

CRUEL AS THE GRAVE;

The Secret of Dunraven Castle.

BY ANNIE ASHMORE, Author of "Faithful Margaret," Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

Kenmore was too delicately faithful to his young lady's dignity to betray his suspicions of the real depth and source of her sufferings; but his rancor against Edgar was all gone in the revulsion of feeling consequent upon recent occurrences.

Amazement and wrath burst forth from Kenmore as he learned the fact of Sircombe having known all the time what Edgar's fate was.

"The foul fiend's in the man!" muttered Kenmore, perfectly aghast. "Little I knew it was your life he coveted when I was roused enough to clothe w' him to row ye over to Scotland an' leave ye there!"

Edgar had fallen down an unknown distance, and lay stunned for a long time. When he recovered his senses he found himself lying upon a bed of fine, deep sand, in a cell or cavern, whose walls of natural rock seemed to stretch a foot to a great height.

As his faculties returned to him, he laughed at his adventure; thinking that Sircombe would arrive at any moment with a rescuing party, when he would rescue him from his prison, and he had discovered the dungeon of the southern bastion.

He investigated the cell as well as he could by torch; it was dry, sand, and hermetically sealed by the wall of living rock.

As time passed and no one came to release him he began to feel uneasy, and wondered whether it was possible for Sircombe to lose the opening of the cavern, and to waste time in searching in a wrong direction.

It is he could scarcely credit, so peculiar had been the appearance of the spot where they had halted; and his perplexity grew hourly, although it never entered his honorable soul that Sircombe had abandoned him to his fate.

He spent much time and strength in wandering through the labyrinth, climbing narrow and rugged ascents, groping down dizzy and precipitous crannies, where daylight never penetrated, though the atmosphere was dry and pure.

At length he happened upon the tiny rivulet, a blessing indeed to the perishing man; and after drinking and bathing his fevered temples in the crystal water, he followed its capricious windings with infinite toil and patience, until it brought him to a dead wall behind which he heard the roaring of the sea.

He was still making desperate efforts to find an outlet when a blessed sound of Kenmore's voice came to him.

All this Edgar had to announce in a few words, and not without painful excitement, for his sub-rings had been frightful.

"And now, all that I ask is that I may get away unsuspected," said he in conclusion. "I have stern work to do before my enemy may know that I have escaped alive."

"Oh, sir, but will ye not tell the Lady Oolava—just her?" pleaded Kenmore; "she can keep faith, she's a true Dunraven!"

"But what right have I to burden her happy heart with my grim secrets?" said Edgar, thirsting for new assurance of her sorrow for his supposed death.

"The burden's on her heart now," muttered Kenmore, sadly troubled between the fear of saying too much and of Edgar leaving Ulva pining under a false delusion.

"Oh, my man, don't tempt me!" groaned Edgar; "I give my life to see her sweet face before I go—but I dare not honor forbid. See now, Kenmore, I'll tell you all. I adore your Lady Oolava; if I cannot win her for my wife, my life will be worthless to me. Now you shall know who it is who dares to look up to Lord Inchcape's daughter."

"Glad girdle us!" ejaculated the amazed Kenmore—"ye ken that!"

"Because an honest man would win her father's consent first," sighed Edgar. "What if Lord Inchcape should say that Ulva was not for me? Then I should have disturbed her for nothing, better far that she should never know who it was that loved and lost her."

He hurried his face in his hands, for it was a bitter potion that honor pressed to his lips; and Kenmore began to feel a proud affection for the young man, and to own that he might even to worthy of beautiful Oolava.

Then Edgar carefully unfolded his scheme, instructing Kenmore in the part that he was to play. Above the mentioned him against betraying the secret of his rescue to anybody on Sleaf-n-Vrecken, lest it might come to Sircombe's knowledge, and he should fly before Edgar had made his intended use of his fears.

Long he balanced in his mind the two alternatives, whether he would indeed leave his tender friends, the ladies of Dunraven, in cruel ignorance of his safety, or risk the success of his scheme by telling them through Kenmore. It afflicted him unexpressedly to give them needless pain; yet, he feared that in spite of all his promises, their changed demeanor would betray the truth to Sircombe, who would be doubly watchful and suspicious in his guilty self-consciousness.

He was determined in the first alternative, namely, to leave them in ignorance of his safety;—by the following considerations:

If his hopes on behalf of Lady Inchcape came to naught, and she was doomed never to be restored to her husband and home, then it would spare her much humiliation and distress if she never knew that her champion was Arden, the heir.

If Lord Inchcape refused to give him the hand of his daughter, it might be as well to spare her the painful knowledge of the black tragedy which had brushed so closely past her in Sircombe's atrocious crime, as well as the embarrassing revelation that her would-be lover had presumed to conceal his identity from her.

"It's farewell, perhaps forever, sweet Ulva!" sighed he; "but though I leave you, I leave my heart with you, and I shall never get it back again!"

Then Kenmore brought his own clever skill to the little haven, and helped the young man in; and in the darkest hour before the dawn Edgar Arden sailed away from Sleaf-n-Vrecken, blessing it for his sweet love's sake.

CHAPTER XIII. THE PURSUERS OF THE CHASE. The Sporting Gazette of Salford advertised the meet of the hounds at Dorlmant a few weeks afterwards.

Hal Creay, being Master of the Fox Hunt for his county, and an ardent sportsman, was in his glory, and presided over the breakfast-table with daybreak in his hospitable hall, with the jolliest air imaginable.

Quite a party were staying in the house, and many came from distant points of the borough; not only masculine huntsmen graced the board, but many a dainty drawing-room queen was there, transformed by a dashing Diana in business-like habits and hunting caps, their beauty shining out all the fairer for the severity of their costumes.

Merrion Rae was splendid to day in her Lincoln green, heavily frogged across the elegant bust in many a rye, with her darkling glances and rich, red, laughing mouth; Auberon was by her side, clear eyed and radiant, as usual, and frankly amused with all her brilliant sallies.

Loveday was not present; she would join the company as they passed the hall, and she would be seen to the hunt under Sir Ure Creay's special care, and skinned a long by his side like a spiritualized shadow wherever he led.

Accrington was not present either; he had never intruded into Dorlmant again; but he was the theme of conversation now, and every one seemed to have something interesting to say about him.

He was determined to be a tower in Salford, said the gentlemen; there was no doubt about it, he meant to stand for the next election on, he was setting every-thing in trim; and with his wealth and push, his popularity and fame, Edgar Arden was like to find him a tough antagonist.

Could Inchcape know how hard he was working? He ought to summon his heir home to look after his interests; it would be an ugly disappointment to Inchcape if Arden was to lose the election.

Meanwhile the ladies were discussing the magnificence of Sheldraik Castle, which Colonel Accrington had purchased and was now fitting up for immediate occupation. They thought he only wanted a wife now to be perfect—a lady wife, who would play the hostess bravely, and use her influence on the right side ways—that was what Colonel Accrington must get at once.

And then some one sent a whisper round, which blanched Mrs. Creay's cheek when it came to her, and she emphatically contradicted it.

"Oh! it's true, whatever Mr. Dellamere may give out," insisted a lady, laughing; "nobody could see the look in his eyes when they rest upon her, and not discover that the attaché's inscrutable heart was taken captive at once. And he is furnishing a boudoir with peach blossom color; he has had it frescoed with nymphs and cupids sporting among the flowers—a lovely poem in paint; what does that portend?"

"A wife, perhaps, yet not that wife," returned Mrs. Creay, anxiously.

"Peach-blossom and golden hair, and every nymph a Loveday," whispered the gossip, with great zest; for it was generally guessed that Mrs. Creay and Mrs. Dellamere would have been well pleased to see their children marry.

ask a confidence which was not un-terred; and Auberon pondered silently. "He will be at the hunt to-day, I hear," said he, at last. "I shall do my best for little Loveday, mother. How is it that Loveday can care for him? Is there no saving instinct, then, for pure women?"

"It must be a mistake," faltered Mrs. Creay, with quivering lips; "save her, Auberon, oh, my boy, save her! you can."

He started, and flashed a keen glance at her; the suggestion seemed to come upon him like an electric shock. Soon a faint, very sweet smile crept about the corners of his mouth, and his eyes shone.

"I wonder if I really can?" said he, dreamily; "I would like to know."

A long bugle call sounded the summons for the start.

Mother and son kissed each other tenderly, and he brouded down stairs and out among the animated company.

What a fine sight it was! Beautiful equestriennes and their cavaliers, mounted on fiery horses, thundered along the avenue, followed by the dogs and their keepers; it was a noisy, splendid hunt weather, for a faint south wind blew and the sky was cloudy, and as they streamed over the clean-shaven champagne lawn outside the Dorlmant gates, satisfaction was visible on every face.

The Pavilion reached, here came Loveday on her jet-black barb, which was as fleet as the wind, and with a grace, without, in the least concealing the accomplished little horsewoman on her back; and Mrs. Dellamere in her pony phaeton, with her companion by her side, as usual. Mrs. Dellamere always drove to the meet when Loveday hunted, and saw her with a glow of triumph in her eyes, and Loveday's barb was quite equal to it.

Loveday made a comical grimace. "Whisper it low; I've never been in at the death yet, and I don't mean to be," said she. "The meet is picturesque, the chase is glorious, and every hero's particle in the blood; but the finish is so pitious that it would make me cry. I loathe such sport as looking on while a panting, helpless little brute gives up its life to a score of enemies, after running its cleverest, and affording the Loveday's sport, and every hero's particle in the blood; but the finish is so pitious that it would make me cry. I loathe such sport as looking on while a panting, helpless little brute gives up its life to a score of enemies, after running its cleverest, and affording the Loveday's sport, and every hero's particle in the blood; but the finish is so pitious that it would make me cry. 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