

**DUCHESS: A TALE
OF THE NINETEENTH
CENTURY**

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Duchess: A Tale of the Nineteenth Century by Daniel Dorren

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DANIEL DORREN

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A Tale of the Nineteenth Century.

BY

DANIEL DORREN.

"This is the place, stand still my steed,
Let me review the scene
And summon from the shadowy past,
The forms that once have been."

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HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

1884.

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CHAPTER I.

LET me take you to a little village on the French coast, reader, where some tall, high cliffs rise against a blue sky and overlook a long stretch of golden sand, where the waves break with a soft splash the livelong day, and where the sand-martins twitter and wheel from sunrise to sunset in utter enjoyment.

Standing on those cliffs you get a view of the Channel, with its ships and white sails passing to and fro in the sunlight, some homeward bound and others outward bound.

Looking inland, you see the granite spire

of a little village church, and a group of humble dwellings nestling at the foot of it.

And through the thick green trees in a hollow peeps the red brick façade of my old home.

I am remembering it all as it was on sunshiny days, but there was another side to that picture. Driving grey clouds, tossing waves, and keen cold winds made their home there at times, and I only give you the view in sunshine because I loved it best so, and because the memory of my old home in summer is sweetest to me.

My father was a Scotchman, and one of the "toilers and spinners" of this world. Circumstances at an early age took him across the sea, accompanied by a young and lovely wife, to seek his fortune. His fortune came in the shape of flax mills, which he built in the village of Touren on the Calvados coast.

There, to the songs of French birds, and

the soft lullaby of Normandy's waves, in the old "Château des Roses" at Touren, we his five children were born.

The old house could tell of merry doings, and bring back many echoes of our happy childish laughter, if walls could speak.

We never thought in those days that death, like the sword of Damocles, hangs over all earthly happiness.

We were boisterously, madly happy, till sorrow and death became living words to us, written in undying letters of fire on our hearts.

By the memory of that happiness I thank God that our future is hidden from us.

As I am not famous, like Sarah Bernhardt, I cannot presume to treat you to the details of my early life, when "I wore red shoes," strung daisies, and indulged in childish escapades.

Suffice it to say that my childhood was indeed a golden age.

Do not imagine that my father was one of the "h-less" sort.

He was, on the contrary, a thoroughly well-educated man.

Lack of "bawbees" had made him a toiler. Like all Scotchmen, he possessed the quality of dogged perseverance, and soon grew wealthy and prosperous.

He was a tall, handsome, fair man, with an air of goodness about him that was indeed the radiation and reflection of a good, pure heart.

His kindness to the poor made him universally adored in the neighbourhood. Even the priests looked kindly on him, and they at first, considering him a heretic *de pur sang*, were inclined to be enemies.

My mother's beauty was of the Grecian type so rare now-a-days, with smiling violet eyes and low white brow. In remembering her forehead these lines come to my mind, "Her forehead was the frontispiece of a temple dedicated to honour."

Reginald, our eldest born, was the type of my father; Nora, who came after him, the living embodiment of my mother's young likeness; whilst I, Antoinette, surnamed "Duchess," took my features and character from some dead and buried ancestor. Lastly came Minnie and Kitty, the twins, who resembled nobody as much as themselves.

We were a goodly family to look at, and deemed the handsomest in Normandy.

We were not angelic children by any means, but we were the pride and joy of our parents, and I do not think there existed a happier home circle than ours in the whole length and breadth of *la belle France*.

I hope you are not disappointed, reader, now that you know "Duchess" was only my sobriquet, and not my title by birth. It is not everyone's fate to be born a real live duchess, and though my story is not replete with lords and ladies, I think you will find it interesting if you proceed. Love stories are

not confined to the *élite* of society, and even the marvellous may happen in the ordinary middle-class of life.

Without more preamble I bring you to my seventeenth birthday. On this occasion we gave a ball, and amongst the numerous *invités* there was to be one stranger. This was an event in our lives.

The stranger was the son of papa's oldest friend, and his arrival from Scotland exactly happened on that afternoon.

When dressed for the evening I ran down to the largest cheval glass in the house, that stood on the landing, to have a good look at myself. I saw the reflection of a girl arrayed in pale blue silk, whose happy round face possessed two large grey eyes, overlooked by two little dark eyebrows, a rosy, saucy mouth, a short, straight nose, with the faintest *souçon* of a turn at its end, and on whose shoulders fell a mass of silky, golden hair *à l'enfant*. Above the left ear was a fresh pink camellia