

THE SECRET OF DUNRAVEN CASTLE.

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

CHAPTER XI.—(Continued.)

"It is the entrance to the southern bastion cell," murmured he. "He has found it after all."

A sudden panic seized him; he bounded up the bank, leaning his hand upon the bowlder as he passed—the bowlder rocked upon its pivot. He did not stop until he was deep in the thicket, out of sight of the horrible place, there he threw himself upon the ground and buried his head in his hands, his pulses thundering and his breath laboring.

"He is dead by this time!" he groaned; "it must have been a shaft, he disappeared within him—no cry, no groan. He is gone; my enemy is gone!" He crawled still lower on the ground, and pressed his hands closer over his ears.

A struggle raged in his soul. The man who could ruin him, the man who sought to win Ulva, was dead, or dying. He had only to let him alone, and he would be as secure in his place—Ulva would be as much the delight of his life as before the fatal stranger came to Dunraven.

But what that demon-dream is this? Is he about to become a murderer? Has he not endured enough remorse and self-disgust for his past treachery, that he should plunge into deeper crime? What had he to do with Ulva? The man stepped back of himself—he did not so much as lay a finger on him. He must be dead long ere this; and if not—

Thus the powers of light and darkness warred within him; but John Sircombe could not live for five long years in sight of the innocent woman he had helped to betray, without deteriorating so far that evil was stronger than good in his soul.

He crouched in the thicket in morose inaction, knowing all the time that Edgar might still be alive, and only wanting help to come forth; perhaps unhurt.

As that idea struck him, he sprang up in great fear and ran back to the place.

As he came in sight of the boulder he remembered how it had oscillated on its pivot under his hand.

He stole near the matted screen of bushes, and he heard the low, muffled moan. Leaf by leaf, turf by turf he parted the tangled net work and peered into the orifice. It was a natural cleft in the rock, and cunning brains had made a stairway to make the ascent, and led to the dungeon of the southern bastion. He saw the ruins of a winding stairway, which seemed to lead into the bowels of the earth. A vault-like breath came up from unknown depths.

He stepped on to the stairway, and stumbled upon the bank behind the boulder which had oscillated. He examined it on every side, and measured its weight and poise with his eyes. It rested upon the apex of a smaller rock, which was firmly bedded in the earth, at a certain elevation from the orifice.

"I believe they used this boulder to block the entrance," muttered Sircombe. He glided back to the pathway and looked and listened, and saw nothing but the low sigh of the rising wind through the trees, and the rising murmur of the waves.

Back he sped to his evil task then. He laid his hands upon the boulder and pushed it, his feet slipping and sliding against it. It yielded—it rolled from its pivot, swayed a moment on the verge, then plunged down with hollow reverberations, and socketed itself in the orifice as if it had been great iron.

A few crushed pebbles round the rock, a ploughed up track in the moss, that was all the trace that was left of the demonic deed. Sircombe anxiously went about restoring everything to its normal appearance; gathered up the fur wraps which had been dropped in the heat of the argument—and fled from the accursed spot.

His whole care was now to protect himself from suspicion, by providing reasonable evidence that Edgar had left the isle. He therefore sped down to the shore, to the secluded little rocky haven where Ulva's skiff was moored; there he hurries into the boat and carefully guided to the entrance of the haven.

Here he arranged the oars in the rowlocks, then he gave the lead one powerful drive with hand and foot which sent it flying among the small, chipping currents, and off it drifted on the current and out of sight.

Then he hastened up the rock-path; and met Kenmore half-way.

A bitter and morose man was Kenmore at that moment, for he was engaged in a plot that his own clean conscience called nefarious; and though too stubborn to crawl back, he liked Mr. Sircombe, his abettor in the scheme, less than ever before.

"You may do as you choose, of course," said Mr. Sircombe, "but the Englishman, boldly telling his love to your master's daughter, you would think the time had come to act."

"Ay! he has dared to do it!" exclaimed the old man fiercely, all his scruples vanishing, "then he has spoken his last word to her." He caught up his lead once more and strode on, only grunting in a acknowledgment of Sircombe's parting warning.

"Wait for me, mind; don't go near him by yourself!"

When Sircombe reached the tower he contrived to be seen by Ulva, to whom he explained that he had returned for something for Mr. Edgar, but that Kenmore with him. Ulva drew his attention to the threatening sign, and suggested that they should give up the excursion on that day.

"I shall give him your message," said Sircombe.

"Certainly not!" cried she, haughtily, "I do not interfere with Mr. Edgar; I merely made a suggestion to you."

And Sircombe eagerly laid the consolation to his vexed soul, that she was doing as he wished, and was to go.

He took his time about going down to the shore, and found Kenmore staring at the vacant mooring.

"What? has he gone by himself?" exclaimed the director; "did you see him?"

Kenmore had not seen him.

"He has probably got tired of waiting," suggested Sircombe; "but that was a rash thing for a man in his condition to do, don't you think?"

"If he's out his lane in that cockle-shell, he's like to be lost," muttered Kenmore unheeding.

"Oh, he's no fool; he has likely gone no farther than round the point there, and he will be back in an hour or two."

They waited in silence; the dead hush was broken only by the lapping sound of the waves against the rocks.

Sircombe could not help straining his ear to listen for a far-off despairing voice, or for a sudden cry, and he was so ghastly pale that Kenmore noticed the unusual look on his face and puzzled over it.

He had not Sircombe's grounds for patience, and he was so started to climb the precipitous rock.

"I'm awa to hae a look for him, he canna be noticing the weather."

When he was gone Sircombe threw himself down on a rock with a groan, and gave way to a paroxysm of horror.

Was the young man alive?

How long it would be before he could find out. What if he could climb up the shaft and gain a foothold behind the boulder? He could never move it, but his shouts might be heard by any passer on the path.

Images of horror crowded upon the guilty man; he writhed and moaned in anguish unexpressed; what would he not have given to be able to undo that deed, and to have the man who had so ghastly pale that Kenmore noticed the unusual look on his face and puzzled over it.

Absorbed in these reflections, the light tones of Ulva's voice speaking beside him caused him to bound to his feet, the crops of agony standing on his brow.

"You have not gone, then?" she was exclaiming in astonishment; "where is Mr. Edgar? Is he out with Kenmore alone?"

She asked this last very nervously; poor child, her only fear of danger for Edgar rose from Kenmore's threat, she never suspected Sircombe. She had felt uneasy about the weather, and finding that she had no means of ascertaining what started out to spend the afternoon among her poor people.

Her quick eyes at once caught the intense agitation of the director, and terror seized her; she forgot her wrath at Sircombe, and dropped all assumption of indifference.

"Surely you did not send him out with no one but Kenmore, who hates him?" cried she, insistently. "Why don't you speak, Mr. Sircombe? What has happened?"

"Nothing at all, Lady Ulva," replied he, coldly, jealousy restoring his presence of mind by deadening his remorse; "at least nothing that need distress you."

"I will think our guest has bidden us farewell."

She grew pale as ashes, her eyes darkened and dilated with pain and fear.

"Oh, what do you mean?" she gasped. That piteous cry, which restored Sircombe to his most natural and straightforward self, he felt a just and cheerful self. He felt a just and cheerful self. He felt a just and cheerful self.

"I believe that Mr. Edgar has started alone," said Sircombe, "and when Kenmore and I came down here he had taken the boat and was gone."

"But why should you say he had gone away? That is nonsense, Mr. Kenmore. I have seen him, and he is as good as dead as that!" said Ulva, incredulously.

"My dear young lady, I have reasons for my conjecture," replied Sircombe.

"After you left Mr. Edgar he betrayed great chagrin and excitement, repeated to me that he was going to return to the man—how shall I ever dare to question her again? I did not presume to face her, and he did not explain himself to me; but after considering a few moments, she was ready to return to her telescope, as he would enjoy looking at the tower through it. Of course I obeyed, but I now perceive that was but a hasty excuse to escape my remonstrances against such a rash undertaking."

Ulva seemed petrified.

And at that moment, with a blinding flash of lightning, and a deafening crash of thunder, the storm broke over the isle.

"He will be lost, you see, looking wildly up to the frowning heavens. Her anguish tore at Sircombe's heart-strings; he gnawed his lip with rage and pain.

How came the rain with a sudden blast that scourged the sea into a white foam, and almost swept the light form of the girl into the water.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my head, and which is so callousness concerning the life of that brave man? I cannot comprehend you!" she cried, her piercing eyes upon the guilty man.

"I will take you home," implored Sircombe. She started and flashed him a wondering, reproachful look.

"Without one effort to save him?" said she sternly. "Am I dreaming or mad? I would not have strange life in this which is upon my