

**MISS
ERIN: A NOVEL**

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Miss Erin: A Novel by M. E. Francis

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M. E. FRANCIS

**MISS
ERIN: A NOVEL**

MISS ERIN.

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To
K. M. S
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MISS ERIN.

PART I.—SEED TIME.

CHAPTER I.

A LEGACY.

“**I**S this the place, I wonder?” thought the solitary wayfarer. “God help us! Of all the lonesome, God-forsaken spots!”

He had raised his head, hitherto bent downwards in the effort to advance in the teeth of a cutting October wind, and now paused, looking about him irresolutely. It was a desolate place, certainly, this low square house, as seen from the rickety gate near which the traveller stood; a house which had once been white, but which was now weather-stained into an indefinable hue, battered by the elements, unspeakably forlorn, a pair of mock windows staring from the upper story blankly, like wide-open eyes in a dead face. Near the gate, a few almost leafless oaks and beeches writhed in the wind, and close to the house the grass-grown slope was thickly studded with gloomy, gigantic fir-trees. The path was overgrown with moss, the low wall separating the enclosure from the road broken down in many places; a lean, miserable-looking cow was cropping the rank

grass languidly, but no other sign of life was apparent, not even a squirrel in the branches, not a wandering clutch of chickens.

"Well—in the name o' God!" said the traveller, heaving a sigh. He wrapped his great frieze coat closer around the bundle in his arms and lifted the rusty latch, uttering an exclamation of disgust as the gate, which had been insecurely supported by broken hinges, fell flat on the ground.

"There doesn't come many visitors here, I'll be bound," he muttered, stooping awkwardly to restore it to its place; "an' no wonder! I'll be glad when I'm out of it myself."

Having propped it up again, he went on his way slowly, looking cautiously to right and to left as though he expected some enemy to spring on him from the shelter of the fir-trees. At last he stood before the porch, and once more scanned the house; not a ray of light, no sign or sound of any living thing.

"Is there any one in it at all?" he said to himself; and then, plucking up his courage, he pulled vigorously at the bell, proceeding after a moment or two to thump the door sturdily with his heavy fist; repeating this operation at intervals with increasing energy as he grew exasperated by the delay.

At last steps were heard approaching, a variety of bolts were withdrawn, and after much rattling and fumbling, the lock shot back and the door opened.

A woman's face peered out into the rapidly-increasing dusk; ghost-like, as seen thus against the background of absolutely dark passage.