

A Little Irish Girl.

By "THE DUCHESS."

[CHAPTER VII]

Honor's a mistress all mankind pursue: Yet most mistake the false one for the true. EYE having received permission, and being anxious on his own part to bring matters to a climax, makes an early opportunity of requesting a private interview with his host. The time chosen is to-day. As wet a day as ever came out of the heavens, and the one after that on which Andy McDermott arrived. There had been a hurried interview between Eyre and Dulcinea in the morning, in which the girl had seemed down hearted and dispirited, and inclined to let matters stay as they were, but as they undoubtedly must be considered; but Eyre—fired with sorrow for her, and a determination to save her from the impending disaster that threatens her, namely, her marriage with that miscreant Anketell—had refused to listen to her fears, and is now standing outside the McDermott's private den, waiting for admission. "It is soon given. The den is an awful agglomeration of things useful and useless—principally useless—but beloved as having once belonged to better days than these. In the midst of the chaos sits The McDermott, calmly smoking a pipe that could never have seen a better day than this, as it is now as black as black can be. "Bless my soul, Mr. Eyre! You, says he, rising and pulling forward a chair for his guest—"you sent me word, I now remember, that you wanted to see me. Feeling strong, eh?—better, eh? Have a brandy and soda?" "No, thanks. No, I assure you. The fact is, I—I wanted to speak to you about your daughter."

That old Goth! He will give his daughter to a man she hates just because in a foolish moment the poor girl had been coerced into an engagement with him. Never had the spirit of Don Quixote been so strongly reproduced as in Mr. Eyre's heart at this moment. He will come to her aid, father or no father! What! would any man stand still and see a girl wantonly, deliberately sacrificed, and not put out a hand to help—to save? If so, his name is not Lucien Eyre! To see Dulcinea is, however, necessary. She must be made cognizant of the plot laid against her happiness. Up to this, poor child, she has regarded her engagement as a usual thing, if hateful; but she must now learn that force will be employed if she refuses to go calmly to the altar with that abomination, Sir Ralph. He has only just stepped into the corridor when he comes face to face with her. "Well, I've seen your father," says he. "What! Oh, no!" says she. "Yes, I have; and a bigger old—I beg your pardon. But—" "He says I must hold to my engagement with Sir Ralph?" "He says that, and that only. If you were a slave, he could not have made it more distinct that you were without power in the matter." "Surely! (growing very pale) 'you exaggerate a little. A slave! Whose slave?" "Sir Ralph's presently, if you don't take swift measures to free yourself. Dulcinea, you trust me, don't you? Come away with me. Come this evening. There is a train at half-past six; meet me there, and—" "And what?" "I'll take you up to town to my sister's, and we can be married to-morrow morning!" "Married to-morrow morning! And—and he—"

blantly. 'There's something behind, this slave market business, isn't there? I never heard a word of it until—that young friend of yours fell into the bog, and was dragged out by some inconsiderate person by the hair of his head, and brought home to be nursed by you.' "I don't know of any one who fell into a bog, and was pulled out by his hair," says she, coldly. "Look here, Dulcinea, (putting her down on a mouldering rustic seat), 'let's give a name to it. Eyre is the bogged one's name. And I expect he has been making love to you eh?' "At all events, he isn't like some people!" exclaims she, with a little frown. "He doesn't lecture and scold and trample on me from morning till night!" "We shall now proceed to give a name to the trampier," says Mr. McDermott. "Anketell! And so you want to throw over Anketell and marry Eyre? Is that what it comes to?" "N—o. Not exactly." "Then you want to throw over Anketell and not marry Eyre. Is that it?" "No—not quite." "Then, my good girl, what is it? If you could throw just one ray of light upon the mystery, I might be able to see you home." "Well—it's this, then," says she, with a sudden touch of passion. "I won't submit to be ordered to marry any one, and certainly not a tyrant like Sir Ralph! Why, if you could have heard him yesterday! But never mind, that. The fact is, Andy, that Mr. Eyre—asked me to marry him; and—I didn't say yes—because—Well—never mind that either. But he went to father, and father, it appeared, was distinctly rude, and told him—'Well' (sighing) 'never mind that either.' "Is there," asks Mr. McDermott, mildly, 'anything I may mind?' "Yes—this," says she, her anger growing. "He then sent for me." "He? Eyre? Just like his impudence!" "He is not impudent; and it was father who sent for me." "To give you a good scolding, I hope." "If you hope that! (trying to rise), there is no use in my going on with this explanation." "Yes, there is—every use. I'm sure to come in handy sooner or later, and therefore it is necessary the plot should be laid bare to me. Come, go on, do! We can have our little war later. What did the governor say to you?" "That I should marry Sir Ralph whether I liked it or not—that nothing should prevent my keeping my engagement with him. He' (paling) 'gave me to understand that if I lost Sir Ralph I should still marry him!" "But you don't loathe him?" "I'm not sure, I'm passionately—I am actually certain that he is backed up father in this matter, and it only to punish me for being a little—you know—a little—" "Yes—I know [nodding]. "Well, to punish me for that, he, too, is in the plot to compel me to marry him!" "What rot!" says her cousin forcibly, if indignantly. "That isn't a bit like Anketell! You must be out of your mind to talk of him like that!" "You don't know him as I do. You think he is fond of me. Now, I'm raising my head and gazing at her cousin with glowing eyes—I know that he detests me." "Come in and have your head shaved. Come quickly. Typhoid, I should say, to look at you!" "Nonsense! There—don't go on like a fanatic. I mean every word I say. The very last interview I had with him he was rude, and cutting, and indifferent, and cruel, and—" "He must have forgotten to pay a compliment or two," says her cousin, thoughtfully. "You can jest if you like," says Dulcinea, rising now with determination. "I did think, Andy, (casting a reproachful glance at him) 'that I might have hoped for sympathy and help from you!" "I don't think I understand it," says Andy, carefully. "You want to marry Eyre, and you don't want to marry Anketell; is that it?" "No! (shortly) 'I don't want to marry either of them!" "Not Eyre?" [doubtfully]. "Certainly not. All I want is—to be free. To let Sir—let father see that I am not to be commanded to marry any one. Andy (coaxingly) 'help me. Speak to—father—do! Help me to break off this odious engagement!" "And so let me free to marry that whippersnapper upstairs with his black, black eye? No, I won't say Andy, with decision: 'Sir Ralph is worth a dozen of him. Do you think I don't see through you? You have fallen in love with that Italian [who looks quite absurd without the monkey and the organ], and you want to pretend that all you desire is freedom." "You refuse to help me, then?" asks Dulcinea, looking suddenly very tall, and very white, and very earnest. "To your hurt!—yes."

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