

**THE REAL  
CHARLOTTE, VOL. II**

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

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**E. OE. SOMERVILLE & MARTIN ROSS**

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REAL CHARLOTTE

BY  
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"AN IRISH COUSIN," "NADOTH'S VINEYARD," ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES*

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# THE REAL CHARLOTTE.

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*VOLUME II.*

## CHAPTER XVI.

FRANCIE felt an unsuspected weakness in her knees when she walked downstairs next day. She found herself clutching the stair-rail with an absurdly tight grasp, and putting her feet down with trembling caution on the oil-cloth stair covering, and when she reached the drawing-room she was thankful to subside into Charlotte's arm-chair, and allow her dizzy head to recover its equilibrium. She thought very little about her nerves; in fact, was too ignorant to know whether she possessed such things, and she gave a feeble laugh of surprise at the way her heart jumped and fluttered when the door slammed unexpectedly be-



hind her. The old green sofa had been pulled out from the wall and placed near the open window, with the *Dublin Express* laid upon it; Francie noticed and appreciated the attention, and noted too, that an arm-chair, sacred to the use of visitors, had been planted in convenient relation to the sofa. "For Mr. Dysart, I suppose," she thought, with a curl of her pretty lip, "he'll be as much obliged to her as I am." She pushed the chair away, and debated with herself as to whether she should dislodge the two cats who, with faces of frowning withdrawal from all things carthly, were heaped in simulated slumber in the corner of the sofa. She chose the arm-chair, and, taking up the paper, languidly read the list of places where bands would play in the coming week, and the advertisement of the anthem at St. Patrick's for the next day.

How remote she felt from it all! How stale appeared these cherished amusements! Most people would think the Lismoyle choir a poor substitute for the ranks of white surplices in the chancel of St. Patrick's, with the banners of the knights hanging above them, but Francie thought it much

better fun to look down over the edge of the Lis-moyle gallery at the red coats of Captain Cursiter's detachment, than to stand crushed in the nave of the cathedral, even though the most popular treble was to sing a solo, and though Mr. Thomas Whitty might be waiting on the steps to disentangle her from the crowd that would slowly surge up them into the street. A heavy-booted foot came along the passage, and the door was opened by Norry, holding in her grimy hand a tumbler containing a nauseous-looking yellow mixture.

"Miss Charlotte bid me give ye a bate egg with a half glass of whisky in it whenever ye'd come downstairs." She stirred it with a black kitchen fork, and proffered the sticky tumbler to Francie, who took it, and swallowed the thin, flat liquid which it contained with a shudder of loathing. "How bad y'are! Dhrink every dhrop of it now! An empty sack won't stand, and ye're as white as a masheroon this minute. God knows it's in yer bed ye should be, and not shtuck out in a chair in the middle of the flure readin' the paper!" Her eye fell on the apparently unconscious Mrs. and Miss

Bruff. "Ha, ha! thin! how cozy the two of yez is on yer sofa! Walk out, me Lady Ann!"

This courtesy-title, the expression of Norry's supremest contempt and triumph, was accompanied by a sudden onslaught with the hearth-brush, but long before it could reach them, the ladies referred to had left the room by the open window.

The room was very quiet after Norry had gone away. Francie took the evicted holding of the cats, and fell speedily into a doze induced by the unwonted half glass of whisky. Her early dinner, an unappetising meal of boiled mutton and rice pudding, was but a short interlude in the dullness of the morning; and after it was eaten, a burning tract of afternoon extended itself between her and Mr. Dysart's promised visit. She looked out of the window at the sailing shreds of white cloud high up in the deep blue of the sky, at the fat bees swinging and droning in the purple blossoms of the columbine border, at two kittens playing furiously in the depths of the mignonette bed; and regardless of Charlotte's injunctions about the heat of the sun, she said to herself that she would go out into the