



The CASTLES *of*
ATHLIN AND DUNBAYNE
BY ANN RADCLIFFE

Chapter 12

MARY, in the mean time, suffered all the terror which her situation could excite. On her way to Dunbayne, she had been overtaken by a party of armed men, who seized her bridle, and after engaging her servants in a feigned resistance, carried her off senseless. On recovering, she found herself travelling through a forest, whose glooms were deepened by the shades of night. The moon, which was now up, glancing through the trees, served to shew the dreary aspect of the place, and the number of men who surrounded her; and she was seized with a terror that almost deprived her of reason. They travelled all night, during which a profound silence was observed. At the dawn of day she found herself on the skirts of a heath, to whose wide desolation her eye could discover no limits. Before they entered on the waste, they halted at the entrance of a cave, formed in a rock, which was overhung with pine and fir; where, spreading their breakfast on the grass, they offered refreshments to Mary, whose mind was too much distracted to suffer her to partake of them. She implored them in the most moving accents, to tell her from whom they came, and whither they were carrying her; but they were insensible to her tears and her entreaties, and she was compelled to await, in silent terror, the extremity of her fate. They pursued their journey over the wilds, and towards the close of day approached the ruins of an abbey, whose broken arches and lonely towers arose in gloomy grandeur through the obscurity of evening. It stood the solitary inhabitant of the waste, — a monument of mortality and of ancient superstition, and the frowning majesty of its aspect seemed to command silence and veneration. The chilly dews fell thick, and Mary, fatigued in body, and harassed in mind, lay almost expiring on her horse, when they stopped under an arch of the ruin. She was not so ill as to be insensible to the objects around her; the awful solitude of the place and the solemn aspect of the fabric, whose effect was heightened by the falling glooms of evening, chilled her heart with horror; and when they took her from the horse, she shrieked in the agonies of a last despair. They bore her over loose stones to a part of the building, which had been formerly the cloisters of the abbey, but which was now fallen to decay, and overgrown with ivy. There was, however, at the extremity of these cloisters a nook, which had withstood with hardier strength the ravages of time; the roof was here entire, and the shattered stanchions of the casements still remained. Hither they carried Mary, and laid her almost lifeless on the grassy pavement, while some of the ruffians hastened to light a fire of the heath and sticks they could pick up. They took out their provisions, and placed themselves round the fire, where they had not long been seated, when the sound of distant thunder foretold an approaching storm. A violent storm, accompanied with peals which shook the pile, came on. They were sheltered



from the heaviness of the rain; but the long and vivid flashes of lightning which glanced through the casements, alarmed them all. The shrieks of Mary were loud and continued; and the fears of the ruffians did not prevent their uttering dreadful imprecations at her distress. One of them, in the fury of his resentment, swore she should be gagged; and seizing her resistless hands to execute the purpose, her cries redoubled. The servants who had betrayed her, were not yet so entirely lost to the feelings of humanity, as to stand regardless of her present distress; though they could not resist the temptations of a bribe, they were unwilling their lady should be loaded with unnecessary misery. They opposed the ruffians; a dispute ensued; and the violence of the contest arose so high, that they determined to fight for the decision. Amid the peals of thunder, the oaths and execrations of the combatants, added terror to the scene. The strength of the ruffians were superior to that of their opponents; and Mary; beholding victory deciding against herself, uttered a loud scream, when the attention of the whole party was surprized by the sound of a footstep in the cloister. Immediately after a man rushed into the place, and drawing his sword, demanded the cause of the tumult. Mary, who lay almost expiring on the ground, now raised her eyes; but what were her sensations, when she raised them to Alleyn—who now stood before her petrified with horror. Before he could fly to her assistance, the attacks of the ruffians obliged him to defend himself; he parried their blows for some time, but he must inevitably have yielded to the force of numbers, had not the trampling of feet, which fast approached, called off for a moment their attention. In an instant the place was filled with men. The astonishment of Alleyn was, if possible, now increased; for the Earl, followed by a party, now entered. The Earl, when he perceived Alleyn, stood at the entrance, aghast. — But resuming his firmness, he bade him defend himself. The loud voice of Osbert re-called Mary, and observing their menacing attitudes, she collected just strength sufficient to throw herself between them. Alleyn dropped his sword, and raised her from the ground; when the Earl rudely pushed him away, and snatched her to his heart. “Hear me, Osbert,” was all she could say. “Declare who brought her hither,” said the Earl sternly to Alleyn. “I know not,” replied he, “you must ask those men whom your people have secured. If my life is hateful to you, strike! and spare me the anguish of defending it against the brother of Mary.” The Earl hesitated in surprize, and the generosity of Alleyn called a blush into his face. He was going to have replied, but was interrupted by some of his men, who had been engaged in a sharp contest with the ruffians, two of whom they had secured, and now brought to their lord; the rest were fled. In the person of one of them, the Earl discovered his own servant, who sinking in his presence with conscious guilt, fell on his knees imploring mercy. “Wretch,” said the Earl, seizing him, and holding his sword over his head, “declare by whose authority you have acted, and all you know of the affair; — remember your life depends on the truth of your assertions.” “I’ll tell the truth, my Lord,” replied the trembling wretch, “and nothing else as I hope for mercy. About three weeks ago, — no, it is not so much; about a fortnight ago, when I was sent on a message to the lady Malcolm, the Count de Santmorin’s gentleman-” “The Count de Santmorin!” re-echoed the whole company. “But proceed,” said Osbert. “The Count de Santmorin’s gentleman called me into a private room, where he told me to wait for his master, who would soon be there.” “Be quick,” said the Earl, “proceed to facts.” “I will, my lord; the Count came, and said to me, ‘Robert, I have observed you, and I think you can be faithful,’ he said so, my lord, — God forgive me!” “Well-well, proceed.” “Where was I?” — ‘Oh! he said, “I think you can



be faithful.” — “Good God! this is beyond endurance; you trifle, rascal, with my patience, to give your associates time for escape; be brief, or you die.” “I will, my lord, as I hope for life. He took from his pocket a handful of gold, which he gave me; — ‘can you be secret, Robert?’ said he, — ‘yes, my lord Count,’ said I, God forgive me! — ‘Then observe what I say to you. You often attend your young lady in her rides to Dunbayne.’” — “What, then it was the Count de Santmorin who commissioned you to undertake this scheme!” “Not me only, my lord.” “Answer my question; was the Count the author of this plot?” “He was, my lord.” “And where is he?” said Osbert, in a stern voice. “I know not, as I am a living creature. He embarked, as you know, my lord, not far from the castle of Dunbayne, and we were travelling to a distant part of the coast to meet him, when we were all to have set sail for Switzerland.” “You cannot be ignorant of the place of your destination,” said the Earl, turning to the other prisoner; “where is your employer?” “That is not for me to tell,” said he, in a sullen tone. “Reveal the truth,” said the Earl, turning towards him the point of his sword, “or we will find a way to make you.” “The place where we were to meet the Count, had no name.” “You know the way to it.” “I do.” “Then lead me thither.” “Never!” — “Never! Your life shall answer the refusal,” said Osbert, pointing the sword to his breast. “Strike!” said the Count, throwing off the cloak which had concealed him; “strike! and rid me of a being which passion has made hateful to me; — strike! — and make the first moment of my entering this place, the last of my guilt.” A faint scream was uttered by Mary; the small remains of her strength forsook her, and she sunk on the pavement. The Earl started a few steps back, and stood suspended in wonder. The looks of the whole group defy description. “Take a sword,” said the Earl, recovering himself, “and defend your life.” “Never, my lord, never! Though I have been hurried by the force of passion to rob you of a sister, I will not aggravate my guilt by the murder of the brother. Your life has already been once endangered through my means, though not by my design; Heaven knows the anguish which that accident cost me. The impetuosity of passion impelled me onward with irresistible fury; it urged me to violate the sacred duties of gratitude, of friendship-and of humanity. To live in shame, and in the consciousness of guilt, is a living death. With your sword do justice to yourself and virtue; and spare me the misery of long comparing what I am, with what I was.” “Away, you trifle,” said the Earl, “defend yourself.” The Count repeated his refusal. “And you, villain,” said Osbert, turning to the man who had confessed the plot, “you pretended ignorance of the presence of the Count; your perfidy shall be rewarded.” “As I now plead for mercy, my lord, I knew not he was here.” “The fellow speaks truth,” said the Count, “he was ignorant of the place where he was to meet me. I was approaching this spot to discover myself to the dear object of my passion, when your people surprized and took me.” Mary confirmed the testimony of the Count, by declaring that she had not till that moment seen him since she quitted the castle of Dunbayne. She pleaded for his life, and also for the servants, who had opposed the cruelty of their comrades. “I am no assassin,” said the Earl, “let the Count take a sword, and fight me on equal terms.” — “Shall virtue be reduced to an equality with vice?” said the Count, “No, my lord, — plunge your sword in my heart, and expiate my guilt.” The Earl still urged him to defence; and the Count still persisted in refusal. Touched by the recollection of past friendship, and grieved that a soul like the Count’s should ever be under the dominion of vice, Osbert threw down his sword, and, overcome with a sort of tenderness-“Go, my lord, your person is safe; and if it is necessary to your peace, — stretching forth his hand, — take my

forgiveness.” The Count, overcome by his generosity, and by a sense of his own unworthiness, shrunk back: “Forbear, my lord, to wound by your goodness, a mind already too sensible of its own debasement; nor excite, by your generosity, a remorse too keen to be endured. Your reproaches I can bear, — your vengeance I solicit! — but your kindness inflicts a torture too exquisite for my soul.” “Never, my lord,” continued he, the big tear swelling in his eye, “never more shall your friendship be polluted by my unworthiness. Since you will not satisfy justice, by taking my life, I go to lose it in the obscurity of distant regions. Yet, ere I go, suffer me to make one last request to you, and to that dear lady whom I have thus injured, and on whom my eyes now gaze for the last time, — suffer me to hope that you will blot from your memory the existence of Santmorin.” He concluded the sentence with a groan, which vibrated upon the hearts of all present; and without waiting for a reply, hurried from the scene. The Earl had turned away his head in pity, and when he again looked round to reply, perceived that the Count was departed; he followed his steps through the cloister, — he called-but he was gone.

Alleyn had observed the Count with a mixture of pity and admiration; and he sighed for the weakness of human nature. “How,” said the Earl, returning eagerly to Alleyn, — “how can I recompense you for my injurious suspicions, and my injurious treatment? — How can you forgive, or I forget, my injustice? But the mystery of this affair, and the doubtful appearance of circumstances, must speak for me.” “O! let us talk no more of this, my lord,” replied Alleyn; with emotion; “let us only rejoice at the safety of our dear lady, and offer her the comfort she is so much in want of.” The fire was re-kindled, and the Earl’s servants laid before him some wine, and other provisions. Mary, who had not tasted any food since she left the castle, now took some wine; it revived her, and enabled her to take other nourishment. She enquired, what happy circumstance had enabled the Earl to trace her route. “Ever since I discovered your flight,” said he, “I have been in pursuit of you. Chance directed me over these wilds, when I was driven by the storm to seek shelter among these ruins. The light, and an uproar of voices, drew me to the cloister, where, to my unutterable astonishment, I discovered you and Alleyn: Spare me the remembrance of what followed.” Mary wished to enquire what brought Alleyn to the place; but delicacy kept her silent. Osbert, however, whose anxiety for his sister had hitherto allowed him to attend only to her, now relieved her from the pain of lengthened suspense. “By what strange accident was you brought hither?” said he to Alleyn, “and what motive has induced you so long to absent yourself from the castle?” At the last question, Alleyn blushed, and an involuntary sigh escaped him. Mary understood the blush and the sigh, and awaited his reply in trembling emotion. “I fled, my lord, from your displeasure, and to tear myself from an object too dangerous, alas! for my peace. I sought to wear away in absence, a passion which must ever be hopeless, but which, I now perceive, is interwoven with my existence. — But forgive, my lord, the intrusion of a subject which is painful to us all. With some money, and a few provisions, I left my father’s cottage; and since that time have wandered over the country a forlorn and miserable being, passing my nights in the huts which chance threw in my way, and designing to travel onward, and to enlist myself in the service of my country. Night overtook me on these wastes, and as I walked on comfortless and bewildered, I was alarmed by distant cries of distress. I quickened my pace; but the sound which should have directed my steps was ceased, and chilling silence ensued. As I stood musing, and uncertain which course to take, I observed a feeble light break through the gloom; I

endeavoured to follow its rays; it led me to these ruins, whose solemn appearance struck me with a momentary dread. A confused murmur of voices from within struck my ear; as I stood hesitating whether to enter, I again heard those shrieks which had alarmed me. I followed the sound; it led me to the entrance of this cloister, at the extremity of which I discovered a party of men engaged in fight; I drew my sword and rushed forward; and the sensations which I felt, on perceiving the lady Mary, cannot be expressed!" "Still-still Heaven destines you the deliverer of Mary!" said the Earl, gratitude swelling in his eyes; "O! that I could remove that obstacle which withholds you from your just reward." A responsive sigh stole from Alleyn, and he remained silent. Never was the struggle of opposing feelings more violent, than that which now agitated the bosom of the Earl. The worth of Alleyn arose more conspicuously bright from every shade with which misfortune had veiled it. His noble and disinterested enthusiasm in the cause of justice, had attached him to the Earl, and had engaged him in a course of enterprizes and of dangers, which it required valour to undertake, and skill and perseverance to perform; and which had produced services for which no adequate reward could be found. He had rescued the Earl from captivity and death; and had twice preserved Mary in dangers. All these circumstances arose in strong reflection to the mind of Osbert; but the darkness of prejudice and ancient pride, opposed their influence, and weakened their effect.

The joy which Mary felt on seeing Alleyn in safety, and still worthy of the esteem she had ever bore him, was dashed by the bitterness of reflection; and reflection imparted a melancholy which added to the langour of illness. At the dawn of day they quitted the abbey, and set forward on their return to the castle; the Earl insisting upon Alleyn's accompanying them. On the way, the minds of the party were variously and silently engaged. The Earl ruminated on the conduct of Alleyn, and the late scene. Mary dwelt chiefly on the virtues of her lover, and on the dangers she had escaped; and Alleyn mused on his defeated purposes, and anticipated future trials. The Earl's thoughts, however, were not so wholly occupied, as to prevent his questioning the servant who had been employed by the Count, concerning the further particulars of his scheme. The words of the Count, importing that he had once already endangered his life, had not escaped the notice of the Earl; though they were uttered in a moment of too much distraction to suffer him to demand an explanation. He now enquired of the man, concerning the mysterious scene of the vaults. "You, I suppose, are not ignorant who were the persons from whom I received my wound." "I, my lord, had no concern in that affair; wicked as I am, I could not raise my hands against your life." "But you know who did." "I — I — ye-yes, my lord, I was afterwards told. But they did not mean to hurt your lordship." "Not mean to hurt me! — What then were their designs, and who were the people?" "That accident happened long before the Count ever spoke to me of his purpose. Indeed, my lord, I had no hand in it; and Heaven knows how I grieved for your lordship; and—" "Well-well, inform me, who were the persons in the vaults, and what were their design." "I was told by a fellow servant; but he made me promise to be secret; but it is proper your lordship should know all; and I hope your lordship will forgive me for having listened to it, — 'Robert,' said he, as we were talking one day of what had happened, — 'Robert,' said he, 'there is more in this matter than you, or any body thinks; but it is not for me to tell all I know.' With that, I begged he would tell me what he knew; he still kept refusing. I promised him faithfully I would not tell; and so at last he told me—'Why, there is my lord Count there, he is in love with our young lady; and to be sure as sweet a lady she is, as ever eyes looked upon; but she don't like him;

and so finding himself refused, he is determined to marry her at any rate; and means some night to get into the castle, and carry her off.” “What, then! — was it the Count who wounded me? — Be quick in your relation.” “No, my lord, it was not the Count himself-but two of his people, whom he had sent to examine the castle; and particularly the windows of my young lady’s apartment, from whence he designed to have carried her, when every thing was ready for execution. Those men were let within the walls through a way under ground, which leads into the vaults, by my fellow servant, as I afterwards was told; and they escaped through the same way. Their meeting with your lordship was accidental, and they fought only in self-defence; for they had no orders to attack any body.” “And who is the villain that connived at this scheme!” “It was my fellow servant, who fled with the Count’s people, whom he himself let within the ramparts. Forgive me, my lord; but I did not dare tell; he threatened my life, if I betrayed the secret.”

After a journey of fatigue and unpleasant reflections, they arrived, on the second morning at the castle of Athlin. The Countess, during the absence of her son, had endured a state of dreadful suspense. The Baroness, in her friendship, had endeavoured to soothe her distress, by her constant presence; she was engaged in this amiable office when the trampling of horses in the court reached the ears of Matilda. “It is my son,” said she, rising from her chair! — “it is my son; he brings me life or death!” She said no more, but rushed into the hall, and in a moment after clasped her almost expiring daughter to her bosom. The transport of the scene repelled utterance; sobs and tears were all that could be given. The general joy, however, was suddenly interrupted by the Baroness, who had followed Matilda into the hall; and who now fell senseless to the ground; delight yielded to surprize, and to the business of assisting the object of it. On recovering, the Baroness looked wildly round her; — “Was it a vision that I saw, or a reality?” The whole company moved their eyes round the hall, but could discover nothing extraordinary. “It was himself; his very air, his features; that benign countenance which I have so often contemplated in imagination!” Her eyes still seemed in search of some ideal object; and they began to doubt whether a sudden phrenzy had not seized her brain. “Ah! again!” said she, and instantly relapsed. Their eyes were now turned towards the door, on which she had gazed; it was Alleyn who entered, with water which he had brought for the Countess, and on whom the attention of all present was centered. He approached ignorant of what had happened; and his surprize was great, when the Baroness, reviving, fixed her eyes mournfully upon him, and asked him to uncover his arm. — “It is, — it is my Philip!” said she, with strong emotion; “I have, indeed, found my long lost child; that strawberry on his arm confirms the decision. Send for the man who calls himself your father, and for my servant Patrick.” The sensations of the mother and the son may be more easily conceived than described; those of Mary were little inferior to theirs; and the whole company awaited with trembling eagerness the arrival of the two persons whose testimony was to decide this interesting affair. They came. “This young man you call your son?” said the Baroness. “I do, an’ please your ladyship,” he replied, with a degree of confusion which belied his words. When Patrick came, his instant surprize on seeing the old man, declared the truth. “Do you know this person?” said the Baroness to Patrick. “Yes, my lady, I know him too well; it was to him I gave your infant son.” The old man started with surprize-“Is that youth the son of your ladyship?” “Yes!” “Then God forgive me for having thus long detained him from you! but I was ignorant of his birth, and received him into my cottage as a foundling succoured by lord Malcolm’s compassion.” The

whole company crowded round them. Alleyn fell at the feet of his mother, and bathed her hand with his tears. — “Gracious God; for what hast thou reserved me!” He could say no more. The Baroness raised him, and again pressed him in transport to her heart. It was some time before either of them could speak; and all present were too much affected to interrupt the silence. At length, the Baroness presented Laura to her brother. “Such a mother! and have I such a sister!” said he. Laura wept silently upon his neck the joy of her heart. The Earl was the first who recovered composure sufficient to congratulate Alleyn; and embracing him—“O happy moment, when I can indeed embrace you as my brother!” The whole company now poured forth their joy and their congratulations; — all but Mary, whose emotions almost overcame her, and were too powerful for utterance.

The company now adjourned to the drawing-room; and Mary withdrew to take that repose she so much required. She was sufficiently recovered in a few hours to join her friends in the banquetting-room.

After the transports of the scene were subsided—“I have yet much to hope, and much to fear,” said Philip Malcolm, who was yet Alleyn in every thing but in name, “You madam,” addressing the Baroness, — “you will willingly become my advocate with her whom I have so long and so ardently loved.” “May I hope,” continued he, taking tenderly the hand of Mary, who stood trembling by, — “that you have not been insensible to my long attachment, and that you will confirm the happiness which is now offered me?” A smile of ineffable sweetness broke through the melancholy which had long clouded her features, and which even the present discovery had not been able entirely to dissipate, and her eye gave the consent which her tongue refused to utter.

The conversation, for the remainder of the day, was occupied by the subject of the discovery, and with a recital of Mary’s adventure. It was determined that on the morrow the marriage of the Earl should be concluded.

On this happy discovery, the Earl ordered the gates of the castle to be thrown open; mirth and festivity resounded through the walls, and the evening closed in universal rejoicings.

On the following morn, the chapel of the castle was decorated for the marriage of the Earl; who with Laura, came attended by Philip, now Baron Malcolm, by Mary, and the whole family. When they approached the altar, the Earl, addressing himself to his bride, — “Now, my Laura,” said he, “we may celebrate those nuptials which have twice been so painfully interrupted, and which are to crown me with felicity. This day shall unite our families in a double marriage, and reward the worth of my friend. It is now seen, that those virtues which stimulated him to prosecute for another the cause of justice mysteriously urged him to the recovery of his rights. Virtue may for a time be pursued by misfortune, — and justice be obscured by the transient triumphs of vice, — but the power whose peculiar attributes they are, clears away the clouds of error, and even in this world reveals his *throne of justice*.”

The Earl stepped forward, and joining the hands of Philip and Mary, — “Surely,” said he, “this is a moment of perfect happiness! — I can now reward those virtues which I have ever loved; and those services to which every gift must be inadequate, but this I now bestow.”

FINIS

