

**THE REAL
CHARLOTTE,
VOL. III**

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The real Charlotte, Vol. III by E. Somerville & Martin Ross

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BY
E. CE. SOMERVILLE & MARTIN ROSS

AUTHORS OF
"AN IRISH COUSIN," "NABOTH'S VINEYARD," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE kitchen at Tally Ho generally looked its best at ten o'clock in the morning. Its best is, in this case, a relative term, implying the temporary concealment of the plates, loaves of bread, dirty rubbers, and jam-pots full of congealed dripping that usually adorned the tables, and the sweeping of out-lying potato-skins and cinders into a chasm beneath the disused hot hearth. When these things had been done, and Bid Sal and her bare feet had been effaced into some outer purlicu, Norry felt that she was ready to receive the Queen of England if necessary, and awaited the ordering of dinner with her dress let down to its full length, a passably clean apron, and an expression of severe and exalted resignation. On the morning

now in question Charlotte was standing in her usual position, with her back to the fire and her hands spread behind her to the warmth, scanning with a general's eye the routed remnants of yesterday's dinner, and debating with herself as to the banner under which they should next be rallied.

"A curry I think, Norry," she called out; "plenty of onions and apples in it, and that's all ye want."

"Oh, musha! God knows ye have her sickened with yer curries," replied Norry's voice from the larder, "'twas ere yestherday ye had the remains of th' Irish stew in curry, an' she didn't ate what'd blind your eye of it. Wasn't Louisa tellin' me!"

"And so I'm to order me dinners to please Miss Francie!" said Charlotte, in tones of surprising toleration; "well, ye can make a haricot of it if ye like. Perhaps her ladyship will eat that."

"Faith 'tis aigual to me what she ates—" here came a clatter of crockery, and a cat shot like a comet from the larder door, followed by Norry's foot and Norry's blasphemy—"or if she never ate another bit. And where's the carrots to make a haricot? Bid Sal's afther tellin' me there's ne'er a one in the garden; but sure, if ye sent Bid Sal to look for salt wather in the say she wouldn't find it!"

Miss Mullen laughed approvingly. "There's carrots in plenty; and see here, Norry, you might give her a jam dumpling—use the gooseberry jam that's going bad. I've noticed meself that the child isn't eating, and it won't do to have the people saying we're starving her."

"Whoever'll say that, he wasn't looking at me yestherday, and I makin' the cake for herself and Mистер Dysart! Eight eggs, an' a cupful of sugar and a cupful of butther, and God knows what more went in it, an' the half of me day gone bating it, and afther all they left it afther thim!"

"And whose fault was that but your own for not sending it up in time?" rejoined Charlotte, her voice sharpening at once to vociferative argument; "Miss Francie told me that Mr. Dysart was forced to go without his tea."

"Late or early I'm thinkin' thim didn't ax it nor want it," replied Norry, issuing from the larder with a basketful of crumpled linen in her arms, and a visage of the utmost sourness; "there's your clothes for ye now, that was waitin' on me yestherday to iron them, in place of makin' cakes."

She got a bowl of water and began to sprinkle the clothes and roll them up tightly, preparatory to iron-

ing them, her ill-temper imparting to the process the air of whipping a legion of children and putting them to bed. Charlotte came over to the table and, resting her hands on it, watched Norry for a few seconds in silence.

"What makes you say they didn't want anything to eat?" she asked; "was Miss Francie ill, or was anything the matter with her?"

"How do I know what ailed her?" replied Norry, pounding a pillow-case with her fist before putting it away; "I have somethin' to do besides follyin' her or mindin' her."

"Then what are ye talking about?"

"Ye'd better ax thim that knows. 'Twas Louisa seen her within in the dhrawn'-room, an' whatever was on her she was cryin'; but, sure, Louisa tells lies as fast as a pig'd gallop."

"What did she say?" Charlotte darted the question at Norry as a dog snaps at a piece of meat.

"Then she said plinty, an' 'tis she that's able. If ye told that one a thing and locked the doore on her the way she couldn't tell it agin, she'd bawl it up the chimbley."

"Where's Louisa?" interrupted Charlotte impatiently.

"Meself can tell ye as good as Louisa," said Norry instantly taking offence; "she landed into the dhrawn-room with the tay, and there was Miss Francie sittin' on the sofa and her handkerchief in her eyes, and Mither Dysart beyond in the windy and not a word nor a stir out of him, only with his eyes shtuck out in the garden, an' she cryin' always."

"Psha! Louisa's a fool! How does she know Miss Francie was cryin'? I'll bet a shillin' 'twas only blowing her nose she was."

Norry had by this time spread a ragged blanket on the table, and, snatching up the tongs, she picked out of the heart of the fire a red-hot heater and thrust it into a box-iron with unnecessary violence.

"An' why wouldn't she cry? Wasn't I listenin' to her cryin' in her room lasht night an' I goin' up to bed?" She banged the iron down on the table and began to rub it to and fro on the blanket. "But what use is it to cry, even if ye dhragged the hair out of yer head? Ye might as well be singin' an' dancin'."

She flung up her head, and stared across the kitchen under the wisps of hair that hung over her unseeing eyes with such an expression as Deborah the Prophetess might have worn. Charlotte gave a grunt of contempt, and picking Susan up from the bar of the