left this evil world, that his son should have a good slice of it.

Now, therefore, the baron’s chief desire was to heal all breaches and make things pleasant, and to keep all the family property snug by marrying his fair Jennyfried (or “Frida,” as she was called at home) to her cousin Albert, now a fine young fellow of five-and-twenty. De Wichehalse was strongly attached to his nephew, and failed to see any good reason why a certain large farm near Martinhoe, quite a huge cantle from the Ley estates, which by a prior devise must fall to Albert upon his own demise, should be allowed to depart in that way from his posthumous control.

However, like most of our fallible race, he went the worst possible way to work in pursuit of his favourite purpose. He threw the young people together daily, and dinned into the ears of each perpetual praise of the other. This seemed to answer well enough in the case of the simple Albert. He could never have too much of his lively cousin’s company, neither could he weary of sounding her sweet excellence. But with the young maid it was not so. She liked the good Albert well enough, and never got out of his way at all. Moreover, sometimes his curly hair and bright moustache, when they came too near, would raise not a positive flutter, perhaps, but a sense of some fugitive movement in the unexplored distances of the heart. Still, this might go on for years, and nothing more to come of it. Frida loved her father best of all the world, at present.

CHAPTER II

There happened to be at this time an old fogy—of course it is most distressing to speak of anyone disrespectfully; but when one thinks of the trouble he caused, and not only that, but he was an old fogy, essentially and pre-eminently—and his name was Sir Maunder Meddleby. This worthy baronet, one of the first of a newly invented order, came in his sled stuffed with goose-feathers (because he was too fat to ride, and no wheels were yet known on the hill tracks) to talk about some exchange of land with his old friend, our De Wichehalse. The baron and the baronet had been making a happy day of it. Each knew pretty well exactly what his neighbour's little rashness might be hoped to lead to, and each in his mind was pretty sure of having the upper hand of it. Therefore both their hearts were open—business being now dismissed, and dinner over—to one another. They sat in a beautiful place, and drew refreshment of mind through their outward lips by means of long reeden tubes with bowls at their ends, and something burning.

Clouds of delicate vapour wandered round and betwixt them and the sea; and each was well content to wonder whether the time need ever come when he must have to think again. Suddenly a light form flitted over the rocks, as the shadows flit; and though Frida ran away for fear of interrupting them, they knew who it was, and both, of course, began to think about her.

The baron gave a puff of his pipe, and left the baronet to begin. In course of time Sir Maunder spoke, with all that breadth and beauty of the vowels and the other things which a Devonshire man commands, from the lord lieutenant downward.

“If so be that ‘ee gooth vor to ax me, ai can zay wan thing, and wan oney.”

“What one thing is it, good neighbour? I am well content with her as she is.”

“Laikely enough. And ‘e wad be zo till ‘e zeed a zummut fainer.”

“I want to see nothing finer or better than what we have seen just now, sir.”

“There, you be like all varthers, a’most! No zort o’ oose to advaise ‘un.”

“Nay, nay! Far otherwise. I am not by any means of that nature. Sir Maunder Meddleby, I have the honour of craving your opinion.”

Sir Maunder Meddleby thought for a while, or, at any rate, meant to be thinking, ere ever he dared to deliver himself of all his weighty judgment.

“I’ve a-knowed she, my Lord Witcher, ever since her wore that haigh. A purty wanch, and a peart one. But her wanteth the vinish of the coort. Never do no good wi’out un, whan a coomth, as her must, to coorting.”

This was the very thing De Wichehalse was afraid to hear of. He had lived so mild a life among the folk who loved him that any fear of worry in great places was too much for him. And yet sometimes he could not help a little prick of thought about his duty to his daughter. Hence it came that common sense was driven wild by conscience, as forever happens with the few who keep that gadfly. Six great horses, who knew no conscience but had more fleshly tormentors, were ordered out, and the journey began, and at last it ended.

Everything in London now was going almost anyhow. Kind and worthy people scarcely knew the way to look at things. They desired to respect the king and all his privilege, and yet they found his mind so wayward that they had no hold of him.

The court, however, was doing its best, from place to place in its wanderings, to despise the uproar and enjoy itself as it used to do. Bright and beautiful ladies gathered round the king, when the queen was gone, persuading him and one another that they must have their own way.

Of the lords who helped these ladies to their strong opinions there was none in higher favour with the queen and the king himself than the young Lord Auberley. His dress was like a sweet enchantment, and his tongue was finer still, and his grace and beauty were as if no earth existed.

Frida was a new thing to him, in her pure simplicity. He to her was such a marvel, such a mirror of the skies, as a maid can only dream of in the full moon of St. John.

Little dainty glance, and flushing, and the fear to look too much, and the stealthy joy of feeling that there must be something meant, yet the terror of believing anything in earnest and the hope that, after all, there may be nought to come of it; and when this hope seems over true, the hollow of the heart behind it, and the longing to be at home with anyone to love oneself—time is wasted in recounting this that always must be.

Enough that Frida loved this gallant from the depths of her pure heart, while he admired and loved her to the best of his ability.

CHAPTER III

The worthy baron was not of a versatile complexion. When his mind was quite made up he carried out the whole of it. But he could not now make up his mind upon either of two questions. Of these questions one was this—should he fight for the king or against him, in the struggle now begun? By hereditary instincts he was stanch for liberty, for letting people have their own opinions who could pay for them. And about religious matters and the royal view of them, he fell under sore misgiving that his grandfather on high would have a bone to pick with him.

His other difficulty was what to say, or what to think, about Lord Auberley. To his own plain way of judging, and that human instinct which, when highly cultivated, equals that of the weaker dogs, also to his recollection of what used to be expected in the time when he was young, Viscount Auberley did not give perfect satisfaction.

Nevertheless, being governed as strong folk are by the gentle ones, the worthy baron winked at little things which did not please him, and went so far as to ask that noble spark to flash upon the natives of benighted Devon. Lord Auberley was glad enough to retire for a season, both for other reasons and because he saw that bitter fighting must be soon expected. Hence it happened that the six great Flemish horses were buckled to, early in September of the first year of the civil war, while the king was on his westward march collecting men and money. The queen was not expected back from the Continent for another month; there had scarcely been for all the summer even the semblance of a court fit to teach a maiden lofty carriage and cold dignity; so that Lord de Wichehalse thought Sir Maunder Meddleby an oaf for sending him to London.

But there was someone who had tasted strong delight and shuddering fear, glowing hope and chill despair, triumph, shame, and all confusion of the heart and mind and will, such as simple maidens hug into their blushing chastity by the moonlight of first love. Frida de Wichehalse knew for certain, and forever felt it settled, that in all the world of worlds never had been any body, any mind, or even soul, fit to think of twice when once you had beheld Lord Auberley.

His young lordship, on the whole, was much of the same opinion. Low fellows must not have the honour to discharge their guns at him. He liked the king, and really meant no harm whatever to his peace of mind concerning his Henrietta; and, if the worst came to the worst, everyone knew that out of France there was no swordsman fit to meet, even with a rapier, the foil of Aubyn Auberley. Neither was it any slur upon his loyalty or courage that he was now going westward from the world of camps and war. It was important to secure the wavering De Wichehalse, the leading man of all the coast, from Mine-head down to Hartland; so that, with the full consent of all the king's advisers, Lord Auberley left court and camp to press his own suit peacefully. What a difference he found it to be here in mid-September, far away from any knowledge of the world and every care; only to behold the manner of the trees disrobing, blushing with a trembling wonder at the freedom of the winds, or in the wealth of deep wood browning into rich defiance; only to observe the colour of the hills, and cliffs, and glens, and the glory of the sea underneath the peace of heaven, when the balanced sun was striking level light all over them! And if this were not enough to make a man contented with his littleness and largeness, then to see the freshened Pleiads, after their long dip of night, over the eastern waters twinkling, glad to see us all once more and sparkling to be counted.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.