CRUEL AS THE GRAVE;

OR

The Secret of Dunraven Castle.

BY ANNIE ASHMORE,

Author of "Faithful Margaret," Etc., Etc

CHAPTER XX.—(Continued.)

Lady Inchcape seemed deeply agitated; she clasped her hands tightly with a look of solemn joy.

"How we have sorrowed for him!" she murmured. "Never was friend more bitterly mourned. If you only knew the nobility of his character—but you shall; since he is alive he shall be my own special protege, and the first boon I shall ask of my dear lord will be to establish his prospects."

"You like him much, then?" asked Lord Inchcape with quiet enjoyment.

"And Ulva—did you say she mourned for him?"

A swift change passed over the lady's face.

"Ulva!" she whispered. "I had forgotten—how shall I break this wonderful news to her?" Her fatherly fond blushed; her eyes fell before the searching gaze of her husband, yet she nestled towards him with fond submission. "In this first dear hour of reunion I cannot withhold anything from my lord," she murmured. "Who and what this young man is I know not, save he is one of distinguished birth, and has turned his attention. But this I know, that no nobler heart beats than Mr. Edgar's; he is a true gentleman, and merits all the friendship which I can show him until the day of my death. But I have to confess, that, selfishly absorbed in my own sorrow, I never dreamed of danger to our darling Ulva. It was only since we believed him drowned that I discovered—that—her grief for his death was as deep—aye, deeper far than my own."

Scarcely daring to look above a whispershe brought this out, and timidly raised her eyes to read the shocked disapprobation she expected from Ulva's haughty father; but his countenance was inscrutable.

"And the young man—what were his sentiments?" asked he grave y.

"That I would give me h to know," sighed my lady; "but I believe he gave no expression to them, even to Ulva, who to be sure was seldom tete a-tete with him. Alas! his honor will now stand in the way of any future explanation. If he loves her he will never approach her again. I know that true heart well. Long and anxiously I studied his nature before I chose him for my friend. Ah, I see now his reason for leaving us in ignorance of his escape from death here. He feared his own heart and fed from temptation. He must have had some noble reason, for he was as tender as he was brave and would not wantonly afflict us."

"He will be here in a few days and will doubtless explain all," said my lord, with a smile, which showed the astonished lady that her confession had not in the least disconcerted him.

My Lord and Lady Inchcape entered Dunraven tower together for the first time.

Every domestic about the premises had been called up by Kenmore and marshaled in the vestibule to do honor to the occasion; and beautiful Ulva received her parents in her arms with love and sympathy unspeakable.

During the evening which followed she could not but watch her stepmother in her new happiness with an admiration very near being awe, so dazzling was the beauty of her countenance, so fascinating her personal manner.

Every look, word and motion was instinct with charming soul, her whole being radiated pure joy. It was impossible to look up and meet her liquid smiling dark eyes softly resting upon her without experiencing a vague assurance of happiness in store even for herself. Ulva's unspoken grief seemed lighter for the first time; she could believe it possible that God would show her how to bear her sorrow nobly.

And the romance of her parents' reunion comforted her; it was so sweet to know that although her life was not to be so blessed there was true bliss yet upon the earth for others.

But what said the maiden's sad philosophy when Lady Inchcape, coming into her room to bid her good-night, drew her into her arms with a burst of tender delight, and bade her, in a thrilling voice, sorrow no more, since there was no more cause.

"For he is not drowned, Ulva, and he is good and true as we thought him, and we shall see him again—very soon, Ulva, darling, very soon!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE FAIREST DAY THAT EVER DAWNED ON INCHCAPE."

Lord Inchcape sought his daughter one day where she sat alone, plunged in maiden reverie, and a smile was on his face.

"See what I have brought for my Ulva to wear on this bright day!" said he, laying an open case in her lap. "They were your mother's pearls; they glimmered round her graceful throat, and from her ears and breast, when first my eyes rested upon her, and I have always kept them for a day in your life like that. I should like you to change this careless toilet at once, my child. She wore the stately attire becoming her beauty and rank, and so should her daughter to-day."

"And why to-day, papa?" asked Ulva, wonderingly, her hands trembling among the shimmering gems.

"Because a guest is at the door who, of all [illegible] could come over the sea to Sleat-na-[illegible]. I most desire to honor. Don your fairest apparel, then, and your kindliest smile, for this is the fairest and kindest day that has dawned on Inchcape for many a wasted year. Come, Ulva; do you tremble, do you fear, and it is your father who bids you be glad? Can you not trust me? My own sweet girl, look up, and read the love in my eyes; there, could I wring your little heart?"

No, no, not if truth speaks in human countenance! She allowed him to raise her by her two hands, and to cad her to a window, and when she had stolen another timid glance at his eloquent face, a wonderful possibility flashed upon her; away fled all her sickening apprehensions of some unknown personage coming with her father's sanction to demand her hand.

"Who is coming, papa?" she whispered, her small hands closing unconsciously round his arm, while a magnificent blush mantled from lily brow to chin; yet she would not await any clearer answer than that which his laughing eyes gave her consciousness, but drifted away without another word.

They had talked so much of Captain Edgar during the past happy week, that although Ulva seldom joined in the discussion, her intently watching father had read enough of her innocent heart to feel sure of his ground. A glance—

And there was Edgar's sloop at last, skimming over the wild waters to the lonely isle; and my lord and his lady had prepared a reception for him, little enough like that which met him the last time he approached, an unknown castaway in the wrecked Merganser.

He lands, as upon sacred ground; and the glory of hopeful love is in his eyes, the proud swing of the conqueror in his step. He is met at the very tide by my lord and his lady-like wife, with leal Kenmore's rugged face beaming behind them; but where is his lady, proud princess of the Sea? Ah! here she comes, stealing down the grim rock-path, the last to greet him, but the first in all the world in his swelling heart. And who so fair and kind in her stately attire and glimmering pearls as this proud daughter of the Inchcape lady-line?

And the one is indeed no more cause for sorrow for Ulva? Is the tired sea-bird to fold her snowy wings in a haven of joy to-day?

There is a sweet wonder in her darkling eyes as she flits nearer; and she comes to a stop close to her father's side, with faith's unconscious appeal.

It is Lady Inchcape, surely, this brilliant, beautiful lady, who first greets the stranger with both eager hands outstretched, and her heart in her happy eyes!

Scarcely can Edgar recognize the pathetic Lady Dunraven whom he left, in his incarnation of beauty and joy!

"Welcome, a thousand times, to our home and our hearts, Edgar Arden!" cries she in a voice like ringing joy-bells. "I honored you above all men (save one) when I knew no kinship between us; but I may love the heir of Inchcape all my life!" And she kissed him.

While yet his senses are reeling under the sweet attack, Lord Inchcape is wringing his hands and uttering words he never shall forget.

"And I welcome you to Dunraven with the promise that, if your heart's desire is in my gift, I will surely give it you!"

Now Ulva, his very "heart's desire," what will you say to welcome him?

She is pale and amazed, and has mechanically laid her dainty hand upon the ready arm of faithful old Kenmore, to steady herself; she gazes and gazes at the young man while her sweet eyes grow wide and fill with tears, and her lovely mouth quivers.

But when he has reached her, and has stolen those dainty hands into his own close keeping, and is pouring the whole passionate love of his heart through his eyes into hers, she conquers that first strange pang and the gnawing thrill that follows, and is speaking low and clear as a noble lady should speak to her father's honored guest.

"Mamma and I have grieved so bitterly over your supposed death, that you are welcome back—even under a new name; but—I shall always—miss 'Captain Edgar!'" And her delicate tones falter and fall over the last words.

"Do not misjudge me, Lady Ulva!" pleads the handsome fellow humbly. "By and by I shall explain everything that seems strange to you and perhaps you will forgive me?" With a lingering pressure he releases her lovely hands for is not Kenmore waiting for his notice, with his leal heart swelling with pride and joy?

"Hurrah for the bonnie heir o' Inchcape!" roars this heart of oak, as he swings his blue bonnet aloft; "an' a fa' fa' the day that brought him first to Dunraven, to raise the curse off Inchcape!"

These proud words fire the young man's spirit; he turns so as to face the whole group, and something in his glance silences every one.

"Kenmore speaks truer than he knows," says he; "the curse is indeed raised off the house of Inchcape. I bring good tidings, my lord; your justification has been found among the Colonel's papers; it was instantly laid before the lords of that committee before whom your honor was impeached, and here is their reply."

He placed a letter in Lord Inchcape's hand; and for once the proud peer seemed overcome as he devoured the brief contents, and passed the paper to his wife.

"A magnificent amende honorable!" cried Lady Inchcape, her fair face flushing proudly; "listen, Ulva; listen Kenmore; you have stuck to us through good and through evil report. Lord Inchcape stands triumphantly vindicated before the tribunal which heard him accused of dishonor five years ago, and in token of their regret for the injury he has suffered, they entreat him to accept his old seat in the cabinet, while in acknowledgment of his past services to the country, they offer him the Blue Ribbon of the Garter. And who brought all to pass? You, I am sure, Mr. Arden, though you do not say so."

And now, indeed, sweet Ulva presses Edgar's hand as well as my lady, and gives him a wonderful flash from eyes glittering with proud tears; but though my Lord Inchcape is mute while he wrings his young kinsman's hand his eye speaks a language which Edgar understands well; and no one is so radiant as he.

They move upward; of all the hovering attendants Kenmore alone is permitted a place near the enchanted group; and Edgar is forced to explain in spite of his gracious modesty.

Yes, it was through his entreaties that the dead man's kinsman, Archerfield, searched his papers for anything bearing upon Lord Inchcape; and when the precious information was discovered in Accrington's diary of the year in question, together with the whole romance of his hopeless passion for Inchcape's exquisite American bride, it was only Edgar's wearied importunities which prevented the fiery old sea-dog from dashing the whole black story into the heart of his own fire, to preserve Accrington's reputation.

How Edward prayed him, bectored him, threatened him; how he appealed to his sense of justice, and all in vain; how he began about the unhappy wife and the sequestered daughter, and suddenly found himself on the Admiral's soft side, and the battle won; of all this he said little at the time, for his thoughts are forever straying, like his eyes, toward Ulva, who dares not meet them.

And how is it that the group divides before they are half way up the tower, and that Lord Inchcape with his wife pass on unconscious that their younger companions have dropped behind?

And what is the story that Edgar Arden, of Inchcape, is telling his pale sea-princess now? and where is all her fire and pride to day, that she does not chide him when he makes the boldest demand man's lips may frame to maiden free—a demand for herself.

No, she does not chide him; she would no, if she could, because she——

And now they have paused by the rocky wall, close by the sea, where a little brook steals from the dark heart of the cliff to sparkle in the sun; and Edgar is telling his love the story of Sircombe's sin and how leal Kenmore delivered him from death.

And the High ander, who has been haunting them from afar, and drinking stolen draughts of the honey, happiness, from the sight of their sweet, young lips, shows his tall form and wind-wrapped form near them, and mutely pleads with wistful eyes for permission to come closer.

And his proud Lady Colava cries out eagerly that he must come and be the first to hear something, oh, so strange and unexpected—for who has a better right than Kenmore?

"And you were here, and heard a dying cry?" she asks of the old man, awe in her eyes, and her light clasp tightening on Edgar's arm.

"'Deed was I, Lady Oolava," answers Kenmore, in tones of solemn joy; "I was wae at heart for the brave man that had drowned at our very doors, as I thought—ay, an' for her that mourned nae bitterly." He paused to contemplate proudly the quick blush that dyes his lady's downcast face, and the impassioned look of her lover; "I had neither broken bread nor slept for sorrow an' shame at the horrid thing that was in-such a mind against him afore his death. An' nae I wandered up an' I wandered doon among the lonely rocks night an' day; an' that night I cast me doon at the fit o' this cliff wa'; an' syne I heard a weary sigh, and it was at my very ear; an' I looked to see the horrid thing was in-such sair trouble; an' then my blood creaped backward an' the hairs o' my head stood up, for I wot it was a ghaist! Doon on my knees I fell, an' called on God for deliverance; an' my voice rang throughh the rocks like a trumpet; an' what should answer but an eerie voice aboot the cliff wa'—'Kenmore! Kenmore! I canna win oot!' an' it was the voice of him I thocht dead an' gone, yet I believed it at once, an' 'maist grat wa' sheer joy! an' syne I saw a pale flutterin' thing creepin' oot through this cranny where the burnie trickles oot, like a wee bird flutterin' from its prison cage, an' I caught it, an' my heart was like to burst, it was sae thin an wounded! for it was his hand, that same hand ye hold between your ain bonny silken anes——" but he may as well close his story here, for his proud Lady Colava is holding her lover's hand to her bosom, and is bathing it with kisses and tears, in an agony of pity and love.

And then they both turn to the old man, who is standing with bared head and wrapt senses, as if he was in church; and each one takes one of his horny hands, and four eyes beaming with youth's loveliest emotion, pour gratitude upon him.

"And you will not grudge your Colava to the unwelcome Englishman any more, will you?" pleads Edgar, with a smile. "Come with us and see for yourself how hard I shall try to make her life a noble and happy one."

"Ah, 'tis not Arden o' Inchcape that leal Kenmore should misdoubt," says the old man, proudly; "you are not in the list with that deil Colonel o' the tithe and poisonous tongue, wha' brought a curse on Inchcape which only you could lift! May heaven's fairest blessings attend this day; may the sun ever shine for it, may no dool or wae e'er darken the day that gave my bonnie young lady to the bravest an' best in England."

And as the blessing rolls out in the fine old Highlander's full tones, the gracious young pair bend their heads to receive it.

Yet hush! What is she saying now, this dear Oolava, adored from the first hour her tender, true face ever smiled in bleak Sleat-na-Creckon?

She has twined her snow-white little hands about the old man's arm, and is pleading in a half whisper, the tears standing in her glorious eyes.

"And you will come with us, and be my own Kenmore still? Ah, do not say no! For to you I owe my Edgar and his love—and I will love you always."

Never will Salford forget the coming home of Lord Inchcape with his long-lost wife and daughter. Some vague hint of wronged innocence and a full vindication at last had leaked out, and gentle and simple were longing to get back the beloved Lady of Inchcape Foss; and to see the splendid womanhood of Lord Inchcape's daughter, who had left them a child.

But when the proud announcement was made that Lady Ulva was to marry the heir, their own popular idol, enthusiasm rose to its height; felicitations were showered upon the noble pair from every quarter.

But none were so sweet to Ulva as Loveday Deliamere's, for the regal beauty from the north and the sunbright sprite with the golden tresses had but to gaze into each other's true eyes to love in very truth forever.

And my Lord Inchcape was reinstated in his lofty place and once more served his country well and wisely. But it was noted that he never would leave his lady behind wherever his duty might send him; his Engelonde must ever be waiting for him after each day's care and toil to charm away his weariness, and to keep him in sweet remembrance of that oft forgotten truth that God's planning of man's day gives time for conjural happiness as well as for daily labor.

He never felt too weary or too preoccupied to converse with Lady Inchcape, for love made her presence a balm for every earthly ill.

So they buried Richard Accrington with great pomp and ceremony, and half the country-side there to see the last of the splendid stranger who was to have given such gallant battle to Arden of Inchcape for the pleasure of representing them.

And though the whole throng admired the magnificence of his last appearance on the world's stage and extolled his genius and wealth, there was no tear shed for Richard Accrington, save that one drop, bitter as gall, which slowly rolled down the mahogany cheek of Admiral Archerfield when he took his last look of the stern, inscrutable face lying in the coffin, for to this simple, fond sailor the ex attache had seemed everything that is most to be proud of, and to discover him a man without honor—that wrung the honest heart of the old sea-dog for many a day.

Hush! there may have been one other being who could weep for lost Richard Accrington—one who loved and betrayed him and who had suffered deeply from his vengeance, for death blots out many black records, and a woman's love lasts forever.

Yet if she wept it must have been in shamed secrecy, for who should loathe his memory more than did Mrs. Dellamere?

My lord's secretary, Mr Sircombe, did not long outlive his disgrace.

When convinced that he was not to be permitted to remain near his offended patron or his family, he vanished out of their ken so suddenly and so completely that he left no trace behind.

But for months after Ulva's restoration to society, when the family were in London preparing for her marriage, any one at all interested in the old and the sad might have observed a certain forlorn figure wrapped in a disguising cloak, which seemed to haunt the steps of the beautiful and brilliant everywhere she condescended to walk; which waited hours in the harsh spring winds at the rail to see her pass by among the other great people who circled round the Ladies' Mile; and grew more and more for orn as time went on; more old looking, more tremulously helpless; until he only came once a month to sit on an obscure bench and gaze afar on the lovely face; then once in a month; then one last time—the best of all, for the beautiful lady chanced to alight from her own carriage to walk a little way with her lover under the royal oaks, and coming nearer slowly, the basest of her desire had time to feed upon her noble form and her adorable face—even to gather every radiant glance—till she chanced to look his way, and found herself face to face with John Sircombe.

No need to turn away in shuddering scorn, sweet Ulva, he will never harm your lover more!

For when she bent over him, struck by an unutterable something in his face, the man's heart was broken—all his life had gone forth in that feeding gaze—he was dead.

His shame had driven him forth, but his grief had killed him.

The Three Graces are once more united, Alice, Laura and Engelonde; but the fatal guest will never again intrude upon their happiness, to draw down upon their lives the curse of that passion which is cruel as the grave—jealousy.

[THE END.]

EMPRESS AND MOTHER AS WELL.

In Spite of Royal Pageants She Found Time to Play with Her Children.

The recent visit of the German Empress and her boys to Felixtowe was evidently an extremely pleasant one. A correspondent writes to a London paper:

The five little Princes of Felixtowe won all hearts by their unaffected boyish manners, but, now that they are gone, no one speaks of them with greater affection than the donkey-boy "Joe," who, every afternoon, proudly ran behind his three fleetest donkeys, each mounted by a little lad in a sailor suit. The Crown Prince particularly begged that his donkey should be a "kicker," and it was a pretty sight to see the dear little fellows galloping along the sands and taking the wooden breakwaters in full speed. As an instance of their kindness of heart I may tell you that, on the occasion of the birthday to which you referred in your paragraph, seeing "Joe" pass their windows they rushed out with a plateful of birthday cake, which they insisted on his taking away. "Too rich for me," said Joe afterwards. "I could only eat a little bit of it." Another day, when riding, the Crown Prince, trying to urge his donkey to a faster gallop, caught "Joe" a good hit across his forehead. He was so distressed at having hurt him that he was reduced to tears, and it was some time before he could be comforted, repeatedly begging Joe to forgive him. They wanted him to go back to Germany with them, but this Joe refused to do, and if you ask him the reason he says he does not like "going so far from home."

The little fellows bathed whenever it was fine, and swam well. One could not help a feeling of astonishment to see the way they were allowed to bathe—without any ropes and no one in the water with them. One day as the donkey boy was leaning against their gate, the policeman tried to push him away. At that moment the Empress happened to come up, and, noticing this, she held up her hand and said to the policeman in her pretty English: "You leave the poor boy alone!" At another time Joe was on the beach, and to his surprise the Empress went up and shook hands with him. He says: "I never felt so ashamed in my life! Why, before every one—and there must have been over 200 people there. I didn't know which way to look!" It was pretty to see the Empress sitting on the beach surrounded by her five boys. They seemed devoted to their mother, and were constantly running up to her, putting their arms round her neck.

A Wild Duck's Forethought.

W. Prentis, of Rainham, England, describes an interesting case of a wild duck's forethought. A mowing machine was set to work round the outside of a field of lucerne bordering a marsh, diminishing the circle each time round the field, leaving about two acres in the center. A wild duck was seen by the shepherd to fly from the piece of lucerne that was left with something in her beak, and, happening to fly near him, she dropped a three-parts incubated egg. She was again observed by the shepherd, and also by the sheep-shearer, carrying another egg in her beak, this time over the marsh wall toward the saltings; and again she was seen for the third time to carry an egg in her beak in the same direction. Next day, when the field was finished by the removal of the last piece of lucerne, the wild duck's nest, from which the eggs had been removed, was discovered.

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