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KATE ASHWOOD.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Mary Ashwood and her husband were sitting in their bed room this very evening. They had been among the guests at Power Court; and Charles, who had been occupied busily all day with Mr. Leicester's affairs, asked Mary to sit up for a while to write some letters which he was anxious to forward early the next morning.

At last Mary, finding the candle going out, went down stairs to get another light. As she did so, she passed by a window, and her eye caught a very bright light in the direction of Power Court. She called Charles, and asked him to go outside the house and look in that direction. He did so, and exclaimed, 'Mary, there is fire no doubt. I shall go up there at once.'

He ran from River Vale to Power Court as fast as he possibly could; and when he arrived there, he found the rick blazing. He rushed to the hall-door and knocked loudly; but no answer came. He then rang the bell violently;—and continued knocking and shouting without any intermission till Mr. Power put his head out of the window, and inquired the cause of the disturbance.

'Your haggard is on fire!' answered Charles; and if something is not done at once, the flames may communicate to the buildings.'

Mr. Power immediately called up the servants, and Charles ran for help to the steward and coachman. Soon the whole household was disturbed. The men came out to render what assistance they could. They procured large buckets of water, which they poured on the flames.

Charles organised a regular plan of operation, and soon formed a chain of communication between the pump and haggard, to keep as much as possible from confusion. He worked himself as hard as any one, filling buckets and mounting the ladders, and then pouring the contents of the buckets on the stacks. Mr. Power stood looking on perfectly helpless.

Soon the women-kind made their appearance; but this only added to the horror of the scene, as their thin drapery, clinging to their legs, was so liable to catch fire. Charles implored them to keep away; but still they would come from time to time forward to inspect proceedings. He became angry, for he had difficulty enough in keeping the men in order, and it was annoying to have increased impediments put in his way.

At length, he placed two men with large clubs in their hands at the entrance to the haggard, with orders to beat away any woman who would persist in entering. Somebody cried out in the midst of the confusion, 'Mrs. Doolin and the children!' These were the wife and children of the herd, who was absent from home. They slept in a small house in a part of the haggard, and they had not been awakened by the noise around them.

Charles now turned his attention in that direction; and putting a ladder against the wall of the house, he clambered up, and was lost sight of for a few moments. He then emerged, carrying an infant in his arms, which he handed out to some of the bystanders. He next lifted out another and another. The lower part of the house was now discovered to be in flames. Some dried sticks had been left close to the door, and besides these was a barrel of tar. A match had been thrown among the sticks, which had not kindled up at once, but lay smouldering; if this was once communicated to the tar, the danger would be awful.

The door had begun to crackle; but three of the children were yet to be saved besides the mother. The little things were heard crying and screaming within. Charles took one more to the window, and handed it out; but the smoke and heat were overpowering. He was becoming suffocated, and shouted to some one to come to his assistance within. He could do no more; and when two men forced their way in, they found him stretched on the floor.

to resuscitate him. They then returned to the scene of horror. Two other men had entered the house, and succeeded in dragging forth another of the children; but Mrs. Doolin and a child still remained. Mrs. Doolin was carried to the window senseless, for she had been stupefied by the smoke. They succeeded in landing her in safety. She came to her senses when she was placed on the grass. Suddenly she seemed to recollect what had happened, and called to her children; but they did not answer. She with difficulty got on her feet and tottered towards the haggard; she called her children again around her, and when they came towards her she exclaimed, 'Where is Biddy?'

'Don't know, mother,' was the answer. The poor woman shrieked aloud, 'She must be in the house! I am sure she must!'

Fitz-James heard her shrieks, and ran to know what was the matter.

'My child?' she exclaimed; 'my own child!—she is there?' and she pointed to the window of the house.

Fitz-James understood her appeal; there was still a child that had been forgotten. He put the ladder to the house again; but the flames were rising higher, and the smoke in the room was so great, it was impossible to see anything. He groped his way along, and felt with his hands in every bed for the missing child. At last he encountered the little soft fleshy arm of a baby, and taking it up, he carried it in his arms to the window. It was a little thing about two years old, and was so completely overpowered by the smoke that Fitz-James thought it was quite dead; still he carried it out and delivered it to the care of its mother. The poor little child was unable to do anything but utter a faint cry. One of the elder children took it and poured water on it. The child never recovered; but the poor mother was consoled by seeing it again.—It was better it should die thus than suffer the agonising pains of fire. The little corpse looked so beautiful, so angelic, that death did indeed seem robbed of its horrors in that pure young face.

A cry now arose that there was no more water, and the fire was not yet extinguished; it had been somewhat got under in one part of the yard, but the buildings were still on fire, and indeed at the herd's house the flames were rising to an alarming height. The nearest supply of water was at a distance of a quarter of a mile.—It was impossible to procure it. Fitz-James and Charles, who was now sufficiently recovered to be able again to exert himself, consulted together as to the only means now left of preventing further damage. They then agreed to set all hands to work to pull down a connecting wall which was between the herd's house and the stables. Mr. Power had done little or nothing meanwhile but walk up and down wringing his hands, and saying, 'Oh, to think of my valuable haggard being destroyed.'

This wall was a high one, and well built, and it was a work of no small labor to pull it down, though all the men worked hard. At length the work was done; the wall was down, and a light shed on top removed far away. This took a long time, and the men were quite exhausted when they had completed it; but now the fire had abated its violence, and only a few smouldering half-extinguished heaps remained, which denoted the sad destruction. The haggard, which the day before had been a perfect model of neat careful agriculture, showed every where the marks of devastation.

The morning light revealed the horrors of the night before. The burnt house was indeed a melancholy spectacle. Mr. Power was excessively angry and indignant. He said that he would have the perpetrators brought to justice; that he would leave no means untried. He also resolved to quit the country as soon as he possibly could; for Mrs. Power's former entreaties were now renewed, and he promised her to go abroad as soon as he possibly could.

He visited Charles Ashwood on the day after the fire; and for the first time since the engagement took place he shook him heartily by the hand, and thanked him earnestly for his exertions. 'You have saved my life, and the lives of my children,' said he, again taking Charles's hand, 'and I thank you.'

Mary Ashwood had been in the most wretched state during the whole night. She had placed herself at a window which looked towards Power Court. She saw the light increasing till it illuminated the entire landscape. How she feared for her family as she stood there! For inactive anxiety is far harder to bear than the most violent exertions. She knelt down and prayed that God in His mercy would spare her family. The sight was awful. The flames seemed to rise above the house and envelop it, and her agony of terror became intense. Towards morning she felt as if she could bear the suspense no longer; and wrapping herself in a large cloak, she set forth. It was still very dark, save where the reflection of the fire cast a light over the

surrounding country; but Mary could no longer remain in ignorance, though she knew her husband would exert himself to the utmost.

She met with no adventure on the road. On arriving at Power Court the fire had been nearly extinguished, and she had the gratification of finding her family safe. This was a great relief to her. Her husband half chided her for coming, as she had been suffering from a cough; and now that all danger from the fire was averted, he hastened to return with her to River Vale.—Thus it was that when Mr. Power sought him, for the purpose of returning thanks, he could not find him, and he had to seek him in his own home.

Mr. Power's sense of gratitude henceforth overcame all his dislike to Charles, which till that date had been ill-concealed; and although the social amenities of life had been kept up exteriorly, visiting and dining occasionally with each other, it was only with a feeling of *malgré lui* that Mr. Power was even commonly polite to his son-in-law. Now, however, he could not help feeling all he owed him. But for his exertions and forethought the whole family might have been burned; and his expressions of gratitude really flowed from his heart. He consulted with Charles as to the best means of bringing the guilty parties to light. But Charles had not yet experienced the immense difficulty there always exists in the discovery of crime in a country where the perpetrators are almost sure of being concealed from the hands of justice if their crime partake in the least of an agrarian nature. His experience of the country was very limited; and he told Mr. Power he supposed the police would be able to discover all in due time. He knew not the spirit of combination among the people; or at least, if he did know it theoretically, he had not had much practical experience of the immense difficulty of arriving at the truth of anything in a country where truth is ignored.

Many wise people shook their heads, and said the authors of the conflagration never would come to light. It was well known by the police, and indeed by all around, that every soul in Killmoyle knew all about the plot, if they would only tell what they knew. The police made inquiries; but found it very difficult to arrive at any conclusion, the reports were so very contradictory. At last suspicion lighted on the Roes. They were always known to be Ribbonmen, and the police had frequently noticed very suspicious-looking men entering their house late at night. This, combined with the fact that the police had been at their house about ten o'clock on the night in question, and that they were then absent from home, increased the suspicions, and they were arrested. One other young man who had been concerned in the affair was taken up at the same time.

But now proofs were necessary; and the police, and other authorities, found it difficult to obtain sufficient evidence. Every one was trying to throw every possible obstacle in the way of the discovery of the whole truth. Still there were grounds sufficient for refusing bail for these men. Three hundred pounds had been offered as a reward for information which might lead to the full and entire discovery of the whole plot; but rewards of that nature never tempt an Irishman. The Irish are rarely indeed, if ever, known to accept any such bribes. They have a soul above such baseness. Who but a slave of the lowest degree would benefit himself in such a manner? Thank God, the Irishman is far above such a crime!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

During this time poor Kate Ashwood was abroad with her family. Fitz-James wrote to her very often imploring her to shorten the time of her exile, and allow the marriage to take place in less than six months after her mother's death. He pleaded the very long courtship, and the frequent disappointments to the completion of their union. Still Kate, though most anxious to accede to his wishes, considered that it would be scarcely respectful to the memory of her departed parent to marry till a proper time should have elapsed.

Meanwhile, Fitz-James was quietly becoming richer. He attended assiduously to his business. He was thoroughly enjoying his renewed health and strength, especially as it enabled him to labor hard. He was early and late at his work, the muses promised well; his estate was improving in many ways; and all promised fair. He would much have wished the marriage had not been again postponed; but he felt he must respect the motives which actuated Kate; yet it was a hard trial to him.

Mr. Power now determined to leave Ireland; at least for some years. He was worried and annoyed, and frightened by the last catastrophe, and resolved to go where he should find peace. He dismissed all his laborers, and stopped the various works he had begun. The people, on the whole, were far the greater losers in the matter. Was it not short-sighted to prevent that

money being invested in the country? Would it not have been much more to their interest to have submitted to what they could not prevent, and derived the advantages they might receive, than to put a barrier to the expenditure of money in a locality which needed it so much? He was disgusted with the country which gave him birth; disgusted with the people. No doubt he deserved to be blamed, and severely so, for not having tried to make the people happier; but surely that is no reason for outraging the laws of God and man.

At the next assizes the two Roes and their colleague were tried for setting fire to the haggard at Power Court. George Roe had not actually done the deed; he was not of the party who went to Power Court on the night alluded to. In the sight of Heaven his guilt was great, no doubt; but in the eyes of the world it was not proved, and he was therefore acquitted. As to his administering the corporal chastisement to James Higgins, none could prove that he had had any share in it; as he had disguised himself his victim could not recognise him. The two men who passed by would not have come forward to give evidence voluntarily on any account; so as they kept their own counsel on the subject, no one knew they were witnesses of the deed, consequently they were not summoned.—Tom Roe and Jack Lemban—the only two of the two parties whose guilt was fully and unmistakably clear to every one—were sentenced to some years' penal servitude.

Mr. Power was now anxious to leave his property in good hands; and he felt he could not do better than trust all to his son-in-law's management. He could not but respect him, and confide in his integrity and conscientious discharge of duty. He therefore asked him to undertake what he wanted; but Charles would not do so without full permission from Mr. Power to do whatever he should consider best for the interests of his tenants; and said that he considered they had been harshly used.

Mr. Power was annoyed. What should he do if his son-in-law refused to undertake the management of his property? This was a turn he never expected matters to take. He had depended on Charles being perfectly enchanted at the prospect, and feeling highly honored at the trust reposed in him.

He drove to Castle Clinton and told Sir Thomas, whom he always considered a most sensible man, of the state of annoyance and vexation he felt at this refusal. Sir Thomas told him in reply that he was not surprised at it, as Mr. Ashwood had been informed of his (Mr. Power's) conduct on a previous occasion, when he had appointed an agent over his property;—that he would leave the agent no discretionary powers whatever; and that he quite agreed with Mr. Ashwood on the propriety of having nothing whatever to do with it. 'Besides,' he added, 'as you have consulted me on the subject, I must tell you that many disapprove of your manner of dealing with the people, considering it harsh and arbitrary. Now I daresay if you give Mr. Ashwood full powers, he will undertake what you want; and I am sure you may feel perfectly at ease as to his manner of discharging his duties.'

Mr. Power listened to Sir Thomas, and took his advice. He would not, in all probability, have minded a word said to him by any other friend in the world, but he both liked and appreciated good, kind Sir Thomas. Mrs. Power rejoiced much at his arrangement as it expedited the movements of the family. Charles consented to the plan, modified as it was.

How delighted Mrs. Power felt when leaving Power Court! She had, during the last proceedings and particularly on the night of the fire, indulged in the delightful and comforting expression, 'I told you so!' for she had, indeed, often warned her husband against living in Ireland; and on the whole, she was rather pleased than otherwise at the outrages, as they led to such a desirable end. Nor was she regretted in the neighbourhood, save by a few, who thought it pleasant to have Power Court to dine and dance in; personally none liked her. Nor did Mary Ashwood much regret the departure of her family. They so constantly found fault with every thing at River Vale, that her patience and forbearance were sometimes nearly exhausted. Her servants were bad, her dinners plain, her house so small; she had no carriage, and poor Mary must walk, was constantly repeated in her ears by her young brother and sisters, who often repeated, parrot-like, for her edification all the remarks made at home.

Little Charley Power was heard saying one night at dinner at Power Court, when seated beside his respected pa: 'Do you know I love Charles Ashwood very much? He always gives me bread-and-jam and fruit when I go to River Vale, and rides me on his back, though pa says he has not got bread-and-jam to spare—he is so poor; and Mary helps cook with the dinner. Is it not funny for a lady? Various 'hush! hush!' were heard from pa, ma, and

elder sisters; but little Charley was accustomed to have his own way. He was decidedly pa's pet in the house. An old lady, aunt of Mr. Power, was present; she was deaf, and did not hear what Charley said; as it excited some attention she called the little boy over to her, and asked for a repetition of what he had been saying. Little Charley, thus encouraged, made many more disclosures about the River Vale establishment and its economies. 'Mary is always mending stockings when I go; and Charles kisses her when she is done them, and says she is a good wife. She loves Charles so much better than pa, or ma, or any one.' Such is the pleasure of having communicative children.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Mr. Leicester, having fairly overcome all pang at seeing Mary, found himself frequently on his way to River Vale; and he would walk into the little study, where Charles and Mary sat at their work, and talk to them. He came upon her quite suddenly one day as she sat working a baby-frock. She blushed deeply when she saw him, and began to put her work away; but he laughed and told her it was very pretty, and that he liked to see young people industrious.—Ere he left, he slipped a draft into her hand for fifty pounds to buy the *Loyette*, and would not stay to be thanked, but ran off, pleading some excessively urgent, but fictitious, engagement.—He often said to his friends how delightful it was to see young people happy, and what a mistake he had made not to have married twenty or thirty years before; and what a sacrifice it would have been to have married Mary. When some people said that they were very poor, and what a bad match it was for pretty Miss Power, he used to smile, and say he did not know what people wished for their children but that they should be happy. He was not a father, and therefore could not speak from experience; but such was his idea. He often told Charles at the same time that he was a very lucky fellow, and that many a person might envy him such a pair of eyes, and such a smile always awaiting him.—Charles always assented, and never was angry with any one who told him so; for he knew he was lucky, and blessed his fate. He often thanked Fitz-James for being the cause of his happiness; for had he not been on a visit to Skanganabab, he never would have met Mary.—Their days passed quietly and calmly.

Charles heard occasionally from Edward, who always said he was so busy he could not write long letters. He was fast overcoming his disgust and annoyance at his present employment, but had been sickened and worried by a visit to Warrenstown. As before stated, Mr. Ashwood senior, was to have four hundred pounds a year for managing his *ci-devant* property, besides the use of his house, offices, and gardens; the latter he never availed himself of. Who could return to the place where he had lived in such splendour, and live on a few hundreds a year. Nor could he make up his mind to manage the property—the humiliation was too great; but Edward obtained permission from Mr. McDougall to go there now and then.

The first of these visits had naturally a most depressing effect upon him. The sight of his former home—the house where he was born—now remaining tenanted, and looking gloomy and uncared for, was not calculated to raise his spirits. He walked through the rooms, which now echoed sadly to the sounds of his footsteps. He thought of the merry hours spent there; and as he visited the new room, which had been inaugurated by the ball at which Mr. Ashwood had heard of his misfortune, he was so overpowered, that he felt inclined to make a rash vow never to go inside the house again. Spiderwebs now hung, in place of decorations, on the walls, and mice gambolled and ran races where fashionable company promenaded formerly. No music was now heard save the creaking of doors and the discordant notes of old Mrs. Groom's voice. She was the house-keeper in days gone-by, and had been left in the house when the family took their departure. She was very old, and unable to do more than walk from one room to the other. Her two sons lived in the house also; but they were out the entire day, and only returned to sleep there at night. Outside, the state of the gardens and pleasure-grounds was not more cheery. Every thing bore the impress of neglect. Edward could scarcely believe that in so short a time a place could become so altered. He then wandered through the fields, musing on the sad changes that had taken place in the fortunes of the family. The demesne was now left for grazing, and it pained him inexpressibly when at every step he encountered strangers in the fields, who looked upon him as an intruder. 'How am I to go through this every five or six months?' thought he, as he walked on. 'I suppose I can get accustomed to it.' He encountered Mr. Verner on the road, who invited him to 'stay' with him. Edward pleaded business as an excuse for a refusal; he could not bear to see his former friends. He