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KATE ASHWOOD.

CHAPTER XIX.—Continued.

The carriage was then proceeding at a very brisk pace. It had not made much way when they heard horses' feet, evidently at full gallop. Sir George suspected some one was on his track. He shouted to the postillions to drive faster.—Georgina inquired in a terrified manner what was the matter.

'Nothing, dearest; surely you are a coward. I fear your father may have ordered pursuit.'

Georgina said she thought that was not likely.

Five minutes more passed, and the sound came nearer and nearer, and men's voices were distinctly heard calling, 'Stop, stop!'

'Go on!' roared Sir George to the postillions.

The horses were beaten furiously. Georgina became so terrified that the beating of her heart could be heard. On they went a few miles further at a terrific pace; the men continued in hot pursuit. They again called out, 'Stop!' The horses began to falter. Sir George muttered between his teeth, 'Those damned bailiffs! I knew he would send them after me, confound him! It was evident the horses could not stand this furious race of going much longer.'

The men now came close to the carriage, and called out, 'We arrest you! you must come with us.'

The game was becoming desperate. Sir George saw that he had no chance of escape from them. He drew out his pistols, and, pointing one of them at the foremost man, he fired. The second man now drew back; there was a horrible shriek, and Sir George, without waiting to see whether the man was dead or alive, set off again. The worn-out horses dragged the carriage on as fast as they could; but they could do but little. Georgina was all this while lying back in the carriage, frightened, trembling, and oh, how sorry that she had ever undertaken the unfortunate journey! She was planning in her mind some mode of escape from the ruffian; some manner of erasing his vigilance and finding her way back to Edendale. The marriage was arranged by a special license to take place as soon as they should arrive in London. Oh for some means of avoiding those now dreaded nuptials!

A very short time brought them to the station where they had arranged to take the train for London. Georgina was so overcome with terror, that she was unable to speak. Sir George tried to reassure her, and spoke very kindly to her; for she was not yet married, and there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. He endeavored also to palliate his conduct, and tried to prove that in self-defence all expedients should lawfully be resorted to; but Georgina now saw things in a different light, and began to perceive more distinctly the character of the man she had loved.

Sir George, while at the station, felt extremely nervous lest he might be pursued either by the second bailiff, or by some people who might have heard of the horrible deed. He concealed himself as well as he could in a recess formed in the wall. He desired Georgina to follow him, and took her arm tightly under his, lest she should run away. She begged to be released; he refused. She then told him she would scream for help if he would not let her go. He was about to persist, when she gave a faint shriek. He then let go her arm, and she rushed from him. A train now came up, which was going in the contrary direction to London, and Georgina gladly took advantage of the means of escape thus offered to her. She knew Sir George would not follow her, as she guessed his aim would be to reach the Continent as quickly as possible. She was right in this conjecture, for Sir George's concern now was to escape the vigilance of the police; and he could not afford to run the risk of being arrested for the chance of a fortune which he might not be able to enjoy.

When Georgina found herself alone, she had time to reflect with bitter regret on the part she had taken in opposition to her father's sage advice. If her fault had been a very grave one, the punishment was terribly severe.

In little more than half an hour she arrived at the station nearest her father's house. The night was very dark and stormy; hail and snow were falling in torrents. The girl was terrified; she also feared recognition by the people employed on the railway. It was to avoid this that she had planned the circuitous drive with Sir George. She drew the hood of her cloak over her head and disguised her voice, in order to deceive, if possible, the station-master. She contrived to pass unobserved. She was appalled as she stepped on the road outside the station.—The roads were like rivers; and the hail pelted pitilessly upon her. She walked on, however, as fast as she could, plashing through the mud and wet; glad enough to have escaped from the

wretch, Sir George. Eight miles lay before her; she who had been so tenderly nurtured—it was melancholy to see her now making her way through a bad heavy road in such desperate weather, at so unseasonable an hour. She was most anxious to arrive home as soon as possible, but she feared much her strength would be exhausted. She had not eaten since luncheon.—She felt weakened and over-powered. 'How,' thought she, 'am I to face my father and the very servants of the house, who are all by this time well aware of what I have done?' She heard, as she passed a farm-house, a dog barking furiously. It rushed out on the road and pursued her; she took flight and ran as fast as she could, till she distanced her enemy. She was by this time so worn out with fatigue that she could with difficulty drag one foot after the other. At length she heard the sound of carts coming along; soon they reached the road she was on; and she asked, in the most piteous manner, the carter to take her into the cart. He was a good-natured fellow, and replied at once in the affirmative. She got in among some sacks, which were sheltered from the rain by a piece of oil-cloth. The carter asked her what brought her out on such a night. She replied in a feigned voice that she was a servant, and had heard that her mother was dying; she left her place at once, to have her blessing before she died.

On reaching Rugton the man asked her to have brandy, or something hot. She refused.—Then he kindly begged of her to go into the inn and warm herself by the fire. She still said she would rather remain where she was. While waiting in the cart she heard one man say to the other, 'Bill, did you hear the news? Squire Norton's daughter went off with a gentleman to be married against her father's will, and the gentleman was run after by the bailiffs; and when they were coming close upon them, he shot one.' The carter soon emerged from the inn, and set off again on his road. 'The bailiff killed,' thought Georgina, 'and that by Sir George!—Oh, if he were only wounded!' and here she shuddered with horror to think of the fate she had escaped.

When she reached the spot where she had not very many hours before, got into the carriage to convey her to London, she thanked the man very much for his kindness, and jumped out of the cart. She soon reached the gatehouse of Edendale, the place she had so lately quitted. She passed on to the house. She knocked feebly at the hall-door; no answer. 'It is past midnight,' she thought, 'and no one is up.'—What a spectacle was now the heiress of Edendale! Her clothes dripping, her gown torn, as it caught in bushes on the road. It had been a rich purple silk; what color was it now? She waited a long time, till her teeth chattered and her feet and hands were numbed with the cold. She rang violently and knocked again. She soon heard steps approaching. How she burned with shame at the prospect of facing even the menials! The kitchen-maid opened the door, and screamed when she saw her. Georgina rushed on; the candle the servant had brought with her to the door illumined somewhat the large oak-wainscoted hall and massive staircase. She went up to her own room; there were a few dull embers of a fire; Georgina felt for a match-box that was usually on her chimney-piece; she struck a light and lit her candle. She then went to her father's room; she was anxious to see him and implore forgiveness. At his door she was met by the old butler, who had known her from infancy, and had often carried her baby form in his arms. He came up to her, and laying his hand solemnly on her arm said, 'Miss Norton, you have killed my master.' Here his sob interrupted him. He said again, as soon as he could find utterance, 'Miss Norton, come and see what you have done. When my master heard the awful news he exclaimed, 'God forgive her, as I do; and he fell back and died.'

Georgina entered the room sorrow-stricken. There, on the bed, lay her father dead—a sweet calm smile on his face. She took hold of his cold stiff hand and sunk on her knees and wept bitterly. There, in that room of death, the wretched girl knelt and wept over the still form of her dead parent. Here indeed was the sin of disobedience visited with a terrible chastisement. Her tears now poured in torrents, and she earnestly besought Heaven to look upon her with compassion. She prayed earnestly and humbly; and Heaven rejoiced over the return of the prodigal.

CHAPTER XX.

"Where shall we bury our shame?
Where, in what desolate place,
Hide the last wreck of a name,
Broken and stained by disgrace?"

When Sir George was left by Georgina, his position was any thing but enviable. He was in fear and trembling every moment lest his hiding-place should be discovered. He heard from time to time whisperings, and began to

fancy that the police were on the look-out for him. He suffered agonies in that recess. 'Conscience doth make cowards of us all,' and Sir George Fasten felt this keenly. He had got himself into this predicament on account of Miss Norton, and this feeling goaded him to cursing and blaspheming her. He now bated her with a demoniac hatred; he invoked malediction on her head. Soon, however, the train for London coming up, put a stop for a few moments to all such reflections. He was somewhat relieved when he at last found himself actually in the railway-carriage; but there was still another enemy to be dreaded—the telegraph: for he was not yet out of danger. On arriving in London he might be taken up at once, and that even on the very railway platform, in view of every one. He thought within himself he would shun such dangerous publicity, and get out of the train at one of the stations near London, and there remain for a day; walk into London disguised;—there change his disguise for some other, and embark at Southampton.

Arrived at the station at which he meant to get out, he did so, and found his way to an inn, a very second-rate one. Sir George, to avoid suspicion, gave his name as Mr. Jones, and retired to his bedroom almost immediately after his arrival. Next morning he was off very early; went to an old-clothes shop, and rigged himself out as a pedlar. He also bought numerous pieces of colored dresses, and in this guise walked to London. While in London he changed his dress for that of an artist. He was habited in a long overcoat, loose badly-fitting trousers, a large wideawake hat, a dirty shirt, and large untied shoes. His toilette was perfect; added to which he had a very large portfolio under his arm, filled with paintings; he spoke a little German. The effect was marvellous. Never was actor on the stage better disguised. In this costume he took the train for Southampton.—He felt happy at the thoughts of being, as he imagined, completely out of danger. He reached Southampton, and there went into the hotel to wait for the packet; but he knew not that one of the most keen-scented of the Scotland-Yard gentlemen was following quickly on his trail.

Mr. Smart was a very valuable member of society, and one who had reflected great credit on the force to which he belonged, by the invaluable discoveries he had made of culprits so hidden and disguised that it seemed as if detection were out of the question. He received a telegraph message on the same evening that Sir George had shot the bailiff, informing him that such an event had taken place, and desiring him to lose no time in securing the guilty party, who was travelling at that moment on the railway to London. Mr. Smart lost not a moment, and was at the terminus some time before the train arrived. He searched all the carriages, but no one was to be found answering to the description he had received of Sir George. The next idea that crossed his mind was that he should start off by the next train, and stop at every station where the train had passed. He would there examine all the tickets to discover if any ticket marked for London had been delivered at a different station. The second stop he made he was successful so far as finding the ticket was concerned. He went to some of the different inns and lodging-houses in the neighboring town, but could not discover any traces of the culprit that night. The town was very full of people, as a great fair was taking place. The next morning, however, he was more fortunate. He heard from a waiter in the small inn in which Sir George had passed the night that a person of fashionable-looking appearance had gone there late on the night in question; that he had gone away very early that morning, and had been seen entering the old-clothes shop. To the old-clothes shop Mr. Smart proceeded. There he obtained information that the gent of whom he was in search had gone to London. Thither Mr. Smart proceeded; discovered there that a peculiar-looking gentleman had been seen in the train going to Southampton. How was it that the marvellously well got-up artist should be, by the police, considered suspicious-looking? It was strange certainly, but they thought there was something not quite natural, and told Mr. Smart their opinion. He went off by the next train, and arrived in Southampton a few minutes before the vessel started. There he saw our friend just on the point of stepping into it. His foot was on the gangway, and he was rejoicing at the prospect of soon being freed from the fear of pursuit; ten, nay five, minutes more and he would have left England. He felt, however, a hand laid on his shoulder; he turned to see.—Who could the person be who thus recognised him? He was not long in doubt, however, as to who it was. The words resounded in his ears, 'Sir George Fasten, I arrest you.' The great Sir George was now a prisoner, taken ignominiously by two policemen, and his shelter that night was a prison. Where was now the

dashing man of fashion, who kept his hunters, took his rides in Rotten Row, danced at the fashionable balls, and flirted with the prettiest women? A prison and prison-fare was all he had to look to. We shall leave him to his well-merited misery for a while, and return to other and more deserving personages in our little story.

CHAPTER XXI.

Charles was, ever since his return from Ireland, most anxious to make known to his family the state of his mind with regard to Mary Power; but the constant round of dissipation and amusement by which he was surrounded prevented his having time or opportunity to discuss the (to him) all-important subject.

A ball was arranged to take place at Warrentown, to inaugurate a new ballroom. Kate and Maria were the stars of the evening, and they certainly did look very pretty; there was a spirit and animation about the ball, which excelled any previous entertainment.

Mr. and Mrs. Ashwood also looked happy, and seemed to be enjoying the prospect before them. The new room really was beautiful.—The conversation turned on Miss Norton, who had not long left the neighborhood; and bets were made as to whether Sir George would succeed in his endeavor to carry off the heiress.—Many laughed with Kate at the fickleness of her lover; but his peccadilloes had not yet been brought to light.

Kate that night looked particularly lovely.—Charles was dull and moody. No one could make out what was the matter with him. Some quizzed him, saying that perhaps he had left his heart in Ireland; he only laughed and gave them no satisfaction.

The supper was announced; and Mr. Ashwood took Lady Carlismen into the supper-room. She was in great admiration of the pretty way in which the supper was laid out; and spoke of the ball to Mr. Ashwood in most complimentary terms. She was one of those gentle creatures who take pleasure in praising everything. She and Mr. Ashwood were conversing agreeably together, when a group of persons came in, evidently very much interested on some subject.—Two young men seemed to be in very earnest conversation; one said to the other, 'Did you hear of the failure of Jefferson's Bank? they stopped payment yesterday.' Here a sudden crash was heard; Mr. Ashwood, who had taken a bottle of champagne from the hands of the servant to fill Lady Carlismen's glass, let it fall on the table, breaking several glasses, and pouring its contents on her ladyship's gown.

She only smiled, and tried to dry it as well as she could with her handkerchief. Mr. Ashwood looked deadly pale; but recovered self-possession sufficiently to enable him to apologise for his awkwardness. No one could understand the cause of Mr. Ashwood's nervousness.

He had always kept his affairs to himself, and no one (not even his children) knew that he was a shareholder to a large amount in Jefferson's bank; and that its failure compromised his whole property. He soon after pleaded sickness and went to bed. The ball was, notwithstanding, kept up with great spirit and animation till a very late, or rather early, hour.

The next morning betimes Charles went in to his father while he was dressing to inquire after his health; he found him pale and anxious-looking, and disturbed in mind. He was sitting looking vacantly out of his window on his lovely parks and pleasure-grounds, when Charles entered. He soon told him of the terrible blow which had fallen upon him: the beautiful house and place must be given up, the exquisite new ballroom, the gardeus, the greenhouses, all surrendered.

'Thank God,' he said at last, 'your mother's fortune still remains to us; but what is that compared to what we have enjoyed? Oh, Charles, it is awful, you can't feel it as I do. You are young and active, and have not known the enjoyment of wealth as I have.' Little did he know that Charles's heart was breaking; where was there now a glimmering of hope for his marriage with Mary Power? Charles was, however, unwilling to annoy his father by referring to his own griefs, which had been betrayed to no one save Kate. He suffered keenly; perhaps far more so than his father. 'Charles, my boy,' continued Mr. Ashwood, 'we are ruined; there is no doubt of it; we are irretrievably ruined.'

When Charles left his father, he went to the drawing-room, and not finding any one there, he paced up and down the room in an agitated manner.

He felt despair gnawing at his heart. He thought of his mother and sisters and brother; and as his mind dwelt on each, he suffered a keen pang when he thought of the agony they would all suffer when it would be necessary to leave the place they had lived in so long—the home of their childhood.

A few minutes after, Kate and Maria both rushed in, exclaiming, 'Oh, Charles, do come

and look at the lovely little ponies at the door; they will answer so well for the new pony-beatons. Mr. Stewart sent them to be looked at, as he knew they would just suit us. We only want your approbation; but,' they added, looking up in his face, 'what is the matter! you seem annoyed about something.'

'Here,' he exclaimed, pulling out half-a-crown from his waistcoat-pocket, 'tell James to give this to the man for his trouble, and desire him to go. I want to speak to you both seriously.'

'What is the matter?' they both exclaimed again; 'what has happened?'

'Have you courage,' he asked, 'to hear the truth? My father is ruined. Jefferson's bank has stopped payment; there is no doubt of it.—Captain Markham spoke of it last night, and this morning my father has been informed of the sad truth by letter. We must leave this place.'

This information was a terrible blow to the girls. The place they had so much loved was to be given up to strangers; and they must go forth with but a small pittance in comparison with what they had owned.

'Well,' said Kate, 'thank God there is mamma's fortune and my ten thousand pounds, which of course I shall make over to my father at once. We shall be poor enough, but after all not so very poor. We can try and make the best of it.'

'Kate, dearest, you are right,' answered Charles, 'to try to bear it cheerfully; I can't. This blow comes just upon me with a bitterness which I cannot tell; and perhaps it is selfish of me to think of my own troubles when you are all so much afflicted.'

'Charles,' said Kate, 'I wish you would tell my father to count on my ten thousand pounds as his own; he may not at this present moment remember its existence. Here,' she continued, unlocking her desk, 'are all the papers connected with it.'

'Indeed, you are a darling girl,' Charles replied; 'but, Kate, it is too bad to see you giving up what I know was meant for you alone by Aunt Kate. Have you reflected, dearest, that with this money vanishes your only chance of marrying Fitz-James? without your money the marriage would be impossible.'

Charles now looked at her earnestly; he wondered much whether she had calculated the full extent of her sacrifice. He searched in her countenance, to read if possible what she thought. At the name Fitz-James her countenance, which had been lighted up with pleasure at the thought of the advantage her money would be to her family, fell as she seemed to reflect on the barrier she would put to her own happiness for life. She became pale as death, and the struggle in her mind was terrible. The conflict, however, was not of long duration. She stood up bravely, and taking up the papers handed them to him, saying,

'Any signature you wish for to complete this arrangement I am quite ready to give. Take them immediately to my father.'

Charles kissed her affectionately; he now valued her doubly as he knew how truly sterling were her virtues. He had not believed in such complete self-abnegation. He would not have thought much of her giving up the money in former days, ere she could have felt the existence of a separate interest from the rest of her family; but now she had in her own mind identified herself and Fitz-James, and Charles, who knew this thoroughly, could best of all her family appreciate fully the completeness of her generosity.

Charles left Kate to inform his father of the offer she had made of surrendering her fortune to him, to be used as he thought best. He at first simply stated the fact that Kate had given up her entire fortune. Mr. Ashwood was surprised and gratified. He never imagined that such unselfish generosity was a virtue that actually existed; he thought it might be found in poetry or romance, but not in real life. Charles also told him what he scarcely believed in before, namely, the constant, enduring love which she entertained for Fitz-James in spite of all opposition.

Mr. Ashwood was essentially a worldly man, and this generous conduct of his daughter touched a new chord in his bosom. Charles also placed before him the fact that with this ten thousand pounds she forfeited her only chance of ever having means sufficient to marry Fitz-James.

'You know, father,' he added, 'whenever I endeavored to induce you to consent to these nuptials, it was only on the ground that Kate, having a fair fortune of her own, would be enabled to marry a man whose worldly possessions were not large.'

'Tell her to come to me,' said Mr. Ashwood; 'I long to thank her myself—my good generous girl! Thank God, I am blessed with such a child; and Mr. Ashwood perhaps in that moment felt a thrill of happiness he had never experienced before.'