

DUCHESS

ONLY AN IRISH
GIRL

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Only an Irish Girl

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Duchess

Only an Irish Girl

CHAPTER I

"And was it only a dream, Aileen?"

"Only a dream, miss, but it consarned me greatly. Shure an' I never had the taste of a sweet sound sleep since I dramed it!"

Honor Blake laughs, and passes her slim hand over the old woman's ruddy tanned cheek.

"You dear silly old thing to bother your head about a dream! It will be time enough to fret when we've something real to fret about."

"Ah, mavourneen, may yez never see that day!" nurse Walsh murmurs with passionate fondness, as she takes the girl's hand between her own broad palms and presses and fondles it. "Shure it's like yesterday – I mind it so well – that yer mother, as she lay dying beyant there, in her big grand bedroom at Donaghmore, said to me, as I stood beside her with you, a wee thing, in my arms, 'Ye'll be a mother to my little one, Aileen, and guard her from all harm, as I would have done.' And I knelt down then and there, and took my solemn oath; and from that day to this it's the wan bit of sunshine in a cloudy world ye've been to me, alanna!"

Tears come into the girl's eyes. There is a sad feeling in her heart this evening, as she stands in the little cottage, and looks across the bog at the long fields of corn beyond the river; and at this mention of her dead mother – the fragile mother whom she has never seen – the feeling grows into passionate pain and longing.

"He's a mighty fine gintleman and a man of manes – I'm not denying it, darlint – but he's not the man for you. Take an old woman's advice, mavourneen! He's black of face and of heart. He's come of a race that ground the poor and raised the rints, and sent poor mothers and old men and babies on to the highway to die of hunger and cold and heart-wretchedness!"

"But Power has done none of these things," the girl says warmly.

"His father and his father's father have done them; and haven't we the word of the Holy Book for it – the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children to the fourth generation?"

Honor shudders, and her pretty color fades. Is she thinking of the sins of the dead-and-gone Blakes, some of which she may yet have to suffer for?

"I must go now, Aileen; the boys will be home by this time. And when I bring this fine Englishman to see you – he is only half an Englishman after all, for his mother was one of the Blakes of Derry – you'll give him a welcome?"

"That I will, asthore, though it's little the welcome of an old woman will be to him while he has your swate face to look on."

The girl laughs and gathers her fur cape about her as she steps out on to the bog road, for a keen wind blows from the mountains. As she turns to leave the cottage, a man, who has been smoking in the shelter of one of the heaps of turf, straightens himself and walks after her. His steps fall noiselessly on the peaty soil; but some instinct makes Honor turn her head, and at sight of him her face flushes.

"Ah, what brings you here, Power? I thought you were away at Drum with Launce?"

"I went part of the way but turned back. Sure they'd nothing better to do! I had!"

"And have you done it?" the girl asks shyly.

"I am doing it now," he says, with a smile.

She does not answer him in words, but her eyes are filled with a sudden glow and sweetness.

"You will find your visitor at Donaghmore," he tells her, as they walk together across the yielding bog; "I met him at Garrick Station, and drove him over. Your father could not go, as he had to run off at the last minute to take the deposition of poor Rooney, who is dying, I'm afraid. The Englishman seemed to think nothing of it, when I told him how the poor fellow had been badly hurt in a fight. He evidently imagines it is the custom for one man to shoot another every week or so in the ordinary Irish village."

"Oh, Power, don't talk like that!" the girl says. "Sure, we all know these dreadful things occur only too often. Don't let us talk about them at all. Tell me what he is like."

"Like an ordinary mortal! He is gray as to his clothes, a trifle pasty as to his complexion, and more than a trifle fine in his manners. But you'll get on with him all right – girls like mashers."

"You know that I hate that word, Power! Why will you use it?"

"Because it describes your cousin to a nicety."

"Goodness! A masher!" the girl cries in dismay. "How will such a creature live at Donaghmore? He should have gone to Aunt Julia's in Dublin – he would have felt at home there."

Whereat they both laugh, natural hearty laughter that dies away in musical echoes.

Aunt Julia is one of the bugbears of the Blake family, her gentility and general fineness being altogether too much for them.

"Oh, hang it, the fellow's man enough to prefer Donaghmore and you to Merrion Square!"

"And Aunt Julia," the girl finishes slyly.

"Yes," he says. And then, with sudden passion – "Is this man to come between us, Honor? To-day as I looked at him I felt, if it was so, I could find it in my heart to shoot him dead!"

It is getting dusk here on the lower quarry road, which leads them by a short cut to Donaghmore. On one side stretches the bog, on the other the grim gray rocks shut out the sky. To Honor's nervous fancy it almost seems as if the rocks catch up his vengeful words, and echo them mockingly. More than one ghastly story is connected with this lonely spot; and, spoken here, the cruel words have double meaning.

"You are changed already," the man says more calmly, seeing the expression of horror on her face. "You and Launce have never been the same to me since that affair at Boyne. It is only Horace who remains my friend."

"And am I not your friend, Power?"

"There can be no friendship between you and me, Honor. There can be but one of two things – love or hatred. I love you as better men would tell you they love their own souls. I want you for my wife – no friend, but my very own, until death us do part! Honor, my darling – Honor, my own love, will you come to me?"

His arms close round her in the darkness, and with a low sob she yields to their masterful pressure, while his words – half fierce in their passion – seem to reach her like words heard in a dream.

Suddenly, out from the middle of the bog, comes a plaintive cry like the call of some night-bird. It is answered half a mile away, in the direction of Donaghmore, and then again there is silence. But it is no bird-call, Honor knows; and she raises her face from her lover's breast with a little sigh of fear.

"Don't sigh, my darling! Sure no harm could touch you with me," the man says tenderly.

But a chill has fallen upon the girl; her brief thrill of happiness has left a vague unrest behind it.

"I must go in now, Power. What will they say to me? I have never been out so late before!"

"And I have never kissed you before, nor held you in my arms," he answers almost incoherently. "Sure love like ours takes no heed of the clock!"

"My father will take heed of it, though," the girl rejoins, smiling, and hurrying, fast as the uneven path will let her, toward the lights that are gleaming now from all the lower windows of her home.

Donaghmore stands on a slight hill overlooking the river on one side and the woods of Colonel Frenche's estate on the other. It is a stone house, with deep-set windows and stout doors, that have

withstood hard blows in their day. Save for Glen Doyle, Colonel Frenche's place, there is no house of equal size for miles around, and several visitors have remarked the loneliness of the situation; but to that the Blakes never give a thought. The solid old house, which faces all the winds that blow, is very dear to them. In its very isolation there is a charm that any other dwelling would lack.

"Honor," the young fellow says, as they reach the house, "will you speak a word of warning to your father and Launce? They won't listen to me, I know. But it is not safe to speak as they have been doing lately. This affair of poor Rooney's may show you the temper of the people. No man was better liked, but he couldn't keep a still tongue in his head, and he lies at death's door this night."

"And are we not to speak, Power? Have we not as much right to our opinion as other people? There never yet was a Blake who was a rebel or a coward!"

"There is a time to speak and a time to keep silent," he answers, taking her face between his hands, and looking down, his dark eyes softening, at the pretty flushed cheeks and lips just curved into a pout. "My own love, trust me! I would not have you or yours bring a stain upon the old name – but silence can hurt no one."

From where they stand they can hear the sounds of voices and men's laughter and the chink of glass, which come through the open windows of the dining-room.

"Those windows ought to be securely fastened before the dusk falls, Honor. Your father is really too – too confident."

"What a prophet of evil you are, Power!" the girl answers lightly; but, all the same, her heart is filled with the vague fear that has been troubling her for weeks past, ever since her brother Launce got into a dispute with some farmers at Boyne Fair, and was threatened by them. "It's enough to make the old abbot walk again," she added, half smiling, half scornfully, "to hear you talk of danger threatening Donaghmore! Didn't he frighten the rebels away in '98, so that ours was the only safe house, lonely as it is?"

"The rebels of to-day are not to be so easily frightened or kept at bay," he answers meaningly. "Good-night, my darling, and remember my words!"

"Good-night," she says softly; and presently the great doors close behind her, and he is alone.

"Come in here, my girl, and give an account of yourself," her father's voice calls to her, as she is slipping past the open dining-room door. "Launce here thought we had lost you, but I knew there was no such luck."

The next moment she is standing in the brilliantly-lighted room, before the little knot of gentlemen – her father, her brothers, and their guest – gathered about one end of the long table.

"This is my little girl, Beresford; and, if she had been a boy, Heaven bless her, your uncle would have adopted her, and left her all the money he had hoarded! But it wasn't to be, I suppose."

The man he calls Beresford smiles slightly at this speech, and Honor sees the smile and resents it. Her gray eyes darken, her face turns suddenly pale and cold as she moves slowly forward to her father's side.

"By Jove, what a grand air!" Brian Beresford says to himself, eyeing her critically. "Where on earth did she learn to carry herself in that fashion?"

"You did not expect to find your cousin safe at home before you, Honor?"

"Yes, papa; I met Power, and he told me. He was saying too" – with a faint smile at Launce – "that he was afraid Mr. Beresford would find Donaghmore dull. He thought he would have felt more at home at Aunt Julia's."

The new-comer does not in the least understand the point of this speech, but he is perfectly conscious that there is a cut in it somewhere; and this consciousness is not lessened by the way it is received. Her father turns red in the face and says, "Tut tut! How absurd!" Horace smiles, and Launce breaks into open laughter.

"I am sorry if I am intruding," Mr. Beresford says stiffly. "I accepted your father's invitation as frankly as it was offered; but – "

"There, my boy, not another word," his host interrupts him, still red in the face, still frowning at Honor in a covert way. "I should have been cut to the heart if your father's son had refused or misunderstood me. But these younger people are full of their chaff; you'll understand each other in a day or so."

"I understand him perfectly as it is," Honor says to herself, as she walks out for the room, very erect and stately, and altogether on her dignity; "and I don't like him a bit. Power was wrong there – we shall never get on together."

As she is crossing the hall she sees that the front door stands open. She turns a little out of her way to close it, and as she does so she sees the shadows of two figures sharply outlined on the smooth gravel.

One man is bare-headed – he has just stepped out the house evidently – the other wears a low hat pulled down over his brows.

It is nothing out of the common for a servant to step out of the house to speak to a friend – domestic rule is not very strict at Donaghmore – yet a strange fear assails Honor. The window by the side of the door is open, and by standing close to it she can hear every word they say; but their words are meaningless – they are talking Irish.

Suddenly one of the men – it is their new groom, whom Launce hired at Boyne – says distinctly in English:

"He's no more from the Castle than you are. How soft ye are, to be sure! He's the master's nephew from London. And sure, if the worst comes to the worst, he'd not count at all, at all; he's little better than a fine young woman in breeches. Faix, and I'd take half a dozen of his make as my own share of a good night's work; but be aisy – he'll be gone before even ye need raise a finger!"

While their hands are meeting and they are bending toward each other as if for a parting whisper, the girl flies swiftly up-stairs and into her own room.

Her heart is beating painfully, her cheeks are pale with fear and anger, and yet she cannot help laughing aloud as the man's words come back to her – "He's little better than a fine young woman in breeches!"

"Could anything be funnier or truer?" she says to herself with malicious satisfaction. "Oh, how I wish he could have heard them! It would take a bit of his starch out, I fancy, and teach him how little mashers are thought of at Donaghmore."

CHAPTER II

"I cannot see what fault you can find in him, Honor."

"Sure if he's faultless, isn't that fault enough, my dear?"

"But you are almost rude to him," Belle Delorme says plaintively; "and I'm sure I can't see why, for he is just a delightful man."

"Of course – you've fallen in love with him, Belle!" Honor retorts coolly. "You fall in love with every good-looking man you meet. The only marvel to me is how easily you contrive to fall out again."

"Sure it's as aisy as lapping crame," the girl says with a little affected brogue and a smile that shows all her dimples. "It would never do if we were all marble goddesses, you know. Life would be mighty dull if one couldn't flirt a trifle."

"Certainly your life should not be dull, if flirting can brighten it, my dear."

"No, it is not altogether dull," the other girl says demurely; "but it would be nicer if one could live in Dublin or London – wouldn't it now?"

She looks very pretty as she lies there, her slim lissom form stretched out in the full glare of the sunshine.

"What an artfully artless little creature you are, Belle! You mean to imply that, if Brian asks you to be Mrs. Beresford, you will say 'Yes,' for the pleasure of living in London?"

"And why not? Sure London is better than Donaghmore."

"And what is to become of poor Launce then?"

"Oh, Launce!" Belle says, turning pale. "You know quite well that he has eyes for no one but Mrs. Dundas."

"My dear, Launce was not born yesterday," Launce's sister assures her companion equably.

"Neither was Mrs. Dundas – nor the day before that," Belle bursts out angrily. "I vow she looks as old as my mother when you get a fair view of her in the daylight. But what does that matter? She has fascinated him!"

"How sweet the ways of women are,
How honeyed is their speech!"

a man's voice says mockingly.

Honor turns lazily in her hammock, but Belle – poor blushing, mortified

Belle – springs to her feet with a cry.

"I knew I should find you here eating all those strawberries!" the newcomer goes on placidly. "Girls do not expose their complexions to a sun like this for nothing."

"Where are the others?" Honor asks lazily.

"Deed and I hardly know. They strolled away by twos and threes till there wasn't a soul left to chum with; and then I bethought me" – with a mocking glance at Belle – "of you; and here I am."

"Polite!" her sister murmurs. "But, to tell the truth, dear, we should prefer your room – no, your strawberries" – for he has begun his onslaught already – "to your company."

"Sha'n't budge now till I've finished this pile," he retorts coolly; and the girls laugh.

The sun slants fiery red between the boles of the old fruit-trees, burns little crimson patches on Belle's fair skin, and turns Honor's cheeks to the hue of wild poppies. The air is heavy with a dozen different odors – of ripening fruit, mignonette, wild roses, and – sweetest of all perhaps – clover from the great sloping fields outside the orchard wall.

Launce has thrown himself upon the grass almost at Belle's feet, and is talking in his low musical voice.

"Tantalizing the poor little thing!" Honor says to herself, as she peeps across at them from her nest among the branches.

She is very fond of Belle Delorme, and she knows that not in all Ireland could her brother find a sweeter, truer little wife. Perhaps he is of the same opinion – perhaps not. It is not easy to read the thoughts behind that square, masterful brow of his.

Presently they stroll away together, leaving Honor alone.

As she lies there in her low hammock, the shadows of leaf and bough flickering on her face, a hand parts the branches, and a man looks in at her.

She flushes deeply in her surprise at the sight of him, and then sits up with a jerk that nearly brings her out of her nest with more speed than grace.

"I'm sorry to have disturbed you," he says, smiling; "but I thought you were asleep, and I could not help envying the good fortune of the fairy prince who might be lucky enough to awaken you after the fashion of fairy princes."

Something in his voice or in his eyes as he looks down at her makes the light words seem almost tender.

"But no fairy princess ever come to Ireland, Mr. Beresford; it's only a 'fine country spoiled,' you know, and 'sunk in semi-barbarism' – not at all the sort of place for a fairy prince to come to."

"I don't know that at all, Honor."

It is the first time he has called her Honor, and she looks up at him half startled as he continues:

"It seems to me the fairy prince might travel farther and fare worse."

"But he might not think so, particularly if he was an English fairy prince," the girl says dryly.

"Why are you so hard on us, Honor? Why are you so hard on me? I should say. For you are sweetness itself to that little curate of Drum, and he's about the poorest specimen of the Cockney I ever met."

"You couldn't expect that any but the 'poorest specimen' would condescend to be a curate at Drum," she returns flippantly.

Taking no heed of her interruption, he goes on:

"You have grudged every kind word, every little attention lavished on me since I've been here. Often and often I've said to myself, 'I will go away and never look upon her face again.' But I have not gone."

"No," the girl says, feeling curiously abashed and contrite under the gaze of those calmly accusing eyes. "I'm sorry if – if I have been rude to you."

"I am glad to hear you say so. You have been rude certainly, but I am quite ready to forgive all that – quite ready to shake hands and be friends, if you care to have it so. If not, it is better that I should go away – at once."

She most certainly is not fond of this man; and yet she feels pained at the mere thought of his going away "at once." She holds out her hand almost pleadingly.

"Oh, do not go away, please!" looking at him with sweet, grave eyes. "I would rather shake hands and be friends."

"So be it!" he says, taking her hand, and holding it for a second in both his own.

He is a man of the world, strong and self-repressed; yet now he turns suddenly pale, and his eyes darken.

"Heavens, child, how I love you!" he cries; and the next instant he has stooped and kissed her on the lips. It is done in a second. The girl looks up at him from among her pillows, as hurt and angry as if the kiss had been a blow; and he looks back at her, amazed at his own audacity.

"On my honor, I did not mean to do it!" he says, almost humbly. "I did not know I should be such a weak fool as to yield to temptation in that mad fashion, only I love you so, and you – "

"And I am 'only an Irish girl,'" she interrupts him vehemently – "little better than a savage in your eyes. If I had been an English lady you would never have taken such a liberty – never!"

Her passionate resentment angers him, slow to anger as he is by nature and habit.

"If you hate me so much, Honor, that the touch of my lips insults you beyond forgiveness, the sooner we part the better," he says bitterly.

"You would please me best by going away, and never letting me see your face again," she answers with equal bitterness.

There is the sound of a step on the gravel, and a man's laugh – a peculiar vibrating laugh that brings the color into Honor's face – reaches them in the stillness.

But the steps pass on, and do not come near their corner among the old fruit-trees. Brian Beresford bends nearer to the girl, lying there amid the bending branches, with the sunshine on her averted face.

"You are only a child, Honor, for all your twenty summers! You no more know your own heart than I do. Take care! If you send me away – me and my love – you may find that you have made a mistake!"

But she will not answer him – she will not even look at him. For all the sign of life she gives she might be that Sleeping Beauty to whom he first likened her.

"If ever you should feel sorry, Honor, for what you have said to-day – if ever you should care to have me back, either as a friend or lover, send for me, and I will come."

The words are calm enough, but by some instinct she divines that the face bent close to hers is neither calm or cold. She hears him go away, as he came, through the gap in the high hedge, but she does not even open her eyes to watch him go. But, when all is still again, and she knows that he has passed away out of her life, as surely as he has passed out of the old-fashioned garden, she bursts into tears.

"Oh, what has come to me?" she says to herself again and again, in a very maze of wonder at her own sensations. "I do not love the man. His coming or his going matters nothing to me."

But, although she says this, not once but many times, the words bring her no comfort. They do not still for one moment the inexplicable pain that has risen in her heart. She gets up after awhile and goes back to the house, choosing the small door at the side, so that she may meet no one.

Aileen is ironing in the large front-kitchen, smoothing out, as she calls it, one of Honor's pretty white dresses. It is a labor of love with the old woman, and every week she comes up from her little cottage to perform it.

At sight of her young mistress standing in the doorway, bright-eyed and flushed, and strangely unlike herself, the good woman pauses.

"An' is it yourself, alanna? Shure my eyes have been aching for the sight of your face this hour or more! But what ails ye, Miss Honor darlint? Shure my black drames – bad 'cess to me for naming them till ye – have not been troubling your mind?"

"No, no!" the girl says, laughing. "I am not troubled about anything, only hot and thirsty, and – yes, Aileen, I may as well own it – cross."

She laughs again, but her voice is tremulous, and she keeps her face well turned from the light.

"I wish it was only cross that I was, darlint!" the old woman says with the peculiar solemnity of her class. "But it's sore and heavy-hearted I am, and that's the blessed truth. I've done nothing but drame since ever I saw you last, and every night it's the same thing over and over again, till my brain is almost turned wid it, and I rise up in the morning all in a cold perspiration."

"Dear old Aileen," the girl says tenderly, "poor Rooney's awful death has upset you? It has upset us all for that matter! And then it must be so dreadful for you alone on that great bleak bog."

"Miss Honor, do ye mind my drame?"

"Every word of it, Aileen."

"Ye mind how I drammed that the boys dug the grave out on the moss, and hid it out of sight wid green branches!"

"I do surely."

"Well, Miss Honor, ever and always in my drame that grave is there still. I watch the boys dig it deep in the black earth, and cover the gaping mouth of it; and me shaking and trembling all the time. But these past three nights – the saints be above us! – there's been another grave, alanna."

"Another grave!" The girl laughs. "Why, that is getting too dreadful!" She plucks a spray of roses from the open window behind her, as she sits on the great oak dresser, and shreds the delicate red petals all over the lap of her gown.

"Listen to me, Miss Honor, and cease your funning! This is no time to laugh and jest at a warning that comes from the saints themselves! That the masther is in danger of his life I know as well as if I saw the very bullet that was to shoot him. The grave was dug deep and broad – and deep and broad it would need to be, save us! – out there on yer own lawn, just forenent the drawing-room windies!"

She has left her ironing-table and come close up to the girl, her face – a delicate-featured face, peasant as she is – rigid with intense feeling, her eyes shining, her upraised hand tremulous.

"Oh, Miss Honor darlint, shure he'd follow you to the ends of the world! Take him away from this till the bad feeling has time to cool down. Things will right themselves, never fear – the old times will come round again; but, if the masther stays on at Donaghmore, he'll never live to enjoy them."

"But if he will not go away?" says Honor, a tone of anxiety in her voice. "You know how obstinate he is; and that letter from Dublin about landlords running away from their posts has upset him dreadfully. Oh, no, Aileen, he'll never leave Donaghmore!"

"Then the saints purtect him!" Aileen answers tremulously. "But as sure as my name is Aileen Walsh harm will come of it!"

CHAPTER III

"As sure as my name is Aileen Walsh harm will come of it!"

The words haunt Honor. They ring in her ears night and day, and spoil many hour's innocent pleasure for her.

But what harm can come? she asks herself. The country is quiet enough now to all appearance, though more than once, in the dusk, she has heard the shrill signal whistle pealing from hill to hill or dying away over the melancholy bog.

Of Power Magill she sees but little. He is now cold and absent, and so unlike himself that it is more a pain than a pleasure to be with him.

Brian Beresford she does not see at all. He has written to her father more than once since his abrupt departure, but she has not even seen his letters.

The squire blames her openly for snubbing "as decent a fellow as ever stepped in shoe-leather," and Launce stings her with covert hints to the same effect. It is all very miserable, but the girl bears it bravely. She must suffer, but she need make no sign. Even Launce's keen eyes are deceived at last, and he tells Belle Delorme that they have been on the wrong scent altogether.

"Honor never cared a button for the fellow – she never cared for any one but Power Magill, and never will, and that's the truth! So you see what a faithful family you are marrying into, my dear!"

But Belle only shakes her pretty head.

"She takes it a deal too easy to please me. I'd rather she would fret a bit. Sure it would only be natural! But the loss of a man like that out of a dull country house is something worth fretting about."

"You don't know Honor," Launce answers oracularly. "She's not the girl to lose her heart in a fortnight or three weeks' time to the best man breathing."

"I'm not saying a word about her heart, Launce; but I do say he took a mighty strong hold on her fancy."

"You think that she loves him, then?"

"I think she would if he'd give her the chance," the girl answers, smiling.

"What a queer little creature you are!" her lover says, looking at her with amused yet wondering eyes. "How on earth did you find it all out? I'll vow Honor never spoke a word to you about it."

"How do I know that the sun is shining or that there is clover in that meadow? Haven't I my senses like other people?"

So they pass on their way, laughing and happy; and the man coming out from the shelter of the larch-wood, which here borders the high-road, looks after them with a frown, and a word that is certainly not a blessing on his bearded lips.

"It's not your fault," he says to himself bitterly, as he watches the two sauntering along in the yellow sunlight, "that she cares for Power Magill, or that she ever cared for him, for that matter."

As he stands there in his well-worn shooting-coat, although he is dressed little better than one of his own keepers, no one could mistake him for other than a gentleman. He is a handsome man, with keen hazel eyes set far back under brows as dark as a Spaniard's, but his face, for all its comeliness, is almost forbidding in its sternness.

Turning off the road now, he makes his way across a field and down some rude stone steps to the bank of the river.

A little house stands here, nestling against the rocky bank. The old door hangs off its hinges, the one small-paned window is stuffed with rags.

Power Magill stoops as he enters the poor place, and his eyes, dazzled by the sunlight outside, look round the room in a vain search. He can see no one; a girl rises from a low stool by the hearth, where she has been coaxing a smoldering turf to light, and comes forward.

"Is your father in, Patsy?"

"He is not, your honor. He went to Derry to-day with one of Neil's foals, and he will not be home till the morning!"

"And your brother – where is he?"

"I can't rightly say, your honor! Maybe he is gone to the bog to – "

But he stops her, frowning impatiently.

"Tell them both that I came here for them. Say no more than that – they will understand."

Then he strikes out, glad to breathe the fresh air after that tainted atmosphere. The girl walks cautiously to the door and looks after him. She is barefooted, and on the earth floor her tread makes no sound.

"Heaven forgive yez!" she says almost fiercely. "The innocent creatures never hurt man nor beast till yez came with your foine tongue and your yellow guineas, tempting and ruining 'em! But I'll be even with yez yet!"

From this fetid little cabin on the river's side a brisk walk of ten minutes brings Power Magill to the gates of Donaghmore. As he passes up the drive he stops and turns aside for an instant to look at the ruins of the old Abbey, standing grim and cold and gray in the yellow sunshine.

The refectory is still standing, its three windows looking toward the stone house on the hill. There is a low arched gateway, but the gate is gone, and beyond in the great quadrangle the stones lie as they have fallen.

"What asses we are, the best of us!" Power Magill says grimly, as he looks at this relic of a dead man's wealth and power.

The old abbot – buried, so say the traditions of the family, under the ruins of the pile that he reared with such pride and vainglory – never lived to enjoy his riches. Twice he built the house, and twice it was destroyed; the first time partially, and by fire, the second time utterly. "For," so the story goes, "a wind rose in the night, and swept the great stones one from another, leaving the place as it is to this day." No Blake has ever been bold enough to rebuild it.

As Power Magill passes into the quadrangle, an owl flies out of the ivy, and sweeps so close before his face that he draws back, startled. The bird's cry is caught up and echoed round the empty spaces, till it seems as if the place must be full of mocking spirits. With a frown he turns and retraces his steps, never pausing to look back till he has gained the steps on Donaghmore. A dark cloud has obscured the sun, and the whole pile lies in the shadow.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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